THE ROLE OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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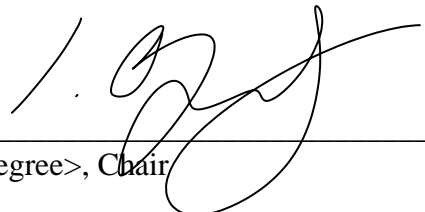
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Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this research to my ever-loving and supportive family: my outstanding parents, **Anica** and **Zdravko**, my beautiful **Anabela**, **Tara** and **Dunja**, and the best brother **Stjepan Grđan**. Without their unconditional love, encouragement, and constant belief and trust in my abilities and dreams, I would never have been able to reach the pinnacle of my education and complete this life goal. You have inspired me to exceed my expectations and hold myself to higher standards.

My family has always seen the potential and strength in me to achieve greater goals. They believe in me and my competences, and I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to them.

I also want to thank all my friends and colleagues, who have been a source of support in my life, as well as those who challenged me along the way, because their influence has helped shape me into the person I am today.

Finally, my gratitude goes out to everyone who is part of my life, enriches my experiences, and makes every success and effort truly meaningful.

Thank you.

Zdravka

ABSTRACT

**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT
OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Zdravka Grđan
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Dissertation Chair: **PROF. DR. SAŠA PETAR, Ph.D.**

Effective management is a critical factor in ensuring the success of public secondary schools. The role of school directors is particularly significant, as they must navigate a complex array of challenges to align institutional goals with national educational priorities, ensure compliance with legal frameworks, and address the expectations of a diverse set of stakeholders. Consequently, understanding the role of school directors in public secondary education requires a comprehensive examination of management principles, contextual factors, and cross-sectoral insights.

At its core, management in secondary schools involves the integration of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to create environments that foster learning and development. However, these managerial functions cannot be understood in isolation, as they are deeply influenced by the external environment, including regulatory requirements, funding mechanisms, and community dynamics.

In addition to navigating the regulatory environment, school directors must contend with the unique challenges posed by the public secondary education sector. Public schools serve a diverse student population, with varying needs and expectations that require tailored approaches to teaching and learning. Moreover, the public nature of these

institutions means that directors are accountable not only to their immediate stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, but also to the broader community and government authorities. This accountability is further amplified by the increasing demand for transparency and efficiency in public sector management, which places additional pressure on school directors to demonstrate measurable outcomes in areas such as student performance, resource utilization, and stakeholder satisfaction.

One of the most significant aspects of the director's role in public secondary schools is their engagement with stakeholders. Stakeholder management in education is inherently complex, as it involves balancing the often-conflicting interests of different groups. For example, parents may prioritize the safety and well-being of their children, while teachers may focus on professional development and academic freedom. At the same time, government authorities are primarily concerned with compliance, efficiency, and alignment with national education policies. The director's ability to navigate these diverse expectations is critical to the success of the school, as it fosters trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to achieving institutional goals.

The evolving role of school directors also reflects broader trends in educational leadership. Globally, there has been a shift toward more inclusive and participatory models of governance, where school leaders are expected to engage with their communities and involve stakeholders in decision-making processes. In Croatia, this trend is evident in initiatives that emphasize the importance of parental involvement, community partnerships, and teacher collaboration in shaping school policies and practices. These developments align with contemporary management theories, such as stakeholder capitalism, which emphasize the need to balance the interests of multiple constituencies to achieve sustainable outcomes. For school directors, adopting such an approach requires not

only a deep understanding of management principles but also the interpersonal skills to build and sustain relationships across diverse stakeholder groups.

To address these challenges, school directors must draw on a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Theoretical frameworks, such as Fayol's principles of management and transformational leadership theories, provide valuable insights into the core functions of management and the characteristics of effective leadership. At the same time, practical experience enables directors to adapt these principles to the specific contexts and challenges of their schools. This interplay between theory and practice is particularly important in the public secondary education sector, where directors must balance the demands of day-to-day operations with the strategic goal of improving educational outcomes.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The effective management of secondary schools is a critical determinant of educational outcomes, student development, and the overall quality of education systems worldwide. According to Eccles and Roeser (1999), foundational institutions such as secondary schools, play an essential role in shaping the future workforce and responsible citizens. The influence of these schools extends beyond academics, impacting social, economic, and cultural dimensions of society. At the forefront of this influence are school directors, whose leadership extends beyond routine administrative tasks to encompass instructional guidance, stakeholder engagement, and the cultivation of a positive school culture (Greenfield, 1995). These directors are tasked with responsibilities that significantly affect the school's day-to-day operations, its ability to meet educational standards, and the success of its students.

The school, as an educational institution and a living community of students, teachers, other administrative and technical staff, parents, and other stakeholders in the social environment, is led in collaboration with the school director. According to the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, Article 125, which has been legally in force since 2008, the role of the school directors in the Republic of Croatia is clearly defined. The school director is the managerial and professional leader of the school institution, responsible for the legality and professional work of the school institution. Their primary tasks include implementing legislative regulations in all segments of the institution's work, attending class visits, analysing the work of teachers and students' achievement results, evaluating the quality of teaching performance, ensuring professional training and development of teachers, planning, organizing, and realizing the complete work of the school, and leading the work of school councils and boards.

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The academic discourse on educational leadership has increasingly recognized the multifaceted roles of school directors and their crucial impact on school effectiveness. The different managerial leadership styles adopted by these directors—whether transformational, instructional, or distributed—play a vital role in driving school performance. Transformational leadership, for example, emphasizes vision-building, inspiring staff and students, and promoting a culture of continuous improvement, while instructional leadership focuses directly on teaching and learning processes to ensure educational goals are met. Research has shown that such leadership approaches correlate with improved student achievement, enhanced teacher satisfaction, and overall school effectiveness (Koh et al., 1995; Ross & Gray, 2006). Despite this recognition, however, gaps remain in our understanding of how school directors specifically contribute to effective management within secondary schools, especially when considering the distinct challenges and contexts of diverse educational settings.

Secondary school management is inherently different from management in corporate settings. Considering that schools place a higher priority on offering a quality education, fostering student growth, and adhering to state educational requirements, in contrast to businesses, which are primarily concerned with profits, market share, and shareholder value. Because of this disparity in objectives, conventional methods of corporate management might not be able to meet the requirements of educational environments in their entirety. Corporate managers are typically guided by financial performance indicators and efficiency metrics. In contrast, secondary school directors must focus on more nuanced success metrics, such as student engagement, academic achievement, and the social and emotional development of adolescents.

Additionally, the regulatory landscape in which secondary schools operate is markedly different from that of corporate organizations. Schools are subject to a range of compliance requirements that pertain to curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, and student assessment methods. These regulations are often designed to ensure equitable access to quality education and to uphold accountability to parents, communities, and government bodies (Arcia, Macdonald & Patrinos, 2016). School directors must navigate these regulations, balancing them with internal objectives to create an environment conducive to learning and personal growth. This task demands a deep understanding of both the regulatory framework and the needs of various stakeholders—including students, parents, teachers, and local communities—each with their own interests and expectations.

The role of stakeholder management in secondary schools is especially intricate due to the diversity of interests involved. Students require a supportive learning environment that addresses both their academic and personal development needs. Parents expect a safe and effective educational experience for their children, while teachers seek professional development and a collaborative school culture. Meanwhile, government agencies demand compliance with educational standards and accountability measures, and the wider community often looks to schools as sources of local pride and centres of community engagement. School directors must balance these sometimes-conflicting interests, fostering relationships that enhance the school's mission and contribute to a supportive educational environment. This degree of stakeholder engagement, along with the requirement to address such diverse needs, further differentiates secondary school management from traditional corporate management, where the focus is often limited to stakeholders like shareholders, customers, and employees.

The education of managers affects their competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes and contributes to the more effective realization of set goals, from mission to vision. Therefore, in the case of secondary schools, other elements are also included in the analyse of CPD. The functionality of the school must be reflected in new creative and innovative approaches to school management. The attitudes of the school director, as well as their professional competencies, are important in management processes, especially during the planning and programming of the school's work, school organization, and human resource management. The culture of the school and the development of collaborative relationships contribute to the effective management of secondary schools. Leadership styles are an important predictor of relationships, human resources, and the organization of the school itself.

Although there is considerable literature on general management and corporate leadership models, much of the research tends to overlook the specific challenges faced by school directors in secondary education. Existing studies often generalize leadership roles across educational settings without delving deeply into the unique aspects of secondary schools. These schools face distinct challenges, such as addressing adolescent developmental needs, managing curriculum requirements, and preparing students for either higher education or entry into the workforce. Understanding how school directors navigate these complexities is essential for developing management practices that respond effectively to the needs of secondary schools.

In summary, the management of secondary schools requires an approach that acknowledges the unique goals, regulatory requirements, and stakeholder dynamics specific to educational environments. Unlike business organizations, which may adopt standardized management models for efficiency and profitability, secondary schools necessitate management practices that are adaptable, student-centred, and aligned with

educational objectives. By exploring these unique characteristics, this study aims to bridge the gap in understanding the role of school directors in secondary school management, providing insights into how their leadership influences school effectiveness and contributes to improved educational outcomes. The study thus seeks to contribute to the development of specialized management strategies that reflect the distinct context and mission of secondary schools.

1.1. The role of school directors in secondary schools

The scope of work for a secondary school director encompasses various processes within the management and administration of an educational institution. There are several key areas within one of the primary activities of a school director, which is the organization of school operations. The initial tasks of the director start with planning and programming the school's activities. Following that is the organization of the teaching process and the management of human resources. The administrative and financial operations of the school fall under the director's responsibility, but also the professional responsibilities of the secretary and accountant. The final segment of the organizational and management areas of the director's work pertains to the evaluation and assessment of the school's performance. Many practitioners highlight this segment of the job as the most sensitive, complex, and challenging. This paper will answer the question of the role of the school director in the process of teacher evaluation as a crucial part of the school's performance assessment and how to conduct the evaluation of teachers' work.

Educational work has various components, of which teaching, as the process of learning and instruction, is the foundation and basis of schoolwork. Naturally, every educational activity has its values and impacts in didactic and methodical terms; however, the teaching process, or the execution of teaching, has very clear rules and evaluation

criteria. For students, this is most simply carried out through evaluation elements and grading as a very complex system of assessment. Teachers undergo their evaluation of educational work, with an emphasis on teaching work, very effectively through comprehensive pedagogical-instructional work. Teachers must very concretely define their educational roles in their teaching work. Similarly, the school director, as the pedagogical and professional leader of the school, has very clear roles that are applied for the efficient functioning of the school, just as teachers apply their roles for successful class management.

School directors have several tasks that define the importance of their professional role:

Leadership

Managing change

Creating and developing the school's identity

Support

Monitoring and evaluation

Considering the complexity of professional tasks, legislative frameworks, the specifics of teaching processes, and the daily challenges that directors face, in this paper four roles of the director in educational processes are highlighted:

Organizer

Motivator

Communicator

Risk-taker and responsibility-bearer

When we speak of a quality and successful teaching process, we refer to effective learning and instruction. Students and teachers demonstrate all their knowledge and

experiences most effectively through successful and efficient learning, just as the execution and realization of the teaching process, or effective instruction, is crucial for teachers. School directors prove their effectiveness most quickly and efficiently when it comes to the methodology of school management and ways to turn daily professional challenges into benefits. The director is absolutely part of the solution to every problem through teamwork. Human resources are most represented in educational institutions, specifically schools, given that a school is a living and dynamic community of students, teachers, professional associates, school staff, parents, and other stakeholders.

1.2. Challenges for secondary school directors

In recent years, the working environment in schools has experienced various conditions and new challenges of modern society. Despite beliefs and attitudes from outside the educational system that schools are very static, tranquil, and technologically and developmentally behind the private sector, we are witnessing a significantly different situation. This was preceded by increased investments in schools and information technology as part of reform processes in the Republic of Croatia, as well as the sudden situation with the pandemic, which overnight accelerated processes of digital and IT maturity. Because of all these circumstances, schools were forced to introduce new work cultures during the pandemic.

The digitalization of education took precedence, along with new so-called "soft skills" involving digital tools, platforms, and content. The autonomy of teachers and school directors took on a new dimension, which is clearly the clearest example of school autonomy to date. Put simply, everyone within the school system did their best to navigate these challenges. Teachers did not falter in their responsibility for effective learning and teaching, while principals and educational consultants faced challenges in supporting

teachers' pedagogical and instructional work and students' outcomes during distance learning. External support, in terms of professional-methodical and inspection oversight, also underwent changes, as did specific organizational forms of work. The development of teachers' professional competencies remains a crucial area for continued progress and the foundation of quality learning and teaching.

Meetings - individual and group (e.g., with teaching staff)

Daily and monthly observations of teachers' work

The evaluation of teachers' work also involves analysing the organization and articulation of teaching sessions, the use of modern teaching and learning methods and approaches. Upon entering a classroom, it is immediately apparent to what extent didactic aids and equipment are used. The professional development of teachers is indicative of readiness for lifelong learning and the necessity to keep pace with the demands of contemporary education.

1.3. Competent School Director - A New Dimension of Management in Education

In this section, we will explain the thesis that secondary school directors, as responsible individuals for the successful operation of schools, require additional management education.

The school director is a key figure when discussing educational management and leadership in education. The specific professional competencies of a school director, along with their levels of action, the ability to translate knowledge into action through quality managerial skills, and a recognizable pedagogical-managerial style of behaviour and action, define the director as a leader. Depending on the goals and outcomes of management and leadership in education, we can broadly divide them into classroom, school, and educational management. However, the school director actively participates

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and influences all levels of educational management, across various levels of organizational structures within the educational system. Given the diversity and complexity of the director's scope of work, school curriculum contents, developmental strategies, and goals evolve and enhance the roles of school directors in the modern school system and work environment.

The secondary school director assumes various roles in their daily work at the school, such as initiator, innovator, controller, mediator, communicator, motivator. It is precisely this interdisciplinary nature and operational applicability of various managerial roles in daily school life that dictates and creates a new dimension of leadership in education. One of the key roles of the school director when it comes to modern educational leadership is the competitive role that defines the school director as a competent school director.

1.4.School Director in the Context of Educational Globalization

Since ancient times until today, humans as primarily thinking beings have been engaged in the eternal themes of upbringing and education. Continuous development of scientific disciplines throughout history, introduction of reforms and transformations of schools worldwide, reflections and research have led to the creation and affirmation of scientific and practical paradigms and theories. Pedagogical science occupies a significant and responsible place in the systematic development of educational determinants. Visible results are human knowledge, achievements, competencies, educational and moral values without which investing in the future would be useless and unimaginable. Intercultural pedagogy is an area of direct educational work on issues that are important for the survival, development, and continuity of individuals, families, certain milieu of people, certain nations, certain cultures. Upbringing is a constant process of forming, affirming, and

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upgrading individuals and societies in all dimensions of life. The absence of the goals of education, its contents, tasks, and methods are disastrous for any new idea of creating a modern school, a quality and developed civil society, and ultimately a responsible and independent individual.

A modern, flexible, and quality approach to the education system, with an emphasis on lifelong learning, is found in intercultural pedagogy. Within the education system, both at the formal and informal levels, it is desirable to create an active relationship of all participants in the educational process towards interculturalism, as a movement and program of equal dialogue, cooperation, unity, and relationships in recognized multicultural diversities of individuals and communities, most sensitive to the issue of relationships. The consequence of such theories and phenomena of society is that the most important questions of education have become individual and collective identity, relationships among people, the ability to live together and respect the freedom of others, the issue of violence and conflict resolution, and the balance of power between individuals, groups, and institutions (Perotti, 1995, p.22). The responsibility, level of awareness, and consistency of educational institutions come to the fore in the implementation of their educational tasks according to the principles of interculturalism. In Croatia, intercultural principles are not explicitly integrated into the school educational system but are incorporated into interdisciplinary cross-curricular contents of Civic Education, specifically in the cultural dimension of Civic Education.

The field of education belongs to the domain of global and international reflections and the shaping of systems. Lifelong learning, as an indicator of educational globalization and as a process of human development and growth in all spheres of life, becomes a necessity and a natural progression in multicultural and multifunctional societies. Creating new processes and relationships in the education system involves dimensions of

intercultural communication, values, and competencies. Opportunities for developing intercultural dialogue among educational practitioners, including collaboration with external institutions, both locally and globally, are based on respecting the diversity of each individual. In this process, the school director plays the most important role, known as the intercultural role, and bears responsibility. Embracing and understanding diversity poses a challenge in the field of intercultural pedagogy, encountered equally by students, teachers, parents, school directors, and all societal spheres, regardless of individual, religious, or national levels. Scientifically grounded pedagogical knowledge, acquired abilities, and skills contribute to creating and improving communication and intercultural dialogue within schools and across society. Various teaching and educational methods are necessary for educating and nurturing children and youth. Through a constructive approach and by demanding mutual understanding, respect, and appreciation for cultural backgrounds, personalities, and interests of individuals, life values such as responsibility, friendship, unity, and anti-racism are acquired and preserved.

The perspective of intercultural education is in the quality and active interaction of the national school curriculum, its fundamental determinants, contents, tasks, goals, and all participants in the educational process to create a supportive network for a stimulating learning community. Raising awareness of intercultural insights and competencies among educational practitioners and policymakers is the primary means to achieve a quality modern society. A competent school director is a professional and pedagogical leader of the school institution who must understand and successfully navigate the demands of globalization, primarily in planning the school's vision and mission, managerial knowledge, and decision-making processes. This is when we can speak of leadership in education in its full meaning, encompassing both local, national, and European educational domains.

