

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Bozhidara Kriviradeva*

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Education, Sofia, Bulgaria

Abstract: The chapter presents the current state of educational leadership in the Republic of Bulgaria in terms of legislative framework and empirical research. Since changes made in the education system in 2015–2016, educational leaderships has been seen as one means toward raising the quality of education and creating effective educational organization. Still, the concept of educational leadership is not fully integrated in the legal requirements for the selection, appointment, and professional development of educational leaders. It is safe to say that leaders achieve the status of “leader” in the mind of their followers. That’s why the question of leadership is closely related to the perceptions and understandings of staff about the leadership position and the qualities of the person in charge. The article presents results from an empirical survey of leadership potential, built upon the concepts of J. Maxwell for “good leadership”.

Keywords: educational leadership, Bulgaria, legislative framework, principal’s professional development.

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade there have been a number of reforms in the educational system in the Republic of Bulgaria. The most important one was the implementation of a new Law on preschool and school education in 2015, which was enforced in August 2016. This law replaced the *Law for people’s education*, which was active from 1991 until 2016 and was adapted, updated and changed numerous times. There was a need to make a smooth transitions between the old and new laws. Thus, policy makers decided that the new law would be officially published almost 10 months before being enforced, so the main stakeholders had sufficient time to prepare for one of the most crucial changes in educational system in the country. Those changes included changes in the school education system structure, changes regarding professional competencies of teachers and school leaders, and changes in school curricula.

For any educational leader to be effective, it is necessary to cooperate with and to consider the roles of national and regional governing bodies.

*E-mail: b.kriviradeva@fp.uni-sofia.bg

The leader is one who stimulates and motivates both teachers and management staff to work together for the implementation of the educational process, including children's socialization. That's why preparation and training educational leaders should be integrated as part of the whole national educational policy. In Bulgaria, the Minister of education and his administration, along with regional and municipal governing bodies, should ensure the qualification and additional in-service training of educational managers.

The chapter presents some features and characteristics of educational leaders and educational leadership in Bulgaria in the context of the new educational law. These features include the legal framework for the selection, appointment and qualification of educational leaders, along with the perceptions teachers have of their school principals as leaders, gathered through empirical research. The research used a questionnaire by J. Maxwell for the evaluation of leadership potential (Maxwell, 1995) in relation to a questionnaire for measuring job satisfaction, developed by M. Radoslavova (Radoslavova & Velichkov, 2005). The job satisfaction questionnaire used several different subscales for measuring total satisfaction: satisfaction with character of tasks/activities; satisfaction with coworkers; satisfaction with leader; satisfaction with results.

According to Maxwell, leaders with high leadership potential should possess certain qualities and should be able to carry out certain activities better than their staff. For example, when applied to educational institutions, leaders with high potential should: know themselves; be confident; be quick-minded and intuitive in decision-making; carry values and norms, which are accepted and recognized from most of educational specialists in the school; be able to reach consensus; be generous, yet decisive and firm, when needed in their professional activity; be as objective as possible, impartial, when making judgements for actions of team members; and have high professional competency.

Leadership as a phenomenon has been an object of a long-term research interest both internationally and in the Bulgarian context. Still, the present article is more focused towards picturing the current state of educational leadership in the Bulgarian context than making a summary of leadership theories. Such summaries are easy to find (Amanchukwu, Stanley, Ololube, 2015; Bush & Glover, 2014; Bush & Glover, 2003; Nawaz & Khan, 2016).

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The main legal document arranging the educational system and its work is the *Law for preschool and school education*. After long debates both on

political and professional levels, with the broad participation of different social strata, the law passed through the Parliament at the end of 2015. With the implementation of the law, Bulgaria committed herself to developing an up-to-date educational system, making the national context closer to European educational policy, yet not forgetting national traditions in the educational field. The law strives for better inclusion of different vulnerable groups in education and for better quality of education as a whole.

While the *Law for Preschool and school education* was accepted but not yet enforces some additional relevant legal documents were also developed, needed for the full implementation of the Law. Some of these documents are directly related to educational leadership and educational leaders, like *Regulation for status and professional development of pedagogical specialists* (2016), where, along with other specialists in education, the professional profile and requirements for principals of educational institutions (educational managers) were stated explicitly for the first time in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Educational leaders are trained during the formal higher education system at Bachelor, Master or Doctoral levels. This can only be done in accredited universities with a license to teach in the field of education and/or management of education. Typically, a graduate gets a formal bachelor degree in a subject field and a qualification to teach. This is enough, along with 5 years of experience as a teacher, to be selected as manager of a school or kindergarten. There is no official requirement for a Masters degree in Educational management, although having one is considered a benefit in the selection process.

