



The Role of the School Principal in the Context of Possible Transformation of the Educational Curriculum

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Received 3 April 2023

Accepted 9 June 2023

ABSTRACT

In the paper, we present the current Czech educational legal norms that set certain boundaries in the operation of Czech primary and secondary schools. In the first part of the article, we present the role of the current school principal in relation to his/her competencies in the context of basic Czech educational norms and present a competence model of school principals, the fulfilment of which by school principals can lead to stabilization and a greater degree of effective education in the context of the educational challenges of the 21st century. In the second part of the paper, we propose the possibilities of optimization of legal norms in education and its possible effective integration into the real educational process. In summary, we can conclude that it should be a matter of greater transparency in the training of teaching staff and school principals, the introduction of an optional direct teaching obligation for school principals, the introduction of mechanisms that would lead to a greater degree of familiarity of teachers and principals with the current legal educational norms and their changes, or the development of a unified and comprehensive concept of teaching within one school. We are aware that the proposed solutions have their limits. The most significant is the increase in the administrative burden on school principals: however, we believe that without the introduction of transparent and verifiable mechanisms to check the fulfilment of certain obligations, it will not be possible to check the obligations in question.

Keywords: School Norm, Curriculum, Training of Teaching Staff and School Principals, Verification, Transparency

Introduction

In this paper, we focus on the role of the principal in the context of the current curriculum reforms and how and to what extent the principal can influence the transformation of the educational curriculum in relation to its reflection in the real pedagogical situation. In the first part of the paper,

we focus on the competencies of the current school principal according to the current Czech school regulations and present the competence model of educational managers, In the second part, we propose the possibilities of optimizing the legal regulation of education and the possibilities of its effective implementation in the practice of schools.

School principal of the current school

The principal is an essential factor in school development, a key aspect influencing the pedagogical process and student outcomes. (Trojan, 2015) Trojan (2015, p. 13) states that “the current form of the principal's position is unsatisfactory. The school principal is permanently overloaded, his attention is diverted from pedagogical work and its management, he does not have time, space, or adequate conditions for it”. The head teacher at a Czech school must have the prescribed qualifications and must meet a specified length of previous teaching experience. Trojan (2015, p. 14) summarizes the current state of the principal’s duties in six points:

- 1) “the burden of many duties on the principal;
- 2) hospitalization analysis;
- 3) differences between principals of different types of schools;
- 4) limited number of tools and methods used;
- 5) teachers' expectations - concerns about hospitalization x requiring feedback;
- 6) working with mediated information.”

An integral part of the head teacher's job is to enter the teaching process, both in terms of the hospitalization and in terms of their direct teaching activities (see Table 1).

Table 1. School principal’s involvement in the pedagogical process

School principal	joint teaching with another teacher
	attending a lesson
	actions of multiple teachers outside the classroom
	school principal’s demonstration lesson
	hospitalization

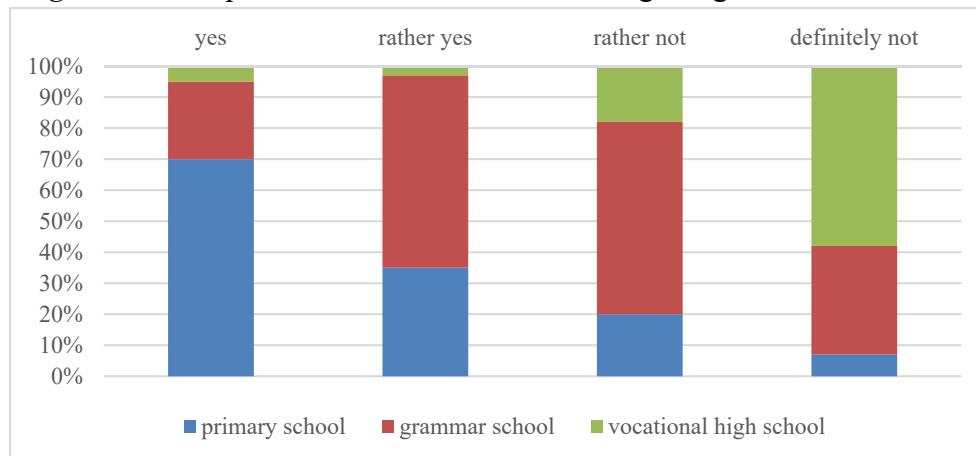
Source: Trojan (2015, p. 16)

A few years ago, Trojan's team surveyed a group of school principals about the direct teaching obligation¹. As can be seen in Figure 1, the type of school in which they work is a decisive factor for the opinion of individual principals².

¹ A total of 178 school principals took part in the survey, 52 % of whom were in favour of maintaining the direct teaching obligation and 48 % of whom were against it (Trojan, 2015).

