



Economic Situation as an Opportunity to Examine School Management Innovation Readiness during Social Change

¹Sandra Rone & ²Māra Vidnere

¹Social Sciences Department, Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy, Latvia

²Social Sciences Department, Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy, Latvia

Abstract

The article presents professional challenges of school managers and teacher readiness to solve problems innovatively during social change. The central part of the article aims to investigate challenges faced by school management, main teacher social tasks and factors which differentiate teachers from working parents.

Materials and Methods- Initially 230 school leaders (10 principals and 220 deputy principals) were interviewed to establish personal psychological resources most essential for teachers during a time of change. The qualitative method, i.e., focused interviews, was used to investigate current managerial and professional problems of school management. Next, a social questionnaire for teachers was developed to investigate the main aims of education and personal qualities required to reach these aims. According to the findings, the qualities most required are responsibility, freedom and independence. Furthermore, a Likert scale was used to assess a sense of responsibility, freedom, and independence at work of 110 teachers and 84 working parents. The results indicated the following: although teacher wages are below the average salary level in the country, teachers exhibit a higher level of the aforementioned professional qualities compared to working parents. Thus we can draw a conclusion that, in spite of the remuneration, teachers have a stronger sense of professional mission, vision and belonging, and strengthen their professional identity through work experience.

Results- While analyzing challenges faced by school management, the internal and external circumstances arisen due to social changes were identified. A comparison of teacher social attitudes and those of working parents established that teachers are more socially responsible than working parents.

Conclusions- The article states and studies the challenges, and proposes definite solutions to these problems.

Keywords- Social change, school management, innovation, economic situation, attitudes.

Introduction and Theoretical Background

Social changes are driven by external and internal factors. External influences driving change are, for instance, legislation, industry development, job market, new technologies and competitor activities. Internal triggers driving change are the need for change, dissatisfaction with the wages and workload, changes in the management, new product development, introduction of new methods, etc. Change can be either forced or natural. It is a psychological indicator which characterises employee perception of the need for change. The change process begins when the current organisational situation, post-change results and employee involvement are examined (Kötter, 2007).

Employees are prepared to support and participate in the change process only if it is triggered internally. "Change management means people management during the change process, therefore employee attitudes and reactions must not be neglected." (Boutros, Joseph, 2007)

Leadership ability is essential in order to create social change. Leaders help create and provide space for people to unite, evaluate and achieve their objectives.

The most valuable asset of every organisation in the 21st century, where change management is concerned, is its people. Therefore such scientists as Karakas (2007), Banutu-Gomez (2004), Hays (2004), Hickman (2010) and others agree that the best organisational strategy is to help individuals achieve their full potential and harmonise their personal goals with the organisational mission, vision and results.

The economic situation in Latvia has significantly affected the school system as a whole: there is a lack of clear strategic direction which would increase school management innovation readiness at all levels (i.e. principal, deputy principal, teacher and parent). Social and political situation which involves frequent changes in the government and replacement of the Minister of Education imposes a great responsibility at all school levels to work innovatively, follow the current trends and be prepared to implement new ideas while maintaining and strengthening values such as freedom, responsibility and independence.

Consequently, a question arises as to the quality of an education institution in relation to innovation. What are the major factors affecting management of an education institution nowadays? One of the major issues is school teacher salaries. This issue is addressed by a pay rise linked to the teachers level of qualification, however, in reality teacher salaries are declining compared with the sharp price rises. Remuneration is one of the factors affecting job satisfaction of the individuals involved in school processes. Levels of responsibility are very high, whereas independence and freedom in this economic climate is limited. Parents also want to be involved and solve problems, they become members of school boards, express their opinions and involve members of the society in looking for possibilities to improve school situation during social change.

Theoretical basis of the research encompasses 1) organisational changes; 2) leadership; 3) school improvement.

Materials and Methods

An empirical investigation is based on a quality-focused research. Interviews with 10 principals and questionnaires with 220 deputy principals, 110 teachers and 85 working parents were carried out to ascertain current problems in school

management. The results of qualitative research provide an opportunity and a basis for further scientific study of teacher professional identity, which is crucial in the development of education management. The research confirms that development of teacher professional identity is related to personal views, career choice, values and professional idealism. These guidelines should be taken into account when identifying professional identity content in further study.

