

Selection and qualification of headteachers of educational institutions in the system of pre-school and school education



INTRODUCTION

Societal expectations and demands on the pre-school and school education system pose several serious issues and challenges for the organization and management of educational institutions. Since 2008, with the introduction of delegated budgets and the "money follows the student" mechanism, the role and functions of school and kindergarten principals have been significantly transformed. From administrators and managers at the operational level, they have become strategic managers of educational institutions, leaders and managers of financial, material and human resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The selection and qualification of principals in the pre-school and school education system should be an integral part of the overall education quality management policy and not just an administrative procedure implemented in the context of the Labor Code and other relevant normative documents. Following this credo, the methodology of the project is based on the concepts of principal as leader and decentralization of education management, which requires well prepared and selected managers in educational institutions.

The main objectives of the study is to analyze the system of selection and qualification of principals of educational institutions and to outline possible ways and mechanisms for its improvement in the context of high expectations for the management of preschool and school education.

The main tasks, according to the set objectives, are as follows:

- Study of the scientific literature on criteria, procedures and mechanisms for the selection of heads of educational institutions and their initial and following qualification at Bulgaria and abroad;
- Implementation of a survey among principals, teachers and experts of the Regional Departments of Education to reveal their attitudes towards the current system of selection and qualification of principals.
- Conducting focus groups with principals, experts from RDEs and teachers in selected districts in the country.
- Develop a comprehensive model for the selection and continuing qualification of principals, including evaluation criteria, procedures and mechanisms during the selection process, and guidelines for improving the initial and continuing qualification of principals.

Results

During the first year of the project the team researched scientific literature, the selection system and mechanisms and appointment of directors of educational institutions, presented the results at a conference in the town of Burgas (June 2024) and published them in three separate articles in the conference proceedings.

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 634 respondents. The main target groups covered in the survey were school principals and vice-principals (155 respondents), experts from the Regional Departments of Education (193 respondents) and teachers (207 respondents) (88% of those who participated in the survey completed the questionnaire).

The purpose of the survey was to outline the opinions and assessments of the surveyed groups on the current procedure for the selection of principals, introduced in Regulation 16 on holding competitions for the post of "principal" in state and municipal institutions in the system of pre-school and school education (SG 52/5 July 2022). The Regulation introduces quite a new process in the selection of directors of educational institutions - an anonymous test, presentation and defense of a concept and case study, as well as thresholds for admission from the first stage (test) to the second stage of the competition (interview, presentation of a concept and case study). The Regulation also sets a minimum threshold for the ranking of candidates for the post in question, thereby seeking objectivity in the procedure and its results. The overall concept of this normative act is to introduce transparency and independence in the selection process, as well as the opportunity to look not only for administrators who are well versed in the regulations, but also for leaders who are able to cope with the challenges of managing educational institutions.

The adoption of Ordinance 16 was accompanied by numerous controversies, including the suspension of its validity for a certain period of time, and the clarification of some texts in it related to the composition of the committees carrying out the competition procedure at regional level. The questionnaire survey was carried out in the period after the first competitions were held under the Ordinance and made it possible to highlight the main attitudes and opinions of respondents regarding the competition procedure.

The main conclusion of the survey is that the current selection procedure established in Ordinance 16 of 2022 is more objective and effective in selecting quality heads of educational institutions, despite some of its shortcomings (Figure 1).

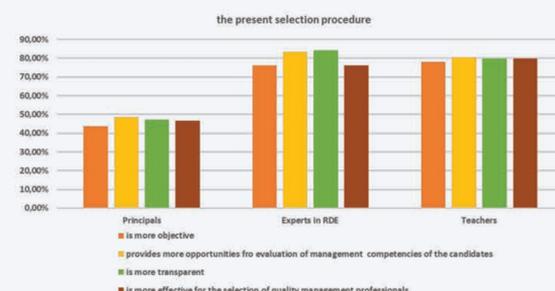


Figure 1

A significant difference of opinion emerges between principals (on the one hand) and experts from the PDE and teachers (on the other), with principals being much more sceptical about the new selection procedure. This is due to the fact that the majority of the principals who participated in the survey (over 68%) were appointed to the post before the entry into force of the regulation and went through selection under the previous mechanisms.

Controversy has also arisen over the composition of the selection committees and, especial about the inclusion of representatives of the Community Council of institutions, for which the candidates apply.

While teachers strongly support the inclusion of the Community Council in the selection committee, principals and experts are much more reserved in their opinion. More than 55% of the principals consider the participation of this entity in the competitions for principals to be completely or rather inappropriate (Figure 2)

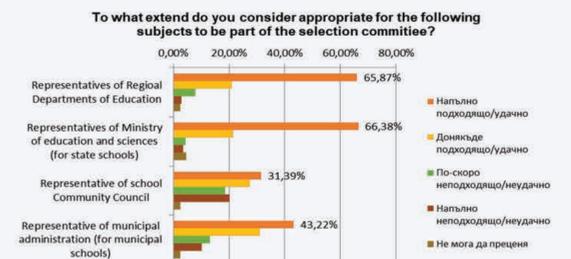


Figure 2

This issue, along with questions about the objectivity of the written test, the ability of the assessment methods to evaluate the managerial competence and leadership potential of the candidates, are subjects of a more in-depth study through focus groups with school principals and RDE experts planned in 18 districts across the country. The focus groups interviews were done at the end of the first and the beginning of the second year of the project.

The initial results of the focus groups so far (11 districts in the country) mainly support the quantitative data collected through the survey. Based on these, several conclusions emerge on the main research variables:

Selection procedure

- The development and defense of a school management concept does not support the evaluation of candidates' qualities;
- The test should be differentiated according to the type of school applied for;
- A minimum threshold should also be set for the second stage of the competition procedure (concept, case studies);
- The case studies of the second stage should be the same for all candidates for the specific school, so that there are equal conditions for all of them;

Selection committee

- The representative of the Community council is rather negatively perceived, due to the fact that the local authority and/or the funding body include their own "additional" participant in the committee through this representative;
- The Community council representative, if from the parents' quota, is often not aware of the regulations and does not have the necessary expertise to fully assess the candidates;
- Involvement, where possible, of psychologists or HR specialists should be considered as an option

Qualification

- The mandatory possession of a Master's degree in Educational management is not positively accepted. Any formal degree in the field should not be a requirement for applying for and holding the post
- Initial qualification should be led by experienced principals
- Main topics for continuing qualification include school finance management, working with the children at risk and with deviant behavior, and working with new generations of pupils, parents and teachers

Upcoming

In the second year of the project, the research team is focusing on a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and building a model for the selection and qualification of leaders, tailored to the needs and characteristics of the Bulgarian education system.

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