

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY CRITERIA OF SCHOOL

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***Abstract.** The article analyses the problem of school work efficiency. The research of efficiency is provided with evaluation criteria offered by various authors, the possibilities of their application in Lithuanian schools are being analysed in the aspect of work efficiency. Modern comprehension of efficient school in Lithuania should be clear and understandable for all groups of interest: students, teachers, parents, school leaders and founders, education institutions and the society. During the continuous changes and reforms, school education in Lithuania is often based on the traditional model of institutional education, which is based on the principles of discipline, obedience and competitiveness. However, in the modern stage, characteristics of analytic thinking, creativity are appreciated. Therefore, emerges a need to change the attitude to requirements for efficient school, evaluate the work fields of school as an organization by improving them with regard to the needs of ever-changing society. In the end of the article, conclusions are presented which distinguish the peculiarities of school work efficiency.*

***Keywords:** organizations, work quality, work efficiency.*

Introduction

The advance strategy „Lithuania 2030“, which was ratified by the Seimas of Lithuanian Republic on the 15th of May, 2012 includes the main striving of Lithuania – to become a modern, thrusting, open to the world, nourishing national identity country. Therefore, the main role of education is to develop an ingenious, ever-learning society, able to change and make decisions. The education system that is able to ensure a balance between the educational needs of society and personality is evaluated as qualitative and fit for the society. The strategy states that the present education system does not give proper attention to strengthening of critical thinking and creative abilities, which is why the future of education system and school should be prefigured considering creativity, public-spirit, development of leadership, community autonomy strengthening. Life-long learning should be motivated by creating a favourable scientific environment. It is very important that the strategy dedicates attention to the education of high schools, because only the country’s ability to adapt and effectively work under the conditions of continuous change can be developed, innovative projects can be created. The education vision presented in the strategy emphasizes the change and dynamics of education institutions, creating a responsible public-spirited society. The education vision introduced by the strategy is as follows:

- Cultural motivation. High quality services, cultural diversity and accessibility should be developed.
- Autonomy of communities. Education institutions should strengthen the autonomy of communities, collaboration with non-governmental organizations. High attention should be given to the education of community leaders and support of civil initiatives.
- Development of cultural and political self-image. Education programs should motivate the development of citizens' national self-awareness and self-respect. Lithuanistic education should be perceived as a base of humanistic education.
- Creation of an effective system of life-long learning. In order to ensure the constantly changing society with the acquisition and improvement of the necessary knowledge and abilities, it is mandatory to create an efficient system of life-long learning, apply the possibilities of informational connections and technologies.
- Motivation of mobility. Lithuania should motivate the mobility of pupils, students and academic personnel, increase the dispersion of cultural and academic life.
- Creation of favourable science and research environments. In order to create attractive conditions for the highest level scientists and researchers, Lithuania should invest into improving science and research environment, strengthen infrastructure, motivate collaboration between science and business.

Currently, a lot of discussions arise, how to effectively work in a school and develop a dynamic, able to function in an ever-changing world, modern society. In the project of national education strategy for 2013-2022 (<http://www.smm.lt/uploads/lawacts/docs/>), one of the goals is to reach such level of pedagogical communities, that the critical mass of them would consist of reflecting, always improving and efficiently working professional teachers. The role of school leaders becomes very important, because they have to create conditions for the teachers' and students' creativity, work following innovative methods with school administration, be able to collaborate with social partners, motivate the development of learning society. Therefore, one of the factors influencing school's efficiency is the school leaders' and teachers' ability to understand the needs of constantly changing society, education training, use of innovations in the education process. V. Kaminskienė (2007) states that the teacher must become a creator, consultant and partner of learning, which is why he must be bestowed with the creative freedom to apply teaching and learning methods in the education process, feeling the responsibility in the development of the personality. In addition, an opportunity to make decisions in school management should be given. We may state that improvement of pedagogues' qualification and work evaluation in the modern school must be purposeful,

correspond to innovative methods, because these factors influence the education quality and the efficiency of the whole school.

The processes of school efficiency, improvement of education organization are analysed by Lithuanian and foreign scientists: Jucevičienė J. (1996), Jucevičius R. (2003); Targamadžė V. (1996, 1999, 2000); Želvys R. (1999, 2003); Bagdonas E. (2000); Simonaitienė B. (2007); Hopkins D., Ainscow M., West M. (1998); Stoll L., Fink D. (1998); Fullan M. (1998, 2001, 2002, 2004); Hargreaves A. (1999); Fidler B. (2006); Davies B., Elison L. (2006) and others.

