

## LEADERSHIP BY PROGYMNASIUM TEACHERS IN ORGANISING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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### ABSTRACT

The problem of leadership by progymnasium teachers in organising the educational process is analysed in this article. In Lithuania, a progymnasium is an educational institution providing a general education (forms 1 to 8) functioning as an intermediate link between an elementary school and a gymnasium. Quantitative research was conducted with the participation of 120 progymnasium teachers. The assessment of teacher leadership in organising the educational process was based on an SLII situational leadership model (Blanchard, 1985). The research revealed that in organising the educational process, teachers apply different leadership strategies: they provide gifted pupils with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying out a task; they praise and encourage pupils to express their opinions; they carry out tasks without direction; they allow pupils to make their own decisions on how a task will be carried out; they provide feedback, etc. In the organisation of the educational process, teachers tend to apply coaching, supporting and delegating styles of situational leadership. In order to organise the educational process more effectively, the examples of teachers-leaders in creating common educational scenarios and trying out innovative methods, mentoring couples, group supervision, and the creation of learning organisation at progymnasium, could be helpful.

KEY WORDS: *teacher leadership, organisation of the educational process, progymnasium.*

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### Introduction

Leadership in education is an area of scientific research that has received quite a lot of attention in recent decades. This is not surprising, considering the relevance of the issue of leadership in a worldwide context, as well as the demand for international research into various aspects of this problem. Researchers (Harris, Jones, 2019; etc) have recently been developing the discussion on the topic of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is seen by contemporary researchers as a particular choice of teacher reflecting the way one thinks, and what one thinks more than the collection of particular actions. Hunzicker (2017) analyses teacher leadership, and directs attention towards the transformation of a teacher into a teacher-leader. Berry (2019) emphasises the necessity to draw attention to the work done by teachers-leaders, the importance of particular agreements needed for work to be started, incentives and rewards for cooperation, and strategies unifying the leadership of teachers and administrative staff. According to Smylie and Eckert (2018), the best way to assess the development of teacher leadership is to consider principles, processes and systems in the long term, to realise teacher leadership in a wide and systematic way and see not only teachers-leaders but also their leadership, and to develop social leadership practice.

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Teacher leadership has been researched from various points of view. Gul, Demir and Criswell (2019) validate the links between teacher leadership and mentoring practices. Gningue, Peach, Jarrah and Wardat (2022) reveal the relationship between teacher leadership and the school climate. Moreno-Casado, Leo, Lopez-Gajardo, Garcia-Calvo, Cuevas and Pulido (2022) analyse the connection between teacher leadership and students' psychological needs. The following aspects of the expression of teacher leadership are also of great relevance to researchers: Grimm (2020) reveals the expression of teacher leadership in Swedish schools. Zarate, Hughes and Maggin (2023) focus on the leadership of special pedagogues and its impact on professional development. Wiens, Beck, Hilton and Moyal (2023) analyse the links between distributed leadership and the job satisfaction of teachers.

The research conducted on teacher leadership has been based on a variety of leadership theories. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2011) examine transformational and transactional leadership, service leadership, situational leadership, and leadership for learning. Some researchers (Torres, 2019; Holloway, Nielsen, Saltmarsh, 2018; Zala-Mezo, Bormann, Strauss, Muller-Kuhn, 2019; and Heikka, Pitkaniemi, Kettukangas, Hyttinen, 2019; etc) have frequently chosen to base their research work on the theory of distributed leadership. Other researchers (Thomson, Glaso, 2015; McCleskey, 2019; etc) analyse the theory of situational leadership. Tabrizi and Rideout (2019) reveal situational leadership in the education system, and its expression in a multi-cultural society. Zohair, Shooroq, Najwa and Hytham (2021) establish the relationship between the situational leadership of school heads and the level of achievement motivation experienced by teachers. The results of this research can be related to high achievements experienced while administering the work of an educational institution, as well as the necessity for school heads and staff to be full of energy, active, and motivated in job-related activities.

Researchers in Lithuania have also been discussing the topic of leadership. Urbanovič and Navickaitė (2016), analysing leadership in the context of autonomous school and educational management factors, identify that school autonomy is the contextual and dynamic state of a school that depends on the area of decision making, the institutional structure and the competences of those taking decisions. Damkuvienė, Valuckienė, Balčiūnas and Petukienė (2019) show the connections between international mobility activity and leadership, focusing on the Erasmus+ Programme. The research work conducted by Gumuliauskienė and Vaičiūnienė (2019) emphasises the problem of the leadership development of school heads and teacher leadership. Atkočiūnienė, Siudikienė and Girmienė (2019) show the role of leaders in organising the process of knowledge management and the creation of innovation. The research work conducted by Brandišauskienė, Česnavičienė and Bruzgelevičienė (2018) highlights the teacher leadership situation in Lithuania and the readiness to cooperate. Skarbalienė (2015) reveals the leadership of teachers-mentors, and how these leadership competences add to the education of leadership competences in students. The research work by Valuckienė, Balčiūnas, Katiliūtė, Simonaitienė and Stanikūnienė (2015) proves the relevance of leadership for learning for school change. Kaminskienė, Žydžiūnaitė and Juozaitienė (2021) analyse teacher leadership through the prism of a positive approach, professional activeness and school-related stress. In the research work on andragogical leadership by Liekis and Tolutienė (2018), distributed, formal and non-formal leadership is discussed in a more detailed way. In the context of a progymnasium, the research work by Žukauskienė and Macijauskienė (2020) identifies the impact of a progymnasium head's leadership on the management of a school of this type.

The relevance of the problem of teacher leadership has been included in the provisions of strategic documents. The vision for state progress 'Lithuania 2050', covering the prospects for the future of Lithuania over a period of more than 20 years, was presented in 2023. In this document, schools are described as modern and ecological multi-functional centres, with both school and social life taking place there (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023). Regarding future school vision, teachers implementing a general education programme have to seek leadership for the creation of a modern school and the organisation of a high-quality educational process.

The reorganisation of the school network in Lithuania dates from 2011, with the aim of improving the school system in such a way that it corresponds to the changing needs of pupils and the expectations of society. Although there were various reasons for the implemented reorganisation of schools, it was mostly related to the emergence of new challenges, and the demand to adapt to the changing circumstances (LR Švietimo įstatymas, 2011). The reorganisation of the school network was determined by the following factors: the need to reduce the

number of vacant places; the need to make use of finance more effectively, maintaining and improving the quality of education, and guaranteeing the accessibility of education; the demographic decline in the country; too many schools of general education and too high a cost for the maintenance of small schools; the imbalance of the school network in meeting standards for a quality education (Progimnazijų ir pagrindinių mokyklų paskirtis ir vieta bendrojo ugdymo sistemoje, 2016). Therefore, as a result of the reorganisation of the school network, the new school type of progymnasium was established. Progymnasiums and general schools (grades 1 to 8) form an integral part of the system of general education, taking on the role of a bridge between an elementary school and a gymnasium, with the main aim of implementing a programme of general education, or parts of it, and of assisting pupils in preparing for further learning, continuing their studies at a gymnasium or a vocational training school (Progimnazijų ir pagrindinių mokyklų paskirtis ir vieta bendrojo ugdymo sistemoje, 2016).