The context of shaping and implementing school educational policy would be inconceivable without acknowledging the role of the school director as the school's manager. The school is a key educational institution that implements specific educational policies at the national level while also creating its own school educational policy. A competent school director is, in fact, the initiator and co-creator of the vision and mission for the development of school educational policy and its curriculum strategies, based precisely on pedagogical, managerial, and intercultural educational determinants. The European dimension of education is closely related to management content in education. Ultimately, the question arises: what is management in education and how do school directors achieve managerial competencies?

It is through addressing these questions that we gain a clearer understanding of the managerial role of the school director, encompassing activities, approaches, and content such as mobility, preparation and implementation of international projects (e.g., Erasmus+, ACES, etc.), multilingualism (introduction of various foreign languages into the curriculum, especially as elective subjects, and the opportunity for schools to offer certified international language exams such as DSD (German language), DELF (French language), FCE (English language), etc.), interdisciplinary approaches, creativity, innovation, social sensitivity, entrepreneurship, culture, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and intercultural communication. Achieving the goals and managerial learning processes provides opportunities to develop and realize knowledge, human potentials, and resources. The educational system possesses unlimited potential for acquiring new knowledge, values, and cultures through professional development processes, and it is the responsibility of school directors to promote and implement the managerial role as a new dimension of contemporary education.

CHAPTER II: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF MANAGEMENT

Management is the structured process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling resources to achieve specific objectives efficiently and effectively (Fayol, 1916). While its principles are universal, their application varies significantly depending on the organizational context. In secondary schools, management assumes a unique role. School directors are tasked not only with maintaining operational efficiency but also with fostering environments conducive to learning, innovation, and community engagement. Their responsibilities go beyond their administrative tasks, encompassing strategic decision-making, stakeholder collaboration, and cultivating an educational culture aligned with broader societal goals.

Even in for-profit educational institutions, such as certain private schools or universities, the primary output remains the development of human potential. While financial sustainability is a necessity, the ultimate measure of success lies in how effectively the institution nurtures its students' intellectual, emotional, and ultimately professional growth. This is supported by the growing recognition that education, whether public or private, is a cornerstone of societal development, as reflected in frameworks like UNESCO's Education 2030 initiative, which emphasizes equitable, quality education as a driver of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

Theoretical foundations laid by pioneers such as Henri Fayol and Frederick Taylor provide a basis for understanding management as a discipline. Fayol's principles, which emphasize planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, remain relevant across industries, including education. Within secondary schools, these principles translate into tasks such as:

- **Planning:** Developing academic calendars, designing curricula, and managing budgets.

- **Organizing:** Structuring teacher teams, allocating classrooms, and coordinating extracurricular activities.
- **Leading:** Motivating teachers and staff, promoting student engagement, and fostering a positive and proactive school culture.
- **Controlling:** Monitoring performance metrics, addressing areas of non-compliance, and ensuring alignment with educational standards.

Studies consistently demonstrate the critical role of management in determining educational outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2004) highlight that effective school leadership by the directors has a significant impact on student achievement, second only to the influence of classroom instruction. Furthermore, the OECD's Education at a Glance 2021 report emphasizes the importance of strong management in navigating resource constraints, fostering teacher development, and improving student outcomes, regardless of the institution's financial model (OECD, 2021).

The role of management extends beyond theoretical constructs to practical application. For instance, for-profit institutions and private international schools often operate in competitive markets but remain focused on their primary output: developing students' competencies and preparing them for real-world challenges. These organizations demonstrate how management practices can bridge the dual imperatives of profitability and educational excellence, achieving both financial and developmental outcomes.

Secondary schools represent complex ecosystems requiring multifaceted management approaches. Unlike corporate organizations, where success is primarily measured by financial profitability, schools are judged by their ability to deliver societal value. This is true even in for-profit education systems, where student outcomes, institutional reputation, and stakeholder satisfaction play crucial roles in sustaining long-term profitability. For example, research by Maringe and Foskett (2002) on the commercialization of higher education highlights that private institutions prioritize student success and employability to maintain market competitiveness, reinforcing the primacy of human potential as the ultimate product of education.

School directors are thus strategic managers tasked with balancing a range of responsibilities. These include:

- Aligning school policies with government regulations and educational standards.
- Managing stakeholder relationships, including parents, teachers, and funding bodies.
- Addressing challenges such as resource constraints, teacher shortages, and diverse student needs.

The implementation of government-mandated reforms, such as the introduction of digital learning platforms, exemplifies the complex responsibilities of school directors. Such initiatives demand extensive planning to procure the necessary technology, thoughtful organization to structure comprehensive teacher training sessions, and effective leadership to motivate staff in adopting new pedagogical methods. Simultaneously, directors must prioritize minimizing disruptions to students' learning experiences while maintaining active engagement with parents to foster support and understanding. This process highlights the critical interplay among the core management functions: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, all of which are essential for achieving successful educational outcomes.

A distinguishing feature of education management is its deep integration with societal dynamics. Schools are microcosms of their communities, reflecting and addressing issues such as cultural diversity, socioeconomic disparity, and technological advancements. For example:

- In urban schools, directors may prioritize initiatives like digital literacy programs to prepare students for knowledge-based economies.
- In rural schools, directors often focus on infrastructure development and basic literacy to address educational inequities.

These contexts highlight the adaptability required in educational management, as school directors must tailor their strategies to the unique needs of their students and communities. Research conducted by Bush and Glover (2014) underscores that the most effective school directors are those who integrate a deep understanding of their local context with universal management principles. This synthesis allows leaders to navigate the complexities of their environments while leveraging universal frameworks to ensure strategic alignment and operational efficiency. For instance, school directors operating in resource-constrained rural settings must adapt management principles such as planning and resource allocation to address unique challenges, such as limited funding and infrastructural deficits. Conversely, directors in urban schools with diverse cultural demographics may prioritize inclusivity and innovation, applying leadership styles such as transformational or participative approaches to meet the distinct needs of their stakeholders.

It is this dual competence, contextual awareness and mastery of established management principles, enables directors to address situational demands effectively while maintaining alignment with broader organizational objectives. This adaptability is crucial in education, where variables such as socioeconomic disparities, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder expectations vary significantly between regions and institutions. As such, localized strategies in building trust and collaboration among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, are of vital importance. Directors who tailor their approaches to reflect the specific cultural, economic, and institutional dynamics of their schools are better equipped to foster a cohesive and motivated community, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes.

By bridging the gap between context-specific challenges and universal management principles, effective school directors not only ensure the smooth functioning of their institutions but also contribute to broader educational reforms and community development. This bifocal perspective underscores the central argument, where effective school leadership requires both a strong theoretical foundation and a deep commitment to understanding and addressing the unique realities of each educational environment.

This introductory discussion establishes a foundation for exploring management in greater depth, particularly its distinctive application within secondary schools. By defining management as a discipline and examining its unique role within secondary schools, this dissertation begins to articulate how these foundational concepts adapt to the multifaceted demands of educational leadership. The sections that follow build on this framework, systematically examining the definition and core tasks of management, alongside the broader dynamics of management styles, sector-specific challenges, stakeholder engagement, and accountability mechanisms. These interconnected elements are pivotal for understanding the role of school directors in ensuring the effective and sustainable management of secondary schools, a central theme that underpins the progression of this dissertation.

2.1. Defining management, core concepts and applications

Management as a discipline has evolved significantly since its inception, offering various theoretical frameworks that provide insights into organizational behaviour, decision-making, and leadership practices. These theories are not only foundational to understanding management but also practical in guiding the roles and responsibilities of leaders in specific contexts, including secondary schools. For school directors, understanding key management theories equips them with the tools to navigate the complexities of their roles, which involve balancing academic priorities, resource constraints, and stakeholder demands.

Among the foundational theories, Henri Fayol's administrative theory stands out as one of the most enduring contributions to management thought. Fayol identified five primary functions of management, (1) planning, (2) organizing, (3) commanding, (4) coordinating, and (5) controlling, all of which collectively form the basis of structured organizational leadership (Fayol, 1916). These functions are particularly relevant in secondary schools, where directors must align educational activities with institutional goals. Planning involves setting academic and administrative priorities, such as designing annual curricula and allocating budgets. Organizing requires structuring staff roles to ensure efficient workflow,

while commanding focuses on motivating and leading teachers and students toward shared objectives. Coordination ensures that different departments, such as academics, extracurricular activities, and administrative support, all work in harmony. Finally, controlling involves evaluating performance metrics, such as exam results and teacher evaluations, to identify areas for improvement.

Another key framework is Frederick Taylor's scientific management theory, which emphasizes efficiency and task optimization. Although originally developed for industrial settings, Taylor's principles of standardization and time management are applicable to education. For example, school directors can use data-driven insights to optimize class schedules, allocate resources equitably, and streamline administrative processes. However, critics of Taylor's approach argue that it may neglect the human and emotional aspects of management. This limitation is particularly relevant in educational contexts, where fostering relationships and addressing the diverse needs of students and staff are integral to success (Taylor, 1911).

Elton Mayo's human relations theory shifts the focus to interpersonal relationships and employee well-being. Mayo's research, particularly the Hawthorne Studies, highlighted the importance of social dynamics in workplace productivity (Mayo, 1933). For school directors, this theory underscores the value of creating a supportive environment for teachers and staff. A director who invests in staff development, provides opportunities for collaboration, and acknowledges individual contributions is likely to foster higher morale and greater institutional loyalty. Such practices have a cascading effect, positively influencing student outcomes by ensuring a motivated and cohesive teaching team.

Contingency theory, introduced by Fred Fiedler, provides another valuable perspective. This theory posits that there is no single best approach to management; instead, effective strategies depend on the specific circumstances of an organization (Fiedler, 1967). In the context of secondary schools, contingency theory highlights the importance of adaptability. For instance, a school director in an underfunded rural school may need to adopt a resource-maximizing approach, leveraging community partnerships and volunteer efforts to meet

institutional needs. Conversely, a director in a well-funded urban school might focus on innovation and enhancing competitive advantages through cutting-edge technology and specialized programs.

Transformational leadership theory, developed by Bass and Riggio, adds a contemporary dimension to management by emphasizing inspiration and vision. Transformational leaders motivate their teams by creating a sense of purpose and commitment to shared goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In secondary schools, directors who adopt this approach often excel at fostering innovation and encouraging professional growth among teachers. By articulating a clear vision for the school, whether it involves improving literacy rates, integrating technology, or expanding extracurricular offerings, transformational leaders inspire staff and students to pursue excellence.

The practical application of these theories is reflected in the multifaceted tasks performed by school directors. One of their primary responsibilities is strategic planning. This involves not only setting immediate goals, such as improving exam performance, but also anticipating future challenges and opportunities. For example, a director may develop a five-year plan to integrate digital learning platforms, which requires identifying funding sources, training teachers, and engaging stakeholders to ensure buy-in.

Resource management is another critical area of focus. Unlike corporate managers, who may prioritize financial returns, school directors must balance fiscal responsibility with the developmental needs of their students. This includes budgeting for essential resources, such as textbooks and technology, while also addressing infrastructural needs, such as classroom renovations or playground improvements. Effective resource management ensures that the school operates within its means while providing a conducive learning environment.

Leadership and team management are equally vital. School directors are responsible for creating a positive organizational culture that motivates teachers and staff. This involves mentoring new teachers, facilitating professional development opportunities, and fostering open communication. For instance, a director who encourages collaborative lesson

planning and provides regular feedback is more likely to cultivate a cohesive and motivated teaching team.

Performance monitoring is another core task of school director. By analysing data such as attendance records, exam results, and teacher evaluations, directors can identify trends and implement corrective actions. For example, a drop-in student performance in a particular subject might prompt the director to organize additional training for teachers or introduce supplementary study sessions for students. This process of continuous evaluation and improvement aligns with Fayol's concept of control, ensuring that institutional goals are met.

Stakeholder engagement further distinguishes educational management from other sectors. School directors must maintain strong relationships with a diverse array of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and government authorities. Effective communication is key to building trust and fostering collaboration. For example, a director who regularly consults with parents and involves them in decision-making processes is more likely to secure community support for new initiatives, such as introducing advanced placement programs or expanding extracurricular activities.

The integration of management theories into these tasks demonstrates their practical value in guiding school directors. However, the effectiveness of these theories depends on their adaptability to the unique challenges of each school. While Fayol's structured approach may work well in large institutions with clearly defined hierarchies, Mayo's emphasis on interpersonal relationships might be more suitable for smaller schools that rely heavily on community engagement. Similarly, the flexibility of contingency theory and the vision-driven approach of transformational leadership highlight the need for directors to tailor their strategies to specific contexts.

In conclusion, management theories provide a robust framework for understanding the tasks and responsibilities of school directors. By integrating classical principles with contemporary insights, school directors can navigate the complexities of their roles and foster environments that promote academic excellence, teacher satisfaction, and

stakeholder engagement. This foundation sets the stage for a discussion of management styles, which further shape the decision-making and leadership approaches of school directors in secondary schools.

2.2. Different management styles and their applications

Management styles are the cornerstone of effective leadership, reflecting how managers guide their teams, make decisions, and achieve organizational objectives. These styles are deeply influenced by the manager's personality, the organization's culture, and the contextual demands of their environment. In the educational sector, where the focus extends beyond operational efficiency to the holistic development of human potential, the choice of management style becomes particularly consequential. For secondary school directors, as well as leaders in elementary schools, high schools, and higher education institutions, adopting the right approach is essential for fostering an environment conducive to learning, collaboration, and growth. Understanding how management styles vary across these contexts and other sectors is critical for appreciating the nuanced role of leadership in education.

2.2.1. Management Styles in Education

In elementary schools, the focus of management tends to centre on nurturing young learners, fostering teacher collaboration, and engaging parents in the educational process. School leaders in this context often adopt democratic or participative management styles, which emphasize collaboration and shared decision-making. For example, principals might involve teachers and parents in discussions about curriculum changes or the integration of new teaching methodologies. This inclusive approach helps build trust and ensures that all stakeholders feel invested in the school's mission. However, in certain situations, such as ensuring student safety during emergencies, an autocratic style might be necessary to enforce rules and maintain order.

Secondary schools, by contrast, often operate in a more complex environment due to the developmental stage of their students and the increased academic and extracurricular demands. Secondary school directors or principals must balance the competing needs of

students preparing for higher education, teachers seeking professional development, and parents concerned about their children's future prospects. In this setting, a transformational leadership style proves particularly effective, inspiring teachers and students to aim for excellence while fostering innovation. For instance, high school directors might spearhead initiatives to incorporate advanced placement courses or career-readiness programs, motivating staff to embrace new challenges.

Higher education management diverges significantly from elementary and high school leadership due to its decentralized structure and focus on academic freedom. Universities often adopt a collegial management style, where decision-making authority is shared among faculty members, administrators, and in some instances even students. This approach values collective input and fosters a culture of intellectual inquiry and collaboration. However, as universities increasingly face pressures to remain competitive, many have incorporated transactional and transformational styles to improve efficiency and respond to stakeholder demands. For example, university leaders may employ transformational strategies to drive innovation in research and teaching while using transactional methods to ensure compliance with regulatory and financial requirements.

2.2.3. How Management Styles Differ Across Sectors

The differences in management styles become even more pronounced when comparing education with other sectors, such as corporate management, public health, military operations, and financial sector. Each sector operates under distinct constraints, goals, and cultural norms, which shape the leadership approaches adopted by managers. While some styles may overlap, their application and emphasis differ based on the unique demands of each field.

In the corporate sector, management styles are often shaped by the pursuit of efficiency, profitability, and market competitiveness. Transactional management is a dominant approach in this context, emphasizing structured policies, performance metrics, and reward systems. Managers focus on achieving specific targets, such as revenue growth or customer satisfaction, by tying employee performance to incentives like bonuses or promotions. For

example, a sales manager in a technology company may set monthly quotas for their team and reward those who exceed expectations.

However, transformational leadership is also prevalent in corporations that prioritize innovation and adaptability. Visionary leaders, such as Jeff Bezos of Amazon or Satya Nadella of Microsoft, inspire their teams to embrace change and think creatively about problem-solving. Unlike educational institutions, where collaboration and inclusivity often take precedence, corporate environments may tolerate higher levels of competition among employees, fostering a culture of individual achievement.

In the public health sector, where equity and collaboration are central to organizational goals, democratic and participative management styles are more prevalent. Leaders in this field must navigate complex stakeholder dynamics, including government agencies, healthcare providers, and community groups. For example, a public health director managing a vaccination campaign may involve local leaders, healthcare workers, and policymakers in planning and execution to ensure widespread community buy-in.

Unlike corporate managers, public health leaders must also prioritize ethical considerations and the well-being of vulnerable populations. This often requires adopting servant leadership, a style that emphasizes empathy, listening, and meeting the needs of others. For instance, during a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, public health managers demonstrated servant leadership by focusing on the safety and welfare of healthcare workers and the general population, often placing their own needs secondary to those they serve.

Military management is perhaps the most distinct in its reliance on autocratic leadership. The hierarchical structure of military organizations necessitates clear chains of command and swift decision-making, particularly in high-stakes situations where delays can have serious consequences. Military leaders are expected to issue directives that are followed without question, ensuring discipline and operational efficiency. For example, during a combat mission, a commanding officer must provide unambiguous instructions to ensure that every team member understands their role.

However, military leadership is not monolithic. In non-combat situations, such as training programs or peacekeeping missions, transformational and servant leadership styles are also employed. These approaches foster trust and motivation among personnel, encouraging them to excel in their roles. For instance, a military trainer might adopt a transformational style to inspire recruits to develop skills and resilience, while also serving as a mentor who prioritizes their personal growth and well-being.

