

# Reflection of Secondary School Management Key Competencies in the Slovak Republic

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**Abstract** – The study deals with the identification of problematic areas within the management of general education high schools in the Slovak Republic and analyses the dependence between the most problematic areas of school management with regard to the length of management practice and the types of managerial training.

The questionnaire method was used as part of the research investigation. The research sample consisted of leading pedagogical staff (106 respondents) working at state grammar schools in Slovakia.

The analysis of the results has showed that for employees in management positions the area of legal management of the school is primarily problematic. The second most problematic area is economic management.

The authors expect that the results of the research will not only contribute to raising awareness of the areas of school management but will also provide additional information about director's competencies and further encourage the responsible authorities to consider other options for methodical support.

**Keywords** – Areas of school management, competences, legal personality, secondary school.

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## 1. Introduction

The dynamic social, political, and technological changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century bring along many challenges and require new approaches even in the education system. The educational system in the Slovak Republic needs to respond to changes and market demands in the form of new skill acquisition that will contribute to the development of society and the economy. The key element responsible for the implementation of reforms in the field of education is undoubtedly the school principal. Thorough knowledge of all management areas of a school, its vision, and the ability to manage its operation are important prerequisites for successfully overcoming and solving its problems. It is important that the director knows all areas of school management and he/she devotes sufficient time to these fields so that they function effectively as a whole. The results of this process are a positive working environment, good interpersonal relations, high-quality performances and conscientious fulfilment of duties both learners as well as teachers.

According to the reasons mentioned above, the main goal of the presented contribution was to identify problematic areas of general education at secondary schools in the Slovak Republic with an emphasis on solving a descriptive and relational research problem.

The demands placed on the profession of a leading pedagogical employee whether from the legislation point of view or from the point of view of personality, abilities, and skills are high. Beam et al. [4] divided the school principal's activities into the following categories: *administration* (writing reports, documentation, forms, electronic, and letter communication), *special education* (work with learners with SEN, gifted pupils, pupils with problematic behaviour, administration related to special education), *relations with parents* (meetings, telephone conversations, electronic and letter communication, cooperation, solutions of problems), *relations with teachers* (class inspections, formal

evaluation, meetings, professional development, supervision), *students discipline* (students leadership, behaviour, provision of educational measures, communication with parents and pupils), *curriculum and educational process* (schedule, management of the educational process, textbooks and aids, assessment of pupils). Based on the study of foreign literature we can conclude that no strict division of activities into individual areas for the process of school management exists. The authors do differentiate the content of activities that are linked to management and to leadership but at some point within individual categories these activities intersect.

In the literature of Slovak authors we encounter the division of the internal system of micromanagement based on the management activities of the school principal. Konečná and Veverková [8] divide it into five areas and distinguish: pedagogical management, professional-methodical management, personnel management, legal management, and economic management. Slovakia as one of few European countries which has developed competency profiles for individual positions in education which are appendices to the Minister's Instruction/Statute no. 39/2017 [12]. The competence profile is perceived as a "strategic tool for improving the quality of national education" [18]. The competence profile helps specify the school director's responsibilities and guide his/her professional development. At the same time, it is the starting point for evaluating the principal in his/her school management success. The competence profile of leading pedagogical staff is focused on four areas of management: the area of normative, economic and conceptual management, management of education and training processes in the school, personnel management, and the area of professional development.

Pisoňová [9], [10], [11] deals with the issue of the implementation of managerial functions into the process of managing secondary schools and considers key managerial functions as follow: planning, organizing, leading people, decision-making, marketing, control and assessment.

## 2. Materials and Methods

On the basis of a theoretical analysis of the current state of school management in Slovakia and abroad we found that in our conditions only a few analyses are devoted to problematic areas of management; therefore, the need to carry out the subject research arose. The main goal was to identify problematic areas of general secondary schools' management in the Slovak Republic as well as to analyse the dependencies between the most

problematic areas of school management with regard to the length of management practice and the process of managerial training.