The goal of the research is to determine the work efficiency peculiarities and criteria of schools as organizations.

Research assignments

To carry out an analysis of work efficiency comprehension. To ascertain the role of school leaders in seeking school work efficiency and organizing school work.

To ascertain the essential criteria of modern school work efficiency. The following empirical research methods were invoked to reach the research goal and assignments:

Analysis of scientific literature and norm acts, structured expert interview.

Research methods: the research was carried out in December of the year 2014. Interview of focus group with school leaders was used to gather data. A total of 6 employees took part.

Three criteria for selection of informants were chosen: direct leadership in an institution (must be a director), managerial experience (no less than 10 years), managerial category (higher than second). The research sample was created using non-probability purposeful method. A homogenous group was constituted on the aspects of specialty, gender and age. All informants were introduced with the goal and use of the research. In addition, questions of confidentiality were discussed. Data was gathered until theoretical „saturation“ was reached and same opinions started to repeat. In order to ensure the confidentiality of research participants, their region and place of residence are not published. The results of the research were analysed using content analysis method. The data gathered during the interview were analysed using qualitative content analysis method (Bitinas et. al, 2008).

Comprehension of school efficiency

The conception of efficiency is used very often both in public and private sectors. Efficiency is inseparable from any work. Efficiency is the realization of appropriately set goals, achievement of a qualitative result by rationally, economically using the available resources V. Targamadžė (2001). S. Puškorius (2002) offers the following definition of efficiency: *„efficiency is a ration between the desired results of work and complex allocations, deposits and other*

resources used to achieve them“. Analysing three terms: „economy“, „effectiveness“, „efficiency“, S. Puškorius (2002) revealed the connections and differences between these terms and emphasized that when evaluating effectiveness and efficiency, it is important to choose the quantitative criteria, because only they allow to evaluate, how effective is some particular work. Therefore, when trying to ascertain whether the organization works efficiently, organizational goals should be defined. According to M. Dittenhofer (2001), there are two main reasons why it is important to examine the efficiency in an organization. Firstly, it is a sort of work index if the organization works well enough. Secondly, measurements of efficiency help the organization to increase a wish to work and reach for the set goals.

Every organization, users of a service and participants of service rendering process define unique criteria of efficiency. It is impossible to make a single best list of criteria, because every user of a service distinguishes the aspects important to himself regarding his assessments, values and expectations. The efficiency of an organization is described by: efficiency, throughput, productivity, quality etc.

It should be noticed that in order to know whether the work is efficient or not, it should be evaluated based on specific elements: effectiveness of resource use; effectiveness of production process; effectiveness of services rendered; effectiveness of employees' work; effectiveness of management decisions.

K. Stid (2010) states that in order for the organization to be efficient, attention to the following fields of activity should be given: leadership; decision making and structure; people; work processes; culture.

According to S. Puškorius (2002), when evaluating efficiency, two aspects may be distinguished: effectiveness of expenditures, when results are situated with the use of financial resources, and work effectiveness, when results are compared to the meaningful factor of productivity – personnel. The result may be indicated as a connection between the provider and user of the service.

J. Mackevičius and D. Daujotaitė (2011) state that efficiency may be defined as a ratio of created products and used complex resources. It could be said that complex use of resources is important for effectiveness, while when evaluating the efficiency of resource use, work results are compared to the resources already used, because expenditures have to be as low, and the result as good as possible.

Work efficiency is a complex process, because when evaluating it, various problems arise: lack of motivation, additional expenditures, lack of knowledge etc. These obstacles arise when an organization does not have the required funding, too high expenditures are foreseen, employees lack motivation etc.

Measurement of work efficiency in organization differs according to its mission, environmental context, nature of work, product or service that the organization creates or provides and clients' needs. However, the first step in evaluation of organization's efficiency is the understanding of the organization

itself, how it functions, what is its structure and what is the most important to it (J. Heerwagen ir kt., 2010). According to the author, the criteria for analysing the organization's efficiency are: achievement of organization's mission; quality and value of a service; clients' satisfaction; innovativeness and creativity; organization's adaptation to the changing environment; effective communication; employees' involvement and maintenance; effective work; work place quality; collaboration; efficiency of operations; image and reputation.

