

THE EXPRESSION OF TEACHER-LEADERSHIP IN THE ORGANISATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AT A PROGYMNASIUM

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the problem of the expression of teacher-leadership at a progymnasium through the organisation of the educational process is analysed. The qualitative research accomplished revealed that progymnasium teachers have no doubts regarding the need to have more than one leader at a school, with the significance of a teacher-leader present in this context, and the emphasis on the community, as a factor impacting teacher-leadership. A teacher-leader at a progymnasium should have organisational skills, be communicative and creative, and possess the skills to inspire and persuade others. Teacher-leadership can be successfully spread by seeking high achievements by pupils, cooperating with parents, communicating with teaching colleagues, and organising the educational process. Resistance to the ideas of teachers, their age, and large workloads, are considered as the greatest problems and obstacles teacher-leaders face working at progymnasiums. Cooperation with other progymnasiums, and participation in projects and in the process of taking strategic decisions are considered as the main areas of the significance of leadership in the organisation of the educational process.

KEY WORDS: *teacher-leadership, distributed leadership, organisation of educational process.*

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Introduction

A reorganisation of the school network was accomplished in Lithuania in 2011, with the aim of improving the system of schools corresponding to the changing needs of pupils and the expectations of society. The restructuring that took place was determined by the worsening demographic situation in Lithuania, the excessive network of general education schools, the too high costs of education in small schools, vacant places for learning, etc. The unbalanced network of schools failed to guarantee educational quality and meeting standards successfully, and was unable to fulfil properly the learning needs of students in the close environment (LR švietimo įstatymas, 2011). A strategic goal was introduced of reducing vacant learning places and the more effective use of funding intended for educational needs, with the aim of overcoming obstacles to increasing the effectiveness of the school network; it was also aimed to maintain and improve the quality of education, and to guarantee the accessibility of compulsory and universal education (Mokyklų tinklo pertvarkos metodinės rekomendacijos, 2004). One of the results gained from the reorganisation of schools is the progymnasium, a new type of school, that has become an integral part of the system of general education, with a role as a bridge between an elementary school and a gymnasium. The aim of this type of school is to implement the programme of general education, or part of it, and to help pupils prepare for further learning at a gymnasium or a vocational education institution (Progimnazijų ir pagrindinių mokyklų paskirtis ir vieta bendrojo ugdymo sistemoje, 2016).

There are currently rapid changes happening in Lithuania at the level of general education, with the organisation of education based on an updated educational programme, with the main aim of providing learners

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with an opportunity to acquire subject skills and abilities, at the same time as guaranteeing a grounding in the fields of maturity, nationality, citizenship, morality and culture. The significance of the skills of pupils relating to a healthy lifestyle, and their social and emotional state, is also considered very high (Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministro *įsakymas „Dėl priešmokyklinio, pradinio, pagrindinio ir vidurinio ugdymo bendrųjų programų patvirtinimo“*, 2022). On 14 June 2023, Lithuania's future vision 'Lithuania 2050' was presented, foreseeing the prospects for the development of the state for over 20 years. Schools are described in this document as modern and ecological multifunctional centres, with not only the school but also an active social life taking place (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023).

Much attention has been directed in recent years to research in the field of the phenomenon of teacher-leadership: A. Harris and M. Jones (2019) researched the changes of teacher-leadership in education; J. Hunzicker (2017) focused on the transformation of a teacher into a teacher-leader; B. Berry (2019) analysed the future prospects of teacher-leadership; F. Grimm (2020) focused on aspects of teacher-leadership at Swedish schools; M. Smylie and J. Eckert (2018) analysed new perspectives, principles and recommendations for the successful development of teacher-leadership; T. Gul *et al.* (2019) overviewed the links between teacher-leadership and mentoring practices; S. Gningue *et al.* (2022) focused on the connection between teacher-leadership and the school climate; K. Zarate *et al.* (2023) researched the leadership of special pedagogues and its influence on professional development; H. Moreno-Casado *et al.* (2022) researched the links between teacher-leadership and the satisfaction of psychological needs in students, as well as the disappointment when the corresponding needs are left unsatisfied. Other foreign researchers analysed in their work the problems of distributed leadership: T. Lahtero *et al.* (2017) researched the practical realisation of distributed leadership in Finnish schools; D. G. Torres (2019) analysed the connection between distributed leadership, professional cooperation and job satisfaction in teachers; J. Holloway *et al.* (2018) developed the topic of distributed leadership through the prism of teachers mentors; E. Zala-Mezo *et al.* (2019) researched the practical application of distributed leadership at eco-schools in Sweden, and the impact of the latter on the improvement of school performance. J. Heikka *et al.* (2019) analysed distributed leadership and teacher-leadership in the context of early education; P. D. Wiens *et al.* (2023) researched the connections between distributed leadership and the level of job satisfaction in teachers, etc.