Today, progymnasiums in Lithuania follow an updated curriculum approved by the order of the minister of education, science and sport 'On the Approval of General Curricula for Pre-School, Primary, Lower-Secondary and Upper-Secondary Education' (2022), with the aim of providing pupils with an opportunity to acquire subject knowledge and abilities meeting their age, to develop the maturity and the moral, cultural, national and civic consciousness, and to consolidate social, emotional and healthy lifestyle skills. Throughout the implementation of the updated general curricula, leadership has been highly relevant to both progymnasiums and schools of other kinds. In the 'Description of Teachers' Professional Competences' published in 2021, various areas, levels and content of professional activity of teachers are planned, whereas in the part on the realisation of the educational process modelling competency, the necessity for a teacher to be able to handle initiatives and leadership in order to help others in creating teaching and learning situations, etc, is mentioned. The project 'Supporting School Principals as Leaders in Curriculum Reform in Lithuania' was implemented from 2020 to 2022, which resulted in material for leadership teaching/learning prepared in 2022, with the aim of using it in all schools in Lithuania, in order to support school heads and teachers in the successful introduction of updated curricula at schools (Mokymo(si) lyderystės mokomosios medžiagos paketas, padedantis mokyklų vadovams sklandžiau įgyvendinti atnaujintą ugdymo turinį, 2022).

Research problem. Although progymnasiums in Lithuania were instituted more than two decades ago, it has further been sought for this type of school to reflect new educational challenges, improve the quality of lower-secondary education, and guarantee accessibility to education. The research insights on leadership in progymnasiums are not abundant, with some aimed at the leadership of the progymnasium head (Žukauskienė, Macijauskienė, 2020; etc). As the organisation of the educational process, without any doubt, was, is and will be one of the main and most objective indicators of the success of the activity, the expression of teacher leadership, in relation to this indicator, is even more significant and relevant. Problem questions: In what way is leadership important to teachers? How is teacher leadership expressed while organising the educational process? And what are the possibilities for increasing the effectiveness of the organisation of the educational process at a progymnasium? The object of the research is the leadership of progymnasium teachers in organising the educational process. The aim of the research is to reveal the leadership of progymnasium teachers in organising the educational process. Methods of research: review of scientific research and educational documents, systematisation, questionnaire survey (written), statistical data analysis, content analysis, generalisation.

## 1. The concept of leadership and situational leadership theory

An analysis of the concept of leadership provides a chance to distinguish several descriptions of the phenomenon: a) leadership is a process; b) leadership is related to influence; c) leadership emerges in a group context; d) leadership is related to reaching goals (Northouse, 2009, 15). According to aspects of the leadership concept, leadership can be defined as a process with a group of people influenced within a period in order for a mutual goal to be reached. The fact that leadership is not possible without leaders and followers is no less significant than the very definition. People performing activities that include leadership are called leaders, whereas those whom leadership is directed at are called followers (Northouse, 2009, 14–15). Šilin-

gienė (2012) agrees with the idea of Northouse (2009) on leadership, and defines it as ‘[...] the way and the result of personal influence of a leader on followers by inspiring visions and changes being expressed as the interaction process of a leader and followers with both parties seeking the same goals [...]’. According to the author, leadership can be realised as the interaction of three elements: a leader, a follower, and a context (Šilingienė, 2012, 12). Miniotaitė and Staškevičius (2019, 17) explain leadership as ‘[...] the process whereby a person influences a group by directing it towards seeking a mutual goal’. Tabrizi and Rideout (2019) claim that areas of adaptation and constructive change are relevant to leadership.

The field of scientific research is filled with various assumptions on leadership theories. Northouse (2009) distinguishes trait, skills, style, situational, circumstantial, path-goal, leader-member exchange, transformational, team and psycho-dynamic theories of leadership. This categorisation gives us a chance to observe the multi-facetedness of the leadership phenomenon. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2011) emphasise leadership theories that could become and actually do become the benchmark for school heads. James M. Burns, who is considered the founder of leadership theory, as early as 1978 presented a definition of leadership as the process where leaders encourage their followers to seek particular goals corresponding to both their own and the leader’s values, motives, needs, aspirations and expectations (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2011, 24–25). It is important to mention that the list of leadership theories is not finite, i.e. new research works and concepts are constantly being added to it. According to Atkočiūnienė, Siudikienė and Girnienė (2019), adaptive, educational, democratic, participative, harmonious and sustainable leadership are only a few new leadership determinations out of those developed recently that, basically, come under the holistic leadership model.

One of the scientific approaches to leadership is Situational Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2009). The very title of this theory shows that attention is directed towards a leader’s actions in a particular situation with the ability to adapt the leadership style to particular situations seen as highly significant to the effective expression of a leader. Within the concept of situational leadership presented by Northouse (2009, 85), there are two essential aspects of directivity and support. In the context of situational leadership, a leader adapts their behaviour to the level of maturity of followers, based on their willingness and ability to fulfil a particular task (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2011, 29). Thus, situational leadership reflects the flexibility and adaptability of a leader, as these abilities in particular provide the possibility to successfully react to circumstances, as well as to make appropriate choices and effective decisions. Situational Leadership Theory (Blanchard, 1985) could be seen as a source explaining why one leader acts effectively in a particular situation, whereas another does not. Tabrizi and Rideout (2019) develop the idea of Blanchard (1985), and emphasise that leaders should be capable of adapting to a situation instead of copying other strategies of activity that look successful. A leadership style that is effective in any situation is non-existent, meaning that a successful leader should apply different leadership styles depending on the appropriateness of the time and the place, and the goals sought (Tabrizi, Rideout, 2019). Bukman and Happy (2020) claim that the situational leadership style applied by a school head impacts on the results of the work of teachers, and causes a growth in teachers’ professionalism; therefore, it should become the standard factor in assessing the work of teachers. In order to maintain and improve performance results, it is essential to have a leader who applies the situational leadership style at work, and is capable of ‘reading’ a situation, as well as evaluating the environment they are surrounded by (Bukman, Happy, 2020).