² This research was conducted in 2015, several years later than the previous research.

Figure 1. Principals' views on the direct teaching obligation



As the figure shows, “many respondents were virtually resigned to the pedagogical role of the school principal and his or her direct work with students.” (Trojan, 2015, p. 79)

A school principal is an employee who is “charged by law with the performance of certain functions of state administration in education. His/her competencies in relation to the school, the public, the municipality, etc. are extensive - in particular, he/she manages the school..., is responsible for the implementation of the curriculum and syllabus, for professional, educational, and training work, for the effective use of financial resources, appoints his/her deputies, etc.” (Průcha et al., 2013, p. 206 in Trojan, 2019, p. 13)

The school principal in the Czech context

According to Czech legislation, the headmaster is responsible for the educational process in all its aspects. “...he/she is responsible for designing, innovating, as well as implementing and evaluating the school’s educational programme, setting adequate criteria for its evaluation, selecting staff and providing support and conditions for their work.” (Trojan, 2019, p. 75) In the Czech context of education, the school principal is also a teacher. PISOŇOVÁ (2011, p. 118 in Trojan, 2019, p. 76) argues: “In performing his/her function, the school principal fulfils a dual mission: he/she is a school manager and, at the same time, a pedagogical employee who teaches. Both require full professional commitment, and the school principal is expected to be not only the most capable manager of the educational processes in the school, but also a teacher with excellent teaching competencies and teaching performance. These expectations are linked to the perception of the principal as a pedagogical authority among the members of the teaching staff based on quality performance in the classroom, an understanding of the nature of educational and learning problems in the school, and the ability to coordinate the pedagogical efforts of the members of the teaching staff in achieving the strategic objectives of the school.”

The dominant task of Czech school principals is not education but creating the conditions for it. “Often it is more about the provision of support processes - space management, space utilisation, workplace management and optimisation, technical building management, energy management,

waste management, indoor and outdoor cleaning, health, hygiene, safety and security, internal services - catering, reception services, meeting room management, secretarial services, etc., ICT, printing and copying services, archive services, internal mail, mail order, transport services, etc.” (Trojan, 2019, p. 76)

According to Trojan (2019), the role of the Czech director can be seen in two senses:

- 1) the first one is based on team roles related to relationships between people;
- 2) the second is based on the concept of the division of activities (the circle of pedagogical management).

Competencies of the head teacher according to school regulations

Trojan (2019, p. 90) states that “legislation promoting school reforms is school-centred, which means that school principals, in their defined role, must take a leadership role in the process of effective implementation of these reforms”. Thus, it can be concluded that the school principal is responsible for the implementation of laws and regulations (compare Rigel et al., 2014).

Trojan (2019, p. 91) differentiates the school principal’s competencies, which stem from education legislation, into three groups:

- 1) “the competencies of the principal as a statutory representative of the organisation, who acts externally on behalf of the organisation and thus gets involved in diverse interactions with other legal and natural persons;
- 2) the competencies of the director as representative of the employer, i.e., in employment relations;
- 3) the competencies of the head teacher as an educational institution, in the sense of the ‘education’ regulations...”

The competencies of the director can also be viewed according to the division of law into objective and subjective. “While in objective law we can find rules that are enforceable by the state, impose obligations on everyone and are therefore universally binding, subjective law includes the totality of the authorization of a certain participant in legal relations (in our case the school principal) to behave in a certain way”. (Spirit, 2008, p. 44 in Trojan, 2019, p. 91) Based on the above, competencies can be divided into:

- 1) those established by primary regulations (duties of the principal);
- 2) granted to the principal by legislation.

Act No. 561/2004 Coll. (the Education Act) is the basic regulation for dealing with the competencies of the headmaster. The fundamental ones are §164³ and §165, which define the basic powers and duties of the school principal. Several other competencies of the head teacher relate to

³ Here it is stated, among other things, that the school principal:

- 1) “decides on all matters relating to the provision of education and school services, unless otherwise provided by law;
- 2) is responsible for ensuring that the school or school establishment provides education and school services in accordance with the Education Act and the education programmes;
- 3) is responsible for the professional and pedagogical standard of education and school services;
- 4) is responsible for ensuring the supervision of children and under-age pupils.” (Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, secondary, higher vocational and other education)

the educational process and related aspects. Other competencies of the head teacher also derive from the *Teaching Personnel Act*⁴. Some provisions can be found in the *Act* which postulate the competencies of the director. An important competence of the headmaster is to determine the weekly hours of direct teaching activity for each teacher, either for the whole school year or for a half-year. The principal of a public school is limited by the implementing legislation, *Government Regulation No. 75/2005 Coll., on the determination of the scope of direct teaching, direct educational, direct special education, and direct pedagogical-psychological activities of teaching staff*.

