

COMPETENCE OF THE HEAD OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND ITS MANAGEMENT POSSIBILITIES IN COVID-19 CONDITIONS

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Abstract. *Competence of the head of an educational institution and its management During the Covid-19 pandemic, a large number of different legal acts and measures are required. They require a large amount of diligence and immediate action in the application of new regulations. All innovations require regular reporting on progress, thus adding to the workload of staff. The results of the research show that a modern school principal does not have enough only pedagogical competences, but at the same time must be both a leader who guides the team towards the goal, and a manager with a strategic vision, the ability to plan and implement these plans, in addition, one must be able to navigate legal acts and their application. The aim of the research: to study the competence of the head of an educational institution and its management possibilities in the conditions of COVID-19. Research tasks: to study the normative regulation of the education system; to perform the analysis of the competence of the head of the educational institution in the conditions of COVID-19; to study the impact of the measures and restrictions introduced by COVID-19 on the management context of the educational institution; summarization and analysis of the obtained survey data. Research methods: scientific literature, internet sources, documents and statistical data research, data processing and analysis of the results of the survey data.*

Keywords: *competence, Covid-19, educational institution, head.*

Introduction

At the time of the spread of Covid-19, the organisation of school work was affected by a large number of different pieces of legislation and conditions that required a great deal of quick understanding and action. All the innovations

involved regular reporting on progress, the need to acquire and apply new competences, which put extra pressure on both teachers and the head of the institution. The use of the competences and leadership skills of the head of the institution became an essential prerequisite for the successful organisation of work in the COVID-19 environment. The successful management of an educational institution in specific circumstances depends to a large extent on a set of managerial competences, which are most often not related to pedagogical competences. Looking at the ongoing processes in society, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 conditions are only one of the aspects that will influence the future organisation of managers' work, creating various special and exceptional circumstances in seemingly mundane processes. The head of the institution and his/her ability to apply different competences plays an important role in influencing the results to be achieved and possibly ensuring the quality of the educational institution.

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Review of the Literature

The term "competence" has many different meanings, definitions, spellings and at least two main approaches to understanding it (Tilde dictionary). Boyatzis (2007) states that competencies are behavioural characteristics of an individual that are causally related to effective or excellent job performance. A study of the scholar's work reveals that the concept of competency-based HR has been known and practiced for more than 35 years, since McClelland (1965) first proposed them as a critical differentiator of performance. Today, almost every institution uses some form of competency-based HRM.

Danvila del Valle, Ángel Sastre and Marroquín (2013) research has shown that the ability to predict the performance of a leader, manager or professional depends on several competences, which can be divided into three categories:

1. Cognitive intelligence competences such as thinking systems.
2. Emotional intelligence competencies or internal skills such as adaptability.
3. Social intelligence competences or interpersonal skills such as, networking.

The concept of competence was originally defined as the ability of individuals to respond to the demands of their environment, and this ability gives a sense of satisfaction or effectiveness. The differences in the understanding of each concept are based on the aspects that are the focus of the respective approach, where the former focuses on the inputs that lead to effective job performance and the latter on the outputs, hence the former are referred to as behavioural competences and the latter as performance-based competences. In simple terms, the former are about the person doing the work, and the second about the work and its parameters. Different approaches, often considered to be the American and British approaches to developing competency models (Horton, 2002). In 1993, Dubois (2004) adapted interpretation of the concept of competence and defined competence as the core qualities that "lead to successful performance in one of life's roles". D. Dubois (2004) described competences as "the tools that employees use in different ways to get the job done". A variety of methods are used to identify competences, which are used to identify the most important requirements for a particular job group or unit. They can only be ascertained once the job components (e.g. duties, tasks, working conditions, means of work, etc.) have been identified. The choice of a specific method for competences is a strategic decision. Dubois (2004) in his study of the competency model, states that it is a collection of competencies for a particular job category that are required for successful or excellent performance in a team or institution. There are different types of competency models, such as competency models that describe the differences between excellent and successful employees, that identify the minimum requirements for success, and models that identify possible reasons for failure. The structure of the competency model, the way it is presented to staff and the way it is applied in practice can be said to reflect the values of the institution's decision-makers and managers. According to Horton (2002), in the 1930s, with the emergence of scientific management and human relations in schools, the question of how best for the manager to lead and motivate the institution's employees became a focus of interest for academics and practitioners.

Latvian researcher Upenieks (2008) believes that Latvia has not developed a unified approach to the issue of competences required of educational leaders. The head of an institution must be able to organise and manage staff. Currently, there are two different approaches - the traditional approach to personnel management and the competence approach to personnel management. Both approaches cover different areas such as rationale, main reasons for the approach, main challenges, HRM functions, HR planning, recruitment and selection, training, performance management, reward management, employee development, etc. Each area involves both a traditional approach and a competency approach.