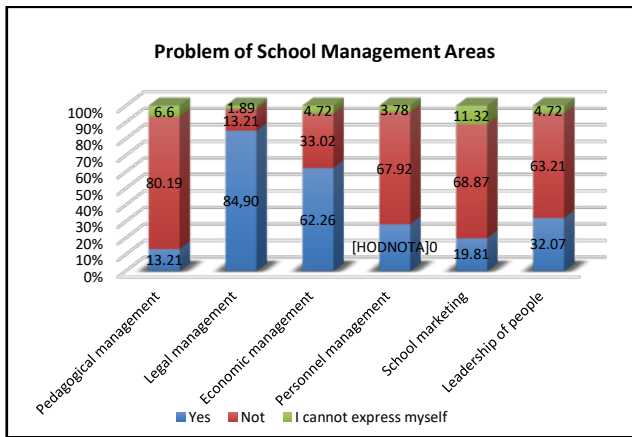
In order to identify problematic areas of management and the causes of problems in individual areas we used the questionnaire method which in addition to 5 items investigating demographic data (age, gender, length of management experience, managerial position, and process of managerial training) also included closed items investigating which areas of management consider leading pedagogical staff of grammar schools as problematic. For the analysis and the assessment of results the following methods were used: frequency detection, item categorization, comparative analysis of obtained data, correlation analysis of obtained data (contingency analysis, Chi-square test -  $\chi^2$  test). Obtained data were processed by the freely distributable statistical program JASP.

For faster data collection a web questionnaire was created within the Google Forms environment which was further sent to the addresses of grammar schools' management - obtained from the CVTI SR database (*Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic*). According to data as of September 15, 2022, 233 grammar schools, 437 secondary vocational schools and 17 conservatories provided secondary education in Slovakia [5] [cit. 2022-12-05]. The return rate of completed questionnaires was 106 completed web questionnaires from the leading pedagogical staff working at state grammar schools in Slovakia out of 144 grammar schools approached.

## 3. Results

In the conducted research we have specified 6 areas of management of general secondary schools in Slovakia which school principals may consider problematic (pedagogical management, legal management, economic management, personnel management, school marketing, people management).

Graph 1 shows that almost 85% of general secondary school principals in Slovakia consider the area of legal management as problematic. For almost 63% of asked respondents the area of economic management of the school is problematic. Leading teaching staff considers the area of personnel management (28.3%) and the area of people management (32.07%) to be approximately equally problematic. The respondents consider the area of school marketing management (19.81%) and the area of pedagogical management (13.21%) to be the least problematic areas of management.



Graph 1. Problems of Individual School Management Areas (source: own research)

Based on the results of identifying problematic areas of management our next aim is to search for connections between the most problematic areas of management and selected variables (specifically we focused on the method of managerial training and the length of management experience). We established the following null hypotheses:

H1.0: Management of the economic area and the process of managerial training are independent.

H2.0: Legal field management and the length of management experience are independent.

In the beginning of the questionnaire we collected data on the type of management training completed and the length of management experience as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Length of Managerial Experience in the Position of a Leading Pedagogical Employee (source: own research)

Respondents' Length of Managerial Practice	n	%
a) 0 – 5 years	38	35.85
b) 6 – 10 years	18	16.98
c) 11 – 15 years	22	20.76
d) 16 – 20 years	10	9.43
e) 21 and more years	18	16.98
Together	<b>106</b>	<b>100.00</b>

It is obvious that the high age of teachers and principals in education and their subsequent retirement also affect the generational change in management positions. Despite this tendency it is evident from the table that less than half of the respondents (47.16%) hold a leading position in school for at least the third term. Recently there has been a lot of discussion about limiting the number of school principals' terms of office. The proposed intention to limit the school director's term of office to a maximum of three consecutive terms, however, amendment no. 415/2021 Coll., which amended Act No. 596/2003 Coll., was not approved [19].

Table 2. Completed Preparation for the Performance of a Leading Pedagogical Employee Function (source: own research)

Respondents' Managerial Preparation	n	%
a) Functional education organized by NIVAM (National Institute of Education and Youth)	89	83.97
b) Functional education organized by CCC (Centers for lifelong learning) at universities	14	13.21
c) University studies with focus on education management	1	0.94
d) No preparation yet	1	0.94
e) Other - please specify which	1	0.94
Together	<b>106</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The means of managerial training of leading pedagogical staff is one of the qualification requirements for the performance of management functions in education. Based on data from the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic as of 21 July 2021 only 6 institutions are authorized to provide functional education [cit. 2022-03-11]. As we assumed the vast majority of directors acquired the professional competences necessary to perform their duties in the National Institute of Education and Youth and in the Lifelong Learning Centres of higher education institutions. Up to 103 respondents completed functional education in these institutions - 97.18%.