Challenges and professional difficulties of school managers are analysed alongside with the teacher readiness to solve these problems innovatively. School management is a process that includes awareness of social attitudes, activity and creative professional identity in the course of social changes. Innovation at school on different levels is a milestone that school management nowadays can lean on.

The Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research is to evaluate challenges faced by school management, teacher main social tasks and factors differentiating them from working parents. An empirical investigation contains interviews with 10 principals, questionnaires of 220 school deputy principals, 110 teachers and 85 working parents. It ascertains problems currently faced by school management in Latvia, leaders' professional challenges and teacher readiness to solve these problems innovatively.

Results of the Research

The internal and external circumstances arisen due to social changes were identified while analyzing the challenges faced by the school management. A comparison of teacher social attitudes and those of working parents identified that teachers are more socially responsible than working parents.

Teacher has a mission to be a leader, (s)he needs responsibility, independence and freedom. The article states and studies the challenges, and proposes definite solutions to these problems.

What are the main challenges faced by the school management? Respondent views differ. Principals face the following challenges embarking on a manager's career: cooperation with parents; document management (though it largely depends on the previous experience) (Respondent A); balance between the administrative and human factor (Respondents A,B,C,F); distribution of responsibilities (Respondents A and D); change management (Respondent H); extra-curricular cooperation (Respondent G); getting acquainted with the school environment (classrooms, people's strengths and talents; budgeting (Respondent E).

Some advice for new principals: Respondent A: not to destroy the established order straight away, gain authority, set priorities for the whole year, a degree in law is recommended. Respondent B: always use the situation (and difficulties) for your own and school's advantage, take over good practices, avoid destroying what works well. Respondent A and C: one must have good deputies in different areas. Respondent D: one must be inspirational in tough times, co-operate with colleagues; one must trust his/her subordinates, not to do everything oneself, but control.

What does it give society and school? In Latvia, a successful school is perceived as a modern school which includes extra-curricular activities: participation in competitions, methodical work and research. Improved communication with teachers during pedagogical meetings, they show greater self-dependence, the principal has no longer to talk as much as before (Principal A - experience 6 years); The number of students at school has increased due to good cooperation with two pre-schools. Evaluation system, work of methodical commissions, work with parents has improved. E-class is introduced. Projects are carried out. (Principal B – experience 2 years); Projects are implemented (choir costumes, installation of music equipment, ravine with lights and equipment for mountain climbers). (Principal C – experience 3 years); Orderly environment. Positive staff. (Principal D - experience 1 year); Good administrative team. School is open to new ideas, activities, work. E-school functions. Good results in final examinations. Orderly internal and external environment. "We are the only school in Latvia which has got a three dimensional board". (Principal E- experience 1 year 8 months); The greatest success – the Principal supports international projects. Renovation carried out, equipment and technologies updated. (Principal F- experience 7 years); Prevention of absenteeism. Expanded opportunities in interest education (21 programme of interest education) to become the centre for children of the area, closer to their homes. (Principal G - experience 1 year).

Results of the investigation confirm that in order to ensure quality education, nowadays principals must be extremely flexible creative leaders, ready to accept various situations and ready for innovation.

Principals are responsible for ensuring compensation for their employees and making sure they are satisfied with their wages. Teachers working in schools are enthusiastic high-class professionals who love their job. The results of the research indicate teacher discontentment in Latvia: 79.1 % of teachers in Latvian-speaking schools and 90.2 % of teachers in Russian-speaking schools consider that their wages are insufficient taking into account their inputs.

Only 10% of teachers in minority schools and 21% in Latvian-speaking schools are satisfied with their job. 90.2% of teachers of minority schools and 79.1% in Latvian-speaking schools are dissatisfied with their job.