The topic of leadership in general, and specifically educational leadership, has been analysed by Lithuanian researchers: J. Martinkienė *et al.* (2021) analysed leadership in the context of the empowerment of employees during the pandemic. M. Damkuvienė *et al.* (2019) focused on the connections between international mobility activity and leadership, with the 'Erasmus+' programme chosen as a central element; and A. Gumuliauskienė and A. Vaičiūnienė (2019) analysed the tendencies of leadership development in school heads and teachers. Other authors have researched leadership from the point of view of educational management: J. Urbanovič and J. Navickaitė (2016) researched leadership in the context of an autonomous school and the factors of educational management; A. Brandišauskienė *et al.* (2018) researched the situation of teacher-leadership in Lithuania, with answers to questions searched on whether teachers are ready to cooperate; L. Žukauskienė and A. Macijauskienė (2020) researched the impact of a progymnasium head's leadership on the management of this type of school; Z. Atkočiūnienė *et al.* (2019) focused on the role of leaders in processes of the organisation of knowledge management and innovation creation. The topic of distributed leadership has also received attention from researchers: A. Liekis and G. Tolutienė (2018) analysed andragogue leadership, emphasising distributed, formal and non-formal leadership; D. Dambrauskienė and L. Liukinevičienė (2018) analysed the perspectives and possibilities for the organisation of the development of distributed leadership at Lithuanian educational institutions; D. Dambrauskienė (2021) researched distributed leadership as a factor of organisational change. The research work of A. Skarbaliene (2015) on the leadership of teacher-mentors, as well as how leadership competences add to the education of leadership competences in students, aimed to research the topic of teacher-leadership. L. Kaminskiene *et al.* (2021) researched teacher-leadership through the prism of a positive approach, professional activity, and stress experienced at school.

The progymnasium was introduced in Lithuania over two decades ago, with the aim for this type of school to meet new educational challenges, help to use the funds intended for schools in a more effective way, improve the quality of general education, and guarantee the accessibility of education. The leadership of a progymnasium teacher is important to understand the interests of pupils and the natural need of pupils for self-expression. Leadership requires a progymnasium to rethink updated educational content, with purposely created educational interaction that is important for pupils' readiness to continue studying at the next school level. Research in progymnasium teacher-leadership extends the knowledge and strategies for solving problems relating to this type of school, and provides arguments as to why it would be necessary to support the expression of teacher-leaders. However, empirical research aimed at revealing the phenomenon of leadership in progymnasium teachers seems lacking these days. In this research work, the problem is put in the form of a question: how is the leadership of progymnasium teachers expressed in the practice of the organisation of education?

The object of the research is the expression of teacher-leadership at a progymnasium in the organisation of the educational process.

The aim of the research is to reveal essential features of the expression of teacher-leadership in the organisation of the educational process at a progymnasium.

The methods of the research include content analysis and the synthesis of scientific literature and documents; semi-structured interview (oral); and a summary of the qualitative research data.

1. Leadership determination and distributed leadership theory

The concept of leadership is revealed by aspects supplementing each other: leadership as a process, leadership related to influence, leadership emerging in a group context, and leadership related to the achievement of goals. Leadership is defined as a process whereby influence is directed by a person at a group of people aimed at reaching a mutual goal. Importantly, both leaders (people with activity including leadership) and followers (people to whom leadership is directed) are essential for leadership (Northouse, 2009, 14–15). Other definitions of leadership are also presented. According to V. Šilingienė (2012), '[...] leadership is the way and result of personal influence on followers by inspiring vision and changes, manifesting as the process of interaction between a leader and followers having mutual goals [...] leadership could be perceived as interaction between three elements: a leader, a follower, and a context (Šilingienė, 2012, 12). A. Miniotaitė and I. Staškevičius (2019) understand it as '[...] the process when a person influences a group by directing the following to seek a mutual goal' (Miniotaitė, Staškevičius, 2019, 17–18). R. J. Marzano *et al.* (2011) define leadership as '[...] the process when leaders encourage their followers to seek specific goals meeting both their and the leader's values and motives, needs, aspirations and expectations' (Marzano *et al.*, 2011, 24–25).

There are various ways for leadership to be categorised. P. G. Northouse (2009) presents trait, skills, style, situational, circumstantial, path-goal, leader-member exchange, transformational, team and psychodynamic leadership. R. J. Marzano *et al.* (2011) focus on transformational and transactional, servicing, situational leadership and leadership for learning theories that become the landmark for heads of educational institutions. It is important to understand that the list of leadership styles and theories in a continually changing world is not and could not be finite, with new research works and emerging concepts being added. Z. Atkočiūnienė *et al.* (2019) claim that adaptive, coaching, democratic, participatory, harmonious, sustainable and other theories of leadership have recently been developed, with the need to apply a holistic approach, as well as to form a model of holistic leadership acting as a unifying element.

As distributed leadership as a term has been circulating since the 1950s, the theory of distributed leadership could hardly be called a new one, with the explanation of it as an idea contrasting with the leadership collected and controlled in the hands of one person, the movement from the leadership implemented by one person to a shared one comparing it to the change occurring when moving from individual to group activity (Crawford, 2012). There are almost no chances to leave benefits with a high potential related to the application of distributed leadership to the activity of an educational institution unnoticed, since the participation of great-

er number of members of staff working in an organisation in the leadership activity, without any doubt, tends to guarantee better results in change management, i.e. people with different skills and experience are able to contribute significantly to the development of leadership (Lumby, 2013). According to D. G. Torres (2019), the engagement of the greater part of the community at an educational institution in mutually developed leadership always leads to positive results. There are four ways to apply leadership of this type. It could be applied: 1) as a theoretical provision to research the problems of educational leadership; 2) to nurture principles of democracy at a school; 3) by raising the goal of more effective activity at an institution; and 4) seeking to inspire others to take the path of development related to the profession (Torres, 2019, 121).