To verify the established hypotheses, we used statistical testing of independence between two variables. For this purpose, it is advisable to use contingency analysis and the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$  test). To verify the size of the effect for the Chi-square test we used Cramer's V which deals with the measure of the relative strength of the association between two variables [2]. We formulated the null ( $H_0$ ) and the alternative ( $H_1$ ) hypothesis and set the level of significance of the test thereby allowing a certain acceptable level of test error. Most often it is a value of 0.05. It means that the level of significance is expressed thusly  $\alpha=0.05$ . We rejected the null hypothesis if the p-value which we calculated using the software was less than the significance level.

H1.0: Management of the economic area and the process of managerial training are independent.

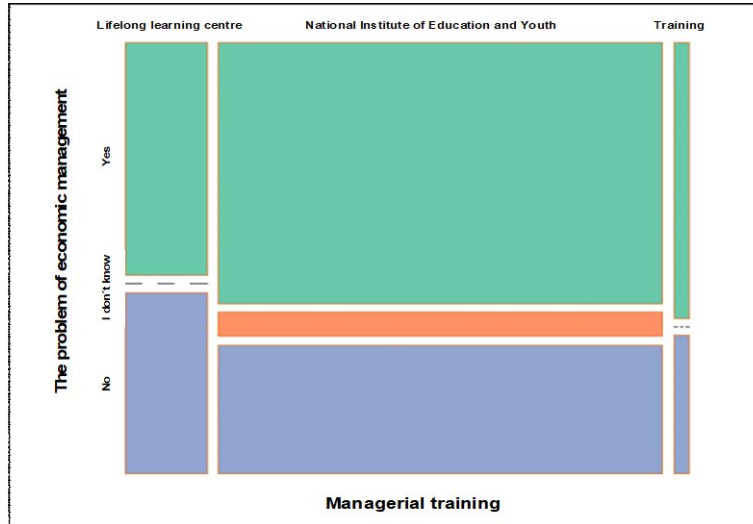
H1.1: Management of the economic area and the process of managerial training are dependent.

Testing confirmed the validity of the hypothesis. There is no statistically significant dependence between the answers to the item determining whether the respondents consider the field of economic management problematic and the process of their managerial training. The respondents answered independently regarding the type of preparation for the function.

We can see that most of the employees were preparing for the leadership position at the National Institute of Education and Youth.

Conclusion: we do not reject H1.0.

Management of the economic area and the process of managerial training are independent. The chi-square test did not show a significant difference between the observed frequency of items compared to the expected frequency ( $\chi^2=4,595$ ;  $p=0,800$ ;  $V=0,147$ ).



Graph 2. Relationship between the responses for management of economic area and for the method of managerial training (source: own research)

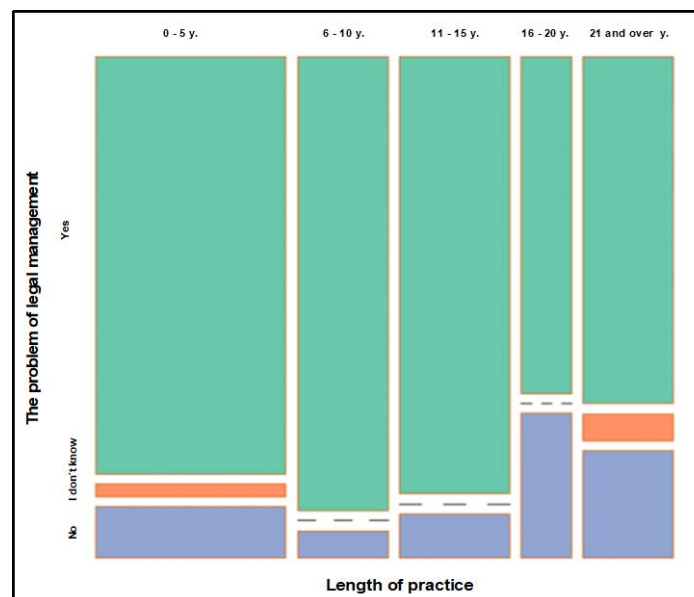
H2.0: Legal field management and length of management experience are independent.

H2.1: Management of the legal field and length of management experience are dependent.

Again, through testing, we came to the conclusion that there is no statistically significant relationship between the length of practice and the challenge of legal management. What we can observe in the analysis of the given item is that, regardless of the

length of experience, the majority of respondents with any length of experience consider this area problematic.