According to the *Law for preschool and school education*, a position of manager/principal/head teacher of an educational institution can be filled by any pedagogical specialist with at least 5 years of experience as a teacher. Exceptions are made for principals of sport schools (with extensive training of professional sportsmen), who can be appointed as principals without being teachers if they have at least 5 years professional experience in the field of Physical education and sports. The principal must have a higher education, although the law does not specify any level, so a Bachelor's degree is enough. The principal should be in possession of at least Bachelor degree in teaching, as the law requires him to teach a certain amount of classes per year. The selection of educational managers of state or municipal schools (both financed with public money) is done through competition, regulated by the Labour code. The competition takes place before a commission, in which there are representatives of the municipality (for municipal schools) or Ministry of education / Ministry of culture / Ministry of sports (for state

schools), a representative of the Regional Department of Education, and a representative of the Community council of the educational institution. The Community council is a new body within educational institutions, created in order to provide means for the better involvement of parents in management processes.

Job competition for becoming a principal of an educational institution in Bulgaria has several stages.

- First stage: job candidates present documents to prove they have the formal education and training, required by the law. A list of candidates, approved for the second stage is officially published and the candidates are formally informed for their results at the first stage. Those whose documents fulfil the requirements for the job are informed about the date and place of the second stage of the competition.
- Second stage: a written exam for evaluating basic competencies and knowledge needed for the job.
- Third stage: interview with candidates who have passed the previous stages of the competition.

The whole procedure for election of educational leaders/manager is quite strict. Still, there are no requirements for specific formal education or training in the field of Educational management, nor any requirements for previous experience as a management team member, (especially in comparison with the health system in Bulgaria where in order to become a director of a hospital, one should have a Master's degree in Health management). There were some debates before the law was implemented as to whether such requirements should be placed for becoming a principal of an educational institution but no consensus was reached on the issue.

A principal is appointed to the job with a formal (unlimited in time) contract, either by the minister of education (for state schools) or by the head of the Regional department of education (for municipal schools). It should be noted, that the Regional department of education is a subsidiary of the Ministry of education, and so, technically, the power of appointing educational managers for all public schools lies within the hands of the government, not in the hands of the municipality. An exception is made for appointing principals of municipal kindergartens – the mayor of the municipality appoints their principals. This is due to the fact that schools, although municipal in position, have some autonomy from the municipal governing body, while kindergartens are established by the municipality and are jointly financed by both the state and the municipality itself.

In the Bulgarian educational system, all staff, including managers, are appointed with time-unlimited contracts of service . There is ongoing debate

in society and among professionals and researchers in the field about whether educational managers should have a restricted mandate – for example 4 or 5 years – for their position. While most teachers believe such a mandate is necessary, there is no common understanding among educational managers and researchers. While some believe such a mandate would motivate managers to work more effectively so they can be appointed for another term, others consider such an idea as an obstacle for their work. The fact that they would have a limited amount of time for the job might make them inactive or could make the strategic planning and development of the organization they are responsible for harder as they would see no point in it. The question of the possible number of mandates additionally complicated the discussion so, for now, there are no evident efforts for a common conclusion on the topic.

As mentioned above, for the first time there is now a description of the competencies an educational manager/leader should have for the job. They are written in the *Regulation 12/2016 for the status and professional development of educational specialists*. These competences include: academic competences; organizational competencies; human resource management competencies; communication competencies; and administration competencies. All the competencies include a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, deemed needed for the job of educational manager, e.g. principals of educational institutions. Such a professional profile makes the selection of managers slightly more professional and effective. Another function of the professional profile is to provide benchmarking indicators and orientation for the leaders themselves, for the way they do their jobs, and for the qualities they should have in order to be successful.

Duties of educational leaders can vary depending on the institution they are appointed in. In general, all educational leaders should lead and manage the educational process in its full scope in the institution, according to national educational policy, and according to the Law for preschool and school education. They should plan, organize, coordinate and control all aspects of school institutional activities as well: administration, communication with external stakeholders, even financial. Educational leaders have a lot of responsibilities relating to the implementation of national educational standards in different fields (such as obligatory school curricula, inclusive education, quality management in education, etc.). They should also develop positive relations with parents and other stakeholders, seek partners for joint activities, and support the development of positive relationships among parents, teachers, and students.