A. Harris (2010) emphasises that while developing distributed leadership theory, like any other leadership theory, it is impossible to avoid specific difficulties. Three groups of obstacles, relating to distance, culture and structure for the implementation of distributed leadership, are distinguished. The author claims that obstacles of distance result from the challenges caused by physical space or distance occurring when leadership is implemented. In these situations, educational institutions inevitably have to take measures for the spread of information and communication aimed at the introduction of technological means. The obstacle of culture is shown when an institution needs to perceive leadership as a shared object rather than the function of one person, i.e. a resource involving the whole organisation with the true benefits felt only when it becomes possible to engage the interaction of people in a more effective way. Finally, the very structure of a school could become the obstacle in reaching the goals (Harris, 2010, 33–34).

2. The role of a teacher-leader in the context of the organisation of education

It would be almost impossible to find areas of human activity left untouched by the significance of leadership. Therefore, it is also purposeful to analyse the phenomenon of leadership at a progymnasium that became a new formation in the educational system of Lithuania in 2011. The concept of leadership is supplemented by the definition of leadership at an educational organisation for an educational leader provided by R. Dukynaitė (2015) claiming that ‘[...] leadership is excellence guaranteed through voluntary commitment,’ whereas a leader in education is ‘[...] the one gathering the educational community or the whole educational community committed to constantly improve their activity [...]’ (Dukynaite, 2015, 14–15). The topic of leadership developed by teachers, and its significance for the successful existence of educational organisations is discussed by researchers both in Lithuania and worldwide. J. Hunzicker (2017) distinguished factors encouraging teachers to start the transformation and become leaders, covering the work experience acquired, the determination to act, the motivation to support pupils and other teachers working at the same school, the appropriate disposition, the skills acquired and the knowledge gained. These factors distinguished by the author add to L. Lambert’s (2011) insight on the importance of leadership developed by teachers. According to L. Lambert (2011), such an evaluation of teacher-leaders should not be surprising, as they form part of the school staff that, due to its size and permanence, could not be compared with anything else.

According to V. F. Espinosa and J. L. Gonzalez (2023), there are various ways and styles of leading. The authors claim that teacher-leadership can motivate, become an example, share wisdom, show empathy, or provide a sense of comfort, whereas the incorporation of all five leadership styles into one’s activity impacts teacher-leadership positively in general (Espinosa, Gonzalez, 2023). In consideration of the educational changes taking place, three dimensions of leadership are distinguished: leadership as influence, as action, and as pedagogical excellence (Harris, Jones, 2019). J. Lumby (2013) emphasised the benefits of the distributed leadership model applied, that cover the higher effectiveness of the implementation of change when more members of staff are engaged in processes, as well as the positive impact of skills and experience acquired for the implementation of leadership.

V. Žydžiūnaitė *et al.* (2020) recognised the necessity of providing support to the development of teacher-leadership. According to these authors, the goals should be sought with the simultaneous reconsideration of the workload teachers receive, providing them with more possibilities to discuss and spread their leadership during the educational process and changes implemented at school (Žydžiūnaitė *et al.*, 2020). V. Grincevi-

čienė (2012) claimed that, for educational changes to happen, the contribution of teachers, pupils and their parents to the increase in the effectiveness of the educational process is significant, with the latter expressed through feedback. Educational content is an integral part of the whole educational process with the ways and means of assessment directly related to educational quality, i.e. meeting standards. D. Martišauskienė and K. Trekšėlyš (2014) presented three possible ways to define educational quality: as a standard established by experts, as the state of meeting criteria set, and the state of meeting the demands of a pupil; V. Targamadžė (2016) highlighted three constituents of personal maturity, achievement, and advance, which, in turn, develop into educational results.

In the updated general curricula approved by the ‘Order of the Minister for Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania’ (2022), a provision was confirmed on the need to form the educational basis and define content for learning that would become the foundation for teachers to help pupils seek goals with assistance for pupils seeking to acquire age-appropriate skills and subject knowledge, laying the basis for civic, cultural, national and moral consciousness and maturity, guaranteeing the consolidation of a healthy lifestyle, emotional and social skills, as well as the ability to take decisions, make appropriate choices, and further continue studies as the aim of general education (LR švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministro įsakymas „Dėl priešmokyklinio, pradinio, pagrindinio ir vidurinio ugdymo bendrųjų programų patvirtinimo“, 2022).

3. Research methodology

In order to reach the aim of the research, qualitative research was conducted, as the provisions of this type of research give an opportunity to provide insights into how various social processes work, without seeking generalising evaluation without typical features distinguished. An essential condition for qualitative research is the need for it to be based on real life problems without any imagined elements. The purpose of this type of research is defined as the aim to cognise, understand and describe under-researched social phenomena, human experience, and social type interactions, and reveal how research participants give sense to the experience acquired, interactions and their daily life (Žydžiūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017).

