

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION – CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract. The issue of leadership in schools is a particularly current problem in our country, given the knowledge that there can be no successful school without good leadership. For that purpose it is necessary to establish a system and mechanisms for training school directors in order to professionalize their function. The paper firstly gives the legal framework, preparation of principals, selection of principals, induction, licensing, career progression, etc). Then there is a display of the current state of educational leadership in the country, based on experience from practice and analysis of research conducted through Coaching-N in 2018 by prof. Petkovski and MSc. Hristovski, principal of school. At the end of the paper some recommendations are given. For the improvement of educational leadership in the country, it is necessary to make changes in the laws on primary and secondary education, as well as the law on training and taking the exam for school directors. It is necessary to establish a school or academia for school principals, which should be a kind of institute that, in addition to carrying out trainings, will carry out scientific research activities from the educational leadership and the development of the education and educational policy in the country.

Keywords: educational leadership, requirements for principalship, duties of principals, principals, academy, licensing, and career progression.

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, development projects and other activities are implemented with the aim of providing a better quality of education. The increased interest in the quality of education is also due to changes in the field of education (Petkovski & Aleksova, 2004). Namely, it is about changes from the disciplinary aspect, i.e. educational technology. These changes result from the development of technique and technology, affirmation of entrepreneurship

and improved quality of life of people in different spheres, and increased awareness and culture among people.

Today's requirements for quality education can be provided only in effective schools where the teaching is delivered by quality teachers. Also, there are no effective schools without good executives – school leaders.

There is a consensus among educational researchers about the features of effective schools. On the basis of the literature used and the acquired knowledge and experience as a principal of a school, Petkovski in his doctoral dissertation gave a list of characteristics which characterize schools that are on the path of effectiveness (Petkovski & Joshevska, 2015).

- to be a safe and disciplined organization in which existed climate for teaching and learning;
- to have a clear mission and focused vision with precisely defined goals and objectives;
- to have a professional school leader;
- to have climate of high expectations of every individual in school;
- to put stress on the way in which the curriculum and teaching are organized and realized;
- to have an organized and permanent professional training of staff;
- to have a system for monitoring and measuring the progress of students and staff;
- to have local community support and cooperation with parents.

One should have in mind the fact that there can be no successful school without a good leader. The practice shows that there may be a bad school run by a relatively good principal, but there is no good school run by a bad principal. The issue of leadership in schools is a particularly current problem in our country. The basic prerequisite for having effective schools is the establishment of a system and mechanisms that can empower school principals so that they can professionally carry out their function. It should be known that a good principal, in principle, must be a good teacher, but does this not mean that any good teacher will be a good principal (Petkovski & Pelivanova, 2009).

It is clear that the initial training and professional and career development of the principals of the schools, which is the subject of this paper, is an extremely important role for the school improvement.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

According to the laws regulating primary and secondary education (Law on Primary Education, article 128, paragraph 1, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017), the school's management authority is the principal. The Principal is responsible for the legality of the work and for the material and financial performance of the school. A person who meets the requirements for a teacher or a professional associate in school may be elected principal of a school; additional requirements are: at least five years work experience in education; having passed the exam for a principal; certificate (not older than five years) in English language proficiency; and having passed a psychological and integrity test. To carry out the psychological test and the integrity test, the State Examination Center hires licensed professionals from a professional institution. The principal's term lasts for four years, with the possibility of another consecutive term.

The Principal carries out the following activities (Law on Primary Education, article 130, paragraph 1, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017): advocates and represents the school and is responsible for the legal operation, organizes, plans, and manages the work of the primary school; prepares a school development program, prepares a draft annual program of work, is responsible for the implementation of the annual work program; is responsible for achievement of the rights and obligations of students; performs the selection of teachers, professional associates and educators, and other administrative and technical staff in accordance with the law and acts of the school; performs the deployment of teachers, professional associates and educators, and other administrative and technical personnel; decides on termination of employment of teachers, professional associates, and educators and other administrative and technical staff according to law and collective contracts; controls the manner in which the professional records of employees are kept; encourages in-service training and improvement of teachers, professional associates, and tutors; organizes mentorship for trainee teachers, trainee assistants, and trainee tutors; observes classes in accordance with the plan for visiting classes of the annual program of work of the school, for which he/she makes recommendations and remarks after the completed visit that are attached to the professional file of the teacher; and monitors

the work of teachers, professional associates, and educators and advises them; monitors the work of the school pedagogue, psychologist, and other professional workers; cooperates with parents, informs the parents about the work of the school and changes in the rights and obligations of students; encourages and monitors the work of the community of students; ensures the execution of the decisions of the school board; adopts the systematization of the school's workplaces; decides on the conclusion of employment contracts; initiates procedures for the disciplinary responsibility of the teachers, professional associates and tutors; cooperates with health institutions in the municipality; and performs other activities in accordance with the law and the statute of the school.