The banking and financial sector, much like the corporate world, places a strong emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and risk management. Transactional leadership is particularly prominent, as managers are tasked with ensuring compliance with regulatory standards, achieving financial targets, and mitigating risks. For example, a bank manager might use structured policies and performance evaluations to monitor the productivity of their team while enforcing strict adherence to anti-money laundering regulations.

In recent years, the financial sector has also embraced transformational leadership to adapt to technological advancements and changing consumer expectations. Leaders who drive digital transformation, such as integrating artificial intelligence into customer service or developing fintech solutions, inspire their teams to embrace innovation. However, the sector's inherent focus on risk aversion often tempers the creative freedom typically associated with transformational leadership, creating a unique balance between structure and adaptability.

2.2.4. Cross-Sector Comparisons with Education

When comparing management styles across these sectors, it becomes evident that education occupies a unique position. While schools and universities share certain characteristics with corporations (e.g., the need for efficiency) and public health organizations (e.g., a focus on equity), their primary output - human development -requires a more nuanced approach to leadership.

For instance, unlike the corporate sector, where competition is often encouraged, education relies heavily on collaboration and inclusivity. Teachers, parents, and administrators work together to achieve shared goals, necessitating participative and transformational leadership styles. At the same time, the regulatory demands faced by schools resemble those of the financial sector, requiring transactional approaches to ensure compliance with standards and accountability.

Moreover, education leaders must navigate the emotional and developmental needs of their students and staff, which distinguishes their roles from those in fields like banking or military operations. The emphasis on empathy and personal growth aligns closely with servant leadership, reinforcing the idea that education management is as much about building relationships as it is about achieving results.

Management styles are not static but evolve in response to the unique demands of each sector. In education, the interplay between democratic, transformational, and transactional leadership reflects the complexity of balancing operational efficiency with human development. Similarly, comparisons with other sectors highlight the adaptability of management styles and the importance of tailoring leadership approaches to specific contexts. For school directors, this understanding is essential for fostering environments that promote academic excellence, teacher satisfaction, and community engagement. The next section will delve into the specificities of management across sectors, with a particular focus on secondary education's unique challenges and opportunities.

2.3. The relationship between management and the external environment

Management does not operate in isolation but is deeply embedded within its external environment, shaped by interactions with stakeholders and, in some contexts, shareholders. These relationships are especially significant in sectors like education, where stakeholder expectations heavily influence strategic decisions and operational priorities. For school directors, understanding and managing these external dynamics is critical to ensuring institutional success. In this section, we explore how management interacts with

stakeholders and shareholders, with a focus on secondary schools, and compare these dynamics with other sectors.

In the context of secondary schools, stakeholders include students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, government agencies, and local communities. Each stakeholder group has distinct expectations and influences the functioning of the institution in unique ways. For example, students seek a nurturing and stimulating learning environment, parents expect schools to provide quality education and ensure the safety of their children, and teachers rely on directors to support their professional development and maintain fair working conditions.

Government agencies and local education authorities also play a significant role in shaping school policies and ensuring compliance with regulations. In publicly funded schools, these bodies often provide financial resources and set academic standards, creating an additional layer of accountability for school directors. Moreover, local communities may influence schools through partnerships, philanthropic support, or advocacy efforts, further emphasizing the interconnectedness of education management with its external environment.

Unlike other sectors, where stakeholder interactions may be transactional or limited to specific objectives, schools operate in a highly collaborative ecosystem. For instance, a school director may engage with parents through regular meetings to gather feedback on proposed curriculum changes or involve teachers in discussions about professional development programs. This participatory approach fosters a sense of shared ownership and accountability, aligning the school's goals with the expectations of its stakeholders.

In for-profit educational institutions, such as private schools and universities, the concept of shareholders introduces an additional dimension to management. Shareholders, typically investors, are concerned with financial returns and institutional growth. This creates a dual imperative for managers: achieving profitability while maintaining the institution's educational mission.

The relationship between management and shareholders in these institutions often mirrors the dynamics seen in the corporate sector. For example, directors may present financial performance reports to shareholders, outlining how investments have supported infrastructure development, faculty recruitment, or marketing efforts. However, unlike corporations, where profitability is often the sole focus, for-profit schools must also demonstrate their impact on student outcomes and institutional reputation. This balance is critical for maintaining long-term sustainability, as parents and students in such institutions are not only customers but also key stakeholders whose satisfaction directly influences enrolment and revenue.

The influence of stakeholders on educational management extends beyond feedback and accountability to shaping strategic priorities. For instance, parental involvement has been shown to enhance student performance and well-being. Research by Epstein (2011) highlights the importance of school-family-community partnerships, which foster a collaborative approach to education. School directors who actively engage parents and communities in decision-making processes often create environments that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of students.

Teachers also play a critical role as internal stakeholders, influencing the school's culture and performance. Directors must balance the needs of teachers with institutional goals, providing resources and support to ensure job satisfaction and professional growth. This dynamic underscore the importance of servant leadership, where directors prioritize the well-being of their teams to achieve broader organizational success.

In addition, students, arguably the most important stakeholders in education, directly impact the school's mission and success. By creating opportunities for student voice, such as feedback mechanisms or participation in decision-making bodies, directors can foster a sense of agency and engagement. This student-centred approach aligns with democratic leadership principles, which emphasize inclusivity and shared responsibility.

2.3.1. Comparisons across different sectors

The stakeholder dynamics in education differ significantly from those in other sectors, reflecting the unique goals and challenges of each field. For example, in the corporate sector, stakeholders are often limited to customers, employees, and regulatory authorities, while shareholders hold a dominant position. Corporate managers focus on delivering value to shareholders by maximizing profits, with stakeholder engagement often taking a back seat unless it directly impacts the bottom line. In contrast, educational management places greater emphasis on stakeholder collaboration, as the success of a school is intrinsically linked to the satisfaction and engagement of its community.

In public health, stakeholders include patients, healthcare providers, government agencies, and advocacy groups. Similar to education, public health management requires a participatory approach to ensure equitable access and address diverse community needs. However, the urgency and complexity of healthcare challenges, such as managing disease outbreaks or addressing disparities, often necessitate a more directive style of leadership.

The financial sector offers a contrasting perspective, where the primary focus is on shareholders and regulatory compliance. Stakeholders, such as customers and employees, are important but are often viewed through the lens of financial performance. For example, customer satisfaction is prioritized because it drives profitability, rather than as an end in itself. This transactional approach is less compatible with the relational dynamics of education, where stakeholder engagement is rooted in shared values and collective responsibility.

Military management provides another unique comparison, as it operates in a highly hierarchical environment with limited stakeholder input. Decision-making is often centralized, and directives are executed without question, reflecting the need for efficiency and discipline. While this approach ensures operational effectiveness in high-stakes scenarios, it contrasts sharply with the participatory ethos of education, where collaboration and consensus-building are central to success.

2.3.2. Adapting management practices to stakeholder expectations

Effective management in secondary schools requires a nuanced understanding of stakeholder dynamics and the ability to adapt practices accordingly. For example, directors may adopt a democratic leadership style to engage parents and teachers in curriculum development while using a transactional approach to ensure compliance with government regulations. This adaptability aligns with contingency theory, which emphasizes the importance of context in determining the most effective management strategy (Fiedler, 1967).

Stakeholder management also involves addressing conflicts and balancing competing interests. For instance, a school director may need to mediate between parents advocating for increased extracurricular activities and teachers concerned about workload. In such situations, the director's ability to listen, empathize, and build consensus becomes critical for maintaining harmony and achieving shared goals.

The relationship between management and the external environment underscores the importance of stakeholder and shareholder engagement in shaping organizational success. In secondary schools, directors must navigate a complex web of expectations, balancing the needs of students, parents, teachers, and government agencies. Unlike other sectors, where stakeholder interactions may be transactional or hierarchical, education management relies on collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility. By understanding these dynamics, school directors can create environments that foster trust, engagement, and collective achievement. The next section will explore how management in educational institutions compares with other sectors, focusing on accountability mechanisms such as external audits and inspections.

2.4 A comparative analysis of external audits and controls

Management is deeply tied to accountability, ensuring that organizational goals are achieved within established standards and frameworks. Across sectors, external audits and

controls play a crucial role in maintaining transparency, measuring performance, and aligning practices with legal and regulatory requirements. In education, particularly in secondary schools, the concept of external controls takes the form of school inspections and standardized evaluations, akin to the financial audits commonly used in corporate and public sectors. This section explores the role of external audits and controls in secondary schools, compares these mechanisms to practices in other sectors, and analyses their similarities and differences.

In secondary schools, external audits and inspections serve as mechanisms to evaluate institutional performance, ensure compliance with educational policies, and provide accountability to stakeholders. These evaluations are conducted by government bodies, independent agencies, or regional education authorities. School inspections typically focus on several key areas, including:

- Academic performance (e.g., standardized test scores, graduation rates).
- Teacher effectiveness and professional development.
- Infrastructure, resources, and safety standards.
- Stakeholder engagement, including parent and community involvement.

The findings of these inspections often have significant implications for schools. Positive evaluations can enhance a school's reputation and attract additional resources, while negative assessments may lead to sanctions, reduced funding, or mandated interventions. For school directors, preparing for inspections involves rigorous internal assessments, ensuring that policies, practices, and outcomes align with regulatory expectations.

One key feature of school inspections is their emphasis on holistic evaluation. Unlike financial audits, which primarily assess quantitative data, educational inspections consider both qualitative and quantitative factors. For example, inspectors may observe classroom interactions, interview teachers and students, and review extracurricular activities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the school's performance. This multidimensional approach reflects the complex nature of educational outcomes, which cannot be reduced to numerical indicators alone.

In the corporate sector, external audits focus primarily on financial performance and regulatory compliance. Independent auditing firms, evaluate a company's financial statements to ensure accuracy, transparency, and adherence to accounting standards. These audits provide assurance to shareholders, investors, and regulatory bodies, fostering trust in the organization's financial integrity.

While financial audits in the corporate world emphasize quantitative measures, they share similarities with school inspections in their underlying purpose: ensuring accountability and building stakeholder confidence. For example, just as a school inspection report may highlight areas for improvement in teaching practices or resource allocation, a corporate audit may identify inefficiencies or risks in financial operations. Both processes aim to enhance organizational effectiveness and accountability.

However, there are key differences in scope and methodology. Corporate audits are often more narrowly focused on financial metrics, reflecting the profit-driven nature of the sector. In contrast, school inspections adopt a broader lens, encompassing academic, social, and cultural dimensions. This reflects the distinct objectives of the two sectors, with education prioritizing human development and corporations focusing on financial returns.

In the public health sector, external audits and evaluations are critical for ensuring the equitable delivery of healthcare services. Agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or national health ministry's conduct audits to assess the effectiveness of health programs, compliance with safety standards, and resource utilization. These audits often involve analysing patient outcomes, reviewing resource allocation, and evaluating adherence to public health policies.

Similar to school inspections, public health audits emphasize both quantitative and qualitative factors. For example, an audit of a vaccination program might assess coverage rates (quantitative) while also evaluating community perceptions and engagement strategies (qualitative). This holistic approach mirrors the multidimensional nature of educational inspections, highlighting the importance of context in assessing performance.

One key difference is the urgency often associated with public health audits. In healthcare, delays in addressing deficiencies can have immediate and severe consequences, such as increased mortality rates or disease outbreaks. This contrasts with the relatively longer timelines for addressing deficiencies identified in school inspections, reflecting the different time horizons of the two sectors.

In the military, external controls and audits focus on operational readiness, resource management, and adherence to strategic objectives. These evaluations are conducted by government bodies, such as defence ministries or independent oversight agencies. For example, an external audit of a military unit may assess the effectiveness of training programs, compliance with safety protocols, or the integrity of procurement processes.

Military evaluations are often characterized by their hierarchical and highly structured nature. Unlike the collaborative ethos of educational inspections, military audits rely on centralized authority and chain-of-command structures. This reflects the distinct operational requirements of the military, where discipline and efficiency are paramount.

However, there are parallels between military audits and school inspections in their emphasis on accountability. Both processes aim to ensure that public resources are used effectively and that organizational goals are met. For example, just as a school inspection may identify gaps in teacher training, a military audit might highlight deficiencies in personnel readiness or equipment maintenance. These findings inform corrective actions, enhancing the overall performance of the institution.

The banking and financial sector operates under strict regulatory frameworks, with external audits serving as a cornerstone of accountability. Regulatory bodies, such as Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency (HANFA), mandate regular audits to ensure compliance with laws and industry standards. These audits focus on financial health, risk management, and adherence to anti-money laundering regulations.

Unlike educational inspections, which evaluate diverse aspects of school performance, financial audits in banking are narrowly focused on quantitative metrics. For example,

auditors might analyse a bank's capital reserves, credit risk exposure, or profit margins. However, both processes share a common objective: ensuring transparency and building stakeholder trust.

One notable difference is the frequency of audits. In the financial sector, audits are often conducted annually or even quarterly, reflecting the fast-paced nature of the industry. In contrast, school inspections may occur less frequently, depending on regional policies and resource availability. This difference highlights the varying operational rhythms of the two sectors.

2.5. Lessons for education management

The comparative analysis of external audits and controls across sectors reveals valuable lessons for education management. One key insight is the importance of integrating both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. While standardized test scores and graduation rates provide valuable data, they must be complemented by qualitative insights, such as classroom observations and stakeholder feedback, to capture the full picture of school performance. Another lesson is the need for proactive preparation and continuous improvement. Just as corporate managers use internal audits to identify risks before external evaluations, school directors can benefit from regular self-assessments to ensure readiness for inspections. This approach fosters a culture of accountability and reduces the likelihood of adverse findings during formal evaluations. Finally, the emphasis on transparency and stakeholder engagement in public health and education highlights the value of collaborative approaches to accountability. By involving teachers, parents, and students in the evaluation process, school directors can build trust and ensure that improvements align with the needs of the community.

External audits and controls play a vital role in ensuring accountability and improving organizational performance across sectors. In secondary schools, inspections serve as a comprehensive mechanism for evaluating academic, operational, and stakeholder-related outcomes. While these evaluations share commonalities with audits in corporate, public health, military, and financial contexts, their multidimensional focus reflects the unique

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priorities of education. By adopting best practices from other sectors, school directors can enhance their preparation for inspections and foster a culture of continuous improvement, ultimately advancing the mission of holistic student development. The next section will summarize the insights from this chapter and transition to the specificities of management in secondary education.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of foundational management principles, theories, and practices, emphasizing their relevance to the role of school directors in secondary education. It began by defining management and its importance in creating structured processes that align resources and strategies with institutional goals. Subsequent sections delved into key management theories, highlighting how concepts such as Fayol's administrative functions and transformational leadership shape the tasks of school directors. This chapter also examined various management styles, demonstrating their adaptability across contexts, from elementary and high schools to higher education institutions, while comparing them with leadership approaches in other sectors such as corporate management, public health, military operations, and banking.

The relationship between management and its external environment was explored in detail, focusing on stakeholder and shareholder dynamics. In secondary schools, where diverse stakeholders influence decision-making, inclusive and collaborative leadership is essential. This stands in contrast to other sectors, such as corporate and military management, which often adopt more hierarchical or profit-driven approaches. The analysis underscored the importance of adaptability in leadership styles, emphasizing the need for school directors to tailor their approaches to meet the unique demands of their institutions and stakeholders.

A detailed comparative analysis of external audits and controls further enriched this discussion. School inspections were shown to serve as comprehensive accountability mechanisms, evaluating both qualitative and quantitative aspects of institutional performance. While parallels were drawn with corporate financial audits, public health evaluations, and military oversight, the multidimensional nature of educational

assessments highlighted the distinctive priorities of the sector. This comparative perspective offered valuable lessons for school directors, including the importance of integrating holistic evaluation frameworks, fostering a culture of accountability, and engaging stakeholders in the continuous improvement process.

In summarizing these insights, it becomes evident that the role of school directors is multifaceted, requiring a deep understanding of management theories, styles, and practices as well as the ability to adapt these principles to the dynamic realities of secondary education. School directors must balance operational efficiency with strategic vision, fostering an environment that supports academic excellence, teacher motivation, and stakeholder satisfaction. Moreover, their ability to engage with external accountability mechanisms, such as inspections, reflects their commitment to maintaining transparency and driving institutional growth.

Building on the foundational understanding of management explored in this chapter, the next chapter will focus specifically on the specific and unique characteristics secondary school framework. It will delve into the challenges and opportunities faced by school directors, examining how they navigate complex educational landscapes, address resource constraints, and implement innovative strategies to enhance student outcomes. By situating these discussions within the broader context of educational leadership, the forthcoming chapter will further illuminate the pivotal role of school directors in shaping the success and sustainability of secondary schools.

CHAPTER III:

SECONDARY SCHOOL SPECIFIC FRAMEWORK

1.   As the overview of the research problem, the research in this doctoral dissertation will focus on hypothesis number 2, which states that school directors need to connect with the labour market to successfully perform their jobs. In this chapter the necessity of acquiring new managerial knowledge and connecting with the labour market is emphasized.

3.1. Secondary School Managers and the Labour Market

The theory of creative destruction, coined by the renowned economist Joseph Schumpeter, explains that economic growth is impossible without innovation. Economic progress requires a continuous process where innovations, new technologies, and business models replace the old. This theory is clear in the example of Industry 4.0, where new digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation replace repetitive tasks such as manual data entry into computers, while simultaneously creating new employment opportunities.

To prepare for future jobs and remain competitive in the labour market, as well as advance in their roles, it is crucial to align existing skills with those increasingly demanded by employers. The World Economic Forum highlights a significant skills gap within firms adopting Industry 4.0 technologies. It is estimated that more than half of employees will need significant retraining by 2025. How can we prepare for these changes?