Statistical analysis was used to ascertain whether wages accurately reflect teacher inputs in both types of schools. Teacher job satisfaction and its gender correlation is as follows: 16% of female teachers and 13 % of male teachers are satisfied with their wages, while 84 % of female and 87 % male teachers are dissatisfied with their wages.

It must be pointed out that these problems have been left unresolved for a long time.

Educational policy makers face an important task of improving teacher social status in the society.

Evaluation of teacher's role at work and self – evaluation was examined in the course of the research, using a questionnaire to determine teacher social status. 84 teachers participated in this research: 43 (51.2 %) from Latvian-speaking schools and 41 (48.8 %) – from Russian-speaking schools. Correlation between teacher wages and their inputs was studied.

Teachers state that desired wages should cover minimum utility payments and satisfy minimum personal and family needs. On average it could be LVL 800 (EUR1000) which is significantly lower than average teacher wages in Europe and developed countries (see Figure1).

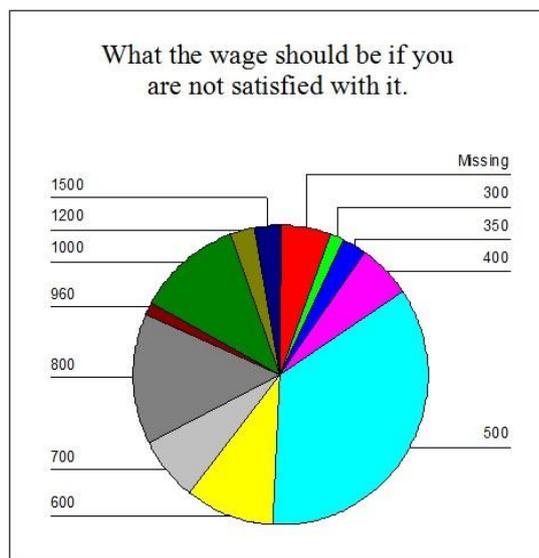


Figure 1. Desired wages for all groups of teachers.

All teacher groups and both respondent groups state LVL 1005 (EUR 2400) as their desired wages which would allow them to work without any additional stress caused by dissatisfaction with their income required to support themselves and their families.

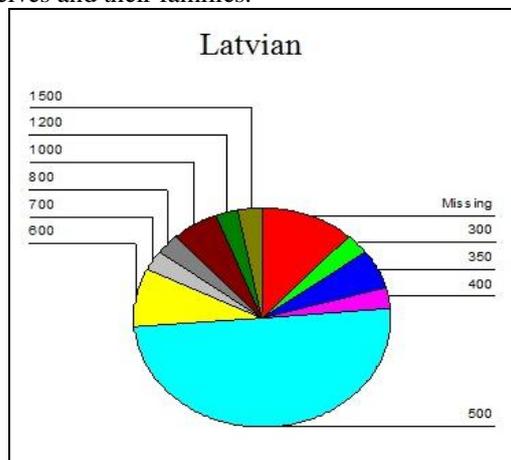


Figure 2. Desired teacher wages in Latvian schools.

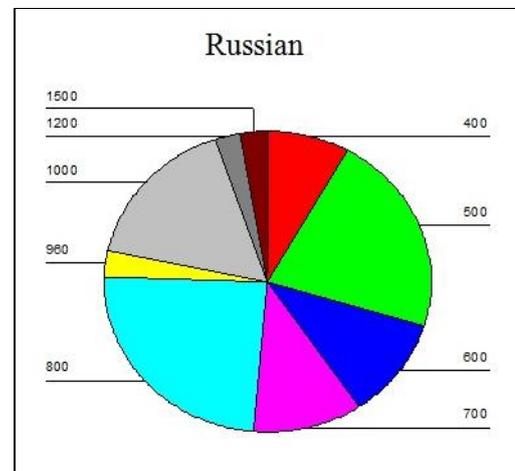


Figure 3. Desired teacher wages in Russian schools.