The principal of a municipal primary or secondary school is elected and dismissed by the Mayor upon proposal of the school board of the school. The principal of the state primary or secondary school is selected and dismissed by the Minister for Education and Science upon proposal of the school board of the school (Law on Primary Education, article 132, paragraph *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017).

The school board and the representative of the Bureau for Development in Education interview candidates who meet the requirements. Within seven days of the interview with the candidates the school board of a state primary or secondary school proposes to the Minister for education and science the two best candidates for election (Law on Primary Education, article 132, paragraph 12, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017).

The training and examination of candidates for school principal is carried out in accordance with the Training and Examination Program. The program for training and examination of school principals is prescribed by the Minister of Education and Science, on the proposal of the State Examination Center (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 9, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15).

The program is implemented by trainers selected in an open competition by the State Examination Center. The trainers should meet the following general requirements: to have completed a master's degree in the relevant field for the implementation of the relevant module, and to have at least five years of work experience in educational and scientific activity and

experience as a trainer in the area of the contents of the module for which he/she is applying (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 6, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15).

The State Examination Center trains the candidates interested in becoming school principals and organizes the exam for principals, in accordance with the law. The program for preparing and passing an exam for principals and the manner of conducting the exam is prescribed by the Minister for Education and Science at the proposal of the State Examination Center.

The basic and advanced training for a candidate for principalship is conducted to enable the candidate to acquire the necessary professional competencies for successful organization, management of educational work, and administration of the work in the school.

The total duration of the training is 192 hours and it is mandatory. The training is implemented in six modules (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 9, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15):

- Application of Information and Computer Technology in Management in Education;
- Organization Theory;
- People in the Organization;
- The Principal as a Pedagogical Leader;
- Legislation;
- Finance.

The training is divided into (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 9, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15):

- group training that lasts 18 hours per module, allocated in 12 sessions of 90 minutes, performed in a period of two days,
- individual work 10 hours in duration of per module, during which the candidates prepare seminar work on the covered topics, and
- presentation for a period of 4 hours per module, where candidates present their seminar paper to the group and the trainer.

The module is considered completed if the candidate has attended at least 10 of the 12 training sessions per module and has successfully presented the seminar paper. Candidates who have successfully completed the training and passed psychological and integrity tests have the right to take the exam (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 9, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15).

After the training, the candidate applies to take an exam by submitting an application to the State Examination Center. In addition to the application, the candidate submits, the electronic record holder (CD) with six seminar papers from the modules and a certificate for a passed psychological test and an integrity test. The director of the State Examination Center appoints a responsible person from the Center to determine whether the candidate meets the requirements for taking the exam (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 10, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15).

The exam for principal is conducted for the purpose of verifying the professional competence of the candidates for school management, application of legal regulations, and organization of work in schools. A candidate who has passed the exam for principal is issued with a certificate. The form and content of the certificate for the passed examination for the principal of a school is prescribed by the Minister for Education and Science. The exam for principal is taken before the Examination Committee established by the director of the State Examination Center. The examination panel consists of a president and four members. The president and one member of the Examination Committee are employees of the State Examination Center, two members are employees in higher education institutions of the areas covered by the modules, and one member is from the Ministry of Education and Science, proposed by the Minister of Education and Science.

The principal exam consists of three parts (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 13, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15):

- practical testing of computer skills,
- testing of the ability to apply theoretical knowledge, and
- presentation and defense of the final seminar paper.

The first part of the exam is taken by using a computer to solve a number of tasks related to the practical application of software programs and applications used in education and in office work. The second part of the exam is taken by using a computer and consists of checking the theoretical knowledge and skills gained during the training. The third part of the exam consists of presentation and defense of the final seminar paper of the candidate.