The essence of Situational Leadership Theory is the Situational Leadership II (SLII) model (Northouse, 2009). An assessment of situational leadership dynamics is possible by dividing the SLII model into two parts, the leadership style and the level of maturity of the followers. In an analysis of teacher leadership, the concept of followers should be understood as learners, and the maturity level of followers as the maturity level of learners. Northouse (2009) distinguishes four styles of situational leadership: the first is *directing* (S1), with high levels of directivity and low levels of support, when a leader directs attention to reaching goals more than to the needs of learners, i.e. orders are given for goals that need to be reached with careful supervision provided; the second style (S2) is called *coaching*, with high levels of both directivity and support, i.e. a leader’s attention is directed to both the goals and the social-emotional needs of learners; the third

style (S3) is called *supporting*, with leaders providing a high level of support and providing less direction when the leader's attention is directed not only to the goal but also to supporting those whose merits are recognised; the fourth style (S4) is called *delegating*, with low levels of both support and directivity, when a leader's participation in the process of goal planning control details and explaining is low (Northouse, 2009, 86–87). The maturity level of learners in the situational leadership model is also of great significance, as it reflects the level of determination of learners to carry out a given task. Northouse (2009) distinguishes four maturity levels (D1, D2, D3 and D4), with descriptions provided. The competence of D1 level learners is low, but their determination is high. D2 level learners are competent, but their determination is not high. The competence of D3 level learners is moderate to high, but they might lack determination. Finally, D4 level learners have the highest competence and determination to carry out a given task. It is essential to situational leadership that the accomplishment of each task requires a different maturity level of learners, reflecting their competence and determination. Consequently, the initial task for a leader is to determine the maturity level of a learner, with the next one being to adapt the leadership according to the recommended SLII model, as well as noting the changes in maturity level. Therefore, the behaviour of a leader should be flexible (Northouse, 2009, 88–89). Tabrizi and Rideout (2019) reveal five advantages of Situational Leadership Theory: it has passed the test of time; it is practical; it is valuable because of its prescriptive value, i.e. an exact explanation of what and how something should happen; it emphasises a leader's flexibility in different situations; and it gives chances to practise as many leadership styles as possible. Although the applicability of the situational leadership model in some areas is obvious, for example, qualification improvement courses or seminars, it is still criticised, for by applying this model a lack of information relating to the maturity level of different learners, competences and commitments is identified, with the education level of learners left unevaluated (Dukynaitė, 2015, 68).

The insights of researchers on leadership, leadership theories and situational leadership in particular prove to be significant in the analysis of the relationship between the leadership of progymnasium teachers and the organisation of the educational process. With the aim of organising the educational process successfully in progymnasiums, not only heads but also teachers can follow situational leadership styles, as well as expressing their leadership in various educational situations.

## 2. Teacher leadership in the organisation of the educational process

An analysis of the scientific research carried out shows that there are no areas of human activity left nowadays where leadership is not relevant. Therefore, it would be useful to look at leaders and followers in the context of a progymnasium. Dukynaitė (2015) develops the idea of leadership in an educational organisation, claiming that '[...] leadership is the guarantee of improvement through voluntary commitment', whereas a leader is '[...] a person gathering the educational community or the whole educational community committed to constantly improving their activity [...]' (Dukynaitė, 2015, 14–15). Lambert (2011) recognises that teachers-leaders are highly valued, and sometimes even called the soul of a school that has achieved a high level of leadership. This evaluation of the importance of teacher leadership should not be surprising, as teachers in particular are assumed to be the main organisers of the educational process.

Hunzicker (2017) claims that the progression of a teacher into a teacher-leader is a gradual process, with several factors influencing the transformation of a teacher-leader being distinguished: knowledge and skills; disposition; the motivation to support students and colleagues; taking action; age and years of teaching experience. While the progression from teacher to teacher-leader is described as a change or a path, it allows us to see the transformation from simply a teacher into a teacher-leader as a gradual process, lasting longer than merely a month or a year. The change appears when a teacher, starting from the stage where the impact is only on a few people, reaches the level where the impact is on a large number of people.

For an analysis of the leadership of progymnasium teachers in organising the educational process, the relevance of the idea of Grincevičienė (2012) is obvious. The author claims that the viewpoint, interests and expectations of all subjects (teachers, students and their parents) is of great significance for changes to be

implemented, as that is the feedback proving the increase in the effectiveness of the educational process. The next factor related to the progression to teacher leadership is self-leadership. Warren (2021) defines self-leadership as the intentional choice to influence one's own thinking, feelings and actions. Accordingly, teacher leadership frequently starts with successful self-leadership, when a teacher chooses a position where it is possible to have a positive impact on students, whereas self-leadership could be seen as a basis for the successful expression of teacher leadership.

Žydžiūnaitė, Kontrimienė, Ponomarenko and Kaminskienė (2020) argue that it would be hard to deny the fact of the necessity for a school to develop the potential gained in order to support teacher leadership. The authors note the importance of acting at the same time in reaching other related goals, systematically reviewing the workload of teachers, as well as the distribution of time, as the aim of these actions is to ensure that teachers experience less stress, with their self-confidence growing. Teachers need to be provided with opportunities to share their views and ideas in discussions, in order to seek the growth of their leadership through the process of teaching and the implementation of changes at school, etc. According to the authors, teachers need open, clear and respectful communication with the school administration about additional tasks or those outside the educational process (Žydžiūnaitė, Kontrimienė et al., 2020).

Harris and Jones (2019) distinguish three essential dimensions aimed at the evaluation of teacher leadership in the broader context of educational change. Firstly, according to the authors, it is important to see teacher *leadership as influence* rather than a particular role or formal responsibility. Secondly, the idea of teacher leadership as *action* leads to not being restricted to classroom tasks, but also to share practical experience and initiate change. Finally, teacher leadership should be understood as *the development of pedagogical excellence*, both working with pupils in the classroom and influencing the practice of others (Harris, Jones, 2019). Espinosa and Gonzalez (2023) put the emphasis on the versatility of teacher leadership, with the possibility of applying different ways and styles of leadership: the leadership of a teacher can be *empathetic, comforting, motivating, showing an example or sharing wisdom*. According to the authors, all these essential styles of successful leadership should be acquired by an effectively acting teacher, with these styles applied depending on the situation and the context, with the aim of reaching the maximum benefit for pupils. The integration of these five leadership styles and their wise application, without any doubt, adds to teacher leadership, proving that such a teacher-leader knows how to be empathetic and motivating, encourage positive feelings, show an example, and seek educational results in a wise way (Espinosa, Gonzalez, 2023).