The headmaster is also responsible for creating the conditions for further education of teaching staff. “The law (...) limits this competence - the plan⁵ may be issued by the headmaster only after consultation with the trade union (...). In a way, the limitation of competence is also represented by other statutory conditions - the headmaster cannot issue a plan for further education of teaching staff purely subjectively but is also obliged to consider the learning interests of the teaching staff and the needs and budget of the school.” (Trojan, 2019, p. 95) The director, as a representative of the employer, also applies labour law in his/her activities (see e.g., Tomšíková, 2014, pp. 38-71).

The real impact of the current school standards in force

The real impact of the selected current standards is summarised by Filipová, deputy head of the primary school (in Ďulíková, 2022, p. 134): “We take inspiration from inside and outside the school. For two years we have been in cooperation with other schools. We visited each other, filmed and analysed lessons together, shared suggestions and ideas. The video hospitalizations helped us, and now we are bringing them into the school. We are also in the Helping Schools to Succeed project, where we focus mainly on literacy, because we know that working with text is very challenging but necessary and needed for children. We also gain inspiration and experience abroad thanks to the Erasmus+ project. In the framework of the project, 10 teachers will go abroad for internships”.

The considerable workload of school principals is the subject of an empirical study, *Overloaded Principals. Who should relieve them?* Černý (2022). Towards the end of the article, based on his findings, the author proposes a model of support for schools based on the role of municipalities in the education system.

Adaptation of primary schools to distance learning and various aspects related to it are discussed by Šalamounová: “The results of the analysis show that the crucial point of the whole adaptation process was the decision of the school management whether the school will be centralized, i.e. the whole school will continue to design teaching and other processes related to teaching in a unified way, or whether the school will follow the path of autonomy of teachers who will implement teaching according to their own plan as experts in their subject and their class” (Šalamounová, 2022, p. 35).

⁴ *Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on Teaching Staff (and on Amendments to Certain Acts)*. See <https://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty-3/zakon-o-pedagogickych-pracovnicich-1>.

⁵ I.e., a plan for further education of teaching staff.

As we have already indicated, the head teacher plays a pivotal role in how parents, especially of potential pupils, will view the school. In the article *What do parents expect from a school and how do they choose it?* (2022) is discussed by Dačevová and Němec. The authors present the results “through qualitative categories (frameworks), among which we can include: a safe school environment where children feel comfortable; informal education represented by a range of leisure activities; teacher competence (character qualities, organisational skills and didactic skills). In terms of school selection strategy, the requirement for transport accessibility of the school, friendship and recommendations from friends resonated strongly” (Dačevová & Němec, 2022, p. 57).

Koldová et al. (2022) discuss the role of the school principal and individual teaching staff in the implementation of integrated learning in the educational process. In the study it is mentioned, among other things, that “for the successful implementation of integrated learning in practice, active and motivated cooperation of actors at different levels in the school organization is necessary, including the creation of appropriate conditions at these levels” (Koldová et al., 2022, p. 235).

Competence⁶ model for managers in education

The definition, which contains two levels of the term competence, is expressed by Pisoňová (2011, p. 22 in Trojan, 2019, p. 106): “The concept of competence represents the demands placed on the performance of the function of the school principal, or the head of the teaching staff of a school or educational institution.”

Within the competence models, it is necessary to reduce the number of areas, the core competencies, so that the model is not too complicated, and the level of competencies achieved can be assessed. The authors of the competency model have supplemented it with a description of observable behaviour. The individual competencies were thus added as follows (in Trojan, 2019, pp. 107–108; abridged):

- *“Competencies of a leader (strategic thinking):*
 - 1) can construct a vision that meets the needs of the school;
 - 2) can set priorities and decide on the urgency and importance of each;
- *Manager competencies (organisational development):*
 - 1) sets strategy, names measurable goals in line with the school’s vision;
 - 2) correctly carries out staff selection, adaptation and appraisal, sets criteria and looks after staff development;
- *Professional competencies (towards the profession of head teacher):*
 - 1) manages the school in accordance with the applicable legal and economic regulations;

⁶ „The term competence has slowly penetrated the Czech literature. It began to gain ground in the 1990s, when it replaced the terms knowledge and skill. The reason for this is the broader content of the term, as competence includes not only knowledge and skills, but also other components, such as experience.” (Trojan, 2019, p. 106)

Thus, competence from someone else and competence from oneself.