In today's world, employers are increasingly seeking specific skills. Given that the Fourth Industrial Revolution involves significant integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) across industries, it is unsurprising that a Deloitte report notes the highest demand for technology, science,

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and engineering professionals. Additionally, there is emphasis on specific skills valued by employers and increasingly required of current and future employees, as discussed by Forbes columnist Bernard Marr.

For instance, creativity will be highly valued because it is a skill that digital technologies cannot replace. The ability to think freely and create innovative solutions will give you a competitive edge. Critical thinking and problem-solving are also among the increasingly sought-after skills.

Critical thinking aids in making effective decisions, analysing, and evaluating concepts, and questioning and interpreting available data. Problem-solving skills help effectively address complex issues and devise intelligent solutions essential to many industries. In the information and communication technology sector, job roles are predicted to become more complex, requiring greater analytical skills.

Individuals with digital literacy skills, who can easily communicate and work using digital tools, and understand how new technologies can impact their work, will have an advantage. Furthermore, data literacy skills, which involve extracting key insights from analytics and scrutinizing the integrity and validity of data, will be highly sought after.

The ability to effectively lead a team or project will also be among the most sought-after skills. It is valuable to learn how to bring out the best in others and create conditions for their advancement. Time management skills, meaning working smarter rather than harder, emotional intelligence, flexibility, willingness to collaborate, and adapting quickly to changes will also be highly valued.

Within the Erasmus+ program for adult education, there are numerous opportunities for enhancing knowledge, skills, and competencies abroad for adults, teachers, and other educational staff. The program provides education opportunities for

adults with fewer opportunities, such as those facing social or economic barriers, thereby offering vulnerable groups in society the chance for a better quality of life.

Erasmus+ also offers opportunities for students, trainees, teachers, and other educational staff to gain skills through vocational education and training. In this program, secondary schools (vocational and arts), local and regional public bodies, and public or private organizations can participate through Mobility projects for learners and staff (KA1), Partnerships for cooperation (KA2), and Jean Monnet Activities (KA3).

While many companies are still adapting to Industry 4.0, forward-thinking businesses are already preparing their operations for the Fifth Industrial Revolution. Whereas the fourth industrial revolution facilitated key technological advancements in areas such as automation, robotics, big data analytics, smart systems, artificial intelligence (AI), virtualization, machine learning (ML), and the Internet of Things (IoT), Industry 5.0 will focus on collaboration between humans and collaborative robots, sustainability, and environmental stewardship.

Given that we live in a world experiencing rapid and substantial changes in recent years, we need to be prepared to acquire new managerial and market skills to effectively meet upcoming challenges.

School practice shows that the old understanding of the school director's role as an administrative manager is no longer sufficient for significantly improving student success. The role of the school director has evolved into a highly complex and demanding position that requires strong instructional and managerial skills.

According to G. R. Cheney and J. Davis (2011), defining an effective school director as: "There is no documented case of a school that has significantly improved its student achievement without talented leadership."

There is growing research defining the attitudes, skills, and knowledge needed for effective school leadership today. A study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation found that successful school directors have the skills to influence student success in two ways: 1) by supporting and developing effective teachers, and 2) by implementing effective organizational processes.

Researchers Robert J. Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty conducted extensive analyses of previous research and found strong connections between effective leadership and student achievement. In their review, they identified 21 specific responsibilities—representing critical knowledge, skills, and practices of effective school directors—associated with higher levels of student achievement. Among these 21, seven are positively correlated with deeper school changes, requiring directors to challenge existing norms and encourage teachers to adopt new knowledge and skills. These seven include:

Change agent (challenges the status quo, leads change)

Flexibility (comfortable with major changes, open to new ideas)

High ideals and beliefs (strong professional beliefs about teaching and learning, shares those beliefs, and demonstrates behaviours consistent with them)

Intellectual stimulation (up to date with current research, exposes staff to new ideas)

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment knowledge

Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Optimizer (inspires teachers, demonstrates a positive attitude, drives major initiatives)

Many of these responsibilities require not only skill and knowledge but also orientation and qualities such as flexibility and specific beliefs.

The national non-profit program for preparing school directors, New Leaders for New Schools, developed its own set of domains of director effectiveness based on lessons learned from its graduates who led schools with significant improvements in student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Based on its analysis of key leadership actions, New Leaders for New Schools identified six domains:

Vision for results and equity (belief and sense of urgency regarding the potential of each student, high expectations, personal and collective responsibility, understanding and valuing diversity)

Learning and teaching (curriculum planning aligned with rigorous standards, high-quality instructional strategies and routines in all classrooms, data-driven support for teaching, intervention strategies for low-achieving students)

School culture (culture of high achievement and aspirations, values aligned with mission, supportive discipline measures, family involvement in learning support)

Staff development and management (rigorous hiring and onboarding processes; high expectations and rigorous evaluation of instructional quality; teacher observations, feedback, and professional development to improve instruction)

Planning and operations (action plans and monitoring to improve instruction, efficient time organization, alignment of financial and human resources with school improvement goals)

Personal leadership (clear communication that motivates and inspires; includes multiple perspectives in decision-making; self-awareness, continuous learning, and resilience in service of continuous improvement)

This emphasis on acquiring managerial knowledge and connecting with the labour market is crucial for the success of secondary school directors. Only with strong leadership

and continuous improvement can we ensure that secondary school directors achieve their full potential.

3.2. Problem Statement

The management of secondary schools encompasses specific challenges and unique characteristics that are not typically encountered in the corporate world. These distinct features stem from the inherently different nature of educational environments, which are shaped by a range of factors, including the objectives of education, the diversity of stakeholders, the regulatory frameworks, and the core values associated with learning and development (Jules, 2018). Secondary school directors must navigate a complex network of relationships involving students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, government agencies, and the broader community. Unlike managers in corporate settings, school directors are not solely focused on achieving operational efficiency; they must also foster an environment that supports effective learning, promotes student well-being, and aligns with educational policies and standards mandated by governing bodies.

When it comes to educational institutions, the objectives go much beyond monetary success or market rivalry. Instead, they place an emphasis on the development of well-rounded individuals who are ready to make contributions important to the broader society. Success metrics in secondary schools are often more abstract and multidimensional, encompassing academic achievement, student engagement, and social and emotional growth. These metrics reflect the broader societal role of education in preparing students to become informed, responsible, and capable members of society. Consequently, school directors must implement management practices that promote an inclusive and supportive school culture, address the diverse needs of the student body, and prioritize student-centered approaches. Therefore, success is not simply assessed by test scores, but also by

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the growth of the whole person, which prepares students to navigate and positively impact a world that is becoming increasingly more complex. Such holistic student development requires leadership approach that is inherently different from that typically found in corporate management.

Furthermore, the regulatory landscape in education imposes specific compliance requirements and accountability measures that differ significantly from those in the corporate world. While companies primarily focus on profitability, shareholder returns, and market share, schools must adhere to stringent regulations related to curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, and student assessment protocols. These policies are often designed to ensure that educational institutions meet both national and local standards, thereby contributing to the overall quality of education within the community (Cheng & Tam, 1997; Vidovich, 2004). School directors must ensure that their schools comply with these regulations while also managing day-to-day operations, a balance that is critical to the long-term success of their institutions. These regulatory requirements add an additional layer of complexity to the role of school directors, as they must navigate bureaucratic processes and frequently adapt to changing educational policies.

Traditional management models used in corporate environments may not fully address these nuances and complexities inherent in secondary school management. Corporate management practices are often geared towards enhancing productivity, optimizing financial performance, and maximizing shareholder value. These models prioritize quantitative performance indicators, such as revenue growth, profit margins, and return on investment, which are not directly applicable to the educational setting. In contrast, secondary schools must prioritize qualitative indicators such as student satisfaction, engagement levels, and educational outcomes, while maintaining financial stability of the educational institution. The emphasis on these unique success metrics

reflects the fundamental differences between educational and corporate organizations, underscoring the need for a management approach tailored specifically to the needs of secondary schools.

Additionally, the role of stakeholder management in secondary schools is particularly intricate due to the diverse and often conflicting interests of various groups involved. As pointed out by Khadija (2022), school directors must engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders who have varying expectations and requirements. Considering that students seek a supportive learning environment that encourages growth; parents expect a safe and effective education for their children; teachers require professional support and resources; and government agencies demand compliance with educational standards and accountability measures. Balancing these competing interests necessitates a management approach that prioritizes effective communication, collaborative decision-making, and a commitment to the school's educational mission. This level of stakeholder engagement and the need to address such diverse perspectives set secondary school management apart from corporate management, where the primary focus often centres on shareholders, customers, and employees.

In summary, the specific challenges and requirements of secondary school management highlight the limitations of traditional corporate management models when applied to educational settings. The emphasis on educational outcomes, the regulatory complexities, and the diversity of stakeholder interests all underscore the need for a specialized approach to managing secondary schools effectively. Understanding and addressing these unique aspects of school management are essential for school directors to lead their institutions in a manner that fosters both academic success and student well-being. This study seeks to explore these distinctions in depth, providing insights that will

inform the development of management practices tailored to the unique context of secondary education.

3.3. Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of school directors in the effective management of secondary schools, focusing on how their leadership influences educational outcomes, student development, and overall school effectiveness. This study seeks to address the distinct management requirements unique to secondary schools and aims to identify strategies that align with these specific needs. To achieve this, the study outlines the following specific objectives:

• To Identify and Analyse the Management Styles Adopted by School Directors in Secondary Schools

This objective seeks to explore the predominant leadership styles among school directors, such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership, and examine how these styles influence various aspects of school management. By understanding the leadership approaches used, the study aims to elucidate how these styles align with the unique goals and challenges of secondary schools, differentiating them from traditional corporate leadership models.

• To Examine the Impact of School Directors' Management Practices on Teacher Performance and Student Achievement

This objective focuses on assessing the direct and indirect effects of directors' management practices on school outcomes, including teacher motivation, satisfaction, and effectiveness, as well as student engagement and academic performance. By evaluating these impacts, the study aims to highlight the importance of management practices tailored

to an educational environment and to demonstrate how these practices contribute to the overall success of secondary schools.

• To Explore the Challenges Faced by School Directors in Managing Secondary Schools and the Strategies Employed to Overcome Them

This objective involves identifying the specific challenges that school directors encounter in their roles, such as navigating regulatory requirements, addressing diverse student needs, and managing resource constraints. The study will also investigate the strategies that directors employ to overcome these challenges, providing insights into adaptive and innovative management approaches that are effective in the context of secondary education.

• To Assess the Role of School Directors in Fostering a Positive School Culture and Climate

This objective aims to examine how school directors contribute to creating and maintaining a supportive, inclusive, and positive school culture. By investigating their role in shaping school values, promoting a sense of community, and enhancing student and teacher morale, the study seeks to understand the broader impact of school leadership on the educational environment and its influence on both academic and social outcomes.

• To Compare Management Practices Between Secondary Schools and Corporate Organizations, Highlighting Key Differences and Similarities

This objective focuses on a comparative analysis of management practices, exploring how the priorities, decision-making processes, and organizational structures in secondary schools differ from those in corporate settings. By identifying these distinctions, the study aims to underscore the need for management models tailored to educational

contexts and to provide a deeper understanding of how these models align with the unique mission of secondary schools.

•   To Propose Strategies and Recommendations for Effective Management Tailored to the Unique Context of Secondary Schools

Based on the findings, this objective aims to offer actionable recommendations and strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of school management practices. The study will provide insights that can assist current and aspiring school directors in navigating the specific challenges of secondary school management, thereby promoting improved educational outcomes and fostering an environment that supports student success and development.

Corresponding Research Questions

To fulfil these objectives, the study will address the following research questions:

1.   What leadership styles are most commonly adopted by school directors in secondary schools, and how do these styles affect school effectiveness?

2.   How do the management practices of school directors influence teacher performance and student outcomes in secondary schools?

3.   What challenges do school directors face in the effective management of secondary schools, and what strategies do they use to address these challenges?

4.   In what ways do school directors contribute to the development of a positive school culture and climate in secondary schools?

5.   How do management practices in secondary schools compare to those in corporate organizations, and what key differences and similarities exist?

6.   What specific strategies can enhance the management practices of school directors in secondary schools, and how can these strategies improve overall school effectiveness?

3.4. Rationale for the Research

This research is grounded in the understanding that school directors play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experiences of teachers and students alike. Secondary schools, which prepare students for higher education and the workforce, operate within complex and ever-evolving environments. The study acknowledges that factors such as policy changes, resource limitations, diverse student needs, and technological advancements all contribute to the multifaceted nature of secondary school management. By exploring these factors and identifying practical strategies employed by school directors, the study seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform the development of targeted interventions, professional development opportunities, and support systems for educational leaders.

In addition, the research addresses the challenges that school directors face in balancing educational leadership with administrative responsibilities. By examining how directors navigate these complexities, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific management needs of secondary schools, supporting efforts to develop policies and programs that empower school directors to lead effectively and foster positive educational environments.

3.5. Significance of the research

This research holds significant importance on multiple levels:

This research contributes to the field of educational management by drawing attention to the distinctive characteristics of the management of secondary schools, which distinguish them from the management of corporations. Through the sharing of insights into the specific challenges and strategies involved in the management of secondary schools, it contributes to the further development of existing ideas on educational leadership.

Practically, the findings provide guidance for current and aspiring school directors on navigating the unique challenges of their roles. By identifying effective management strategies tailored to secondary schools, the study offers practical recommendations that can improve administrative practices, enhance educational outcomes, and create a positive learning environment.

Policy-wise, the study informs educational policymakers and stakeholders about the specific needs of secondary school management. These insights can support the development of training programs, policies, and support structures that enhance the capacity of school directors to fulfil their roles effectively.

3.6. Scope and Delimitations

The study focuses specifically on secondary schools, as primary and tertiary educational institutions have different management dynamics and requirements. It examines the role of school directors within these schools, emphasizing their responsibilities, challenges, and impact on school effectiveness. While the study includes a comparison with corporate management, it does not seek to provide an exhaustive

analysis of corporate practices but rather to highlight key differences relevant to secondary education.

3.7. Summary of the Literature Review

The school educational policy of a secondary educational institution, whose head is the school director, is created and implemented by the school director in collaboration with teachers, students, parents, founders, and the relevant Ministry of education. The national educational policy and the school's vision and mission must be aligned and legally regulated in their key determinations and guidelines. Establishing a certain quality of work in secondary schools, which is defined by the school culture, school identity, leadership styles, school organization, communication and motivation methods, establishment of teamwork, management, and leadership, as well as conflict management, largely depends on the school director's professional competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The role of the school director in leading educational institutions is crucial for the development of school quality. Numerous studies in the field of leadership and management of educational institutions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbech, 1999; Hallinger and Heck, 2002; Burušić et al., 2008; Burušić et al., 2009) emphasize the school director's key role in shaping school culture, the quality of education, and the overall educational process. These authors highlight that school directors significantly contribute to creating a positive working atmosphere, collaborative relationships, and achievements within schools.

Research confirms that school directors who create visions, missions, and common goals, and who apply respectful communication and care about the professional development of staff, positively influence the development of their institutions. It is assumed that the success of secondary schools is directly related to aligned goals and the

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joint work of teachers and school directors. Conversely, Robbins (2013) warns that ineffective leadership can result in confusion, weakening interpersonal relationships, and a decline in school quality. Robbins (2013) also warns of the negative consequences of ineffective leadership, which can result in a reduction in the quality of education and poor working relationships. Therefore, it is important for school directors to continually work on developing their professional competencies to ensure the success of their institutions, specifically in the field of management.

The competencies of school directors that are investigated include the ability for strategic planning, effective communication, team motivation, and continuous professional development. School directors who successfully implement these competencies often achieve better results in terms of education quality and staff satisfaction. Leithwood and his colleagues (1994; 1999) emphasize the importance of transformational leadership, which includes inspiring and motivating staff, while Hallinger and Heck (2002) stress the importance of having clearly defined school goals and missions. Burušić and his colleagues (2008; 2009) further confirm that school directors play a vital role in ensuring a collaborative and encouraging working environment. The professional competencies of school directors also include the ability to make decisions, manage resources, and evaluate and improve school programs. These elements are key to achieving a high level of education quality and the overall functioning of secondary schools.

School directors who actively promote the professional development of teachers and provide opportunities for their advancement often have secondary schools with better educational outcomes. Leithwood and colleagues (1999) emphasize that school directors who support innovations and changes contribute to a dynamic and progressive educational environment. The communication skills of school directors, including the ability to listen actively, convey information clearly, and resolve conflicts, are crucial for maintaining

healthy interpersonal relationships within the school. The school director's role in fostering cooperation among teachers, students, and parents is also of great importance. Effective cooperation leads to better implementation of school programs and increased satisfaction of all involved parties.

The professional competencies and behaviours of school directors are crucial for the success of schools. Domović (2003), Mulford (2003), and Lindstrom and Speck (2004) emphasize that good collaborative relationships, stemming from the school director's approach to staff, significantly contribute to the effectiveness of schools. At the local level, research in Croatia also confirms the importance of the competencies and role of school directors in schoolwork. Resman (2001), Staničić (2003; 2006; 2007), Hitrec and Blankov (2005), Stilin (2005), Puzić (2006), Peko, Mlinarević, and Gajger (2009), and Fegeš and Kovač (2016) in their research highlight that the competencies of school directors are crucial for the quality management and leadership of educational institutions. Regardless of the research approach, all authors agree that the knowledge, vision, and competencies of school directors significantly contribute to the quality management of schools.

A competent school director must have clearly defined goals and the mission of the school and be able to inspire and motivate their staff. Additionally, the school director must be skilled in decision-making, management, and the evaluation of school programs. Competent school director also contributes to the development and implementation of innovative educational programs, which positively affect students' educational outcomes. They are key in ensuring that educational programs are adapted to the needs and abilities of all students."