For the collection of research data, the interview method was chosen, as it is suitable for the collection of information related to various peculiarities of pedagogical processes with the aim of analysing in detail the specific motifs of performance and experience teachers and/or pupils have, their subjective opinions on phenomena, etc (Kardelis, 2016, 255). In order for the survey to be conducted, a semi-structured interview was applied. The interview questionnaire was compiled based on the ideas of J. Hunzicker (2017), A. Harris and M. Jones (2019), V. F. Espinosa and J. L. Gonzalez (2023), and other researchers on factors and conditions influencing the determination of teachers to choose the path of transformation into a teacher-leader, with the aim of taking a deeper look at the changes taking place within the education sector, the dimensions of teacher-leadership assessment, and different ways and styles of teacher-leading. The insights provided by L. Lambert (2011) on the significance of leadership developed by teachers, and the benefits of distributed leadership for the implementation of leadership at an educational institution, were chosen as the theoretical basis for this research.

The survey sample. For the qualitative research to be accomplished, eight informants from seven progymnasiums were selected. Purposive sampling was applied that is chosen when ‘[...] quite a small sample is formed’ (Žydžiūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017, 63). For a research sample to be formed, progymnasium teachers with former participation in the ‘Lyderių laikas’ project were chosen. The two main criteria, according to which informants were selected for the research, were the type of school they work in, i.e. a progymnasium, and participation in the national educational project ‘Lyderių laikas’.

Characteristics of the study participants. Eight progymnasium teachers, who participated in the ‘Lyderių laikas’ project, took part in the interview. Nearly all the informants had a university education, two informants had a qualification category as a teacher, two a senior teacher, and four a teacher methodologist. Their ages varied from 31 to 61, with pedagogical experience from four to 40 years. The work experience, education and qualification category provide the opportunity to claim that during the interview, teachers

delivered an evaluation of leadership while organising the educational process at a progymnasium based on their experience and participation in the ‘Lyderių laikas’ project.

The collection and analysis of the research data. With the method of interview applied, the researcher projects topics and problems to be discussed during the interview, at the same time avoiding attaching to the order or questions by changing their sequence easily, or choosing additional questions (Rupšienė, 2007, 67–68). The following topics were planned for discussion: 1) leadership at a progymnasium; 2) features of a teacher-leader at a progymnasium; 3) the expression of a teacher-leader in the life of the progymnasium community; 4) challenges faced while developing leadership at a progymnasium; 5) teacher-leadership and increasing the effectiveness of the educational process. After the interview, the data collected was transcribed, analysed, and interpreted with the categories and subcategories distinguished and reasoning each subcategory, as well as illustrating with direct quotations from the informant’s answers during the interview. Throughout the accomplishment of the research, the main ethical principles covering respect for privacy and confidentiality, and anonymity, goodwill and the disposition not to do harm and fairness, were followed (Žydžiūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017, 332).

4. Research findings

In this article, not all the interview results are presented, only the ones that reveal the peculiarities of teacher-leadership while organising the educational process at a progymnasium. One of the interview questions aimed to find out what the opinion of informants was on the aim of a contemporary progymnasium to have more than one leader, when the role of leader is normally assumed by the head of the school. The analysis of the data collected during the interview showed that one category of leadership at a progymnasium and three subcategories of one leader is not enough, one strong leader and shared leadership were distinguished (see Fig. 1).

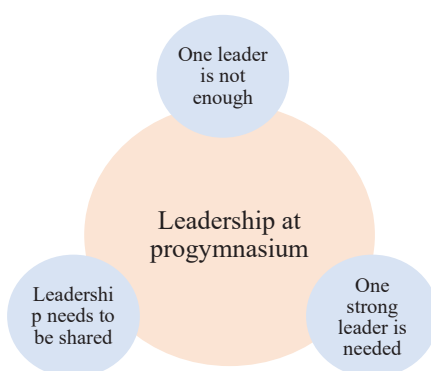


Fig. 1. Informants’ views on having only one leader at a progymnasium

In the opinion of the informants, one leader is not enough for both a progymnasium today and for a school in general: ‘[...] there is more than one leader at school for sure, if there was only one, the progymnasium would not be able to function’ (I1); ‘[...] the head is not capable of covering everything, or understanding everything that happens at a school, as it is simply too much for one person’ (I3); ‘[...] it is more beneficial for a progymnasium to have more leaders’ (I6). The informants emphasised the need to follow the principle of distributed leadership, claiming that one leader is not enough for a progymnasium: ‘[...] to share leadership in various work and methodology groups’ (I5); ‘[...] shared leadership based on the interests of one’s area is very powerful’ (I7). The informants mentioned a teacher-leader highlighting the importance of community to leadership: ‘[...] a teacher-leader at school cannot be alone, but shares leadership’ (I4); ‘[...] at our progymnasium teachers are also included in the team that takes decisions’ (I5). Nonetheless, some of

the informants claimed that a progymnasium needs one strong leader: '[...] *one strong manager should be present [...]*' (I8); '[...] the head of the school or administration, in my opinion, should be a strong leader' (I2). The responses by the informants show that one leader, in their opinion, is not enough for the effective work of a progymnasium. They claimed that the head of the school is unable to cover all areas of activity and understand everything that happens at a progymnasium; therefore, the informants tended to support the principle of sharing, especially at the level of work and methodology groups. Still, some informants think that a progymnasium needs one strong leader, with the head of the school or administration being the most frequently mentioned. It is important to take account of different opinions on leadership at a progymnasium in order to seek the effective performance of the school and cooperation between teachers.