In addition, the law requires educational leaders to organize the whole institution in terms of students' enrolment plans and process, the number of

teachers needed, and they should develop and care for the physical setting of the institution. In schools, the educational leader has quite a lot of power due to the system of delegated budgets, which provide school principals with the power to plan and spend school finances at their own discretion and they can also select, appoint and dismiss teachers and all school staff members. These powers provide school principals with broad management discretions and actually require additional set of competencies, such as economic understanding and financial management competencies, etc. Schools in Bulgaria actually compete for students, as free school choice has been established, along with “per capita” funding for schools (Law for preschool and school education, 2015, art. 12; Law for people’s education, 1991, art. 9, Eurydice – National education system – Bulgaria¹). Due to this fact, school budgets depend heavily on the number of students in the school and educational leaders are expected to be proactive in their communication with the outside community, be aware of the school image, and create and implement effective strategies for marketing and advertising what the school can offer.

When it comes to human resource management, it is a common understanding that educational leaders should provide beneficial work conditions for school staff, should motivate them in higher achievements, and support their professional development through providing opportunities for on-going in-service or outside school training.

All of these responsibilities require both managerial competencies and leadership potential. While managerial competencies are described in details in the professional profile of the manager, mentioned above, leadership potential and leadership behavior are still considered more like personal attributes, relating to the individual, than a characteristic that can be developed through focused training. For example, some of the Communication competencies of an educational leader, stated in the professional profile in Regulation 12 for educational specialists, include knowledge, skills and attitudes for building effective teams in school, promoting team work, creating positive school climate and effective communication channels, building partnership within school and with outside institutions and stakeholders, implementing strategic planning and developing school vision, building school quality, and solving conflicts, etc. All of these skills are part of the leadership process but still they are hard to conceive in formal in-service training. Educational leaders are supposed to undergo a process of attestation every 4 years. This is a new process for the Bulgarian educational system, enforced with the new law. All educational specialists will be evaluated in a specific way and this includes managers as well. Attestation

¹ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/bulgaria_en

is a process of evaluating the compliance of a manager's work with his professional profile, with job requirements, and with the institutional strategy for development and its goals. Attestation is done by a commission that includes the manager's employer (minister and/or representative of Regional department of education, the mayor, and representatives of the staff in the institution and the Community council). If the school provides vocational education, a representative of business organizations (partners of the school) can also become part of the commission. Each member of the commission is expected to evaluate the work of the educational manager in an unbiased manner, using evidence from the manager's self-evaluation, the manager's portfolio, school documents, etc. The commission then issues a joint evaluation in a special attestation report and provides recommendations for future development or to correct issues that members of the commission see as problematic.

The whole process of the attestation of an educational manager is similar in nature to the selection process. While formal criteria are easy to establish and evaluate, leadership potential or the way the staff see their manager as a worthy leader is hard to support with documentary evidence. The law does not state that attestation should include a survey among teachers or parents, but if the commission wants it, it can be done.

An educational leader is responsible for his own professional development and for the professional development of staff. There is a requirement that at least 1% of a school's annual budget for salaries should be spent on professional development of school staff, while the manager should participate in training for professional development as well. According to the law, on-going professional development is specified in the form of the number of academic credits all educational specialists, including managers, should get during an attestation period (3 credits for each 4 years). Such credits can be earned at accredited universities or through participating in courses, provided by training organisations with a special license from the Ministry of education. There are also several special organizations within educational system, which provide additional qualification and training for educational specialists.

In 2018, the Ministry of education started a project "Qualification for professional development of education specialists", which is intended to end in 2021. The project is funded by the "Science and education for intelligent growth" Program, with European grants. The training planned to be developed and offered within the project include three thematic fields:

- Knowledge and competencies for implementation of innovative teaching methods, academic results evaluation methods, diagnostic of

personal development, and consultation of students for better learning results;

- Implementation of models for development and creation of a positive school environment, including improvement of home–school relations, involving parents in school life, and effective class management;
- Raising competencies of management specialists for implementation of modern management models in educational institutions, leadership for effective organization of school activities, and coordination of educational teams within the institution.²

In this last field of future training there is a special place for management and educational leaderships, but there is still no special training for only educational managers.

Some institutions governed by Ministry of education, like the National centre for qualification of educational specialists, offer special courses for educational managers. Some of these courses deal with topics like financial management in education in relation to recent changes in financing mechanism; managing a delegated budget; the modern educational leader – specifics of functions, etc.³. There are other courses, provided by different training organizations, licenced by the Ministry of Education. A brief search in the register of these organizations revealed that there are approximately 178 approved training programs, concerning leadership and leaders in education for both teachers and managers⁴.