2) monitors trends in educational development and is able to implement them in the life of the school;

- *Personal competencies:*

- 1) is able to schedule his/her time, follow his/her work;
- 2) educates himself regularly, can learn from his own mistakes;

- *Social competencies:*

- 1) can assemble a team and work with its members;
- 2) resolves conflicts openly and quickly; can manage resistance to change;

- *Competence in managing and evaluating the educational process:*

- 1) can plan and implement a curriculum appropriate to the school, the pupils and the situation in which the school finds itself;
- 2) uses regularly collected pupil results to improve the educational process.”

Proposal for the optimization of the legal regulation of education and the possibilities of its effective implementation in the practice of schools

In this section of the paper, we propose several options for optimising education regulation and outline possible ways in which they can be implemented in school practice. It is not our aim to present a comprehensive proposal for a solution. Given the design of the paper, we have chosen to present our proposal in a table (see Table 2). Again, we stress that this is a kind of list that may inspire relevant experts to elaborate on the items in more detail or to expand the list provided.

Table 2. Proposal for the optimization of the legal regulation of the Czech education system and its effective implementation in the practice of schools

proposal for the optimisation of the legal standard	a proposal for its implementation in school practice
compulsory training in current legal standards (teachers and principals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during a one-day or multi-day trip, subject matter experts would present to school principals and teachers the current legal norms related to education, with an emphasis on changes in these regulations
compulsory occupational safety training (teachers and principals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the implementation of this proposal could take place in the framework of the above-mentioned retreat (first training), which would simulate practical examples that participants may encounter in practice
compulsory participation of the school in the cultural and social life of the town or region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to avoid the formality of this training, participants would be required to complete a test (exam), which would be recorded • it could be a presentation of the pupils’ achievements in school clubs (e.g., theatre performances, etc.)
development of the school’s teaching concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in most cases, teachers have been involved in the postulation of School Curricula, but these do not define the concept of teaching <i>sensu stricto</i>; as part of this innovation, individual subject committees would develop a more detailed concept for their fields of education, emphasizing inter-subject relations, the integration of cross-curricular themes or the presentation of educational results in the context of the school’s participation in the cultural or social life of the city or region

regular inspections of school facilities by representatives of the Regional Sanitary Station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the representatives of the Regional Sanitary Station would not deal with the consequences of an event, but some of them could be prevented by regular inspections this proposal foresees active cooperation of school principals (e.g., passing on the number of sick children and staff, etc.)
abolition of direct teaching duties of school principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> this proposal is a double-edged sword: 1. school principals would have more time for administrative work and other duties; 2. they would be detached from real teaching activities a possible way out is to provide for voluntary direct teaching work by principals, with the proviso that this would be work that would be paid over and above the principals' full-time hours
compulsory mutual hospitalization of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of the obligation of mutual hospitalization between teachers with the same qualification, within the scope of 2 teaching hours per semester there would be no record of the hospitalization, but there would be an obligation to conduct a reflective dialogue between the participating teachers in the presence of the principal, who would then draw up a short record of the reflection
activities of the Czech School Inspectorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the visit of the Czech School Inspectorate, the director of the school would be informed one day in advance in our opinion, this innovation can lead to a more realistic picture of the functioning of the school
developing the necessary competencies of school principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> offering further education for school principals with an emphasis on developing the competencies needed for adequate performance of their work the training would be practically oriented and would also serve to transfer examples of good practice

As we have already submitted, we are aware that the above list does not and cannot include a complete proposal for improving the current situation within the framework of the issue under review. Our aim has been to highlight possible innovations in this area, while recognising that many of the proposed solutions may add to the administrative workload of school principals and teachers. Our aim was to ensure that the implementation of these proposals was in some way auditable.

Conclusion

In the paper, we presented the current Czech educational legal norms that set certain boundaries in the operation of Czech primary, secondary and higher schools. In the first part of the article, we presented the role of the current school principal in relation to his/her competencies in the context of the basic Czech educational norms and we presented the competence model of school managers, the fulfillment of which by school principals can lead to stabilization and a greater degree of effective education in the context of the educational challenges of the 21st century.

In the second part of the paper, we proposed the possibilities of optimization of legal norms in education and its possible effective integration into the real educational process. In summary, we

can say that it should be about a greater degree of transparency in the training of teaching staff and school principals, about the introduction of an optional direct teaching obligation for school principals, about the introduction of mechanisms that would lead to a greater degree of familiarity of teachers and principals with the current legal educational norms and their changes or the development of a unified and comprehensive concept of teaching within one school. We are aware that our proposed solutions have their limits. The most significant is the increase in the administrative burden on school principals: however, we believe that without the introduction of transparent and verifiable mechanisms to check the fulfilment of certain obligations, it will not be possible to check the obligations in question. Leading to the control of the fulfilment of certain obligations will not be possible to check.

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Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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