Some of the key questions that are intended to answer and evaluate for this research are:

1. What professional competencies of secondary school directors affect the effectiveness of school management?

2. What specific skills and knowledge do secondary school directors consider most important for effective school management?

3. What are the main obstacles that secondary school directors encounter in their daily work?

4. School directors of secondary schools are responsible for ensuring and implementing the professional development of teachers.

5. What are the most common communication and motivational strategies used by school directors of secondary schools?

6. School directors are responsible for human resource management in their schools.

7. The motivational and communication approach of the school directors towards their staff is crucial for a positive school atmosphere.

8. The school director is responsible for effectively resolving conflicts within the school.

9. The school director encourages creativity and innovation in their schools.

10. The professional development of school directors contributes to improving the effectiveness of school management.

11. What are the most important factors for successfully leading and managing changes and reforms in secondary schools?

12. The leadership styles of school directors affect the effectiveness of school management.

13. The school director is responsible for the satisfaction of teachers with their workplace.

14.   The communication style of the school director must be clear and understandable.

15.   The school director is solely responsible for providing the equipment and materials necessary for teachers to perform their duties properly.

16.   The school director ensures that every employee gives their best every day.

17.   The school director receives recognition or praise for a job well done.

18.   The school director cares for each employee in a holistic manner, showing concern for every staff member.

19.   The school director encourages the professional growth and development of each employee.

20.   The school director values every employee's opinion.

21.   The school director feels supported by every employee in leading the school.

22.   Job satisfaction positively affects the professional effectiveness of the school director.

3.7.1. Preliminary literature review objectives

Based on the premise that "the management of secondary schools has specificities that do not exist in company management," this preliminary literature review aims to thoroughly explore and critically analyze existing knowledge on this topic. The paper seeks to establish a comprehensive understanding of the distinctive aspects of secondary school management, thereby laying a solid foundation for the current study. The objectives of the literature review are as follows:

1. To Explore Theoretical Frameworks Relevant to Educational Management

This paper will first examine key theoretical frameworks that inform management practices within educational settings, with a particular focus on secondary schools. It will identify and analyze theories such as Transformational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, and Distributed Leadership, which are prominent in educational management literature. By examining these theories, the study aims to establish a solid theoretical foundation that contrasts with corporate management models, like Transactional Leadership and Bureaucratic Management.

The objective is also to emphasize the unique leadership requirements of secondary schools. For instance, transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and motivating staff and students to achieve their full potential, is critical in an educational context. Corporate management, in contrast, may prioritize efficiency and profit maximization. Highlighting these differences underscores the necessity for specialized management approaches in educational settings.

2. To Examine the Unique Characteristics of Secondary School Management

The paper will also explore the specific characteristics inherent to secondary school management, such as fostering student development, implementing curricula, providing a safe and conducive learning environment, and addressing diverse student needs. By analyzing these characteristics, the study aims to demonstrate why these management approaches diverge from those used in corporate settings.

Moreover, secondary school management often requires balancing administrative responsibilities with educational leadership. School leaders must not only manage resources and personnel but also lead pedagogical initiatives and promote academic excellence. This dual role adds complexity to their management practices, which this literature review will analyze in detail.

3. To Compare Management Practices between Secondary Schools and Companies

The literature review will conduct a comparative analysis of management practices between secondary schools and corporate organizations. This analysis will identify similarities and differences in organizational structure, decision-making processes, performance metrics, leadership styles, and stakeholder engagement. Through this comparison, the study will illustrate how management practices in educational institutions differ due to unique objectives and operational environments.

For instance, while companies often prioritize profitability and shareholder value, using financial indicators to measure success, secondary schools focus on educational outcomes, student well-being, and compliance with educational standards. This comparison will emphasize the necessity for adapting corporate management models when applied to educational settings.

3.7.2. To Identify Challenges Faced by Secondary School Directors

Additionally, the paper seeks to understand the challenges and obstacles faced by secondary school directors due to their unique operating environment. These challenges may include resource constraints, staff retention issues, policy implementation difficulties, and the need to balance administrative duties with pedagogical leadership. By examining these challenges, the study aims to highlight the need for management strategies tailored to the specific needs of secondary school directors.

The paper will also consider external factors, such as changes in educational policy, technological advancements, and societal expectations, that impact secondary school

management. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective solutions and support mechanisms for school directors.

3.7.3. To Assess the Impact of Educational Policies and Regulations

This objective involves assessing how educational policies and regulatory frameworks influence management practices in secondary schools. The paper will explore the impact of compliance requirements, accountability measures, and policy changes on school management. By understanding how these policies shape management practices, the study will demonstrate the regulatory differences between educational institutions and corporate organizations.

For example, schools are often subject to stringent government regulations regarding curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, and student assessment methods. These regulations can limit the autonomy of school directors and require them to navigate complex bureaucratic processes, unlike companies, which may operate with more flexibility.

3.7.4. To Investigate Stakeholder Dynamics in Secondary Schools

The literature review will investigate the dynamics of stakeholder relationships within secondary schools, examining the roles and expectations of students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, government agencies, and the wider community. By analyzing how school directors manage these diverse and sometimes competing interests, the study will highlight the complexity of stakeholder management in educational settings.

Effective communication and collaboration with stakeholders are essential for creating a supportive educational environment (Slater, 2008). This review will explore strategies used by school directors to engage stakeholders, manage conflicts, and build

strong school-community relationships. These dynamics contrast with corporate settings, where the primary focus is often on shareholders, customers, and employees.

3.7.5. To Review Predominant Leadership Styles in Educational Settings

This objective seeks to identify and evaluate leadership styles predominant in educational settings, such as Transformational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, and Servant Leadership, and assess their effectiveness within secondary school management. By comparing these with corporate leadership styles, the study aims to illustrate the different competencies and approaches required in educational contexts.

For example, instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning, which is specific to educational settings. Understanding these leadership styles will provide insights into how school directors can effectively lead their schools toward achieving educational goals.

3.7.6. . To Analyze Organizational Culture and Climate in Schools

The literature review will examine the organizational culture and climate within secondary schools, exploring how values, beliefs, norms, and shared practices influence management approaches and outcomes. By understanding the unique culture of schools, the study seeks to demonstrate its impact on leadership styles, decision-making processes, and overall school effectiveness.

Furthermore, the review will explore how school culture affects student behavior, teacher motivation, and community perceptions. In corporate organizations, culture is often driven by brand identity and market positioning, highlighting further differences between the two contexts.

3.7.7. To Identify Gaps in Existing Literature

The review aims to identify gaps and inconsistencies in the existing research related to secondary school management and its comparison with corporate management. By critically evaluating current literature, the study will highlight areas that require further investigation, thereby justifying the current research and guiding its development.

Identifying these gaps ensures that this study makes a meaningful contribution to the field by addressing unexplored or under-researched aspects of secondary school management.

3.7.8. To Establish a Conceptual Framework for the Study

Finally, the literature review will establish a conceptual framework that integrates the findings from the review and guides the research methodology. This framework will illustrate the relationships between key concepts, variables, and anticipated outcomes, providing a structured approach to the study and ensuring coherence between the research objectives, questions, and methods.

3.8. Conclusion

The review lays a solid theoretical and conceptual basis for the study, ensuring it is grounded in existing knowledge while addressing gaps in the literature. This comprehensive approach is essential for developing effective management strategies tailored to secondary schools' unique contexts.

Ultimately, the insights from this review will contribute to improved educational outcomes and school effectiveness by informing management practices responsive to secondary schools' specific needs and challenges. Recognizing and addressing these unique aspects of educational management will enable school directors to enhance their

leadership, engage stakeholders, and create positive learning environments that support student success.

The school educational policy of a secondary educational institution, whose head is the school director, is created and implemented by the school director in collaboration with teachers, students, parents, founders, and the relevant Ministry of education. The national educational policy and the school's vision and mission must be aligned and legally regulated in their key determinations and guidelines. Establishing a certain quality of work in secondary schools, which is defined by the school culture, school identity, leadership styles, school organization, communication and motivation methods, establishment of teamwork, management, and leadership, as well as conflict management, largely depends on the school director's professional competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

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a decline in school quality. Robbins (2013) also warns of the negative consequences of ineffective leadership, which can result in a reduction in the quality of education and poor working relationships. Therefore, it is important for school directors to continually work on developing their professional competencies to ensure the success of their institutions, specifically in the field of management.

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School directors who actively promote the professional development of teachers and provide opportunities for their advancement often have secondary schools with better educational outcomes. Leithwood and colleagues (1999) emphasize that school directors who support innovations and changes contribute to a dynamic and progressive educational environment. The communication skills of school directors, including the ability to listen actively, convey information clearly, and resolve conflicts, are crucial for maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships within the school. The school director's role in fostering cooperation among teachers, students, and parents is also of great importance. Effective

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In conclusion, this preliminary literature review establishes a critical foundation for the study by exploring and analyzing the unique specificities of secondary school management. By addressing these objectives, the review provides a comprehensive understanding of the distinct challenges and characteristics of educational management,

highlighting the differences with corporate management and identifying areas for further research.

The current study investigated the relation between the general management definitions and specific demands for secondary school directors, researching the availability of trained manpower needed to fill positions of the secondary schools' directors. A research questions were identified which were designed into an online survey and the analysis of the data collected from the online survey consisted of applying descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis.

This chapter also includes the research design, details about the main problems in applying managers' knowledge into the defined frames of public secondary schools, as well as sample size and description and characteristics of the participants. No legal or financial barriers influenced the collection of data, and the collection and method of study was explained in next chapters.

CHAPTER IV: MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Effective management is a critical factor in ensuring the success of public secondary schools. In the Republic of Croatia, the role of school directors is particularly significant, as they must navigate a complex array of challenges to align institutional goals with national educational priorities, ensure compliance with legal frameworks, and address the expectations of a diverse set of stakeholders. The complexity of their role is compounded by the dynamic nature of education, where shifts in policy, societal expectations, and technological advancements continuously reshape the landscape. Consequently, understanding the role of school directors in public secondary education requires a comprehensive examination of management principles, contextual factors, and cross-sectoral insights.

At its core, management in secondary schools involves the integration of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to create environments that foster learning and development. However, these managerial functions cannot be understood in isolation, as they are deeply influenced by the external environment, including regulatory requirements, funding mechanisms, and community dynamics. For school directors, effective management goes beyond administrative competence; it demands strategic vision, adaptability, and the ability to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, from government authorities to teachers, students, and parents. These multifaceted responsibilities place school directors at the nexus of institutional governance and educational leadership, requiring them to balance operational demands with broader societal objectives.

The Croatian educational system provides a particularly compelling context for studying the role of school directors. Governed by national legislation, including the Zakon

o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools) and the Zakon o srednjem školstvu (Law on Secondary Education), public secondary schools operate within a centralized framework that defines their structure, funding, and administrative processes. This legislative foundation ensures standardization and equity across the education system, but it also imposes certain constraints on the autonomy of school directors. For instance, while directors are responsible for managing their schools, their ability to make independent decisions is often limited by bureaucratic procedures and resource constraints. This duality of responsibility and restriction underscores the complexity of their role and highlights the importance of contextual awareness in management practices.

In addition to navigating the regulatory environment, school directors in Croatia must contend with the unique challenges posed by the public secondary education sector. Public schools serve a diverse student population, with varying needs and expectations that require tailored approaches to teaching and learning. Moreover, the public nature of these institutions means that directors are accountable not only to their immediate stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, but also to the broader community and government authorities. This accountability is further amplified by the increasing demand for transparency and efficiency in public sector management, which places additional pressure on school directors to demonstrate measurable outcomes in areas such as student performance, resource utilization, and stakeholder satisfaction.

One of the most significant aspects of the director's role in public secondary schools is their engagement with stakeholders. Stakeholder management in education is inherently complex, as it involves balancing the often-conflicting interests of different groups. For example, parents may prioritize the safety and well-being of their children, while teachers may focus on professional development and academic freedom. At the same time,

government authorities are primarily concerned with compliance, efficiency, and alignment with national education policies. The director's ability to navigate these diverse expectations is critical to the success of the school, as it fosters trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to achieving institutional goals.

The evolving role of school directors also reflects broader trends in educational leadership. Globally, there has been a shift toward more inclusive and participatory models of governance, where school leaders are expected to engage with their communities and involve stakeholders in decision-making processes. In Croatia, this trend is evident in initiatives that emphasize the importance of parental involvement, community partnerships, and teacher collaboration in shaping school policies and practices. These developments align with contemporary management theories, such as stakeholder capitalism, which emphasize the need to balance the interests of multiple constituencies to achieve sustainable outcomes. For school directors, adopting such an approach requires not only a deep understanding of management principles but also the interpersonal skills to build and sustain relationships across diverse stakeholder groups.

At the same time, the role of school directors is influenced by the broader socio-political context. Education in Croatia, as in many other countries, is deeply intertwined with national identity, cultural values, and political priorities. This intersection of education and politics often manifests in the form of policy reforms, funding decisions, and public debates about the purpose and direction of schooling. For school directors, these external pressures add another layer of complexity to their role, as they must navigate political influences while maintaining a focus on their school's mission and goals. For example, directors may be tasked with implementing government-mandated reforms, such as curriculum changes or digital learning initiatives, which require extensive planning, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. These responsibilities highlight the need

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for directors to be both strategic leaders and effective managers, capable of aligning institutional priorities with external demands.

The importance of effective school management is further underscored by the unique characteristics of the education sector. Unlike the corporate or manufacturing industries, where success is often measured by tangible outputs and financial metrics, the primary "product" of education is knowledge and human development. This intangible nature of educational outcomes presents unique challenges for management, as it requires school directors to adopt long-term perspectives and focus on qualitative measures of success. For instance, while standardized test scores and graduation rates provide important indicators of student achievement, they do not capture the full scope of educational impact, such as the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, and social responsibility. As a result, directors must navigate the complexities of evaluating and demonstrating their school's performance in a way that reflects the multifaceted goals of education.

To address these challenges, school directors must draw on a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Theoretical frameworks, such as Fayol's principles of management and transformational leadership theories, provide valuable insights into the core functions of management and the characteristics of effective leadership. At the same time, practical experience enables directors to adapt these principles to the specific contexts and challenges of their schools. This interplay between theory and practice is particularly important in the public secondary education sector, where directors must balance the demands of day-to-day operations with the strategic goal of improving educational outcomes.

Given the complexity of their role, school directors must also be skilled in managing change. The education sector is characterized by continuous evolution, driven by factors such as technological advancements, globalization, and changing societal

expectations. For example, the increasing integration of digital technologies in education requires directors to not only adopt new tools and platforms but also to support teachers in developing the skills needed to use these technologies effectively. Similarly, the growing emphasis on inclusive education calls for directors to implement policies and practices that address the needs of diverse student populations, including those with disabilities or from marginalized communities. These changes require directors to be proactive, innovative, and resilient, as they navigate the uncertainties and challenges of a rapidly changing environment.

The role of school directors in the effective management of public secondary schools in Croatia is both multifaceted and dynamic. As leaders, they are responsible for guiding their institutions through a complex web of internal and external challenges, from navigating regulatory frameworks and stakeholder expectations to implementing innovative practices and addressing socio-political influences. By integrating a deep understanding of management principles with contextual awareness and interpersonal skills, directors can create environments that support academic excellence, foster collaboration, and promote the holistic development of students. This chapter provides the foundation for exploring these themes in greater depth, beginning with a comparative analysis of secondary education systems globally and their implications for public secondary schools in Croatia.

4.1. Comparative Analysis of Secondary Education Systems

The management of secondary schools is deeply influenced by the broader education systems within which they operate. These systems reflect diverse historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts, resulting in significant variations in their structure, governance, and curriculum delivery. A comparative analysis of secondary

education systems in Anglo-American countries, the European Union, Islamic nations, and China reveals distinctive approaches to leadership and administration. Examining these systems offers valuable insights into global best practices and their implications for Croatian public secondary schools, highlighting potential areas for alignment and reform.

Anglo-American education systems, particularly in the United States and Canada, are characterized by decentralized governance structures. In the United States, state and local governments oversee most aspects of secondary education, including curriculum development, funding, and teacher certification, while the federal government plays a limited role through legislation such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This decentralized structure allows for flexibility and adaptability to local needs but often results in disparities in resources and educational outcomes between affluent and disadvantaged districts (Spring, 2021). School leaders, such as principals, wield significant authority in managing budgets, hiring staff, and designing programs, fostering a culture of innovation and localized decision-making.

Similarly, Canada's education system is administered at the provincial level, leading to diverse approaches across the country. In Ontario, for example, principals have autonomy in resource allocation and teacher evaluations while adhering to provincial standards. Levin's (2008) analysis of Canadian education emphasizes that this balance of centralized policies and localized implementation enables schools to address unique community needs effectively. However, challenges such as funding inequities persist, highlighting the importance of equitable resource distribution in decentralized systems.

The United Kingdom represents a hybrid model within the Anglo-American framework. Recent reforms, such as the establishment of academy schools, have shifted governance from local authorities to independent trusts while maintaining public funding (Ball, 2017). This quasi-autonomous structure empowers school leaders with operational

flexibility but increases accountability through inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Leaders in academies are expected to manage resources efficiently, demonstrate measurable outcomes, and foster innovation in teaching practices, reflecting a blend of entrepreneurial and administrative responsibilities.