The situation is even more dramatic if we examine average per capita income in teacher families in Latvian and Russian schools. Distribution of per capita income in teacher families in Latvian and Russian schools is similar. It shows a critical situation as more than ¾ of teachers live on per capita income which is behind the minimum living level in the country. More than ½ of teachers have a status of low-income persons and therefore are forced to take on additional workload. These conditions indicate that continuous social changes create serious health threats for teachers and members of their families.

Due to the aforementioned, women take up insufficiently rewarded teaching positions, whereas men ignore this occupation altogether due to its low social prestige. The wages do not accurately reflect teacher inputs: this is an unresolved long-term issue, which contributes to degradation of values in the society and hampers further development efforts.

Changes in teacher attitudes are important as they provide them with an opportunity to compare themselves to others. Teachers also feel confident that they are a significant part of the society promoting youth thinking and understanding of attitudes in the society.

Education as an aim of the development of the society during social change

Intellectual and mental development of a multi-faceted personality determined by the optimal choice of psychological and pedagogical means is one of the most complicated tasks for a teacher in the transition process of the society. Maintenance of a country’s cultural life and its improvement is given a very special role in education. Education supports culture. Culture is taking care of and adjusting of the beautiful, the good and the humane through education. Cultural values can be cultivated, put in order and created only by a progressively educated and free person.

A professor of the University of Latvia states, that a cultured nation is a well-educated nation which focuses on society as a whole (Jurevičs, 1936). Upbringing of a civilized person who has acquired cultural experience and is able to preserve it, develop it and pass it over to the next generations has always been one of the most significant functions of education.

Freedom begins with a choice. Freedom is capabilities and possibilities of a person to think and choose optimal actions and behaviour to suit their needs. Freedom can be both internal and external. An internally free person is autonomous. This manifests itself in being independent and responsible irrespective of the external environment and

circumstances. Free persons independently choose their aims and means, and are responsible for the decisions taken. Student freedom is related to that of their parents and teachers.

Teachers and the society are interrelated. Only in a democratic society free citizens are able to work, develop and shape themselves. Teachers are limited by various conditions, standards and the environment. They are, however, able to express their attitude. Nowadays humanists value people who rely on their abilities and opportunities to build their behaviour and attitudes in a free and independent manner while retaining a sense of responsibility. It provides positive interaction and co-operation in the social environment during social change.

Attitudes as conscious internal social mechanisms

Gordon Allport (1935) is one of the first theorists who defined attitude as the psychic condition of readiness which is gained in the course of experience, which in a directive or dynamic way influences the trend to objects and situations which are connected with the experience (Allport, 1935).

Nowadays we can differentiate between two main approaches of the understanding of attitudes. The first one is based on an assumption which includes three different components (Calvo J., Lopez A., 2005):

- affective component – love, hate, like dislike and other emotions connected with the object of attitude
- cognitive component – views, opinions, and thoughts connected with the object.
- native or behaviour components – intention of action, will, tendency to act in a definite direction. This is the most widespread understanding of the attitude.

“Attitude” itself is inner psychic model. It is the most widespread understanding of this concept. Sometimes people’s thoughts and behaviour contradict their feelings. This discrepancy made a group of researchers put forward another concept of attitudes. This approach is based on attitude evaluation. (Devjatkin, 1999). According to this approach, attitude is evaluation.

Attitudes can have a powerful effect on behaviour. The same influences that lead to attitude formation can also create a change in attitudes.

Learning Theory of Attitude Change: Classical conditioning, operant conditioning and observational learning can be used to bring about attitude change. Classical conditioning can be used to create positive emotional reactions to an object, person or event by associating positive feelings with the target object. Operant conditioning can be used to strengthen desirable attitudes and weaken undesirable ones.

Elaboration Theory of Attitude Change: This theory of persuasion suggests that people can alter their attitudes in two ways. First, they can be motivated to listen and think about the message, thus leading to an attitude shift. Or, they might be influenced by characteristics of the speaker, leading to a temporary or surface shift in attitude. Messages that are thought-provoking and that appeal to logic are more likely to lead to permanent changes in attitudes.