With the aim of revealing the links between teacher leadership and the organisation of the educational process, it is important to discuss the order of the minister of education, science and sport of the Republic of Lithuania 'On the Approval of General Curricula for Pre-School, Primary, Basic and Secondary Education'. This document approves the updated general curricula to be implemented by progymnasiums, as well as the moral values to be taught, competences, and social and emotional capabilities. In the updated general curricula, attention is directed towards communication, cultural, creativity, cognition, citizenship, digital, social, emotional and healthy lifestyle competences. The competences of progymnasium pupils should be taught by ensuring the presence of multiple connections between different subjects in the educational process, with the aim of shaping a thorough picture by creating assumptions for the implementation of interdisciplinary integration. The provisions of the general curricula are related to the constituents of the educational results, namely, the *personal maturity, achievements and advancement* expressed by Targamadžė (2016). Consequently, the process of education is mutual, encouraging the active involvement of pupils. Thus, the development of a teacher into a teacher-leader is seen as a change linking teacher leadership with the organisation of the educational process.

Learners, and the whole surrounding environment of an educational institution, get into the field of the influence of teacher leadership. It is essential to support the leadership of progymnasium teachers for a positive impact on the educational process to be made, with changes implemented relevant to a particular period in time.

### 3. Research methodology

To achieve the aim of the research, a quantitative study was conducted based on the theory of positivism (Conte, 1892), as it seeks to describe a phenomenon rather than to answer the question of whether it exists or not. Creswell (2018), a developer of ideas of positivism, notes that quantitative research is appropriate for revealing the relationships between various traits. Based on the positivist approach, the empirical research conducted revealed the relationship between teacher leadership and the educational process at a progymnasium. The *questionnaire survey method (written)* was chosen for the study.

**Survey sample.** The essential feature of sampling for the quantitative research is progymnasium teachers. Teachers from seven progymnasiums in west Lithuania that organise the educational process participated in the research. Altogether, 120 respondents were included in the sample for the quantitative research. In order to implement the research, convenience sampling was chosen, as it covers units of a general set that could be easily accessed (Rupšienė, 2007, 19).

**Characteristics of the study participants.** The results obtained in the research accomplished reflect mostly the opinions of teachers in the 35 to 55 age group on the relationship between teacher leadership and the organisation of the educational process. Most of the research participants had a higher education, acquired at university, and nearly half of them had over 21 years of pedagogical work experience, with the qualification category of a teacher-methodologist. The pedagogical work experience of about one third of the research participants varied between 11 and 20 years, whereas slightly more than a fifth of respondents reported having gained a professional qualification as a teacher, and slightly more than a quarter had the professional qualification of a senior teacher.

**Collection and analysis of the research data.** The survey questionnaire was based on the ideas of Northouse (2009), Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2011), Tabrizi and Rideout (2019), and other leadership researchers. The questions in the questionnaire focused on elements of situational leadership according to the situational leadership model (SLII) of Hersey and Blanchard (1985), adapted to the particularity of the work of progymnasium teachers. The SLII model consists of two main parts representing leadership styles (*teacher leadership* in the context of this research), and the maturity levels of followers (*learners* in the context of this research). According to Northouse (2009, p. 88), there are four styles of situational leadership: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. The research aimed to show the decisions made by progymnasium teachers in particular situations, depending on the circumstances of the organisation of the educational process, as well as the level of pupils' readiness. For the internal coherence of the questions in the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied, showing that the internal coherence of the questions is sufficient, reaching to over 0.7 (Vaitkevičius, Saudargienė, 2006, 160). Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the questionnaire applied equalled 0.856. The IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.0.0 (241) version was used in processing the research data, and for the identification of variable relationships the Spearman correlation coefficient was counted (Bitinas, 2006, 311). While conducting the research, the main ethical principles were followed, with the aim of avoiding problems of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and fraud (Kardelis, 2016, 42).

### 4. Research findings

Only some of the results from the research conducted reveal the leadership of progymnasium teachers in organising the educational process. The research results reflecting the implementation of the situational leadership model in organising the educational process at a progymnasium are presented.

Firstly, it was sought to reveal the ways *leadership is important to teachers in a progymnasium*. Throughout the analysis of the data collected in the research, it was determined that most of the respondents (47.9% [57]) agreed completely, and 49.6% (59) agreed, that *teacher leadership helps to implement progressive ideas and novelties in a progymnasium*. Almost the same proportion of respondents (44.5% [53]) agreed completely, or agreed (49.6 [59]), that *teacher leadership helps to overcome the challenges a progymnasium faces to work harmoniously*. Fewer respondents (38.1% [45]) agreed completely, and half of them (54.2%

[64]) agreed, that *teacher leadership helps the community of a progymnasium to build itself*. The correlation analysis accomplished shows a statistically significant, weak, positive correlation between the statement that *teacher leadership helps to implement progressive ideas and novelties in a progymnasium* and *the age of the research participants* ( $r = 0.253$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 1).

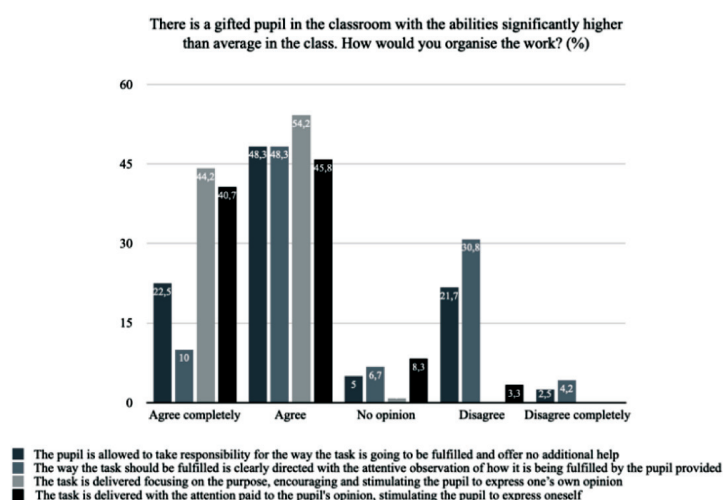
Table 1. The correlation between the leadership of progymnasium teachers and their age

	Age of research participants
Teacher leadership helps to implement progressive ideas and novelties in a progymnasium	0.253**

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 1 shows that older respondents tend to agree more with the statement that teacher leadership at a progymnasium helps to implement progressive ideas and novelties.

The research aimed to reveal *the way progymnasium teachers organise the educational process when there is a pupil with exceptional abilities, and how a task is presented*. The research participants were presented with several answer options, asking them to choose the option that seemed the most appropriate to them (see Picture 1).