Within the European Union, secondary education systems exhibit varying degrees of centralization. Finland's model stands out for its emphasis on equity, inclusivity, and student-centered learning. In this highly centralized system, the national government oversees key aspects of education, including curriculum development and teacher training, while granting school leaders significant autonomy in operational matters (Sahlberg, 2015). Finnish school leaders are regarded as pedagogical experts who prioritize collaboration and professional development for teachers, contributing to Finland's reputation for high educational quality and equitable outcomes.

By contrast, France's education system is rigidly centralized, with the Ministry of National Education controlling virtually all aspects of governance, from curriculum design to teacher appointments. According to Van Zanten and Maxwell (2015), this hierarchical structure ensures uniformity and consistency but limits the autonomy of school leaders, who primarily act as implementers of national policies. While this approach supports standardization, it often stifles innovation and responsiveness to local needs, posing challenges for adapting to diverse student populations.

Germany offers a distinct approach within the EU, characterized by its federal structure. The Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) facilitates cooperation among states while allowing regional governments to tailor policies to their populations (Ertl, 2006). This system fosters diversity in educational practices but requires robust coordination mechanisms to ensure cohesion across the country. For Croatia, the German experience

underscores the importance of balancing local autonomy with national oversight to address regional disparities.

Islamic education systems, particularly in the Middle East, are deeply influenced by religious and cultural values. In Saudi Arabia, secondary education integrates Islamic studies with general academic subjects, reflecting the central role of religion in public life (Elyas & Picard, 2010). School leaders operate within hierarchical frameworks where ministries of education exercise significant control, leaving limited room for localized decision-making. However, countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are modernizing their education systems, incorporating international curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) alongside traditional models. These reforms reflect the dual priorities of preserving cultural identity while meeting global education standards.

For Croatian school directors, the Islamic experience offers lessons in balancing cultural values with modernization. While Croatia's secular education system does not integrate religious instruction to the same extent, the importance of aligning national priorities with local community needs remains a shared challenge.

China's secondary education system is one of the largest and most centralized in the world, governed by the Ministry of Education. Its focus on academic achievement is epitomized by the Gaokao examination, which serves as the gateway to higher education and influences every aspect of the school system (Zhao, 2020). Chinese school leaders are tasked with ensuring compliance with national directives while meeting rigorous performance metrics. This centralized approach supports consistency and efficiency but leaves little room for innovation or contextual adaptation.

Recent reforms in China aim to reduce the reliance on rote learning and promote holistic education, reflecting global trends toward student-centered practices (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). These developments highlight the challenges and opportunities of balancing

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standardization with flexibility, offering insights for Croatian school directors navigating similar tensions within their centralized framework.

Croatia's public secondary schools operate within a centralized system defined by the Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools) and the Zakon o srednjem školstvu (Law on Secondary Education). These laws provide a standardized framework for governance, funding, and curriculum design, ensuring equity across the education system. However, as in France, this centralization limits the autonomy of school directors, who must implement policies within a tightly regulated structure.

Unlike Anglo-American systems, where stakeholder engagement is emphasized through mechanisms like parent-teacher associations and school boards, Croatian schools rely more heavily on top-down governance. This limited participatory element can hinder the ability of school directors to build trust and foster collaboration with local communities. As Epstein (2011) argues, effective stakeholder engagement enhances school performance by aligning institutional goals with community needs.

Additionally, Croatian schools face challenges in integrating technology and innovation due to resource constraints. While systems like Finland and the UAE have embraced digital tools and personalized learning, many Croatian schools struggle to modernize their practices. For school directors, this disparity underscores the importance of strategic planning and external partnerships to enhance resource availability and technological integration.

The comparative analysis of global secondary education systems offers valuable lessons for Croatian school directors. Finland's balance of centralized policy with local autonomy demonstrates that empowering school leaders can improve outcomes while maintaining equity. Similarly, the Anglo-American emphasis on stakeholder engagement

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highlights the importance of participatory management in fostering trust and collaboration. Finally, the adoption of technology in systems like the UAE and Finland underscores the need for Croatian schools to prioritize digital transformation to remain competitive in a globalized education landscape.

Secondary education systems reflect the unique cultural, economic, and political contexts of their respective nations. While Croatia shares similarities with European models, it can benefit from lessons learned in Anglo-American, Islamic, and Chinese contexts. By adapting best practices, such as fostering greater stakeholder engagement, integrating technology, and balancing centralized policy with local innovation, Croatian school directors can enhance their effectiveness in managing public secondary schools. These insights provide a foundation for the next section, which explores distinctions between public, private, and semi-private education systems and their implications for school management.

4.2. Comparative Approaches to Financing, Decision-Making, and Stakeholder Relations

The governance and management of secondary schools are shaped by the interrelated elements of financing, decision-making, and stakeholder relations. Across public, private, and semi-private education systems, these elements are configured differently, reflecting the priorities, resources, and accountability structures of each model. By examining these approaches comparatively, particularly in the context of Croatia's public secondary schools, we can uncover valuable insights into how financing mechanisms, decision-making authority, and stakeholder engagement influence school management and educational outcomes.

The financing of secondary education varies significantly across public, private, and semi-private systems. Public schools are predominantly funded through government

budgets, which are often allocated based on student enrolment, regional demographics, and national policy priorities. In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education oversees the distribution of funds, ensuring compliance with the Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools). This centralized approach is designed to promote equity, providing resources to schools in economically disadvantaged areas. However, limited budgets often constrain innovation and the ability of school directors to address emerging needs, such as integrating digital technologies or expanding extracurricular programs.

Private schools, in contrast, rely primarily on tuition fees and donations, which offer greater financial flexibility. This independence enables private schools to invest in advanced facilities, specialized curricula, and smaller class sizes, enhancing the overall quality of education. For example, private schools implementing international curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), often allocate significant resources to teacher training and state-of-the-art learning environments (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). However, the reliance on tuition fees limits access to private education, raising concerns about equity and social stratification.

Semi-private schools could combine public funding with private contributions, striking a balance between accessibility and innovation. These institutions often operate under public-private partnerships (PPPs), with governments providing core funding and private entities contributing additional resources or managerial expertise. The United Kingdom's academy model exemplifies this approach, where schools receive government support while enjoying operational autonomy (Gunter & McGinity, 2014). For Croatia, semi-private models could offer a viable solution to address resource gaps in public schools, fostering innovation without compromising social equity.

The authority to make decisions is another key differentiator among public, private, and semi-private schools. Public school directors often operate within highly regulated environments, where national or regional authorities dictate key policies related to curriculum, staffing, and budget allocation. In Croatia, the centralized governance model restricts the autonomy of school directors, requiring them to navigate bureaucratic processes to implement even minor changes. While this standardization ensures consistency across the education system, it can limit the ability of directors to respond to local needs or experiment with innovative practices.

Private schools, by contrast, grant school directors significant decision-making authority. Freed from the constraints of government bureaucracy, private school leaders can design unique curricula, recruit specialized teachers, and allocate resources flexibly to meet institutional goals. This autonomy fosters a culture of entrepreneurship and adaptability, enabling private schools to remain competitive in a dynamic educational landscape. However, directors in private schools also face greater accountability to parents and donors, requiring them to demonstrate tangible results, such as high academic performance or successful university placements.

Semi-private schools occupy an intermediate position, with decision-making authority shared between public and private stakeholders. Directors in semi-private schools often have more flexibility than their public-school counterparts but must navigate the dual expectations of government funders and private partners. For instance, directors may be required to adhere to national education standards while also meeting the specific goals set by private stakeholders, such as achieving certain enrolment targets or implementing innovative programs. This dual accountability can be both an opportunity and a challenge, requiring directors to balance competing priorities effectively.

Stakeholder engagement is an essential aspect of school management, shaping the relationships between directors, teachers, parents, students, and the broader community. Public schools are accountable to a wide array of stakeholders, including government authorities, local communities, and taxpayers. In Croatia, the public nature of secondary education creates an expectation of transparency and inclusivity, with directors often serving as intermediaries between policymakers and local stakeholders. For example, directors may organize parent-teacher meetings or collaborate with local organizations to address specific community needs, such as promoting vocational training or improving access to extracurricular activities.

Private schools, on the other hand, maintain a narrower focus on their stakeholders, prioritizing the satisfaction of parents and students as paying customers. This direct accountability fosters strong relationships with families, as directors strive to deliver personalized attention and high-quality services. However, the emphasis on parental expectations can sometimes lead to a more transactional approach to stakeholder relations, where broader community engagement is deprioritized.

Semi-private schools adopt a hybrid approach, engaging with both public and private stakeholders. Directors in these institutions must balance the interests of government funders, private partners, parents, and students, requiring a nuanced approach to communication and collaboration. For example, a semi-private school director might work closely with government officials to ensure compliance with national standards while engaging with private partners to secure additional resources or implement innovative programs. This dual engagement fosters a more dynamic stakeholder environment, offering opportunities for collaboration but also presenting challenges in managing competing expectations.

For Croatian school directors, understanding the comparative approaches to financing, decision-making, and stakeholder relations is critical for navigating the complexities of public secondary education. While the centralized funding model ensures equity, it also requires directors to advocate effectively for their schools to secure additional resources. Building partnerships with local businesses or non-governmental organizations could provide supplementary funding and support for innovative initiatives.

In terms of decision-making, Croatian directors can learn from private and semi-private models, where greater autonomy fosters adaptability and responsiveness. While the current regulatory framework limits the scope for experimentation, directors can adopt proactive strategies, such as piloting small-scale projects within existing guidelines or leveraging stakeholder feedback to advocate for policy changes.

Stakeholder engagement remains a crucial area for improvement in Croatian public schools. By adopting participatory management practices, such as establishing parent advisory councils or student leadership committees, directors can foster stronger connections with their communities and create a more inclusive decision-making process. These practices align with international trends in educational leadership, emphasizing collaboration and shared accountability as key drivers of success (Epstein, 2011).

The comparative analysis of financing, decision-making, and stakeholder relations highlights the diverse approaches to secondary school management across public, private, and semi-private models. Each system offers unique advantages and challenges, from the equity-driven funding of public schools to the flexibility and innovation of private institutions and the hybrid potential of semi-private models. For Croatian school directors, understanding these dynamics provides a valuable framework for enhancing their leadership practices and addressing the evolving demands of public secondary education. The next section will explore the influence of politics on these educational models,

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examining how policy decisions shape the management of public, private, and semi-private schools.

4.3. The Influence of politics on different models of schools

The management of secondary schools is intrinsically shaped by the political environment within which they operate. Governments and policymakers influence key aspects of school governance, funding, curriculum, and accountability across public, private, and semi-private education systems. This section explores how politics impacts each type of school, highlighting the complexities of navigating these influences and their implications for Croatian school directors.

Public schools are the most directly influenced by politics, as they are funded, regulated, and governed by governmental authorities. In Croatia, public secondary schools operate under the centralized oversight of the Ministry of Science and Education, with regulations outlined in the Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools). This centralized framework ensures equity and standardization across the education system, but it also subjects schools to shifts in political priorities and changes in government leadership.

Political influence is particularly evident in the allocation of resources, where national budgets and funding priorities determine the financial capacity of public schools. For example, during economic downturns, governments may reduce education budgets, forcing public school directors to operate with constrained resources. Conversely, political commitments to educational reform or innovation can lead to increased funding for initiatives such as digitalization or STEM education. These fluctuations underscore the need for public school directors to adapt to changing political contexts and advocate effectively for their schools.

In addition to funding, political ideologies often shape curriculum content and educational priorities. In Croatia, as in many countries, debates over national identity, history, and cultural values influence curriculum decisions. For example, the inclusion of civic education and ethics in school programs often reflects broader political and societal priorities. For school directors, implementing politically motivated changes requires balancing compliance with stakeholder expectations, particularly when these changes provoke public debate or resistance.

Private schools operate with greater autonomy than public schools, allowing them to remain less directly influenced by government policies. However, private schools are not entirely immune to political pressures, as they must comply with national education standards and regulatory requirements to maintain accreditation. In Croatia, private secondary schools are subject to the same overarching legal frameworks as public schools, but they have more freedom to design their curricula and manage their finances independently.

Political influence on private schools is often indirect, shaping the broader educational environment within which they operate. For instance, tax policies affecting private tuition fees or subsidies for private education can impact the financial sustainability of these institutions. Additionally, political decisions on issues such as teacher certification or curriculum approval may constrain the autonomy of private schools in certain areas.

In countries with strong political opposition to privatization, private schools may face societal scrutiny or resistance. For example, debates about the role of private education in perpetuating inequality are common in politically polarized environments. In Croatia, where private schools serve a relatively small proportion of students, such debates are less prominent but still relevant for understanding the political dynamics of education.

Semi-private schools, such as public-private partnership (PPP) models, occupy a middle ground between public and private systems and are particularly sensitive to political influence. Governments often provide core funding and set regulatory requirements for semi-private schools, while private entities contribute additional resources and managerial expertise. This dual accountability creates a complex dynamic where political priorities can shape both the funding structure and the operational autonomy of these institutions.

The political implications of semi-private models are particularly evident in the United Kingdom's academy system, where schools receive public funding but operate independently. As Gunter and McGinity (2014) note, the expansion of academies has been driven by political ideologies promoting market-based reforms in education. Proponents argue that semi-private schools increase efficiency and innovation, while critics contend that they exacerbate inequalities and reduce public accountability. For Croatian policymakers and school directors, these debates offer valuable insights into the potential benefits and risks of potentially adopting semi-private models.

In Croatia, the influence of politics on secondary education is most pronounced in public schools, which account for the vast majority of secondary institutions. School directors in public schools must navigate a centralized governance model where national policies and political priorities dictate key aspects of their work. For example, government initiatives to modernize education, such as the introduction of digital tools or revised curricula, often require directors to implement significant changes within short timeframes. These top-down reforms can place additional strain on school management, particularly in the absence of sufficient resources or stakeholder support.

The impact of politics on private schools in Croatia is relatively limited compared to public institutions. However, as private schools grow in prominence, they may become more affected by political debates over education policy, particularly in areas such as

regulation and funding. For instance, discussions about government subsidies for private education could influence the financial sustainability of these schools and their accessibility to a broader demographic.

Semi-private models are less developed in Croatia, but their potential introduction could bring new political dynamics to the education system. Policymakers would need to carefully balance the benefits of increased efficiency and innovation with concerns about equity and public accountability. For school directors, managing the dual expectations of public funders and private stakeholders would require new skills in negotiation, collaboration, and strategic planning.

The influence of politics on secondary education has significant implications for school directors, particularly in public and semi-private systems. Directors must remain attuned to political developments and adapt their management strategies to align with shifting policy priorities. This requires a combination of strategic foresight, advocacy skills, and the ability to engage with diverse stakeholders.

For public school directors in Croatia, the centralized governance model necessitates compliance with national policies while maintaining a focus on local needs. Effective communication with government authorities, teachers, parents, and students is essential for navigating politically driven changes and fostering a sense of shared purpose. Directors can also play a proactive role in influencing policy by providing feedback to policymakers and advocating for the needs of their schools.

Private school directors, while less directly affected by politics, must remain aware of regulatory changes and societal debates that could impact their institutions. Engaging with policymakers and demonstrating the societal value of private education can help mitigate potential political risks and enhance the reputation of private schools.

For directors in semi-private schools, the dual accountability structure requires careful management of relationships with both public and private stakeholders. This includes balancing the operational flexibility needed to innovate with the transparency and accountability expected by government funders. Semi-private school directors must also navigate the potential political sensitivities associated with public-private partnerships, particularly in contexts where such models are viewed with scepticism.

The influence of politics on secondary education varies across public, private, and semi-private systems, reflecting their distinct governance and accountability structures. In public schools, political priorities directly shape funding, curriculum, and management, requiring directors to align their strategies with national policies. Private schools enjoy greater autonomy but remain subject to regulatory oversight and broader political dynamics. Semi-private schools face dual political influences, balancing the expectations of government funders and private partners.

For school directors in Croatia, understanding these dynamics is essential for navigating the complexities of their roles and advocating effectively for their schools. By developing strategies to engage with policymakers, adapt to shifting priorities, and address stakeholder concerns, directors can enhance their leadership effectiveness and contribute to the long-term success of secondary education. The next section will examine the constraints faced by school directors in public secondary schools, focusing on the structural, financial, and operational challenges that limit their decision-making capacity.

4.4. Specific Characteristics of Work in Education Compared to Other Sectors

The management of secondary schools presents unique challenges and opportunities, particularly when compared to other sectors such as corporate, healthcare, or manufacturing industries. Unlike these sectors, where tangible products or services are the primary outputs, education focuses on the intangible goal of knowledge creation and human development. This distinction fundamentally shapes the nature of educational management, requiring school directors to adopt strategies that address the long-term and non-material outcomes of their institutions. This section examines the specific characteristics of work in education, highlighting the implications for leadership and management in Croatian public secondary schools.

One of the most defining characteristics of education is that its primary "product" such as knowledge, skills, and personal growth, is inherently intangible. Unlike the corporate sector, where the value of a product or service can often be measured immediately through market feedback, the success of education is realized over time and is influenced by numerous external factors. For example, the quality of education provided by a secondary school may be reflected in students' future academic achievements, career trajectories, and societal contributions, making it difficult to quantify outcomes in the short term (OECD, 2018).

This intangible nature of education poses significant challenges for school directors, particularly in terms of performance evaluation and accountability. Metrics such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, and university placements provide valuable insights, but they do not fully capture the broader impact of education on students' critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. Consequently, directors must balance the need for measurable outcomes with a holistic understanding of their school's mission and values.

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In addition to being intangible, the outcomes of education often unfold over an extended period. This temporal aspect sets education apart from sectors like retail or technology, where the success of a product or service can be assessed almost immediately. For school directors, this means that the impact of their decisions may not be fully realized until years later, requiring them to adopt a long-term perspective in their planning and management.