Dissonance Theory of Attitude Change: As mentioned earlier, people can also change their attitudes when they have conflicting beliefs about a topic. In order to reduce the tension created by these incompatible beliefs, people often shift their attitudes. (Myers, 1999, Hockenbury, & Hockenbury, 2007, Smith, & Mackie, (2007)

The object of attitude is important if it influences the interests of an individual in a direct way as well as the results of case activity. In general way the definition shows that attitude has relatively consistent, positive or negative evaluative trend and it is directed towards the definite people, objects or ideas and it influences and motivates the activity.

Attitudes form directly as a result of experience. They may emerge due to direct personal experience, or they may result from observation.

Development of education and society are interrelated and conditioned. The more democratic the society, the more opportunities there are for human self – realisation and becoming free, independent and responsible teachers. This can only be achieved through the process of self-education, which nowadays has become the basis for education. Teachers are real role-models for their students.

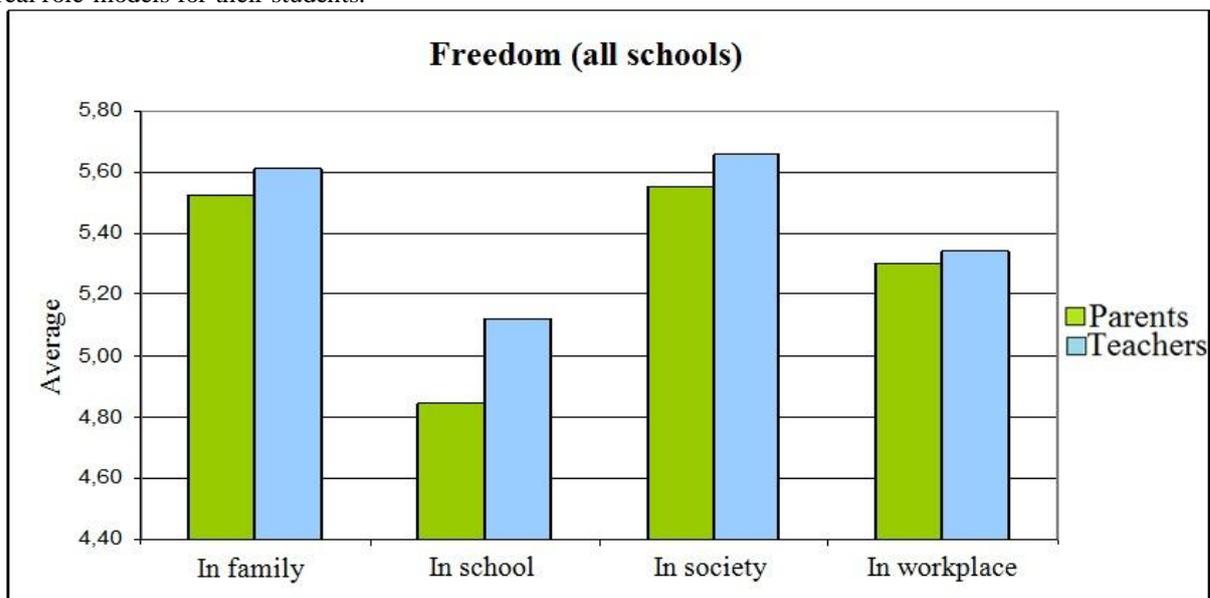


Figure 4. The diagram of average values “Freedom”

Figure 4: Indicates the relationship between teacher and parental sense of freedom.

Research data analysis shows that teachers’ sense of freedom in the family, school, society and workplace is higher compared to parental freedom; it means that teachers play a crucial role in developing students’ sense of freedom.

Responsibility - it is honest performance of one's duties. Responsibility is the first step towards success. An individual voluntarily accepts constraints externally imposed by society or environment while creating a moral framework within.