The first and second part of the exam is technically carried out by the State Examination Center, and the third part of the exam is conducted by the Examination Committee. All parts of the exam are taken on the premises of the State Examination Center. The first, second and third part of the exam are taken in a room for taking the exam, specially equipped with material-technical and IT equipment, internet connection, and equipment for recording the exam.

The first part of the exam consists of a test with three tasks from the electronic system regarding the practical application of software programs and applications used in education and a test with three tasks from the electronic system regarding the practical application of software programs and applications used in office work. The electronic system contains at least 50 tasks that are prepared by experts engaged by the State Examination Center. The electronic system does not allow the existence of an identical test for the first part of the exam in one session for more than one candidate. The candidate solves tasks on a computer. The test tasks are evaluated with the points specified in the test. The first part of the exam is assessed as passed /not passed, based on the record from the passed electronic test submitted by the administrator to the Examination Commission. The entry in the first part of the exam is kept in the candidate's file. It is considered that the first part of the exam is passed by the candidate who, with correct answers to the test questions, achieved at least 60% of the total number of points envisaged.

The candidate takes the second part of the exam if he/she has successfully passed the first part of the exam. In the second part of the exam, the candidate on a computer solves 30 questions from the theoretical knowledge gained from the modules during the training. Questions are multiple-choice ; one option is correct, and three are incorrect. Test questions are evaluated with points specified in the test. The questions are prepared by the trainers and stored electronically, with 60 questions for each module, a total of 300 questions. The examination panel verifies the questions. The electronic system does not allow identical test content for the second part of the exam in a session for more than one candidate. The pass mark for the second part of the exam is 60% correct answers.

The candidate takes the third part of the exam if he/she has successfully passed the second part of the exam. For the third part of the exam, the candidate prepares, presents, and defends a completed seminar paper – a case study. The topic of the final seminar paper is received by the candidate after the completion of the training, computer-generated, whose content randomly determines the software of the electronic system from the list of topics. The topics from the list from paragraph 3 of this article are prepared by the trainers, with 20 topics from each module, ie a total of 120 topics. The Examination Commission verifies the topics.

The final seminar paper is prepared, presented and defended by the candidate within 30 days from the day of receiving the topic. The candidate completes the final seminar paper and defends it in front of the Examination Committee. The Examining Committee is quorate if all its members are

present. The decisions of the Examination Committee will be adopted by a majority of votes. The third part of the exam is assessed by the Examination Commission as pass/fail, based on the prepared, presented, and defended completed seminar paper. The candidate will be immediately notified of the assessment of the Examination Committee. It is considered that the candidate is successful if he/she has passed all parts of the exam. Candidates, who have not passed the exam at the third attempt have no right to take the exam for the next three years.

Advanced training is mandatory for principals who have passed the exam. For the purpose of upgrading knowledge, school principals are obliged to attend training for continuous professional development of at least four seminar days, with a total duration of at least 32 hours, over a one-year period. The training is organized by the State Examination Center. Trainers of advanced training are experts from the State Examination Center, educational institutions and institutions related to the topics of the Program for Advanced Training of Principals, determined by the director of State Examination Center (Law for training and exam for school principals, article 21, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 10/15, 145/15 and 192/15).

The program for the advanced training of principals is prescribed by the Minister, at the proposal of the State Examination Center, proposed in cooperation with the Bureau for Development of Education, the Center for Vocational Education and Training, the Center for Adult Education, and the State Education Inspectorate. For participation in advanced training, the State Examination Center for principals issues a certificate and records it. The form and content of the certificate for the participation of advanced training of principals is determined by the Principal of the State Examination Center. The candidate who has passed the exam is issued a certificate, signed by the President of the Examination Commission and the State Examination Center, within seven days from the day of the completion of the exam. The form and content of the Certificate for the passed exam for the Principal is prescribed by the Minister of Education and Science, upon proposal of the State Examination Center (Program for advanced training of principals, *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 219 on 14.12.2015).

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE COUNTRY

The main problem in the selection of school principals,¹ established for over twenty years, is the high degree of politization. This is confirmed by the fact that from 1998 to 2006, with the change of the central government, principals of schools were also changed (in this period, the appointment of principals was under the competence of the Minister of Education and Science, according to the law). Since 2006, as the mayors of municipalities were changed, the principals of schools have also been changed (in this period according to the law the appointment of the principals was under the authority of the local mayor). With the change of local and central government, in most cases that means appointing principals from the ruling parties. This problem should have been avoided by the Law on Local Self-Government² and Law on Primary Education, according to which there are representatives from the staff of school boards, parents of students, in addition to representatives delegated by central and local governments. The number of teachers and parents of students is greater than the number of delegated representatives from the central and local government, but due to the high degree of politicization of society among all categories of representatives, party membership comes to the fore rather than the quality of the reported candidates for principal, in the interest of the school and students. This is a serious problem that needs to be overcome.