The next interview question for the informants aimed to find out *what features are important for a teacher-leader or one seeking to take on the role of leader at a progymnasium*. After an analysis of the data collected during the interview, one category of *features of a teacher-leader at a progymnasium* and four subcategories of *communicability, organisational skills, creativity, and skills to inspire and convince* were distinguished (see Fig. 2).

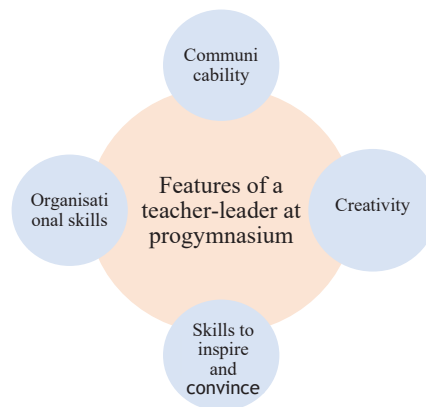


Fig. 2. Informants' opinions on the features of a teacher-leader at a progymnasium

One feature that a teacher willing to take on the role of a leader must possess is communicability. This feature reflects the ability to communicate effectively with others, deliver information, and seek mutual interaction. It is important not only for the understanding and engagement of pupils, but also for cooperation and an effective educational process: '[...] capable of explaining topics in a clear and understandable way' (I1); '[...] capable of delivering information in a way pupils can understand and get involved in the learning process' (I3); '[...] it is important not only to talk but also to hear the opinions of pupils, one should initiate discussions and open conversation in the classroom for active participation and sharing ideas encouraged' (I5). Creativity is a significant and integral part of the features a teacher-leader at a progymnasium needs to possess: '[...] creativity allows a teacher to include interesting tasks, projects, and even unconventional solutions in a lesson' (I6); 'A creative teacher should be able to adapt to the different needs and learning styles of pupils by applying innovative and adapted learning strategies' (I7). The informants highlighted the added value of inspiration and persuasion, when the role of a teacher-leader at a progymnasium is sought. This feature involves the ability to inspire pupils and act in a way for them to feel involved in the learning process, as well as the ability to persuade and convince others of their ideas and opinions: '[...] allows a teacher to form a strong connection with pupils' (I8); '[...] involves pupils, and gathers them around a mutual goal' (I1). After the analysis of informants' responses on the features of a teacher-leader is accomplished, it is important to draw attention to the subcategory of organisational skills: '[...] helps a teacher to plan lessons effectively' (I5); '[...] can process lesson material effectively, adapt it to the different needs of pupils'

(I4). These informants' responses provide an opportunity to understand that particular features and abilities are necessary for a teacher to become an effective leader. Communicability is an essential factor allowing a teacher to communicate effectively with all participants, and create a strong connection. This feature helps to guarantee a smooth educational process, and individualise learning based on pupils' needs. All the features and abilities distinguished allow a teacher to become an influential leader with meaningful educational experiences provided at a progymnasium. A successful teacher can combine these features and abilities by creating the basis for a beneficial learning environment and the development of pupils.

The next interview question aimed to find out *what it means to be a teacher-leader in a progymnasium community, how teacher-leadership can be displayed at a progymnasium*. After the analysis of the data collected during the interview, one category of *expression of teacher-leadership* and four subcategories of *high achievements of pupils, organisation of the educational process, cooperation with parents, and communication with teaching colleagues* were distinguished (see Fig. 3).

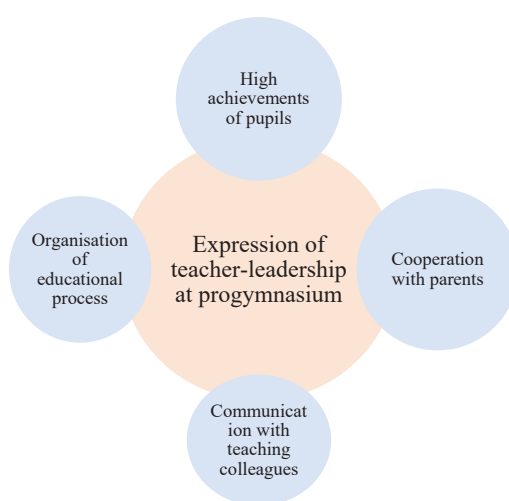


Fig. 3. Informants' opinions on the expression of teacher-leadership at a progymnasium