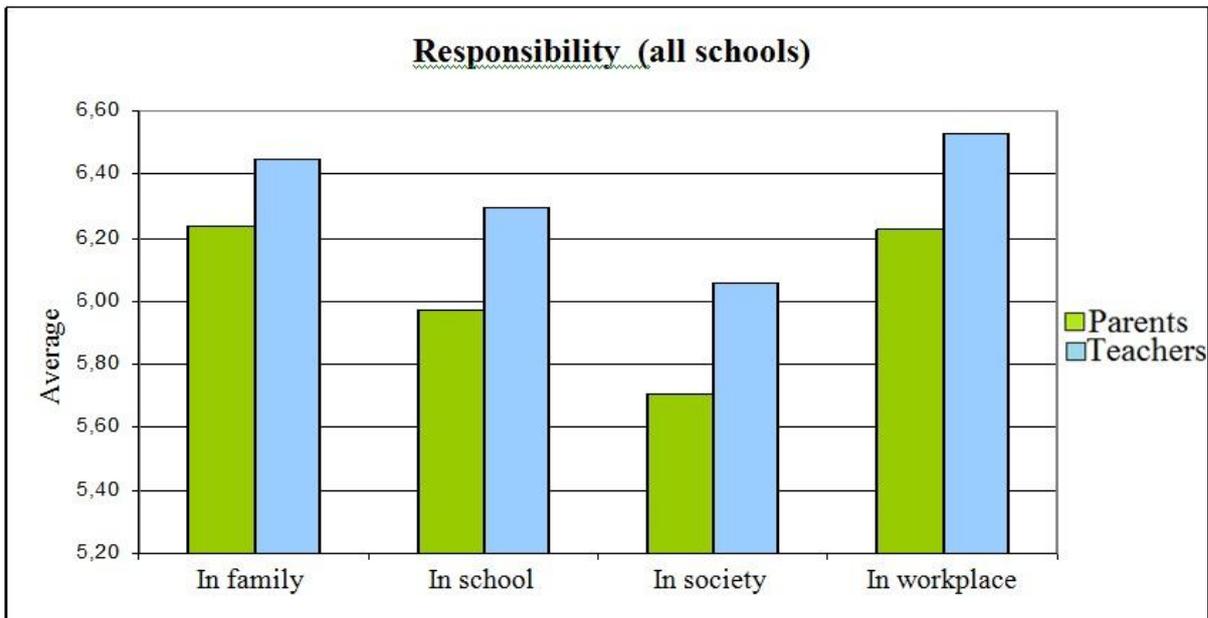


Figure 5. The diagram of average values "Responsibility"

Alongside freedom, teachers demonstrate a significantly higher level of responsibility in comparison to parents. It should be indicated that out of 110 teachers – research participants, only 8 were male. It emphasises the level of responsibility of female teachers in the family, school and work.

The research reveals that parents and teachers demonstrate different levels of sense of independence in the family, school and work. The research establishes that parental independence is explicitly higher than that of female teachers (Figure 6).