In addition, the training content and the manner of taking the exam for a school principal represent serious problems. This was identified through the views and opinions of the respondents from a survey conducted among principals of 109 primary schools and 27 secondary schools in our country in 2018 (there are 550 schools for primary and secondary education), by the authors of this work.³

Two instruments (scales for estimation) were implemented in the research, one related to the training and the exam for principals, i.e. the necessary topics for the advanced training of the already elected principals, and the second, related to the necessary knowledge and skills of the school principals, as well as the amount of time (in percentage) the principal spends in certain activities.

In regards to the training of school principals, very indicative answers (attitudes) of respondents were received according the content and manner in which exam for school principals is implemented. To the question:

¹ National Program for Development of Education in 2005-2015, Foundation Open Society Macedonia (this program was approved by the Parliament in 2005)

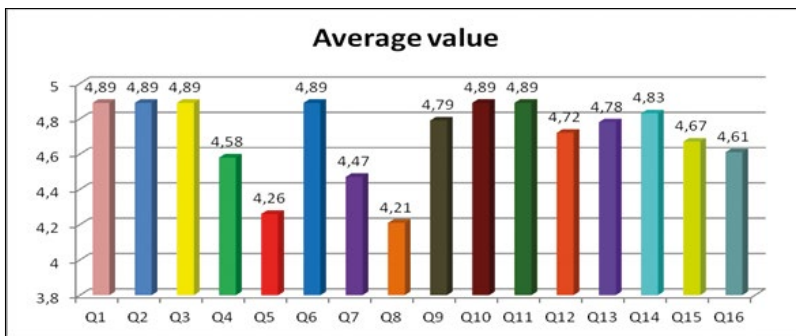
² Law on Local Self-Government, article 22 and 50. *Sluzben vesnik na RM*, No. 5/2002

³ The results are in the process of publication.

“How do you evaluate the usefulness of the implementation of the module 1: Application of Information and Computer Technology in the Management of Education”, almost half of the respondents (47.6%) think that this module is not well conceived and that it does not function to improve the quality of school principals’ work. According to principals’ opinions, this tool can help in the management of school, but is of much less importance for the work of the school as a whole (and especially for improvement of the quality of teaching) than Modules 2 (Theory of Organization), 3 (People in the Organization) and 4 (Principal as Pedagogical Leader). This is the attitude of 53.5% of respondents. Likewise, the respondents consider that Modules 5 and 6 do not have a direct impact on the quality of teaching, but are important because mistakes in these areas result in sanctions and penalties for principals. Also, the general remark is that the manner in which the training is implemented is not the most appropriate (39.6% of the respondents), especially for modules 1, 5 and 6, because they are more theory-based and have few concrete practical examples. There are also notes on the time frame in which training is implemented, as 9 hours per day is too much for effective work. In this context, their position is that instead of two days, one module should be held over three days, and that the training should be implemented in regions, not only in the capital, Skopje. Also, the respondents noted that changes are needed in the direction of improving the quality and facilitation of the trainers. Finally, respondents believe that more emphasis should be put on training, rather than on the exam, in relation to the first two parts⁴, where time and not the factual knowledge is more important.

The following graph shows participant’s opinions regarding the necessary knowledge and skills of the school leader in the performance of the given activities. The responses were noted using the 1–5 Likert scale.