A comparison of HRM approaches shows that there are some differences between the traditional approach and the competency-based approach, as traditional HRM is based on job analysis and job descriptions, while the

competency-based approach helps to identify the qualities that make an employee successful or excellent in their job.

Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations Nr.618 (Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets, 2020b) determine the procedure for the evaluation of the professional performance of the head of an educational institution. The national information system of the Electronic Evaluation Form (<http://www.ikvd.gov.lv>) is used as a tool for the evaluation of the head of an educational institution. The self-assessment form for the head of an educational establishment must be completed and approved no later than two weeks before the expert panel starts work in the educational establishment.

Table 1 Framework for the evaluation of the professional performance of the educational institution, the educational programme and the head of the educational institution (RD IKSD, 2019)

Field				
Alignment	with	Quality learning	Inclusive environment	Adequate management
Criteria				
Competence and achievements	and	Teaching and learning	Availability	Administrative efficiency
Further education and employment		Professional capacity of teachers	Safety and psychological well-being	Management professional activity
Equality and inclusion	and	Implementation of education programmes	Infrastructure and resources	Support and cooperation

Quality assessment in education should ensure regular, independent, objective and valid quality assessment in all areas of quality. The authors consider the objectives of evaluation to be important in providing objective information and data on the compliance of an educational institution's performance and curriculum delivery with legislation and best practice, in determining the level of quality of performance, in monitoring the quality of education, and in supporting innovation. The guiding principles of quality education evaluation are results orientation and efficiency, participation and ownership, accessibility and modernity, regularity and continuity, objectivity and human centredness.

The evaluation criteria are management professional activities, which assess the knowledge, skills and competences of the head of the educational institution required to ensure a high quality and effective management process, as evidenced by the quality domains of each educational institution. The evaluation criterion shall take into account indicators that assess the knowledge, skills and competences of the head of the educational institution in the areas of justice, leadership, management, effective and respectful communication, quality of

education, educational development and/or sector policy, as well as the ability of the head to provide and receive professional feedback, ensuring the transition of the educational institution to the core principles of the learning organisation in management. In line with the principles of the new School 2030 curriculum, the activities of educational institutions are decentralised and the founder's responsibility for the quality of education is increased. The responsibility of the school as a learning organisation for the achievement of objectives, quality education, an inclusive environment and effective governance increases significantly. The educational leader and his/her competences are a key factor in the management of an educational institution. LeFrevre and Robinson note that crisis management and basic management knowledge are important for managers of an institution (LeFrevre & Robinson, 2015). This determines the degree of leadership as a collective effectiveness. The Covid-19 circumstances created additional responsibilities and tension in educational institutions and the actions to be implemented by the heads of these institutions in accordance with the changes in legislation, which were not acceptable to some teachers.

On 12 March 2020, a state of emergency was declared by the Cabinet of Ministers by Order No 103 with the aim of limiting the spread of Covid-19 (Latvijas Republikas Ministru Kabinets, 2020a). The Cabinet of Ministers Regulation stated that a teacher should plan the development of his/her professional competence in cooperation with the head of the educational establishment where the person carries out his/her teaching activities. This means that the head of the educational establishment is responsible for the implementation of professional competence development in the educational establishment.

Research results

The research methodology is based on the work of A. Geske and A. Grinfeld (Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006), Dz. Albrehta (1998), P. Agliati, P. Barriga, A. Cifuentes et al. (2020) and other authors, as well as the theoretical framework developed by the working group of the subject standards component of the Education System Development Project of the Ministry of Education in planning, conducting, processing and interpreting the results of educational research.

The study involved a questionnaire survey of heads of 37 Latvian comprehensive schools. The survey was carried out in the period from May 2022. The questionnaires were completed by 37 heads of educational institutions from all regions of Latvia. 28 women and 9 men took part in the survey. The age and gender statistics of the respondents allow us to identify central tendency indicators of the empirical distributions. In Latvia, most educational institutions are headed by women, the arithmetic age of the respondents is 28 years, while the arithmetic age of men is 52 years. The high proportion of women among the staff also

determines the predominance of women among the heads of educational establishments. 34 heads of educational establishments were reported to have a Master's degree. 24 respondents indicated that their current job is in a secondary school or gymnasium. Accordingly, 8 respondents were supervisors in a secondary school and 5 respondents were in a primary school.