For instance, investments in teacher professional development or curriculum innovation may take several years to translate into improved student outcomes. This long-term focus necessitates patience, persistence, and a willingness to navigate uncertainty, as directors work to create sustainable improvements in their schools. As Fullan (2011) emphasizes, successful educational leaders must be "system thinkers" who understand the interconnectedness of their decisions and their implications for the future.

Another unique feature of education is the centrality of relationships in achieving organizational goals. Unlike industries that prioritize processes or technologies, education depends heavily on the interactions between teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. These relationships form the foundation of the learning process, influencing everything from classroom dynamics to school culture.

For school directors, managing these relationships requires strong interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. Directors must foster a positive and inclusive environment where teachers feel supported, students feel valued, and parents feel engaged. This relational aspect of education aligns with servant leadership principles, which emphasize empathy, collaboration, and the prioritization of others' needs (Greenleaf, 2002). Directors who adopt this approach are better equipped to build trust, resolve conflicts, and inspire collective commitment to the school's mission.

The role of a school director is inherently multi-faceted, encompassing academic leadership, operational management, and stakeholder engagement. Unlike corporate managers, who may specialize in specific areas such as finance or marketing, school directors are expected to oversee a wide range of functions. In Croatian public secondary schools, this includes implementing national curricula, managing budgets, coordinating staff development, and addressing the needs of students and parents.

This broad scope of responsibilities requires directors to be adaptable and resourceful, as they navigate the complexities of their roles. For example, directors must balance the immediate demands of day-to-day operations with the strategic goal of improving long-term educational outcomes. They must also act as mediators, reconciling the often-conflicting expectations of stakeholders such as government authorities, teachers, and families.

Education is inherently a values-driven sector, with a strong emphasis on equity, inclusion, and social responsibility. Unlike profit-oriented industries, where financial performance is a primary measure of success, schools are judged by their ability to foster positive societal change. This ethical dimension of education places additional responsibilities on school directors, who must ensure that their policies and practices reflect the principles of fairness, respect, and diversity.

In Croatia, the emphasis on equity is particularly significant, as public secondary schools aim to provide equal opportunities for students regardless of their socioeconomic background. Directors play a key role in addressing disparities by allocating resources effectively, supporting underprivileged students, and promoting inclusive practices. As Sahlberg (2015) notes in his analysis of Finland's education system, equity is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for achieving excellence in education.

While education shares some commonalities with other sectors, such as the need for effective leadership and resource management, its unique characteristics set it apart in several ways. For example, the manufacturing sector focuses on optimizing production processes to deliver high-quality goods efficiently. In contrast, education prioritizes personalized learning experiences, which require flexibility and adaptability rather than standardization.

Similarly, the healthcare sector shares education's focus on relationships and long-term outcomes, but it is often driven by quantifiable metrics such as patient recovery rates or treatment efficacy. Education, by comparison, operates within a more ambiguous framework, where success is influenced by subjective factors such as student motivation, teacher creativity, and community support.

The specific characteristics of education have significant implications for school directors in Croatia. First, the intangible and long-term nature of educational outcomes requires directors to adopt a strategic mindset, focusing on sustainable improvements rather than short-term gains. This includes investing in teacher development, fostering a positive school culture, and building partnerships with external stakeholders.

Second, the relational aspect of education highlights the importance of interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence in leadership. Directors must be effective communicators, empathetic listeners, and collaborative problem-solvers, as they navigate the complex web of relationships within their schools.

Finally, the ethical and social dimensions of education underscore the need for directors to act as moral leaders, promoting equity, inclusion, and social responsibility in their schools. By aligning their practices with these values, directors can create environments where all students have the opportunity to thrive.

The management of secondary schools is fundamentally shaped by the unique characteristics of education, including its intangible outcomes, extended time horizons, and reliance on relationships. These features distinguish education from other sectors and present both challenges and opportunities for school directors. For leaders in Croatian public secondary schools, understanding and embracing these characteristics is essential for navigating the complexities of their roles and achieving their institutions' goals. The next section will examine the pressures and influences that external stakeholder, such as parents, communities, and societal norms, exert on school management, drawing comparisons with stakeholder capitalism theories.

4.5. The Influence of External Pressures on Management

The management of secondary schools is significantly shaped by external pressures from a wide array of stakeholders, including parents, local communities, policymakers, and societal norms. These pressures influence decision-making, resource allocation, and overall institutional direction. For Croatian public secondary schools, external pressures often emerge in the form of parental expectations, community involvement, and regulatory compliance. This section explores how these pressures impact school management, compares them with theoretical frameworks such as stakeholder capitalism, and highlights the strategies school directors can employ to navigate these dynamics effectively.

Parents are among the most direct and influential stakeholders in secondary education. Their expectations often centre on the quality of teaching, the safety and well-being of their children, and the preparation of students for future academic and career success. In Croatia, as in many other countries, parents play an increasingly active role in school affairs, demanding transparency and accountability from school directors.

The influence of parents can manifest in various ways, from participation in parent-teacher associations to vocal advocacy for specific policies or practices. For example, parents may push for greater investment in extracurricular programs, updated facilities, or enhanced academic resources. Research by Epstein (2011) underscores the importance of school-family-community partnerships in improving student outcomes. For Croatian school directors, fostering constructive relationships with parents is essential for maintaining trust and aligning institutional goals with stakeholder expectations.

However, parental pressures can also create challenges for school management. Conflicts may arise when parental demands conflict with institutional policies or resource constraints. For instance, parents may advocate for increased funding for sports programs, while directors must prioritize core academic needs. Balancing these competing interests requires directors to engage parents in meaningful dialogue, providing clear explanations of their decisions and emphasizing the broader goals of the school.

Beyond parents, local communities exert significant influence on secondary schools. Communities often view schools as central to their social and economic development, placing high expectations on school directors to contribute to local well-being. In Croatia, community involvement in education is particularly relevant in rural areas, where schools serve as key hubs of social and cultural activity.

Community expectations may include the promotion of vocational training programs, partnerships with local businesses, and initiatives to address specific societal challenges, such as youth unemployment or social inequality. For example, a school in an economically disadvantaged region might face pressure to implement programs that prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce, while urban schools might be expected to emphasize pathways to higher education.

Engaging with community stakeholders requires school directors to adopt a participatory approach to management. This aligns with theories of stakeholder capitalism, which advocate for balancing the interests of all stakeholders to achieve sustainable outcomes (Freeman, 1984). Directors who actively involve community members in decision-making processes can foster a sense of shared ownership and enhance the school's reputation as a valuable community resource.

Regulatory compliance is another significant source of external pressure for public secondary schools. In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education establishes a comprehensive legal framework that governs key aspects of school operations, from curriculum content to teacher qualifications and performance evaluations. School directors are responsible for ensuring adherence to these regulations, which often involves navigating complex bureaucratic processes.

While regulatory frameworks provide consistency and accountability, they can also limit the flexibility of school directors to address local needs or implement innovative practices. For instance, national policies may mandate the use of standardized testing, which can detract from efforts to promote creative or student-centred learning approaches. Additionally, the administrative burden of compliance—such as completing reports or coordinating inspections—can divert directors' attention from instructional leadership and long-term planning.

Societal norms and cultural expectations also exert significant influence on school management. In Croatia, as in many other countries, education is seen as a means of preserving national identity and promoting cultural values. This societal perspective shapes curriculum content, teaching methods, and institutional priorities, often reflecting broader political and ideological trends.

For example, debates about the inclusion of civic education, ethics, or religious studies in school curricula are often driven by societal expectations about the role of education in shaping citizenship and moral values. Directors must navigate these debates carefully, balancing the need to comply with national policies with the expectations of their local communities and stakeholders.

In addition to cultural expectations, societal trends such as globalization and technological change influence the priorities of secondary schools. Parents and communities increasingly demand that schools prepare students for a globalized world, emphasizing skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication. Meeting these expectations requires directors to integrate global best practices into their schools while remaining sensitive to local cultural contexts.

Navigating external pressures requires school directors to adopt proactive and adaptive management strategies. One key approach is fostering transparent and inclusive communication with stakeholders. By engaging parents, community members, and policymakers in open dialogue, directors can build trust, address concerns, and align expectations with institutional goals.

Collaboration is another critical strategy. Directors can leverage partnerships with local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to address resource gaps and expand opportunities for students. For example, a director might collaborate with a local company to establish a vocational training program or seek funding from a philanthropic organization to support extracurricular activities.

Directors can also mitigate the impact of regulatory pressures by streamlining administrative processes and delegating tasks to specialized staff. This allows directors to focus on instructional leadership and strategic planning, rather than becoming

overwhelmed by compliance requirements. Additionally, directors can advocate for policy changes that align with the needs of their schools, contributing to broader discussions about educational reform.

Finally, directors must remain flexible and adaptable in their management practices. The dynamic nature of external pressures requires directors to anticipate and respond to changing stakeholder expectations, societal trends, and policy developments. This involves continuous professional development, as well as the ability to learn from global best practices and tailor them to the local context.

For Croatian public secondary school directors, the influence of external pressures underscores the importance of effective stakeholder engagement and strategic leadership. Directors must navigate a complex web of relationships with parents, communities, policymakers, and society at large, balancing competing interests while maintaining a focus on the school's mission and values. By adopting participatory and collaborative approaches to management, directors can enhance their ability to address external pressures constructively and position their schools for long-term success.

External pressures from parents, communities, and societal norms play a central role in shaping the management of secondary schools. These pressures present both challenges and opportunities for school directors, requiring them to balance stakeholder expectations with institutional priorities. For directors in Croatian public secondary schools, understanding and addressing these influences is critical for navigating the complexities of their roles and fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. The next section will examine the role of local and national policies in shaping educational management, focusing on their impact on decision-making, resource allocation, and institutional accountability.

4.6. Governance and Policy Influences on Public Secondary Schools

Governance and policy frameworks are critical in shaping the management of public secondary schools. These structures establish the rules, standards, and accountability mechanisms that school directors must navigate in their roles. In Croatia, public secondary education operates under a highly centralized system, defined by national laws and regulations such as the Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools) and the Zakon o srednjem školstvu (Law on Secondary Education). This section examines how governance and policy influences affect school management, focusing on decision-making, resource allocation, and institutional accountability. Additionally, it explores the broader implications of governance models and policy priorities for school directors in Croatia.

Croatia's public secondary schools are governed by a centralized system in which the Ministry of Science and Education oversees key aspects of school operations, including curriculum design, teacher recruitment, and funding distribution. This centralized framework ensures uniformity and equity across the education system, providing all students with access to standardized educational resources and opportunities regardless of their geographic or socioeconomic background.

The benefits of centralized governance are particularly evident in ensuring compliance with national educational goals and policies. For instance, the introduction of mandatory subjects such as civic education or digital literacy reflects broader societal priorities that are uniformly implemented across schools. This consistency enables students to receive comparable educational experiences, facilitating mobility within the education system and alignment with national standards.

However, centralized governance also imposes constraints on school directors, limiting their autonomy in decision-making. Directors must adhere to national policies and guidelines, often leaving little room for localized adaptation or innovation. For example, decisions regarding resource allocation, hiring, and infrastructure development typically require approval from higher authorities, delaying implementation and reducing directors' ability to respond to immediate needs.

Policies play a central role in shaping the decision-making processes of school directors. In Croatia, national policies dictate key aspects of school management, from curriculum content to teacher qualifications and evaluation criteria. While these policies ensure alignment with national education goals, they also create a rigid framework within which directors must operate.

For instance, the emphasis on standardized testing in Croatian secondary schools reflects a policy-driven focus on measurable outcomes. While standardized assessments provide valuable data on student performance and system-wide accountability, they can also narrow the scope of teaching and learning by prioritizing test preparation over holistic education. School directors are tasked with balancing these policy requirements with the broader mission of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and social-emotional development among students.

Additionally, policies related to teacher recruitment and professional development influence the quality of education delivered in schools. In Croatia, the centralization of teacher hiring processes ensures consistency in qualifications and standards but can limit directors' ability to select candidates who align with their school's unique needs and culture. Directors must navigate these constraints by fostering a supportive and collaborative environment for teachers, emphasizing professional growth within the parameters of national policies.

Governance and policy frameworks also play a decisive role in determining the allocation of financial resources to public secondary schools. In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education distributes funds based on factors such as enrolment numbers, regional demographics, and specific programmatic needs. This centralized funding model promotes equity, ensuring that schools in economically disadvantaged areas receive adequate support.

However, the limitations of centralized resource allocation are evident in the persistent funding gaps faced by many schools. Budgetary constraints often restrict directors' ability to invest in modern facilities, technology, and extracurricular programs. For example, while the national curriculum emphasizes the importance of digital literacy, many schools lack the infrastructure and equipment necessary to implement robust digital learning initiatives.

Financial policies also impact the flexibility of school directors to manage resources effectively. Strict procurement regulations and bureaucratic approval processes can delay projects or limit directors' ability to prioritize spending based on their school's specific needs. These constraints highlight the importance of financial management skills for school directors, who must navigate complex funding mechanisms while advocating for additional resources.

Governance and policy frameworks establish accountability mechanisms that hold school directors responsible for their institutions' performance. In Croatia, accountability is primarily enforced through inspections conducted by the Ministry of Science and Education and regional education authorities. These inspections evaluate compliance with national standards, including curriculum implementation, teacher performance, and student outcomes.

While accountability mechanisms are essential for ensuring quality and consistency in public education, they can also place significant pressure on school directors. The focus on compliance often requires directors to prioritize administrative tasks, such as preparing reports and coordinating inspections, over instructional leadership and strategic planning. This administrative burden underscores the need for directors to delegate operational tasks to specialized staff, enabling them to focus on broader institutional goals.

In addition to formal accountability measures, directors must navigate informal expectations from stakeholders such as parents, community members, and local government officials. These expectations often reflect diverse and sometimes conflicting priorities, requiring directors to balance compliance with national policies against responsiveness to local needs.

A comparison with other governance models provides valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of Croatia's centralized system. In countries with decentralized education systems, such as the United States and Canada, school directors have greater autonomy in decision-making, enabling them to adapt policies and practices to local contexts (Spring, 2021). However, decentralization can also lead to disparities in resources and educational outcomes, particularly in regions with limited funding or administrative capacity.

In contrast, highly centralized EU systems such as France share similarities with Croatia's governance model, emphasizing uniformity and equity. However, studies have shown that excessive centralization can stifle innovation and reduce the responsiveness of schools to local needs (Van Zanten & Maxwell, 2015). These findings highlight the importance of striking a balance between centralized oversight and localized flexibility, enabling school directors to address the unique challenges of their communities while maintaining alignment with national goals.

The governance and policy framework in Croatia present both opportunities and challenges for school directors. On the one hand, centralized oversight provides clear guidelines and ensures equity across the education system. On the other hand, the rigidity of these structures can limit directors' ability to innovate and adapt to local needs.

To navigate these challenges, Croatian school directors must adopt a proactive approach to policy implementation. This includes engaging with policymakers to provide feedback on the practical implications of policies and advocating for greater flexibility in areas such as resource allocation and teacher recruitment. Directors can also build partnerships with local organizations and businesses to supplement government funding and support innovative programs.

Additionally, directors must develop strong administrative and leadership skills to balance the demands of compliance with their broader responsibilities. By delegating operational tasks to qualified staff and focusing on strategic priorities, directors can enhance their effectiveness in managing their schools within the constraints of the governance system.

Governance and policy frameworks play a central role in shaping the management of public secondary schools, influencing decision-making, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms. While Croatia's centralized system promotes equity and consistency, it also imposes constraints on school directors, limiting their autonomy and flexibility. By adopting proactive strategies and leveraging partnerships, directors can navigate these challenges effectively and contribute to the long-term success of their schools. The final section of this chapter will provide an overview of the organizational structure of secondary education in Croatia, highlighting key data and trends that contextualize the role of school directors.

Statistical Overview of Secondary Education (2019–2023)

To understand the scale and scope of secondary education in Croatia, it is important to examine recent data on the number of schools, directors, and students. According to the Ministry of Science and Education:

Number of Schools: In 2023, there were approximately 370 secondary schools in Croatia, including gymnasiums, vocational schools, technical schools, and art schools. The distribution of schools reflects regional population densities, with urban areas hosting a larger concentration of institutions.

Number of Students: As of 2023, secondary schools served approximately 150,000 students nationwide. Enrolment trends indicate a steady decline over the past decade, attributed to demographic shifts such as declining birth rates and emigration.

Number of Directors: Each secondary school is managed by a director, resulting in approximately 370 directors nationwide. These directors are supported by administrative teams, including deputy directors and department heads, to ensure effective school operations.

These statistics underscore the critical role of school directors in overseeing a substantial portion of Croatia's education system, particularly in light of demographic challenges and evolving policy priorities.

The legal framework governing secondary education in Croatia is outlined in key legislation, including:

- Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools): This law establishes the foundation for the organization and management of schools, defining the roles of directors, teachers, and other stakeholders. It also sets standards for curriculum delivery, teacher certification, and student assessment.

- Zakon o srednjem školstvu (Law on Secondary Education): This law provides specific guidelines for secondary schools, including their classification, governance structures, and funding mechanisms. It also outlines the procedures for monitoring and evaluating school performance.

The Ministry of Science and Education conducts regular inspections to ensure compliance with national standards. These inspections evaluate curriculum implementation, resource utilization, and stakeholder satisfaction, providing accountability and identifying areas for improvement.

The certification and ongoing professional development of teachers are regulated by the Ministry, ensuring consistency in teaching quality across schools. Directors play a key role in facilitating professional development programs and fostering a culture of continuous learning among their staff.