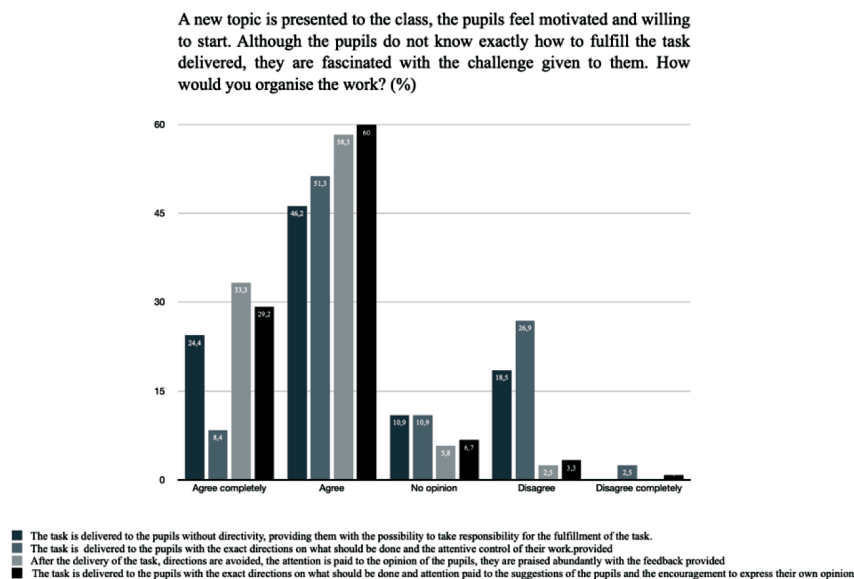


Picture 1. The models of task delivery for a pupil with exceptional abilities (N = 120)

Throughout the assessment when there is a situation with a pupil with exceptional abilities present in the class, most of the respondents (44.2% [53]) agreed completely that, when giving tasks to the pupil, they *focus on the purpose, encourage the pupil to accomplish the task, and share their opinion*. More than half the respondents agreed with this statement (54.6% [65]). Slightly fewer research participants (40.7% [48]) agreed completely that a task for a gifted pupil should be given *paying attention to the pupil's opinion and encouraging the pupil to express it*. Nearly half the respondents agreed with this statement (48.3% [58]). Some of the respondents thought that a gifted pupil should be given a task *allowing the pupil to take responsibility for carrying out the task without offering additional help*. A total of 22.5% (27) of respondents agreed completely, and 48.3% (58) agreed, with this statement. The fewest respondents agreed completely (10.0% [12]), and agreed (48.3% [58]), that a gifted pupil should be *clearly directed in how a task should be carried out, observing carefully how it is carried out by the pupil*.



The next question aimed to reveal *how teachers organise the educational process when a new topic is presented during the lesson*. Pupils feel motivated and willing to learn, for they are fascinated by the challenge they get from the task, although they do not know exactly how the task set by the teacher should be carried out. The respondents' opinions on models for setting a task when a new topic is presented is shown in Picture 2.



Picture 2. Models for setting a task when a new topic is presented (N = 120)

Picture 2 shows that slightly more than a third of respondents (33.3% [40]) agreed completely that when a new topic is presented, *the task should be set avoiding directivity, paying attention to pupils' opinions, providing lots of praise and sufficient feedback*. More than half (58.3% [70]) the respondents agreed with this statement. About a third of the respondents (29.2% [35]) agreed completely that when a new topic is presented, *the task for the pupils should be set providing exact directions on how it should be carried out, and, at the same time, paying attention to pupils' suggestions, encouraging them to share their opinions*. A total of 60.0% (72) respondents agreed with this statement. Slightly less than a quarter (24.4% [29]) of the respondents agreed completely that when a new topic is presented, *the task should be set avoiding directivity, and providing pupils with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying out the task themselves*. A total of 46.2% (55) of the research participants agreed with this statement. Fewer respondents agreed completely (8.4% [10]), and (51.3% [61]) agreed, that when a new topic is presented, *the task should be set for pupils providing exact directions on what should be done, and observing carefully the pupils' work*.

A correlation analysis of the research data revealed the correlation between the work experience of research participants and statements on the organisation of the educational process when a new topic is presented during a lesson (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows statistically significant, weak, negative correlations between the work experience of research participants and the statement to *set a task for pupils with exact directions on what should be done and control carefully their work* ( $r = -0.253$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and the statement that *when a task is set, directions are avoided, attention is paid to the opinions of pupils, and they are praised abundantly with feedback provided* ( $r = -0.202$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The respondents with more work experience tended to agree less with the statement that after setting a task for the pupils, the exact directions on what should be done are provided, with careful control of their work implemented. Also, teachers with more work experience after setting a task for pupils tend not to avoid directivity, they pay attention to pupils' opinions less, and praise them less, with feedback not always provided.

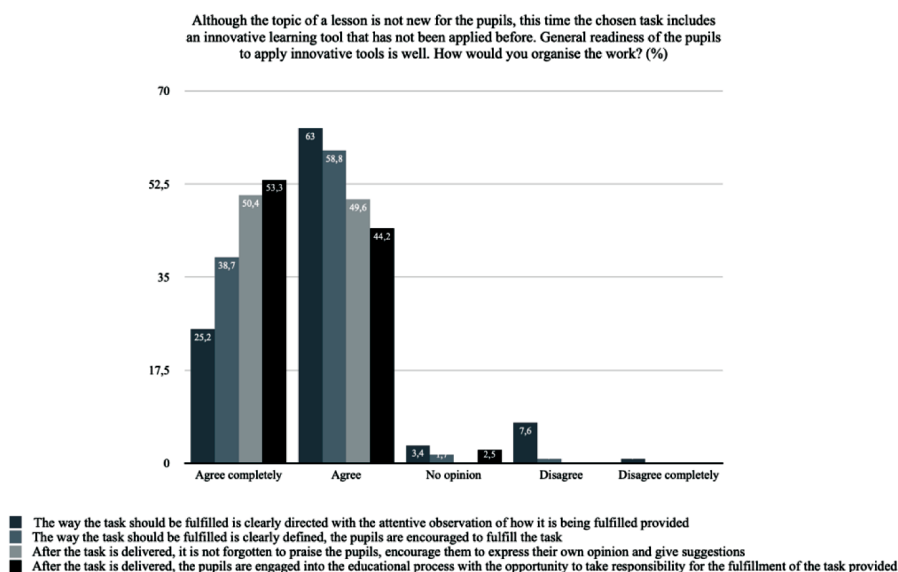
Table 2. Correlations between the work experience of teachers and the organisation of the educational process

	Work experience of research participants
The task is set for pupils with the exact directions on what should be done and careful control of the work provided.	-0.253**
After setting the task, directivity is avoided, with attention paid to the opinions of the pupils, and abundant praise and feedback provided.	-0.202*

\* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

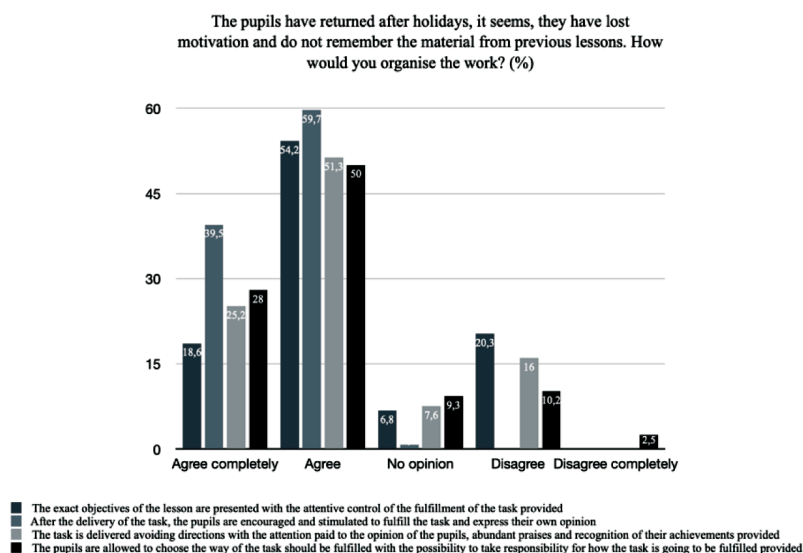
The research aimed to show how *progymnasium teachers organise the educational process when the lesson topic is not new, but the task chosen includes an innovative learning tool that has not been applied before* (see Picture 3).



Picture 3. Models for the delivery of tasks by teachers by applying an innovative learning tool that has not been applied before in the educational process (N = 120)

Picture 3 shows that most of the research participants (53.3% [64]) agreed completely that *when a task is set, pupils are engaged in the educational process with the possibility of taking responsibility for carrying out the task set*. A total of 44.2% (53) of respondents agreed with this statement. Half the respondents (50.4% [60]) agreed completely, and (49.6% [59]) agreed, that *a task should be set without forgetting to praise the pupils, encouraging them to express their opinions and make suggestions*. Some of the respondents agreed completely (38.7% [46]), and some agreed (58.8% [70]), that *a task should be set defining clearly how pupils should carry it out, at the same time providing encouragement*. Fewer respondents agreed completely (25.2% [30]), with most (63.0% [75]) agreeing, that *a task should be set defining clearly how the pupils should carry it out, with careful observation provided*.

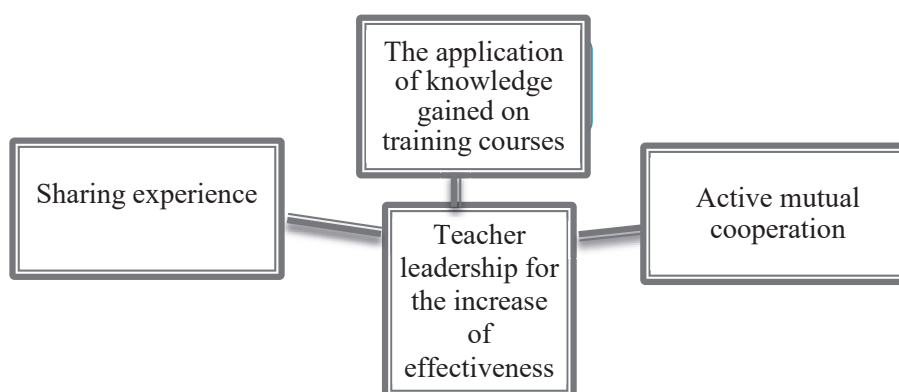
The research aimed to identify *how the teachers organise the educational process in the classroom with pupils that have returned after the holidays feeling distracted, having lost their motivation, and forgotten material from previous lessons*. The respondents shared their opinions on scenarios for setting tasks (see Picture 4).



Picture 4. Models for setting a task for pupils who have returned after the holidays ( $N = 120$ )

Picture 4 shows that more than a third of the respondents (39.5% [47]) agreed completely, and more than half (59.7% [71]) agreed, that a task for pupils should be set providing encouragement and stimulating them to carry it out, asking them to express their opinions as well. Less than a third (28.0% [33]) of the respondents agreed completely, and half (50.0% [60]) agreed, that a task should be set allowing them to choose the mode for carrying it out, and providing pupils with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying it out. A quarter (25.2% [30]) of respondents agreed completely, and more than half (51.3% [61]) agreed, that a task for pupils should be set avoiding directivity, paying attention to pupils' opinions, praising them abundantly, and recognising willingly their achievements. Fewer respondents (18.6% [22]) agreed completely, and more than half (54.2 [64]) agreed, that a task should be set with the exact lesson objectives presented and careful control provided throughout the whole process of carrying out the task.

One of the questions in the questionnaire was open, aiming at getting to know how teacher leadership could help to increase the effectiveness of the educational process at a progymnasium. The qualitative analysis of respondents' opinions was accomplished, with one category distinguished on teacher leadership for the increase in effectiveness of the educational process; and three subcategories for the application of knowledge gained on training courses, sharing experience, and active mutual cooperation (see Picture 5).



Picture 5. Teacher leadership to increase the effectiveness of the educational process at a progymnasium

To increase the effectiveness of the educational process at a progymnasium, respondents suggested *applying the knowledge gained on training course*: ‘[...] deliver open lessons or cooperation sessions (R1; R5); ‘[...] make mentoring couples for mature teacher leaders to have an opportunity to put the knowledge gained on training courses into practice’ (R11); ‘[...] reflect regularly on the knowledge gained on training courses and one’s own teaching practice’ (R22); ‘[...] share experience by applying new ideas’ (R35; R51); ‘[...] change classes: try to give a lesson to a colleague’s class, discuss achievements’ (R62); etc. The second factor for increasing the effectiveness of the educational process, in the respondents’ opinion, is *sharing experience*: ‘[...] gather into congenial groups (R15); ‘[...] participate in teachers’ methodical groups in one’s town’ (R17); ‘[...] a teacher-leader could create a virtual learning community, with teachers sharing their experience at the state level’ (R56); ‘[...] a teacher-leader could gather colleagues-congenials for teamwork (R59); ‘[...] create a model for a learning organisation, encourage pedagogues to share knowledge and skills’ (R83); ‘[...] share experience, supervision in groups, and meetings while organising the educational process’ (R107). The third factor that increases the effectiveness of the educational process, in the respondents’ opinion, is *active mutual cooperation*: ‘[...] through one’s work and example, inspire colleagues and students’ (R42); ‘[...] gather teachers into teams with the aim of seeking the mutual goals of the progymnasium’ (R70); ‘[...] create mutual learning scenarios by trying innovative methods’ (R93); ‘[...] cooperation helps to understand better the needs of students, create an individualised learning environment, and guarantee better results’ (R111); ‘[...] strengthen teachers’ professional growth’ (R120).