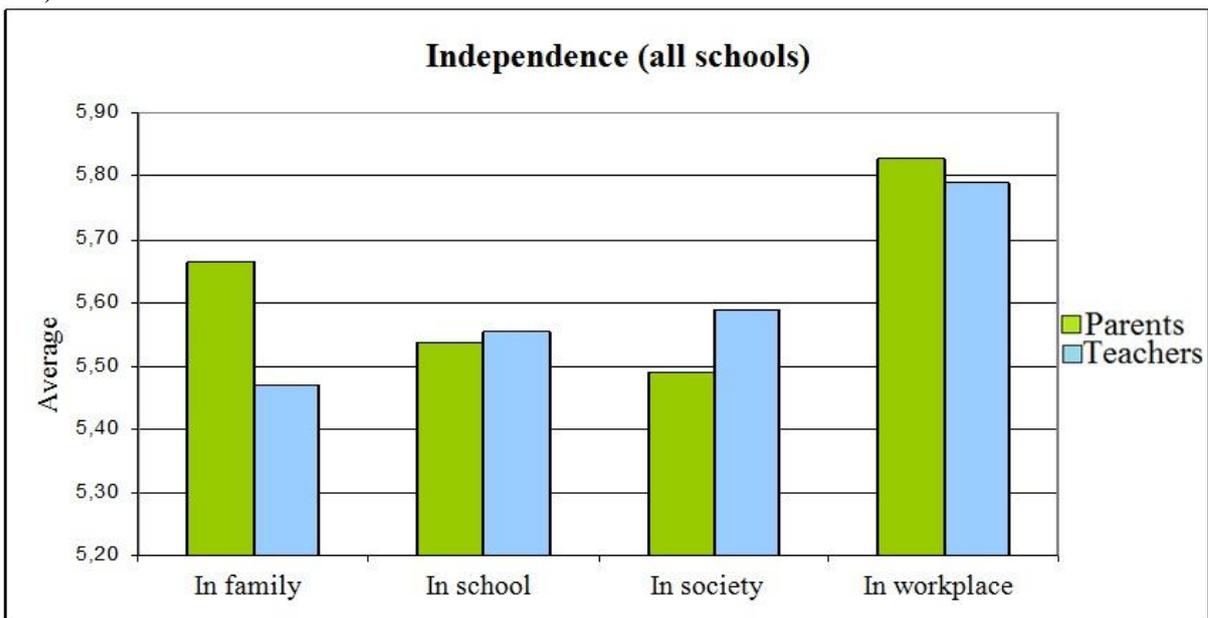


Figure 6. The diagram of average values "Independence"

Thus, inheritance of socially important values for students – freedom, independence responsibility - in the family and school are not unequivocal. These values are developed through communication with adults, where parents and teachers are essential role models. A specific further research is required to establish the situation in teacher families as teachers lack independence in this social institution.

Teacher status. Socialization is a process whereby a definite social status based on particular socio-economic factors (i.e. occupation, education, ownership, rights and incomes) is achieved.

Each status usually includes several roles. For example, teacher status is determined by their attitude to students and colleagues, connections in the ministry, as well as universities and various institutions. This role is a point of intersection where the society and a personality meet.

In the current economic climate innovation is a humane personality based on freedom, independence and responsibility. Such a personality can only be formed through development and operation, irrespective of the insufficient remuneration and school management issues. This objective is feasible in a democratic society where concerns about humans and their well-being is the highest value. School management innovation readiness is related to a holistic approach to family, school, society and environment, which is impossible without active self-development of each growing individual.

Conclusions

1. Social changes are encouraged by external and internal factors. External influences driving change are legislation, industry development, job market, new technologies and competitor activities.
2. The economic situation in Latvia has significantly affected the school system as a whole: there is a lack of clear strategic direction which would increase school management innovation readiness at all levels (i.e. principal, deputy principal, teacher and parent).
3. Internal influences driving change are the need for change, dissatisfaction with the wages and workload, changes in the management, new product development and introduction of new methods.
4. Teacher has a mission to be a leader, (s)he needs responsibility, independence and freedom. This article states and studies the challenges, as well as proposes definite solutions to these problems.
5. The results of the investigation confirm that in order to ensure quality education principals today have to be extremely flexible creative leaders, ready to accept various situations and ready for innovation.
6. Teacher job dissatisfaction in Latvia: 79.1 % of teachers in Latvian-speaking schools and 90.2 % of teachers in Russian-speaking schools consider that their wages are insufficient compared to their inputs.
7. Evaluation of teacher's role at work and self – evaluation was examined in the course of the research, using a questionnaire to determine teacher social status. 84 teachers participated in this research: 43 (51.2 %) from Latvian-speaking schools and 41 (48.8 %) – from Russian-speaking schools. Correlation between teacher wages and their inputs was studied.
8. Teacher and the society are interrelated. Only in a democratic society free citizens are able to work, develop and shape themselves. Teachers are limited by various conditions, standards and the environment. They are, however, able to express their attitudes.
9. Attitudes form directly as a result of experience. They may emerge due to direct personal experience, or they may result from observation.
10. Socialization is a process whereby a definite social status based on particular socio-economic factors (i.e. occupation, education, ownership, rights and incomes) is achieved.
11. In the current economic climate innovation is a humane personality based on freedom, independence and responsibility. Such a personality can only be formed through development and operation. This objective is feasible in a democratic society where concerns about humans and their well-being is the highest value.

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