Figure 1. Participants’ opinions regarding the necessary knowledge and skills of the school leader



⁴ Practical testing of computer skills, testing of the ability to apply theoretical knowledge

- Q1: It is important for the school principal to possess good communication skills
- Q2: It is important for the school principal to possess good planning skills for school work
- Q3: It is important for the school principal to possess good organizational skills
- Q4: It is important for the school principal to possess good leadership abilities
- Q5: It is important for the school principal to possess good abilities to provide professional help to teachers
- Q6: It is important for the school principal to possess good skills in managing human resources
- Q7: It is important for the school principal to possess good abilities to manage financial resources
- Q8: It is important for the school principal to possess good time management skills
- Q9: It is important for the school principal to possess good abilities for organizing and conducting meetings
- Q10: It is important for the school principal to possess good abilities to motivate employees
- Q11: It is important for the school principal to possess good abilities to build a good working environment
- Q12: It is important for the school principal to possess good conflict resolution skills
- Q13: It is important for the school principal to encourage teamwork
- Q14: It is important for the school principal to be a person with integrity
- Q15: It is important for the school principal to possess the ability to build good public relations
- Q16: It is important for the school principal to have a proactive attitude towards educational change and contemporary education tendencies

According to participants' responses, particular indicative findings are obtained regarding the engagement of principals in a few activities and how much time they spend in their implementation in everyday performance. These findings are systematized in the following table, where (in percentages) the approximate time per week the principals devote to the listed activities is given, and accordingly whether this is good and how much time principals should spend. The participants were told to allocate the time in percentages so that the total amount would be 100%. In the table given, the mean values are expressed in percentages of all participants in total.

Table 1. Mean values expressed in percentage of all participants total for time that principals spend, time that principals would like to spend

ACTIVITY	time principal spends (%) (Average)	time principal would like to spend (%) (Average)
Administrative matters – problems	10,21	5,13
Phone calls and e-mails	6,89	4,09
Financial matters – problems	9,37	7,06
Visit the classes	6,26	8,09
Works on planning the work of the school	8,84	10,01
Works on own professional development	5,68	8,05
Works to improve the work of the school	9,05	11,00
Meetings outside the school	4,84	4,05
Meetings at the school	4,74	5,06
Talking with the teachers	7,26	8,50
Conversations with professional associates	6,74	7,18
Conversations with administrative and technical staff	5,11	4,56
Conversations with students and their parents	6,47	7,06
Providing professional assistance to employees	6,42	7,19
Other	2,88	2,97

From the table, it can be concluded that principals spend more than a third of their time, in activities that do not have a direct impact on the provision and quality of teaching. The practice shows that in this context there are problems with school principals in terms of time management, as well as their ability to organize and conduct meetings.

Advanced trainings should be correlated with the career progression of the principals, which at this moment is not legally formalized. According to the above study, the school principals cite the following topics for advanced training:

- Decision Making and Problem Solving;
- Emotional Intelligence Leadership;
- Time Management;
- Coaching;

- Organizational Learning;
- Knowledge Management;
- Talent Management;
- Assertive Communication;
- Project Management.

VIEW TOWARDS THE FUTURE

For improvement of educational leadership in the country, it is first necessary to make changes in the laws on primary and secondary education, as well as the law for passing exams for a school principal, in order to make an integral, consistent concept for initial training of school principals, as well as for their professional and career development (there is a law, but there are no by-laws in which standards and programs are defined). Specifically, this means the way in which the school principals will be trained before taking up their duties and the way of taking the exam for a principal. Also, advanced training of school principals needs to be better defined and clear standards and career progression criteria need to be established. This would reduce the impact of politization of the selection of school principals and improve the competencies of the school principals. Attaining higher levels in the career advancement ladder should be a factor whereby a principal should be elected for a larger number of mandates, and mandates should not therefore be restricted by law. It is not reasonable for a successful and effective principal to be replaced only because of a legal limitation.

It is necessary to establish a school or academy for school principals, which, for start, can be a special sector in the State Examination Center, and then, if the need arises, can also be transformed into a separate entity. Trainers should be permanently employed at a school or academy for school principals and hold master's or doctoral degrees in educational leadership. In fact, the proposed academy should also carry out research in educational leadership and educational policy in the country.

The previous attitude is confirmed in the 2018 OECD report.⁵ Namely, the report states that more and more OECD countries are establishing master's programs and academies for school leadership in order to improve the capacity of principals.

⁵ The report is in the draft version presented at the workshop: "Review of the Evaluation and Evaluation System" on January 31, 2018. The Minister and other representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science attended.

In addition to gaining the necessary managerial and leadership skills, according to the draft OECD report, it is important for principals to develop skills for self-evaluation, but it is also important for them to develop their general knowledge and skills for teaching leadership (this is in the context of the role of the principal as coach in the school). This will help the school's evaluation to fit in with other aspects of school leadership, such as setting a school vision and planning for improvements (Ingersoll, Sirinides & Dougherty, 2017).

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