The analysis of the informants' responses showed that teacher-leadership at a progymnasium is expressed through the high achievements of pupils, and cooperation with both pupils' parents and teaching colleagues: in the opinions of the informants, a teacher-leader focuses on the high achievements of pupils: '[...] teacher-leadership is expressed through the high results of progymnasium pupils' (I5); '[...] teacher-leaders put their efforts into pupils achieving high results' (I8). During the interview, the informants emphasised the expression of a teacher-leader in the life of a progymnasium community, cooperating with parents: '[...] a teacher-leader is a link between the progymnasium community and pupils' parents' (I3); '[...] teacher-leadership is important when cooperating with parents' (I1). According to the informants, teacher-leadership at a progymnasium is expressed through cooperation with teaching colleagues: '[...] the trust of colleagues is acquired through cooperation, initiating new activities, or implementing decisions that have already been taken' (I6; I4); '[...] cooperating with colleagues, meaningful feedback is received on your leadership expression' (I2); '[...] cooperation with colleagues can help you to understand your role as a leader' (I7). It was also claimed during the interview that the expression of teacher-leadership is spread while organising the educational process: '[...] seeks to improve and encourage colleagues to share ideas, new things and best practice in order to improve the educational process and ensure pupils' success' (I2); '[...] organises the educational process in such a way that it would encourage pupils to become independent, critically thinking personalities, with the ability to solve problems' (I5); '[...] adapt to the changing needs of pupils for motivating and for beneficial learning conditions to be created' (I8). Teacher-leadership at a progymnasium is related to the

high achievements of pupils, with efforts made by teachers for pupils to achieve high results. Also, the leadership of a teacher is expressed through cooperation with parents, where teachers become the link between the progymnasium community and pupils' parents. Additionally, cooperation with teaching colleagues is an important aspect, whereas trust and feedback help to understand better one's role as a leader. The informants also emphasised that the expression of teacher-leadership at a progymnasium is seen in the organisation of the educational process with the aim of improving oneself, encouraging to share ideas, new things and best practice, as well as adapting to pupils' needs and creating motivating and beneficial learning conditions.

With the next interview question, informants were asked to share their thoughts on *the problems teacher-leaders must face at a progymnasium while organising the educational process*. After the analysis of the data collected during the interview, one category of *problems faced by teacher-leadership at progymnasium* and three subcategories of *resistance to innovation, the age of teachers and high workload* were distinguished (see Fig. 4).

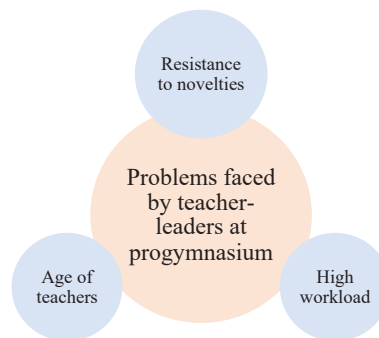


Fig. 4. Informants' opinion on problems faced by teacher-leaders at a progymnasium

Sharing comments on the situation, the informants mentioned resistance to innovation and passivity: '[...] resistance to innovation exists among colleagues' (I1); '[...] other teachers just observe passively' (I2); '[...] could resist new ideas, methods and technologies' (I4). The research participants distinguished the problem of a teacher's age: '[...] nothing is needed, nothing is interesting, they live in the future, with a well-deserved rest approaching, retirement, stewing in the same juice with no change wanted' (I3); '[...] most teachers are almost at the age of retirement' (I5). The informants also mentioned the great workload at a progymnasium: '[...] professional fatigue, suggestions from colleagues to leave the school while still young' (I7); '[...] you just cannot have time to do everything as you would like to' (I6); '[...] teachers often have a high workload' (I8). The informants' responses showed that teacher-leaders at a progymnasium face several problems related to the organisation of the educational process. One such problem is the resistance of colleagues to innovation, and passivity, which, in turn, could prevent change and innovation at school. Another issue is the age of teachers, as most teachers are close to retirement age; therefore, they might lack enthusiasm or the willingness to implement changes. Moreover, teacher-leaders experience a high workload that could restrict their possibilities and negatively impact their health, which distances them from the implementation of innovation. These problems could require appropriate strategies, support and organisational solutions in order to promote innovation, motivate colleagues, and ease the workload teacher-leaders have.

With the next question, the informants were asked to share their opinion on *the expression of teacher-leadership for an increase in the effectiveness of progymnasium performance*. After the analysis of the data received during the interview, one category of *teachers' view of leadership in organising educational process* and three subcategories of *cooperation with other progymnasiums, participation in educational projects, and taking strategic decisions* were distinguished (see Fig. 5).

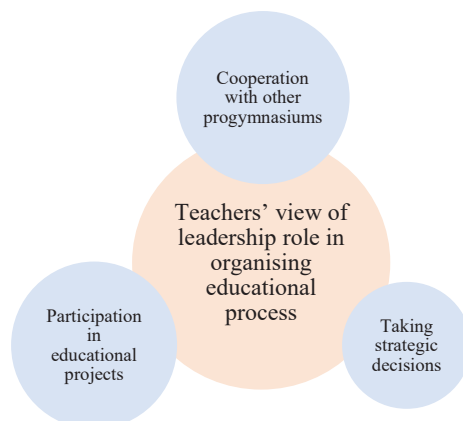


Fig. 5. Informants' opinions on the teacher's view of the leadership role in organising the educational process