Summary of the research findings. The analysis of the research data revealed the great importance of leadership for progymnasium teachers, as it adds to the implementation of progressive ideas and new ideas in progymnasiums, helps to overcome the challenges faced, and to act harmoniously and develop the community in this kind of institution. There was a statistically significant, weak, positive correlation between *the statement that teacher leadership adds to implementing progressive ideas and new ideas at progymnasiums* and *the age of the research participants* ( $r = 0.253$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), i.e. older respondents tended to agree more frequently with the statement that leadership in a progymnasium helps to implement progressive ideas and new ideas.

The analysis of respondents’ opinions on the expression of leadership in organising the educational process showed models for setting tasks prevailing in different situations.

*When there is a pupil with exceptional abilities*, most respondents identified that when tasks are set, they tend to focus on the purpose, with encouragement and stimulation provided to express one’s own opinion. Slightly fewer respondents claimed that a task for a gifted pupil should be set with attention paid to opinions, encouraging them to express them, and allowing a gifted pupil to take responsibility for carrying it out without additional help offered. In cases where the pupil has exceptional abilities, teachers tend to pay attention to this circumstance, with attention being paid to the opinion of the pupil and the encouragement to express it, providing an opportunity to take responsibility for carrying out the task. When evaluating teacher leadership, respondents tended to choose responses corresponding with supportive, coaching and delegating styles of situational leadership.

Most of the respondents identified that *while presenting a new topic*, a task should be set avoiding directivity, paying attention to pupils’ opinions, praising them abundantly, and providing feedback. Respondents also emphasised that a task for pupils should be set with exact directions provided on what should be done, at the same time as paying attention to their suggestions and opinions. Fewer research participants expressed the opinion that a task should be set without directivity, providing pupils with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying out the task themselves. Statistically significant, weak, negative correlations were identified between the professional experience of the respondents and the statement to *set a task for pupils with exact directions on what should be done and careful control of their work* ( $r = -0.253$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and the statement *after setting a task, directions are avoided, attention is paid to the opinions of the pupils, and they are praised abundantly with feedback provided* ( $r = -0.202$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), i.e. respondents with more work experience tended to agree less with the statement that after a task is set for pupils, they should be provided with exact directions on what should be done, exactly directing their work. Teachers with more work experience tended to agree less frequently that after setting a task, directions are not avoided, they tend to pay less attention to pupils’ opinions, and do not provide much praise and feedback. In such a situation, the research participants chose most frequently the responses reflecting supportive and coaching leadership styles.

When the topic of a lesson is not new, but the task for the pupils includes an innovative learning tool that has not been applied before, and the general readiness of the pupils for innovative learning is considered to be high, most respondents identified that when a task is set, the pupils are engaged in the educational process, with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying out the task, providing the pupils with praise and encouraging them to share their opinions, as well as giving suggestions. Fewer research participants thought that a task should be set defining exactly how the pupils are supposed to carry it out, and at the same time encouraging them; the task is set clearly defining the way the pupils should carry it out, as well as observing them closely. The respondents tended to choose responses corresponding to coaching and delegating styles of leadership.

The analysis of the opinions of the research participants on *setting a task for pupils who have returned after the holidays, feeling motivation is not high enough, when they do not remember the material from the previous lesson* showed that most respondents set a task encouraging pupils to carry it out, and stimulating them to share their opinions. Fewer research participants provided pupils with the possibility to choose the way for a task to be carried out by themselves and taking responsibility for its fulfilment. Some respondents claimed that the best way to set a task for pupils is by avoiding directivity, paying attention to their opinions, praising them more, and recognising their achievements. In such a situation, response options corresponding to coaching and delegating styles of leadership dominated.

Thus, the responses to the questions in the questionnaire based on the situational leadership model SLII (Blanchard, 1985) show essentially the willingness and capability of teachers to consider the circumstances of the organisation of the educational process (the setting of tasks, the motivation of pupils, etc), their readiness to share leadership in order to guarantee a more effective organisation of the educational process, and provide pupils with both the possibility to carry out tasks as successfully as possible and give a chance to experience positive emotions from the results of education. It is clear that the different circumstances in the organisation of the educational process cause teachers to apply different styles of leadership. The results of the research prove the statements of Tabrizi and Rideout (2019) on the non-existence of a universal style of leadership, as well as the necessity for a successful teacher-leader to choose various leadership styles according to the circumstances.

To increase effectiveness in the educational process at progymnasiums, respondents suggested applying *the knowledge gained on training courses*, i.e. to give open lessons or co-operational sessions, create mentoring couples for mature teachers to help less mature ones, reflect on knowledge and practice gained, and apply new ideas. The research participants recognised the significance of *sharing experience*, and suggested gathering in congenial groups, participating in methodological groups, creating a virtual community for teachers to share their experience, creating a model for the organisation of learning in their progymnasiums, and organising group supervision. *Active mutual cooperation*, in the opinion of research participants, is one of the factors facilitating the more effective organisation of the educational process at progymnasiums, with teachers-leaders having a chance to use their own example to inspire both colleagues and pupils, create mutual learning scenarios, try innovative methods, create an individualised learning environment, etc. These suggestions from the respondents correspond with the dimensions for the evaluation of leadership distinguished by Harris and Jones (2019) that define leadership as the impact, action and development of pedagogical excellence.

## Conclusions

Given the different definitions of leadership, the main aspects of the concept of this phenomenon (leadership as a process, leadership as impact, the link between leadership and seeking results, etc) remain unchanged. Despite the various ways to categorise leadership by type and style, this list is not finite, it is constantly changing. The situational leadership theory and the model presented within it differ from the rest due to its practicality, with the flexibility of a leader in different educational situations emphasised. The significance of teacher leadership and the demand for it is justified by changes in contemporary education (the implementation of new educational programmes and curricula), knowledge and skills that are continuously updated. The motivation to encourage pupils and colleagues, the determination to take action, and the experience gained, influence directly the expression of teacher leadership.

The place and purpose of a progymnasium in the educational system of Lithuania was established in 2011 with the reorganisation of the network of schools, the reasons being related to the aim to improve the quality of education by guaranteeing access to compulsory and universal education. The mission of contemporary gymnasiums is to implement the programme of general education, and to prepare pupils for further learning at a gymnasium or another educational institution. Teacher leadership is an integral part of the organisation of the contemporary educational process, as are important changes implemented in schools of this type.