If they wish, educational managers and future managers can get a master's degree in Educational management in several universities, such as Sofia University, Plovdiv University, Southwest University, Veliko Tarnovo University, etc. Within these master's programs students learn how to be a professional and effective educational manager. The programs have different length – from one year for specialists in education to 1.5–2 years for people from different professional field. Master's programs are often offered full or part-time, and some universities also offer distant learning. Some of the subjects in such master's program include Educational management, Human resource management, Strategic management and management of Innovation, Financial management in education, ITC in educational management, etc. Still, as there are no formal requirements for having a master's degree in Educational management, participation in such programs is only up to managers' personal wish for professional development.

² <https://teachers.mon.bg/Uploads/Docs/Themes-10-09-2018.pdf>

³ <http://niokso.bg/events.html#>

⁴ <http://iropk.mon.bg/public/search>

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN BULGARIA – SOME EMPIRICAL DATA

The summary of the law and of the situation of educational leadership in Bulgaria presented in the previous part raised some questions regarding leadership and the way it is perceived in our educational system.

The formalization of the selection and attestation processes can be seen as a positive step toward more objective appointment and evaluation of educational leaders. In addition, leadership is highly popular as a training topic in non-governmental training organizations. On the other hand, formal requirements do not include a formal higher degree diploma in educational management and leadership. State training bodies only vaguely touch the topic as it has been a modern issue in Bulgaria for the past few years.

Still, the idea of leadership, and educational leadership, is not measurable with a set of formal criteria. It is more visible in the interaction of the leader with the staff, and such an approach for understanding educational leaderships perhaps needs to be implemented in our system. Of all definitions of leaderships available, the ones that focus upon interpersonal interaction and the ability to “lead” and inspire others are the most appealing ones. So it is safe to state, that being a “leader” means having “followers”. So it is up to the perception of staff to define the educational leader and this means that each organization can see its manager as a leader to some extent or in some situations, and cannot recognize him as a leader in others. That’s why, finding ways to “pull out” the perceptions of staff regarding their leader should be on the research agenda and should underline leadership research, along with common ideas and understanding of leadership characteristics.

For the past several years, the author has done a series of research work on educational leadership in different aspects (Kriviradeva, 2015, 2015a). During these studies different research tools were used for studying leadership in different aspects and its potential for development. In this part of the paper there is a brief presentation and summary of empirical results, implemented in 2017 and 2018.

The study included a total of 377 respondents, all of them teachers in kindergartens and schools, 84.2% females and 11.6% males. 4.8% did not reveal their sex. Of all surveyed people 40.3% were between 40 and 50 years old, and 32.6% were older than 50. Teachers below 30 years old comprised just 6%. The average number of years work in the educational system was 19.4.

Leadership was studied with an adapted version of Maxwell questionnaire for evaluating the level of potential leadership qualities (Maxwell, 1995). The questionnaire includes 25 characteristics of leaderships, formed in 25 statements. The qualities include: having positive approach toward people, can solve problems, sees the big picture, can handle stress, express positive attitudes, has a good understanding of himself, etc. Each respondent is asked to evaluate the principal of his/her school or kindergarten for every question on a 4-point scale with (1) being “the principal absolutely does not have this quality” and (4) being “the principal absolutely has this quality”. The questionnaire presents a Likert scale with a maximum possible evaluation of 100 points. Reliability analysis shows Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.953, which provides quite a confidence in the reliability of the tool.

Maxwell (1995) uses this questionnaire to differentiate 5 levels of leadership in terms of the way leaders are perceived by their staff:

- An exceptional leader – 90–100 points – should keep up the good work and should coach and build other leaders in the team;
- A good leader – 80–89 points – should keep to developing and could engage with supporting and building others;
- A rising leader – 70–79 points – should focus on building his own leadership qualities and behaviour;
- A leader full of potential – 60–69 points – like a candidate-leader in the future;
- Incomplete leader (needs serious improvement) – below 60 points.

Using this classification of leaders, we can actually reveal the way educational staff perceives their principals and can build a summary picture of educational leadership.