The participants in the research shared their insights showing that, in seeking the more effective performance of a progymnasium, it is useful to cooperate with other progymnasiums: '[...] gathering and directing teachers for some activity with other progymnasiums in the town' (I1); '[...] cooperate with other progymnasiums' (I2). According to the informants, teacher-leadership seeking to increase the efficiency of a progymnasium's performance could be expressed by participating in projects: '[...] take part in projects, spread your experience, publicise outside the progymnasium' (I3); '[...] the teachers in our progymnasium participate in various projects both abroad and in Lithuania' (I5); '[...] take part in training programmes and support projects initiated by teachers' (I8). The participants in the research noted that the possibility for teacher-leaders to contribute to the strategic decision of an institution is significant and influential in increasing the effectiveness of the educational process at a progymnasium: '[...] the teachers' contribution to strategic decisions allows us to bring our ideas into the activities of the school' (I4); '[...] it allows us to feel important and valued in the school community' (I7); '[...] inclusion in strategic decisions helps us understand better and meet the needs of the school and the pupils' (I6). The informants emphasised the importance of cooperation with other progymnasiums in the results of educational activities. Also, the participation of teachers in projects and programmes providing an opportunity to develop professionalism and internationality is important. Teacher-leadership that contributes to engagement in strategic decisions allows teachers to feel important and valued in the progymnasium community. The participation of teachers in taking strategic decisions provides an opportunity to understand better the needs of the progymnasium, as well as forming a direction for the activities of this type of school.

Summary of the research findings

The research helped to show that the informants had no doubts about the need for a school to have more than one leader. Even those that mentioned the need for a progymnasium to have one leader also emphasised the need for such a leader to have a strong team. The need for a distributed leadership was shown with the significance of a teacher-leader distinguished within this context, as well as emphasising the great impact of community on teacher-leadership. These results correspond to the idea of J. Lumby (2013) on the different skills acquired by different people, and the importance of the experience gained to the successful expression of leadership. In the opinion of the participants in the research, a teacher-leader at a progymnasium should have organisational, communication and creativity skills, as well as being able to inspire and convince others. The opinions expressed by the research participants on the peculiarities of teacher-leaders do not contradict the statements of V. F. Espinosa and J. L. Gonzalez (2023) on the different ways and styles of

leading, as leaders with different skills are able to develop leadership of different styles. The results of research on successful teacher-leaders at a progymnasium, and the leadership spread by such a leader, show that teacher-leadership is expressed most successfully by aiming at high achievements by pupils, communicating with parents and teaching colleagues, and organising the educational process. The informants' responses correspond to the idea presented by D. G. Torres (2019) on engaging more members of staff from the school community as a significant condition for the development of leadership.

In expressing opinions on the problems and obstacles teacher-leaders face while working at a progymnasium, the research emphasised that the greatest burden of issues is caused by the unwillingness of teachers to try new things, and the resistance to them, with most teachers belonging to the older age group, and finally, the negative impact on teachers caused by the workload. The opinions of the research participants on factors having a negative impact on teacher-leadership correspond to the statement by V. Žydžiūnaitė *et al.* (2020) on the importance of support that contributes to the development of teacher-leadership, and the necessity to reconsider the workload of teachers. Sharing the insights on the importance of leadership in organising the educational process, the informants distinguished the importance of cooperation with other progymnasiums, participation in projects, and contributing to strategic decisions. These research results relate to the description of distributed leadership provided by M. Crawford (2012), with the essential aspect of moving from leadership implemented by one person to group activity, i.e. cooperation.

Conclusions

Leadership as a process, leadership as influence, leadership expressed in a group context and as a connection between leadership and achieving goals, are considered essential aspects of the concept of leadership that are revealed throughout the analysis accomplished. There are different styles and ways to categorise leadership, with the list changing constantly. In the theory of distributed leadership, the engagement of a greater number of employees in an organisation is highlighted, as it contributes to the implementation of change at an educational organisation. Changes involving the contemporary educational sector are related to the importance of leadership implemented by teachers, as well as the need for it to be developed. Knowledge and skills, disposition, the motivation to provide support to pupils and teaching colleagues, the determination to act, and pedagogical experience gained, influence the spread of teacher-leadership.

The reorganisation of the Lithuanian educational system implemented in 2011, with the aim of improving the quality of education and guaranteeing the accessibility of compulsory and universal education, provided an official start to the emergence of the *progymnasium*. The implementation of general education for the preparation of pupils for further learning at a progymnasium or institution of vocational studies was considered the main mission of the progymnasium. For such a mission to be implemented, it is important to support the leadership of teachers working at a progymnasium, which is significant in organising the educational process and implementing change at a progymnasium.

The qualitative research conducted on the opinions of progymnasium teachers revealed that one leader is not enough, the need for distributed leadership was highlighted, with the impact of a teacher-leader on the leadership of other teachers and the importance of the community shown. A teacher working at a progymnasium needs to be confident, communicative, creative and full of initiative. The leadership of progymnasium teachers is expressed in the practice of an educational organisation through communication with teaching colleagues and pupils' parents, as well as seeking great achievements by pupils. The unwillingness of teachers to try innovations, and resistance to them, age, and excessive workload, are considered the greatest problems and obstacles teacher-leaders face when working at a progymnasium, whereas evaluating the impact of leadership on the organisation of the educational process, the prospect of participating in projects, the contribution to making strategic decisions, and cooperation with other progymnasiums, were emphasised.