The conception of school work efficiency is constantly changing, taking the changes in the society into consideration. A. Bagdonas and P. Jucevičienė (2000) state that the educational meaning of the term „efficiency“ is important, but that does not allow to dissociate from its managerial context, because the efficiency of a school is being analysed and the school is working not through the direct interaction of teacher-to-student, but as an organization, ensuring favourable environment with the help of managerial means. Analysing the conception of efficiency, V. Targamadžė (2001) presented the criteria of efficient school of many foreign authors and, concluding them, states that an efficient school, just like any other organization seeks goals that satisfy the needs of students, parents and society. L. Jovaiša (2007) defines efficiency on a pedagogic aspect. According to the author, efficiency is a meaningful result of a pedagogical influence. Low efficiency may be influenced by inappropriate organization of the pedagogical process. The level of efficiency is difficult to evaluate, because it depends not only on the organization of the pedagogical process, but also on the personal characteristics of the students and various environmental factors.

A school is an organization with many groups of interest, which causes different attitudes to work efficiency; the results of work become clear only after some time, a few or even more years; sometimes results are difficult to measure due to insufficient methodological basis.

However, main elements defining efficiency can be distinguished: setting of organizational goals; striving to reach organizational goals; optimal use of limited resources.

In 1995, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore distinguished 11 characteristics of efficient schools that are most often found in literature sources (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995):

1. Professional leadership – a solid and purposeful, based on involvement, professional leadership exists in the school;
2. Unified vision and goals – goals that unite the school community, consistent practice, collegiality and collaboration;
3. Learning environment – tidy atmosphere, attractive work environment;

4. Attention to the teaching and learning process – maximization of teaching time, emphasis on academic work, concentration to achievements;
5. Purposeful teaching – effective organization, clear goals of a lesson, structured lessons, applicable practical assignments;
6. High expectations – ambitious expectations known to the whole community, intellectual challenge;
7. Positive motivation – clear and righteous discipline, feedback;
8. Observation of progress – observation of students' progress and evaluation of school work results;
9. Students' rights and duties – development of students' self-confidence, distribution of responsibilities, work supervision;
10. Home-school partnership – parents' involvement into their children's education process
11. Learning organization – personnel's learning and improvement.

Analysing the documents of Lithuanian education policy, peculiarities of education quality, education management efficiency are emphasized.

The education guidelines (2002) state that the most important goal of education development is to implement a system of responsible management, based on monitoring, strategic planning, clearly defined accountability, information and involvement of the community. The State education strategy for 2003-2012 (resolution No. IX-1700 of Lithuanian Republic Seimas, July 4th, 2003), distinguishes the following priorities: knowledge society, secure society and competitive economy; system of responsible management, based on periodic analysis of conditions of education levels; managerial culture oriented at improvement of education; information and participation of the society (Access on the internet: <http://www.smm.lt/strategija/vss.htm>).

The 2005 January 24th resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 82 „On the verification of the program for state education strategy for 2003-2012 provisions“ states that one of the most important strategic goals of the education development is to „create an effective, harmonious education system that would be based on responsible management, purposeful funding and rational resource use (paragraph 9.1, section III). The general guidelines for leaders' attestation evaluation criteria state: „the main goal of the school leaders' work is to professionally manage the school, ensuring its successful work and efficient development, oriented at student's self-development and life success (Access on the internet: http://www.smm.lt/teisine_baze/docs/isakymai/05-07-21-ISAK-1521.htm).

The importance of efficient management is also emphasized in the clause 5 of Lithuanian Republic education law (2011), „Principles of education system“, which indicates that based on efficient management, appropriately and timely decisions, education system must strive for good quality results by smartly and thrifty using the resources, always evaluating, analysing and planning its work.

The law obliges the school to prepare a strategic education plan and annual program of educative work, which must be ratified by the school's council and founder and confirmed by the school leader.

The first section of Lithuanian Republic education law (2011) paragraph 63, „Involvement of members of the school community in the management of education“ defines that members of the school community have the opportunity to participate in the management of education, forming various associations and organizations of groups (students, teachers, parents) and interests that carry out the assignments and functions of education development set by their members and provided in their work statute.

Development, innovation and (self-) development of an education institution directly depends on the quality of management, competence of the leader and his team – intellectual and pragmatic administration skills and abilities. Therefore, school leader's leadership is inseparable from the subjects functioning in the organization and their interests.