Results show an interesting picture. The average evaluation of educational leaders by their staff is 74.64 points, (SD=17.584). Such an evaluation defines the cumulative perception for educational leader as being “a rising leader”. Variation in opinions is quite large as every respondent evaluated his/her own principal. Still, an average result like this shows that there is hope about educational leaders when it comes to the way their followers see them. Quartiles of the leadership evaluation provide additional insight into this perception (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation of school principals as educational leaders

Quartiles	25	50	75
Points	66	74.64	87

It can be seen that 25% of all respondents evaluate their principals with 87 points or more. In addition, when the evaluation mark of each respondent is coded in accordance with Maxwell's classification, 18.8% of surveyed staff evaluated their principals with 90 points or more, and another 18% – with less than 60 points, ergo – principals are seen as incomplete leaders, or so to say – not seen much like leaders; 26.5% perceive their managers like good leaders and another 26.5% like raising leaders. Only 10% evaluate their principals as leaders, full of potential.

These results more or less suggest that although the leadership role of an educational manager should be understood as crucial for the effective management of educational institutions, at the present time in Bulgaria the summary picture of a manager/leader in education is mostly between rising and good leader. Maxwell states a that rising leader should focus on his own personal growth. If Maxwell's theory of decreasing leadership potential is true, then such leaders will select and appoint teachers and staff with less leadership potential than themselves and they will not be interested in building and supporting other leaders in the organization. Such a scenario will inevitably lead to a decreasing leadership potential in their organizations, and considering the fact that every teacher is sort of a leader for their students (Harrison & Killion, 2007), with a huge role in their motivation for learning, the decreasing leadership potential among teachers can create a situation of lowered academic achievements of students.

As we see the educational leader as a leader in the eyes of staff, it is interesting to see if there is a relation between the level of leadership that respondents see in their principal and the level of their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is measured with a questionnaire, developed and validated by Radoslavova (Radoslavova & Velichkov, 2005). It has 4 subscales which aggregate into a total level of job satisfaction. These subscales reveal the satisfaction of the characteristics of the job, of coworkers, of the principal, of results. Each statement in the questionnaire is evaluated on a 5-point scale.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between evaluation of principals' leadership potential and the evaluation of respondents' own job satisfaction. There was a significant positive correlation between the two variables [$r=.589$, $n=374$, $p=.000$]. Detailed analysis shows that this correlation is higher when it comes to satisfaction of principal [$r=.702$, $n=374$, $p=.000$] and is at its lowest value in satisfaction of results [$r=.169$, $n=374$, $p=.002$]. Although a causal relationship cannot be presumed from a correlation, these results show that there is a possible connection between the way "followers" perceive the principal as a leader and the levels of their job satisfaction. Such a

connection should be further researched as it can help to strengthen educational leadership and improve job satisfaction and performance.

VIEW TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The ideas and empirical data presented above provide a base for the following recommendations for improving educational leadership in the Bulgarian context:

- Selection and appointment of principals should require a Master's degree in Educational leadership and management. This will allow the leader to have a more solid background in management practices and a deeper reflection on his role as educational leader;
- It is necessary to strengthen life-long training and additional qualification of educational leaders so they can better understand leadership, their own leadership potential, and to find ways to improve. This may include training in organizational leadership, personal development trainings, etc.
- Future educational leaders in the Bulgarian context should have basic economic and financial literacy so they can manage school budgets in a better way. This can also be said about their skills in human resource management.
- There is certainly a need of a specially designed obligatory course for newly appointed educational leaders, which will provide deeper understanding of school organization, educational leadership, and educational management practices.
- It is necessary to keep in mind and to search for ways to reveal and understand the way educational staff perceive and evaluate educational leaders. As there is various and numerous research on effective leadership, this should be complemented with data about staff expectations, staff evaluation of leadership, and to use such data for future planning and development of both the leader and the organization. As the presented results revealed – there is a positive correlation between leadership level and job satisfaction, which can provide further insights into educational leadership.
- All of the above certainly requires a specific merge between practice and theory in management of educational institutions. Joint research, conferences, and events should be part of developing a new model of educational leadership – one serving good in practice with the help of theory.

Improving educational leadership means creating a structure for the training and support of educational leaders, changing practices of selection, appointment, and qualification, creating working mechanisms for evaluation, and taking into consideration the perceptions and opinion of educational staff about leadership and leaders. It also means finding the relations between educational leadership and other parameters of educational organization and their management, like job satisfaction, organizational culture, motivation, etc. Such a mission requires the common efforts of practice and theory, which may require the establishment of a national organization, working purposefully and actively with educational leaders so good practices can be made visible and be shared both on national and international levels.

Educational leaders should have high leadership potential and be ready to build school leaders and teacher-leaders who will increase the effectiveness of educational institutions and the quality of education. It is necessary to start developing social skills training, training in leadership, team work, built upon interactive teaching methods, which will increase the leadership potential of school community members, their job satisfaction, and the way they do their work.

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