Conclusion: we do not reject  $H_0$ . The management of the legal area and the length of management experience are independent. The chi-square test did not show a significant difference between the observed frequency of items compared to the expected frequency ( $\chi^2=7,775$ ;  $p=0,456$ ;  $V=0,192$ ).



Graph 3. Relationship between the responses to management of the legal field item and the length of management practice (source: own research)

#### 4. Discussion

The main goal of the research was to identify problematic areas of secondary school management. The focus is on general education secondary schools, the founder of which is the self-governing region. The scope of interest was on areas of management the leading pedagogical staff consider problematic.

The analysis of the results that we obtained by descriptive research showed that for up to 85% of employees in school management positions the area of school legal management is problematic. The directors clearly agreed that problems in the legal field arise primarily as a result of constantly changing legislation. Permanent changes in laws, decrees, regulations, and directives cause difficulties for management employees, also because they do not receive adequate legal and methodological support from superior authorities and from the founder. The authors of the analysis *To dá rozum (That makes sense)* [7] also drew attention to the lack of support from the founder, who pointed out that grammar school principals receive significantly less support from the founder than kindergarten and primary school principals. At the same time, it turned out that some founders are more interested in the field of economic management of the school than others. Respondents declare the need for relevant legal service and advice which they consider essential especially due to ambiguity and different interpretations of the law and orientation in the currently valid legislation. As a result of this it is difficult for them to implement these changes in internal guidelines and regulations. Our results correspond with the results of research carried out in the USA which confirmed that up to 85% of secondary school principals had a problem in the area of school legislation and expressed that if they had sufficient knowledge in this area they would make different decisions [16].

The second most problematic area of grammar schools' management appears to be the area of economic management. According to the vast majority of respondents, the causes of the problems are mainly due to insufficient and missing competences in the economic field. Respondents pointed to the lack of education in this area as well as insufficient training within functional education. At the same time they pointed out that the offer of training and professional seminars for employees in the economic field is insufficient. Management employees lack knowledge especially in the field of project management, accounting, budgeting or public procurement. Inadequate financing of education which the respondents also pointed out forces them to look for ways to get funds from extra-budgetary sources as well.

Schools therefore strive to participate in various grant challenges, which, however, are related to the aforementioned problems. Problems with financing and management of the economic area were also found in the research of [14], [6]. Robina et al. [13] confirmed the problems of beginning secondary school principals in Kenya in the economic area, mainly due to lack of funds or frequent legislative changes. The directors declared problems mainly with accounting and justified them with insufficient competences in this area.

The low attractiveness of the teaching profession, social status and low evaluation have a negative effect on the number of job applicants in education. Therefore, it is difficult for management employees to find suitable candidates and due to the lack of financial resources to appraise them adequately. For these reasons they are often forced to employ unqualified or low-quality employees, as a result of which the quality of school management decreases.

Among the less problematic areas of school management according to the leading pedagogical staff participating in the research are the area of school marketing and the area of pedagogical management. The problems that have arisen in the field of school marketing are mostly related to insufficient knowledge in this area. Leading teaching staff also lacks sufficient time and funds for marketing activities. Communication with the public via the Internet and social networks is particularly problematic which may be related to the leading staff's older age which was confirmed in the research of [1].

The least problematic area for the leading pedagogical staff is the area of pedagogical management. However, the lack of qualified and motivated employees negatively affects the pedagogical management of the school. Managers increasingly point to problematic cooperation with parents, similar to what was found in other foreign research [15], [17]. The creation and implementation of the school educational programme is also problematic which was confirmed in the researches of [3].

#### 5. Conclusion

Modern society places increasingly high demands on the work of principals, because they are the ones who participate in school management, staff management, their motivation, and the creation of conditions for an effective educational process. Individual countries try to adapt their educational systems to the demands and expectations of contemporary society, which is why the role of the director has changed significantly in the recent years.

Based on the results of the research we conclude that the set goal was achieved. Among the problematic fields of general education high school management primarily are included the area of *legal* (constantly changing legislation, insufficient legal and methodological support from superior authorities and the founder, problems with orientation in valid legislation and the creation of internal standards and guidelines) and *economic* (lack of knowledge and skills in the given area, fundraising from extra-budgetary sources, project management, accounting management) school management.

We expect that through the conducted research, we will contribute to increasing awareness of the areas and scope of school management, the duties and competencies of the principal, contribute to the improvement of the management training of school principals, and encourage the responsible authorities to think about the possibilities for methodical support from the founders' side.

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