Discussion

The results of interviews with teachers working at progymnasiums revealed that most of the research participants had no doubts about the necessity for a school to have more than one leader. This supports the insight of J. Lumby (2013) on the importance of the skills possessed by different people, and the experience acquired, for the successful implementation of leadership. While sharing thoughts on inseparable components of the transformation of a teacher into a teacher-leader, the personal features necessary for a leader combined with the influence of colleagues, as well as the importance of both teamwork and professional pedagogical competence emphasised, were mentioned by informants. The analysis of the answers provided by the research participants about a successful teacher-leader, and the leadership expressed by the latter, corresponds with the three basic dimensions of leadership provided by A. Harris and M. Jones (2019), concerning leadership as influence, leadership as an action, and leadership as pedagogical excellence.

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MOKYTOJŲ LYDERYSTĖS RAIŠKA PROGIMNAZIJOJE ORGANIZUOJANT UGDYMO PROCESĄ

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama progimnazijose dirbančių mokytojų lyderystės raiškos problema organizuojant ugdymo procesą. Pastaraisiais metais mokytojų lyderystės temai daug dėmesio skyrė tiek užsienio, tiek ir Lietuvos autoriai. Prieš daugiau nei du dešimtmečius pristatytas naujas mokyklos tipas – progimnazija, kuriuo siekiama atliepti naujus švietimo srities iššūkius, efektyviau naudoti mokykloms skiriamą finansavimą ir iš esmės pagerinti švietimo kokybę bei prieinamumą. Lyderystė gali būti vertinama kaip procesas, poveikis, grupės kontekste besireiškianti lyderystė, ryšys tarp lyderystės ir tikslų siekimo traktuojamas kaip vienas esminių aspektų. Yra daugybė skirtingų lyderystės skirstymo būdų ir stilių, kurių sąrašas nuolat kinta ir papildomas naujais. Pasidalytosios lyderystės teorija apima didesnio organizacijos darbuotojų skaičiaus įsitraukimą į lyderystės procesą, kuris savo ruožtu prisideda prie pokyčių švietimo organizacijoje įgyvendinimo. Šiuolaikinį švietimo sektorių apimantys pokyčiai susiję tiek su mokytojų įgyvendinamos lyderystės svarba, tiek su poreikiu ją toliau plėtoti. Žinios ir įgūdžiai, noras ir motyvacija suteikti mokiniams bei kolegoms paramą, ryžtas imtis veiksmų ir sukaupta pedagoginio darbo patirtis teigiamai veikia mokytojų lyderystės raišką.

2011 m. įgyvendinta Lietuvos švietimo sistemos reorganizacija, kuria siekiama pagerinti švietimo kokybę ir garantuoti jo prieinamumą, tapo oficialia naujo mokyklos tipo – progimnazijos – pradžia. Progimnazijų misija tapo bendrojo ugdymo įgyvendinimas, rengiant mokinius tolesniam mokymosi procesui gimnazijose ar profesinėse mokyklose. Siekiant šių tikslų ypač svarbu remti progimnazijose dirbančių mokytojų lyderystę, kuri tampa reikšmingu veiksniu tiek organizuojant ugdymo procesą, tiek įgyvendinant pokyčius progimnazijoje.

Atliktas kokybinis tyrimas, taikant interviu metodą. Interviu dalyvavo 8 informantai iš 7 progimnazijų, dalyvavę projekte „Lyderių laikas“. Beveik visi tyrimo dalyviai buvo įgiję aukštąjį universitetinį išsilavinimą, 2 iš jų turėjo mokytojo, 2 – vyr. mokytojo, 4 – mokytojo metodininko kvalifikaciją. Informantų amžius siekė nuo 31 iki 61 metų. Atsižvelgiant į tiriamųjų sukaupią darbo patirtį, įgytą išsilavinimą ir įgytą kvalifikacijos kategoriją, galima teigti, kad vykdant interviu mokytojai pasidalijo lyderystės išvalgomis progimnazijoje organizuojant ugdymo procesą, remdamiesi savo patirtimi ir dalyvavimu projekte „Lyderių laikas“.

Atliktas kokybinis tyrimas, kuriame dalyvavo progimnazijose dirbantys mokytojai, atskleidė, kad vieno lyderio mokykloje neužtenka, akcentuojamas pasidalytosios lyderystės poreikis, reikšmingas mokytojo lyderio poveikis kitų mokytojų lyderystei bei bendruomeniškumo svarba. Progimnazijoje dirbantis mokytojas turi būti pasitikintis savimi, komunikatyvus, kūrybingas, iniciatyvus. Progimnazijos mokytojų lyderystė reiškiasi organizuojant ugdymo procesą, bendraujant su kolegomis mokytojais ir mokinių tėvais, siekiant aukštų mokinių rezultatų. Mokytojų nenoras imtis naujovių ar netgi priešinimasis joms, vyresnis mokytojų amžius ir didelis darbo krūvis, tyrimo dalyvių manymu, yra didžiausios problemos ir kliūtys, su kuriomis mokytojai lyderiai susiduria dirbdami progimnazijoje. Pabrėžiamas lyderystės poveikis ugdymo proceso organizavimui, dalyvavimo projektinėse veiklose svarba, indėlis priimančiam strateginiams sprendimams ir bendradarbiavimas su kitomis progimnazijomis.

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

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