The quantitative research conducted revealed that leadership is important for progymnasium teachers, as it encourages pupils to take part in the implementation of advanced ideas, overcome the challenges set, act harmoniously, and build a community of progymnasiums. Teachers at progymnasiums apply different leadership strategies (providing gifted pupils with the possibility to take responsibility for carrying out a task, giving pupils abundant praise, and encouraging them to express their opinions); tasks are set avoiding directivity, paying attention to the opinions of the pupils; the pupil is allowed to make decisions on how a task is fulfilled; pupils are encouraged to share their opinions, they are praised abundantly, with their achievements gladly recognised, feedback provided, etc. Within the educational process, coaching and delegating styles of situational leadership dominate, with a flexibility that helps to react to educational situations and make effective decisions. The research participants recognised that reflecting the knowledge and skills gained on training courses, as well as their application in practice, co-operation sessions to apply the new ideas, sharing experience in methodological groups, the example of the teacher-leader for the creation of a learning organisation, group supervision, active mutual cooperation, trying innovative methods in the learning environment, etc. are considered factors encouraging the organisation of the educational process at progymnasiums in a more effective way.

Although the results of the research, based on the opinions of teachers that took part in a survey of situations provided according to the SLII model and the analysis of possible scenarios of the behaviour of teachers-leaders, show that the research participants tended to react to a situation and model the behaviour and actions of a particular type based on leadership, it would be reasonable to take a deeper look at the application of situational leadership theory and the SLII model for research on teacher leadership to be conducted, with the possibility of supplementing the questionnaire with several open questions that could be helpful in understanding the motives and aims of the corresponding leadership expression models. Further research in teacher leadership is relevant, as it would provide a deeper analysis of the contexts of the educational process, and help to understand better the development of the educational process at progymnasiums, for them to be organised more effectively.

It is recommended for teachers to reflect on the expression of their leadership while organising the educational process, as well as self-evaluating the need for change in educational activity. In addition, teachers should constantly improve their leadership and other competences, and implement the spread of the results of educational activity.

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# MOKYTOJŲ LYDERYSTĖS IR UGDYMO PROCESO ORGANIZAVIMO PROGIMNAZIJOJE TARPUSAVIO RYŠYS

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## Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama progimnazijos mokytojų lyderystės problema. Lietuvoje progimnazija yra bendrąjį ugdymą (nuo 1 iki 8 klasių) teikianti švietimo įstaiga, tarpinė grandis tarp pradinės mokyklos ir gimnazijos, kur aktuali mokytojų lyderystė. Ji neatsiejama nuo šiuolaikinio ugdymo proceso organizavimo ir jo efektyvinimo, reikšmingų progimnazijoje įgyvendinamų pokyčių (naujų ugdymo programų, ugdymo turinio įgyvendinimo ir pan.).

Laikantis pozityvistinės nuostatos, atliktas kiekybinis tyrimas, siekiant atskleisti mokytojų lyderystės ir ugdymo proceso organizavimo progimnazijoje tarpusavio ryšį bei efektyvinimo prielaidas. Tyrimas vykdytas septyniose Vakarų Lietuvos progimnazijose, anketinėje apklausoje dalyvavo 120 ugdymo procesą organizuojančių progimnazijų mokytojų. Vertinant progimnazijos mokytojų lyderystės ir ugdymo proceso organizavimo sąsajas, remiamasi situacinės lyderystės modeliu SLII (Blanchard, 1985).

Atlikus tyrimą atskleista, kad lyderystė reikšminga progimnazijos mokytojams, nes skatina prisidėti prie pažangių idėjų ir naujovių įgyvendinimo, įveikti keliamus iššūkius, darniai veikti ir kurtis progimnazijos bendruomenei. Atlikus koreliacinę duomenų analizę nustatytas statistiškai reikšmingas, silpnas, teigiamas koreliacinis teiginio, „kad mokytojų lyderystė leidžia įgyvendinti pažangias idėjas ir naujoves progimnazijoje“, ir tyrimo dalyvių amžiaus tarpusavio ryšys ( $r = 0,253$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ), t. y. vyresni mokytojai labiau sutinka su teiginiu, jog mokytojų lyderystė progimnazijoje leidžia įgyvendinti pažangias idėjas bei diegti naujoves.

Ugdymo procese progimnazijos mokytojai taiko skirtingas lyderystės strategijas (suteikia gabiam mokiniui galimybę prisiimti atsakomybę už užduoties atlikimą, negaili jam pagyrų ir padrąsina reikšti savo nuomonę; užduotis pateikia vengdami nurodinėjimų, įsiklauso į mokinių nuomones; leidžia mokiniui priimti sprendimą, kaip užduotis turėtų būti atlikta; ragina mokinius išsakyti savo nuomonę, suteikti grįžtamąjį ryšį, skiria pagyrų ir noriai pripažįsta jų nuopelnus, ir pan. Nustatyti statistiškai reikšmingi, silpni, neigiami koreliaciniai tyrimo dalyvių darbo stažo ir teiginio „pateikiate mokiniams užduotį tiksliai nurodydami, kas turi būti padaryta, atidžiai kontroliuojate jų darbą“ tarpusavio ryšiai ( $r = -0,253$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ), taip pat teiginio „po užduoties pateikimo vengiate nurodinėjimų, įsiklausote į mokinių nuomonę, negailite pagyrų, suteikiate grįžtamąjį ryšį“ ( $r = -0,202$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), t. y. didesnę darbo stažą turintys respondentai mažiau sutinka su teiginiu, kad pateikę mokiniams užduotį tiksliai nurodo, kas turi būti padaryta, ir atidžiai kontroliuoja jų darbą; didesnę darbo patirtį turintys pedagogai pateikę užduotį nevengia nurodinėjimų, mažiau įsiklauso į mokinių nuomones, gaili pagyrimų ir ne visada suteikia grįžtamąjį ryšį. Organizuojant ugdymo procesą, vyrauja mokytojų ugdomasis ir deleguojantis situacinės lyderystės stilius, atsiskleidžia mokytojų lankstumas, leidžiantis reaguoti į ugdymo situacijas, tinkamai pasirinkti ir priimti veiksmingus sprendimus.

Tyrimo dalyviai pripažįsta, kad mokymuose įgytų žinių ir įgūdžių reflektavimas, praktinis taikymas, bendradarbiavimo sesijos diegiant naujoves, dalijimasis patirtimi metodinėse grupėse, mokytojo lyderio pavyzdys kuriant besimokančią organizaciją, supervizijų grupės, aktyvus tarpusavio bendradarbiavimas, inovatyvių metodų išbandymas mokymosi aplinkoje ir pan., yra veiksniai, skatinantys efektyviau progimnazijoje organizuoti ugdymo procesą.

**PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** *mokytojų lyderystė, ugdymo proceso organizavimas, progimnazija.*

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