The survey shows that the majority of heads of authority have been in their post for more than 10 years. This in turn indicates that experience and best practices are acquired over time from other heads of institutions, which provides opportunities to improve the organisation and development of their institution. Nine respondents have been in the post of head of an institution for a period of 5-10 years, which is also noted as a relatively long-term and experience-determining factor. Thus, 31% of respondents are relatively new leaders of educational institutions, whose early years of leadership are still within living memory and whose experience of leading an educational institution is still developing. In terms of the time when an educational institution has been managed from 1-5 years, 5 respondents have checked the following. Most of the respondents started their career as educational institution managers when they had accumulated some experience in the field of teaching. It cannot be denied that those with more than 10 years of experience are working in different fields, not only in pedagogy.

In response to the question "What motivated you to become the head of an educational institution?" Trends in the motivation of educational institutions to take up the post of head can be observed. The author considers that the position is not correct for the observation that 17 respondents indicate that they accepted their current position because they were persuaded to accept it. This in turn suggests that it was not their own choice, but a method of persuasion at work. On the other hand, 11 respondents indicated that they wanted opportunities for personal career development, so they prepared early and applied for the vacancy and got it. In addition, 4 respondents had their career development opportunities affected by a change of residence. External motivation - persuasion, recommendation, promotion, election, as well as domestic - dominated the responses.

The questionnaire asked the heads of educational establishments to identify the solutions they consider to be the most important when taking up the role of head of an establishment. It can be concluded that the most important for the 34 respondents was the introduction of new solutions in the internal working procedures of the educational institution. However, 11 respondents indicated that new solutions were also needed in the recruitment of support and technical staff. Nine of the respondents pointed out the need for changes in the organisation of internal order, as well as in the image of the school. This suggests that the responsibilities are mostly related to the application of managerial competences rather than pedagogical competences. When analysing the competences required for the performance of duties, 67% of respondents indicated that an understanding

of financial management and dealing with economic issues (72% of respondents) were essential for carrying out day-to-day duties. The most important challenges are: preparation of development plans, planning repairs and reconstruction works, preparation of budgets.

Covid - 19 in a context where compulsory vaccination was required for teachers, some staff and school teachers refused. This was a major challenge for school managers to find and attract new staff in an emergency situation. The survey results show that 79% of respondents were faced with finding and recruiting staff to meet the curriculum.

School leaders identified a lack of legal and administrative knowledge as a major weakness in their performance appraisals. This was noted as important by 88% of respondents. Respondents identified the need to improve their knowledge of labour and occupational safety legislation. 76% of respondents identified the need to improve organisational skills in crisis and emergency situations as important, while 68% of respondents identified the need to improve presentation skills.

The results of the question "Where do school leaders seek help to resolve unclear issues?" showed that 89% of respondents learn by themselves or by consulting relatives, friends, acquaintances and only 5% said they consulted their previous head or colleagues and 6% sought support from the education authority.

The survey asked for the most problematic aspects of school management in the Covid-19 context that have required special attention from the Head. As a result, it can be concluded that in the performance of their duties, leaders need to be able to deal with a wide range of issues related to different areas. The most important are:

- Lack of information on the right way to go when introducing new solutions;
- Lack of support from senior management and colleagues;
- Teacher burnout syndrome;
- Increased workload and lack of time;
- Decision-making in a short time and with limited resources;
- Loss of motivation for teachers and pupils;
- For teachers, many of the activities are not explained, which makes them more time-consuming because they have to be self-taught;
- Lack of communication between different groups in society;
- Resource constraints, including human resources.

The results of the study show that in the Covid-19 context, the introduction of various conditions and constraints created additional workload for the school leader. 53% of respondents confirmed that on average 6-10 hours per week were spent on various Covid-19 related issues, while 42% of respondents spent as much as 11-15 hours per week on these activities.

Conclusions

Educational leaders have to take a number of decisions in different fields on a daily basis. Heads of schools are teachers who act as leaders. These functions require not only pedagogical competence, but also a range of other competences that need to be applied in their daily work. Every change and emergency situation requires quick, responsible action and the application of a wide range of knowledge in different areas, such as law enforcement, communication, record-keeping, etc.

In the Covid-19 environment, school leaders felt the extra strain of additional work on various issues. The introduction of the emergency conditions made it necessary for school leaders to put into practice various management competences which are not used in everyday life and which are not always acquired by school leaders during their education. According to the survey results, the acquisition of management competences is most often in the hands of the managers themselves, or can be acquired through self-learning.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that school leaders, in order to perform their duties effectively and successfully, would need to acquire additional competences related to communication changes and crisis situations, organisational, resource management competences and legal competences. A comparison of the competences required from school leaders and what is needed in practice shows that management competences (including financial, legal and organisational) are important for school leaders to carry out their daily duties and especially to deal with emergency situations.

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