

School Leadership and Autonomy



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BRIEFLY ABOUT THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH ...



LITHUANIA

Territory and population



Area		65,300 km ²
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Population	2015 estimate	2,907,569
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<u>Ethnic groups</u> <u>(2011)</u>	84.1% Lithuanians 6.6% Poles 5.8% Russians 1.2% Belarusians 0.5% Ukrainians 1.9% others and unspecified	
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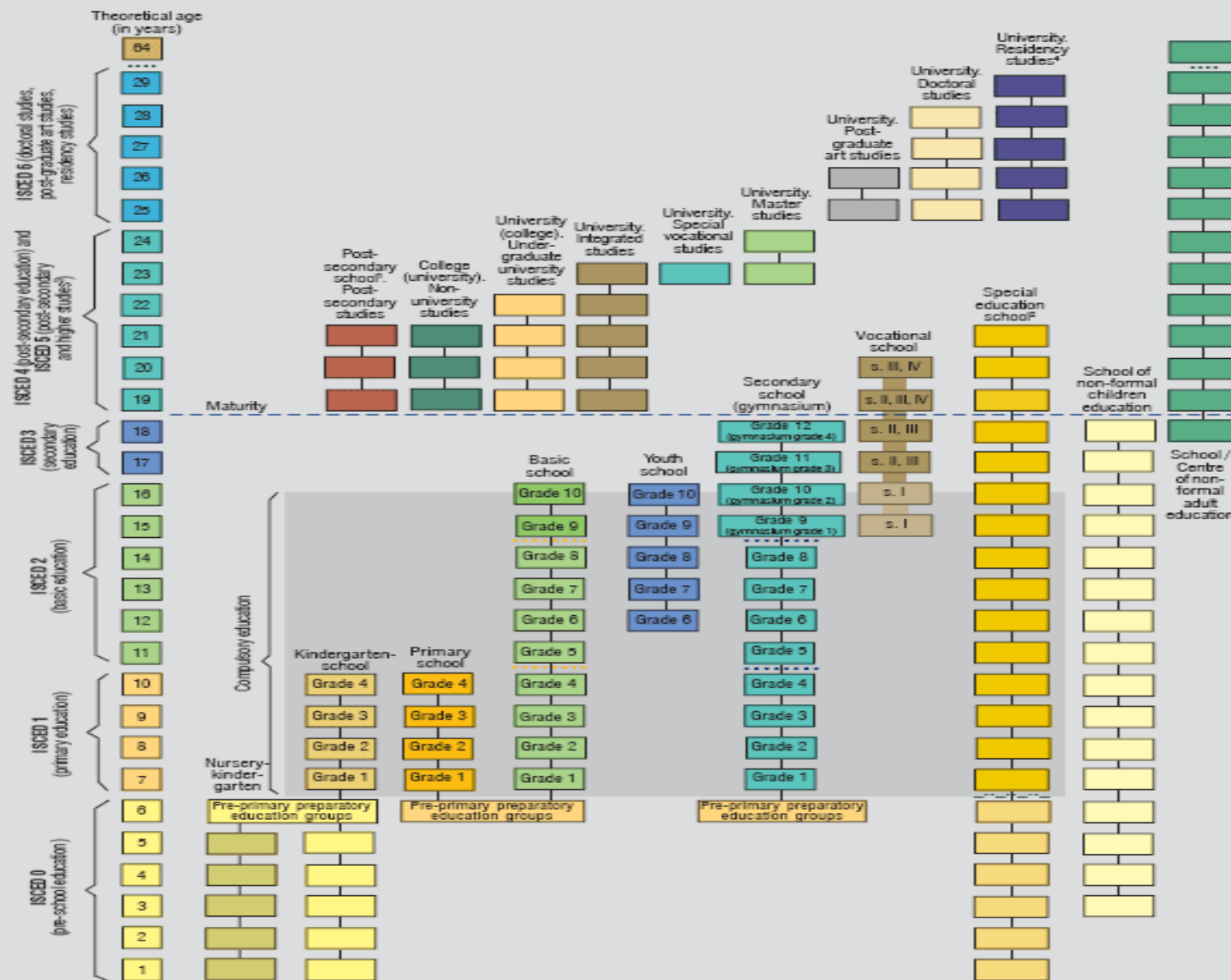
Religion	Roman Catholic	77,2%
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Lithuanian independence

- *1990 - the Restoration of Independence*
- *2004 - joined the NATO, European Union*



THE EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA



¹ Enrolment stopped in 2003.

² Children with special needs may attain education at special schools or by attending classes of general education.

³ The scheme includes an indication of the most usual duration of higher studies.

⁴ Residency studies are cycle III studies (just like doctoral and post-graduate art studies).

Some special schools have preparatory classes.

Basic schools may choose to not implement pre-primary preparatory and primary education curricula as well as curricula falling under the second content centre of basic education.

Secondary schools may choose to not implement pre-primary preparatory and primary education curricula as well as curricula falling under the first content centre of basic education. In separate cases gymnasiums may choose to implement pre-primary preparatory and primary education curricula as well as curricula falling under the first content centre of basic education.

RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Research on the topic in question show that:

There is insufficient evidence allowing to conclude that there is a direct link between the level of school autonomy and pupils' academic achievements

however, in schools with developed leadership skills pupils tend to have better academic achievements and

impact of school leadership on academic achievement tends to be stronger in schools with higher degree of school autonomy.

There is a strong interdependence between autonomy of schools and school leadership development which results in higher academic achievements of pupils.

Aim of the research:

- This research is designed to research school leadership and school autonomy by identifying and analysing different elements and factors influencing school, revealing principles of autonomous school management and preconditions for successful school leadership development.