When seeking for school work efficiency, especially important role is held by the principles of quality management: active work of leaders, orientation to the client, procedural and systematic attitude, involvement of the people, making decisions based on facts, continuous improvement of processes.

Evaluation of school work efficiency from the experts' point of view

After a qualitative analysis of the research results, the most important problems of school work efficiency were distinguished, which are related to: competences of leaders and teachers; education service quality and students' achievements; identification of the needs of interested sides.

When identifying the problems related to distribution of functions among leaders, experts emphasized constant increase of delegated functions, stressing out that *„school as an organization has to be responsible for functions that are not actually of its own“*, *„various initiatives are given from above and the schools are insufficiently prepared and informed about them“*, *„there is no sustainability, no perspective change support systems are being created“*.

The experts emphasized the importance of human resources: *„it is the biggest treasure of the organization“*, *„when a teacher is improving, school community is changing“*, *„a teacher has to constantly change in order for the education process to be effective“*.

According to the experts, teachers do not participate in the management of the school enough, because *„teachers' reluctance to participate is related to material motivation“*, *„teachers do not wish for additional work because there is no pay for it“*, *„often material reasons determine to do something“*.

Experts noted the lack of knowledge on *communication with parents* of leaders and teachers. The experts indicated the following problems of collaboration with students' parents: *„the parents' attitude to the school as an organization is not appropriately formed“*, *„the majority of the parents do not*

participate in the education of children actively enough“, „*are unwilling to collaborate, do not always have the time to discuss the child's achievements or problems*“, which allows to think that improvement of competences of collaboration with parents is a very important criterion of work efficiency.

Competences of leaders and teachers that are important to assess when evaluating school work efficiency were indicated: „*the school leader must have experience in administrative work*“, „*must be educated and graduated in education management*“, „*pedagogic education is mandatory*“, „*only having work experience in education sphere allows to understand the aspects of school's work*“.

Evaluating the school leader's work, the informants agree that: „*work must always be evaluated*“, „*it is a factor for improvement*“, „*requirements are different, how will the leader be appointed?*“, „*work evaluation system is oriented to efficient, purposeful strategic management*“. An assumption can be made that the leaders appreciate this requirement because following the set criteria, leader's work can be identified.

The following ways of leader's work evaluation were mentioned as the most important: „*certification of school leaders*“, „*external evaluation of school work quality*“, „*accreditation of secondary education program*“, „*school's work self-evaluation is important*“, „*we would like if the community evaluated our work positively*“. These ways of work evaluation were distinguished because the work of schools are mostly evaluated using the mentioned methods. It may be stated that the said ways of school leaders' work evaluation are oriented to the leader's competence and qualification, quality of education services, student's results and achievements.

It is interesting to emphasize that the system evaluating work is necessary, because „*it motivates to look for novelties*“, „*helps to manage school innovatively*“, „*is a wish to improve and know the tendencies of efficient school work*“, „*I may base management on democratic principles*“, „*ascertain the values of the organization*“.

The research found that evaluation of school leader's work efficiency is oriented according to the set criteria, because it is being oriented at „*competence and qualification of leader and teacher*“, „*during the external evaluation, quality of school as an organization providing education services is being evaluated*“, „*accreditation of education program, just like the evaluation process is oriented at the quality of education services, education results and students' achievements*“.

Conclusions

The analysis of scientific literature on school work efficiency has shown that school efficiency is a constantly changing conception. School work efficiency is ensured by accomplishment of set goals by ensuring the quality of educational and managerial processes in order to ensure the science progress by

allowing the person to obtain the newest knowledge and skills that secure the future perspectives in labour market. Due to this reason, constant evaluation of teachers and school leaders motivates to efficiently make decisions that have significant importance to the school work, effectively collaborate, ensuring the quality of education services and striving for efficient school work.

The leaders positively evaluate the process of eternal evaluation of school work quality, because it is oriented at the improvement of teacher's and leader's personal competences as well as to the efficiency of school work. The evaluation system for the work of teachers and school leaders that exists nowadays is based on the following criteria: analysis of leaders' and teachers' competence and qualification; education service quality, education results and students' achievements are evaluated; orientation to the needs of the interested sides. Taking these criteria into consideration allow the school to seek work efficiency. It is agreed that the accreditation of a program influences the improvement of school efficiency, because during the process, work quality of teachers is analysed and observed, which guarantees the quality of education services and students' results and achievements.

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