Research questions:

- *How do school communities evaluate the leadership at schools and how do they perceive the principles of self-governance/ autonomous governance?*
- *What are precondition for leadership having a varied degree of autonomy in school management?*
- *What are the factors determining the success of leadership in a decentralized/autonomous school?*
- *What problems arise for school leaders while applying self-management model in schools?*

Methods of the research:

- **quantitative research** (questionnaires for teachers, principals and deputies in writing):
 - to determine the elements of expression of school leadership;
 - to determine a degree of perception and expression/application of autonomy in schools.
- **qualitative research** (semi-structured interviews with school principals):
 - to identify both the factors determining successful application of autonomous management models and preconditions for successful leadership development.

Scope of the research:

Quantitative research:

- 87 Lithuanian general education schools
- 3149 teachers
- 87 principals
- 170 deputies

Qualitative research:

- 30 principals

Theoretical framework

The models of education management:

- Biurocratic/ formal
- Managerial
- Democratic/ participating/ colegial

Characteristics of the education management models

Elements of management	Type of model		
	Biurocratic/ formal	Managerial	Democratic/ participating/ collegial
Focus of the goals	Order consolidation/maintenance	Change initiation	Development of social reliability/trust
Determining of the goals	Set by leaders	Set by leaders following the market trends	Agreement
Nature of decision process	Rational	Negotiatory	Colegial
Organizational structure	Hierarchy	Market	Network
Style of leadership	Biurocratic administration	Transactional	Partnership – consultations
Basis of the activities/ performance	Procedures	Results	Needs
Service receiver (pupil, student, parent)	Entitlement to rights and duties	Customer	Partner
Nature of relations	Domination and subordination	Competition and collaboration	Collaboration and interdependence
Organizational status of the school	Monocentric system	Autonomic system	Policentric system
Level of school autonomy	Low level of autonomy	High level of autonomy	Middle level of autonomy

Underling principles of the research:

The degree of autonomy in schools and expression of leadership is studied following below provided areas of school activities:

- *Managament autonomy* – organizing activities,
- *Pedagogical/teacher autonomy* – curriculum and organization of teaching process,
- *Staff/school personnel autonomy* – human recourse management,
- *Financial autonomy* – management of school assets,
- *External factors* – relations with oher schools, governmental institutions.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Perceptions of the school autonomy concept

- Theoretical and legal framework analysis revealed, that *school autonomy is described as the right and capability of the school to independently, without breaching the set procedures, make decisions, organize activities, and take responsibility for the results.*
- Based on the results of the research it could be concluded, that the perception of the concept of the school autonomy differs among the schools. The schools have different needs for autonomy and they use different self governance tools. This can be explained by the fact that each school is unique and has a specific school environment. Regardless of those differences it is highly important that the schools were aware of and clearly understand the values of national policy and the aims of school autonomisation.

The autonomy in school management

Research questions:

- Is the school *executor* of the centralized decisions, or the *creator* (more focused on local community needs)?
- What is the decision making model in the school?
- What is the type of leadership in the school?
- How democratic is school management process?
- How is the power distributed among the school community?
- What is the level of school community involvement/ activity/ passivity?

Preliminary results:

- *Most of the schools are more focused on local community needs.*
- *The main decision maker is usually the principal of the school, occasionally the teams of school teachers are involved in that process, and rarely a wider school community.*
- *School board - is more formal body for formal procedures.*
- *School community is usually a passive observer and a service receiver.*

The autonomy in curriculum and teaching process

Research questions

- How is the content of education formed?
- How are student achievement and progress measured?
- How are teaching aids, textbooks chosen?
- How is school community involved in organizing teaching process?

Preliminary results:

- *The research showed, that the legal framework does not hinder self management in curriculum and teaching process development. However, the important factor is the unique management culture and community/ social awareness level in a particular school.*

The autonomy in personnel management

Research questions:

- Who makes decisions regarding personnel management (selection, evaluation, motivation etc.)?
- If and how school community is involved in organizing personnel management?
- How active teachers are motivated? Are teacher salaries differentiated? If yes, how?
- How is staff professional development done?

Preliminary results:

- *School leaders do not use all legal and managerial possibilities to involve employees and their representatives in setting teacher workload (and thus teacher salaries) and employee performance evaluation.*
- *Differentiation of salaries does not apply to all schools. The most common reasons for not differentiating salaries is desire to avoid tension between the teachers.*
- *Usually professional development of teachers is fragmented, whereas some of the schools have clear PD systems.*

The autonomy in financial management

Research questions:

- What is the level of school financial autonomy?
- Who makes decisions regarding financial issues in the school?
- If and how school community is involved in financial issues?
- How are the school's financial projects and infrastructure development planned and managed?

Preliminary results:

- School community is not yet ready to be fully accountable for the rights and responsibilities of self-managing assets and resources in schools.
- Autonomous financial management is understood only as the distribution of money and as an accounting function and not as a cost-effective management of school resources

External relations

Research questions:

- Who/what the school is accountable to?
 - to local community/
 - to governmental institutions
 - to politicians
- What are the relations with other schools?
 - competition or collaboration
- What is the style of the relations with authorities (founder, national authorities)?
 - control or counseling
 - subordination or cooperation

Preliminary results:

- In carrying out their activities the schools try to maintain the balance between national policy and local needs.
- Most common is the competition between neighboring schools, and cooperation with distant schools.
- Relations with authorities vary, however, the dominant answer was that the functions of the education departments at municipal level are not clear.

Key factors of successful autonomous school performance:

- competence of the school principal,
- activeness and support of the school community,
- trust between the founder of the school - the school principal - community.

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