The organizational structure of secondary education in Croatia faces several challenges, including:

- Demographic Decline: The decreasing number of students poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of secondary schools, particularly in rural areas. Directors must address the implications of declining enrolment, such as reduced funding and the potential closure of schools.

- Resource Constraints: Limited budgets restrict the ability of schools to invest in modern infrastructure, technology, and extracurricular programs, affecting the quality of education delivered.

- Centralized Decision-Making: The highly centralized governance model limits the autonomy of directors to adapt policies and practices to local needs, hindering innovation and responsiveness.

Despite these challenges, recent trends indicate a growing emphasis on digitalization, inclusivity, and alignment with European educational standards. Initiatives such as the integration of digital tools and the promotion of inclusive education reflect Croatia's commitment to modernizing its secondary education system.

The organizational structure of secondary education in Croatia has significant implications for school directors. As key leaders within this system, directors must navigate the complexities of centralized governance while addressing the unique needs of their schools. This requires a combination of strategic planning, resource management, and stakeholder engagement.

To enhance their effectiveness, directors can advocate for greater flexibility within the governance framework, enabling them to implement localized solutions and innovative practices. They can also leverage partnerships with local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations to address resource constraints and expand opportunities for students.

The organizational structure of secondary education in Croatia provides a comprehensive framework for governance, administration, and service delivery. While the centralized system ensures equity and consistency, it also presents challenges related to resource allocation, decision-making autonomy, and demographic trends. For school directors, understanding this structure is essential for navigating their roles effectively and contributing to the long-term success of their schools. This chapter has explored the foundational elements of management in public secondary education, setting the stage for a more focused examination of the specific challenges and opportunities faced by directors in Croatia.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the multifaceted role of school directors in the effective management of public secondary schools in Croatia, contextualized within broader educational and managerial frameworks. By exploring foundational management principles, global education systems, governance structures, and the specific challenges of Croatian secondary education, the discussion has highlighted the complexities directors face in balancing centralized policies, resource constraints, and diverse stakeholder expectations.

The analysis underscored the critical interplay between leadership, accountability, and adaptability in navigating the unique characteristics of education as a values-driven, long-term endeavor. For Croatian school directors, leveraging strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and innovative practices within the constraints of the governance framework remains vital for fostering sustainable and equitable educational outcomes. This chapter sets the foundation for subsequent discussions on the specificities of management in secondary education and strategies for addressing its evolving challenges.

CHAPTER V:

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH

5.1   Introduction

This research focuses on the role of school directors in the effective management of secondary schools in Croatia, with particular emphasis on the challenges they face, the competencies they require, and the strategies they implement to address these challenges. According to the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, Article 125, in effect since 2008, the role of school directors in Croatia is clearly defined. They are responsible for the managerial and professional leadership of the institution, ensuring that the school operates in compliance with legislative regulations, overseeing teaching quality, and managing both staff and school operations. School directors must attend class visits, analyze teachers' performance and students' achievements, evaluate teaching quality, ensure professional development, and lead various school councils and boards.

The doctoral dissertation aims to investigate how the professional competencies of school directors influence the effective management of secondary schools. The study seeks to analyze the specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that school directors possess and how these contribute to the improvement of school management, ultimately enhancing the quality of education. The research also identifies which tasks within the director's scope require further improvements and professional development, with the goal of positioning school directors as competent leaders and effective managers.

The research objectives are as follows:

To improve the professional learning and education of school directors as part of continuous professional development (CPD).

To examine communication and motivational models in practice.

To critically assess current practices in the work of school directors.

The education of school directors directly impacts their competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, contributing to the more effective realization of the institution's goals. In the context of secondary schools, it is essential to consider elements such as innovative approaches to school management, human resource management, and the development of a collaborative school culture. Leadership styles play a key role in determining relationships within the school and in managing the organization itself.

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. A survey was conducted with 73 school directors from secondary schools across Croatia to gather their perspectives on the level of autonomy they have, their involvement in curriculum development, and the strategies they use to foster communication and collaboration within and beyond the school environment. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of measurable data as well as in-depth insights into the school directors' experiences and leadership practices.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted to identify trends and patterns in the responses, while qualitative analysis focused on understanding the participants' views on their leadership roles. Descriptive statistics were applied to quantify the responses, and thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and insights from the open-ended questions.

The research was carried out over several months, ensuring that ethical standards were strictly adhered to. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to understanding the role of school directors in the management

of secondary schools and offer practical recommendations for enhancing their autonomy and leadership effectiveness in Croatia.

The research aims to answer key questions regarding the professional competencies required by school directors and how these competencies impact the overall management of schools. It also seeks to identify areas where professional development is needed to empower school directors and help them overcome the challenges they face in their leadership roles. Ultimately, this study intends to provide valuable insights that will enhance the quality of education and student outcomes by improving the management practices of secondary schools in Croatia.

5.2. Research methodology

Studies in educational leadership have consistently highlighted the crucial role of school principals in shaping the culture, effectiveness, and overall success of educational institutions. Research spanning various international contexts (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbech, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 2002) confirms that the leadership style of a principal significantly influences the school's climate, the quality of education, and student outcomes. Positive leadership impacts the fostering of teamwork, the establishment of a productive work environment, and the achievement of collective goals. Research also suggests that principals contribute to the success of their schools by crafting clear visions, communicating effectively, and promoting professional development among all staff members.

Further research by Schmidt-Davies and Bottoms (2011) on school performance found that aligning goals between teachers and principals, as well as fostering collaboration, are key to school success. Robbins (2013) cautioned, however, that ineffective leadership often leads to confusion, poor communication, and diminished

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interpersonal relationships, ultimately affecting the quality of the institution. Numerous scholars argue that competent leadership and a positive working relationship between principals and staff are vital for achieving high levels of success and operational efficiency within educational settings (Domović, 2003; Harris et al., 2003; Fullan, 2008).

The body of literature exploring school leadership is extensive. Some researchers (Armstrong, 2001; Andevski et al., 2012) have examined the personal traits and characteristics of effective school leaders. Others (Hous & Aditya, 1997; Elmore, 2000) have focused on different leadership strategies and models, while some have investigated the essential competencies that effective school leaders must possess (Hoyle et al., 1998; Goleman et al., 2002; Pagon et al., 2008). In Croatia, researchers have explored the competencies required for effective school leadership (Resman, 2001; Staničić, 2003; Fegeš & Kovač, 2016), emphasizing the need for school leaders to possess a deep understanding of educational management, a clear vision, and the ability to drive institutional success.

Despite the wealth of research on school leadership, there remains a gap in studies focused on early childhood and preschool education. This gap suggests a need for further exploration of how leadership functions in the context of preschool settings, which operate with unique challenges compared to primary and secondary schools. Recognizing this, the present study shifts its focus to preschool principals, aiming to provide insights into educational leadership at this level. By examining self-assessments from key stakeholders—including principals, teachers, and educational staff—this research seeks to gather objective data on the perceived professional competence of preschool leaders. Self-assessment is preferred over staff evaluations, which might be influenced by subjectivity or lack of familiarity with certain aspects of leadership practice.

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This study assumes that the professional competencies of preschool leaders, as reflected in their behaviour and interpersonal relationships, have a direct impact on the quality of their institutions. The aim is to assess how principals perceive their own competence, leadership style, and the overall quality of their educational environments.

5.3. Research approach and strategy

This study on the role of school directors in Croatia adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the professional competencies and leadership strategies employed by secondary school directors. The mixed-methods design allows for a nuanced exploration of the directors' experiences, challenges, and leadership practices, offering both measurable data and in-depth qualitative insights into their roles.

The research utilizes a descriptive approach to capture the lived experiences of school directors. Descriptive research is particularly effective for gathering detailed information about individuals' attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and perceptions, which are central to understanding the complexities of school management (Doyle et al., 2020). Through this approach, the study aims to identify and compare key aspects of school leadership, including the communication and motivational models employed by directors and the effectiveness of their strategies in addressing institutional challenges.

The research design was structured around surveys and in-depth interviews. A quantitative survey was distributed to 73 school directors across Croatia, incorporating both closed and open-ended questions. This allows for the collection of numerical data that reveals patterns and trends regarding leadership practices, school autonomy, and involvement in decision-making processes, while also capturing qualitative feedback that provides deeper insights into the directors' strategies and perceptions. The combination of

closed-ended questions and open-ended responses ensures a well-rounded exploration of the research topics.

The quantitative analysis of the survey data employs descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns in the responses, offering an overview of the key challenges school directors face and their approaches to managing school operations. For the qualitative component, thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses to uncover recurring themes and insights related to leadership practices, professional competencies, and the development of school culture. This analysis provides a rich context to understand how directors perceive their roles and the impact of their leadership on school effectiveness.

The study is conducted over several months, adhering to ethical guidelines by ensuring informed consent from all participants and maintaining confidentiality throughout the research process. The mixed-methods approach facilitates a balanced investigation, offering both a broad overview through quantitative analysis and an in-depth exploration through qualitative insights, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings.

Ultimately, the research seeks to address key questions regarding the professional competencies required by school directors, how these competencies influence the overall management of secondary schools, and what areas need further development to enhance their leadership effectiveness. The findings are expected to provide actionable recommendations that will contribute to improving the management practices of secondary schools in Croatia, empowering school directors to overcome challenges and drive positive change in their institutions.

5.4. Study population and sampling

The population for this study consists of **secondary school directors in Croatia**, who are responsible for the overall management and leadership of their respective institutions. In accordance with the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Article 125), school directors are tasked with managerial and professional leadership, overseeing teaching quality, staff management, and ensuring that schools operate in compliance with legislative regulations. These responsibilities provide an ideal context for examining how directors' professional competencies impact the effective management of secondary schools.

The target population includes **73 school directors** from secondary schools across Croatia. This group was selected to ensure a comprehensive representation of school leadership practices in the country. The directors were chosen from a diverse set of schools, including **public** and **private** institutions, to capture a wide range of experiences and management styles. The schools included in the study vary in size, geographic location, and socio-economic background, ensuring that the sample reflects the diversity of secondary education institutions in Croatia.

For the purpose of **sampling**, a **non-probability, purposive sampling method** was employed. This technique was selected to ensure that the participants possess the relevant expertise and experience to provide valuable insights into the role of school directors in the management of secondary schools. Purposive sampling allows for the intentional selection of individuals who can provide rich, detailed, and context-specific data on the research topic. The inclusion criteria for school directors were as follows:

Position: Only individuals currently serving as school directors in secondary schools across Croatia were eligible to participate.

Experience: Directors with a minimum of one year in their current role were included to ensure they had sufficient experience to provide informed perspectives on the challenges and strategies related to school management.

Diversity of Schools: A mix of school types and dormitories (vocational, and general secondary schools, high schools) was included to capture a range of management experiences across different school environments.

The sample size of 73 directors was determined based on the **feasibility** of the research and the need to obtain a sufficient quantity of data while ensuring the quality and depth of insights. This sample size is expected to provide a balanced representation of secondary school leadership in Croatia, ensuring that the findings are both reliable and reflective of the broader educational landscape.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the study incorporated both closed and open-ended survey questions, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data will provide a broad understanding of trends and patterns, while the qualitative responses will offer in-depth perspectives on leadership practices and challenges faced by school directors.

The sampling procedure was designed to ensure that the study population includes directors with a diverse range of professional experiences, leadership styles, and institutional contexts. This diversity enhances the generalizability of the findings and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the role of school directors in the effective management of secondary schools in Croatia.

5.5. Data collection, methods and instruments

For this doctoral research on the Role of School Directors in the Effective Management of Secondary Schools in Croatia, a standardized, structured survey was

employed as the primary method for data collection. The survey was designed to explore a comprehensive range of topics related to the work of school directors, incorporating both existing literature on educational leadership and insights from relevant international programs. The questionnaire consisted of **30 questions**, covering **14 key areas**, which were specifically chosen to understand the challenges faced by school directors and identify potential solutions. These areas include:

1. **Status of School Directors in the Republic of Croatia**

2. **Competence Profile of School Directors (Scope of Work)**

3. **Leadership Styles of School Directors**

4. **Administrative and Financial Operations of the School**

5. **School Organization**

6. **Human Resources Management**

7. **Motivation**

8. **Communication Skills and Relationships**

9. **School Culture and School Atmosphere**

10. **Professional Development of School Directors**

11. **Managing Change**

12. **School Development (Vision, Mission, Director Autonomy, Projects, Mobility, Well-being, Strategies)**

13. **Ensuring Quality in Secondary Schools through Effective Management and Leadership**

The questions in the survey were carefully constructed to include **closed-ended**, **open-ended**, and **Likert-type questions**, allowing for both **quantitative data** and **qualitative insights** into the directors' leadership styles, competencies, and the challenges they face. The survey aimed to gather data on participants' demographic backgrounds,

leadership approaches, the challenges encountered, and their strategies for effective school management.

The design of the survey instrument was inspired by established studies and best practices in educational leadership, particularly **Gallup's Employee Engagement Survey**: *Ask the Right Questions with the Q12® Survey*. Gallup's model was utilized due to its proven effectiveness in measuring engagement and leadership outcomes across various sectors, including education. For this research, the survey was adapted to better fit the context of school leadership in Croatia. The structure of the Gallup Q12® served as a model, ensuring that the questions were effective in gauging key aspects of school management, leadership engagement, and the school directors' roles in fostering a positive work environment.

The process of creating the survey followed these steps:

1.   **Survey Development in Line with Research Objectives**: The first step involved crafting the questionnaire to align with the research objectives and theoretical framework of the doctoral dissertation. It was important that the questions were relevant, clearly defined, and in line with the research hypotheses and goals.

2.   **Review by Supervisor and Committee**: Once the survey was developed, it was sent for review to the dissertation supervisor, who provided feedback on improving the clarity and structure of the questions. In some cases, the wider research committee, including methodology experts, also reviewed the survey to ensure its validity and reliability.

The final instrument was customized to the Croatian context, integrating theoretical frameworks from **ETUCE (2008)**, the **United Nations (2014)**, and studies by **Jagiellonian University in Krakow** and the **University of Oslo (2015)**. Additionally, global best practices, such as the **"Leadership Academy"** in Sweden and **"Teach Like a Champion"**

in the United States, were also consulted and incorporated into the design, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of international leadership strategies.

The survey was distributed electronically to a random sample of 73 secondary school directors across Croatia, ensuring broad representation from diverse types of secondary schools. The use of electronic distribution facilitated efficient data collection and accessibility for participants. The data collection process spanned four months (July to October 2022), providing ample time for follow-up and ensuring a robust response rate.

Follow-up reminders were sent to participants to encourage participation and improve the quality of responses. Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed reflections on their leadership practices, challenges, and solutions. The responses to these questions were thematically analysed, helping to identify patterns and emerging themes that enriched the interpretation of the quantitative data obtained from closed-ended and Likert-type questions.

In addition to the survey, relevant documentation, such as school reports, educational policies, and regulations, was reviewed to contextualize the survey findings and validate the data. These documents provided further insights into the operational framework in which Croatian school directors operate and the national policies that affect their leadership.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, along with the use of a well-structured survey instrument, enabled an in-depth exploration of the role of school directors in the effective management of secondary schools. By addressing these 14 key areas, this research aims to offer valuable insights into the competencies required for effective school leadership, the challenges school directors face, and the strategies they employ to ensure quality education and manage change. The integration of global examples, such as the "Leadership Academy" in Sweden and "Change School" in the

Netherlands, further enhances the study by showing how international strategies can be adapted to the local context in Croatia.

5.6. Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of the survey used in this doctoral research, titled **The Role of School Directors in the Effective Management of Secondary Schools**, were key to ensuring the robustness and accuracy of the study's findings.

Validity:

The **content validity** of the survey was ensured through a thorough review and validation process. Initially, the survey instrument was crafted in alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework of the dissertation. To ensure the questions were relevant and accurately reflected the topic under investigation, the survey was reviewed by the **research supervisor**. This review process provided expert feedback on the clarity, alignment, and relevance of each question within the context of the research aims.

Furthermore, the survey was shared with **five school directors** from secondary schools in Croatia, who provided feedback on whether the questions were appropriately framed and whether they accurately addressed the key areas of the study. This feedback allowed for adjustments to be made to ensure that the questions captured the essence of the challenges faced by school directors in their day-to-day roles, as well as their leadership practices, competencies, and strategies for effective school management.

In addition to content validation, the **construct validity** was ensured by referencing established theoretical frameworks and best practices in educational leadership. The survey incorporated elements from globally recognized programs and instruments, such as Gallup's **Employee Engagement Survey (Q12®)** and international leadership programs like the **"Leadership Academy"** in Sweden. These frameworks were adapted to the

Croatian educational context, ensuring that the survey measured the intended constructs related to school leadership, management practices, and school improvement.

Reliability:

To assess the **reliability** of the survey, a **pilot test** was conducted with **five participants**. This pilot test was crucial for evaluating two key aspects:

1. **Participants' Understanding of the Questions**: The pilot testing ensured that the questions were clear, comprehensible, and did not confuse or mislead participants. Feedback from the pilot test participants helped refine the wording and structure of the questions, making sure they were relevant and easily understood by the respondents.

2. **Data Collection Format**: The pilot test also allowed for the verification that the survey was capturing data in the correct format, ensuring that the response types (closed-ended, open-ended, and Likert-type) were functioning as intended and that the data could be processed effectively.

The **internal consistency** of the survey was also a key consideration. The questions were designed to measure related aspects of school leadership and management. The use of Likert-scale questions allowed for statistical analysis of consistency across the responses, ensuring that the data collected was reliable for drawing conclusions about the challenges and strategies of school directors.

Together, these steps of validation and reliability testing contributed to the robustness of the survey instrument, ensuring that it effectively captured the necessary data for analyzing the role of school directors in the effective management of secondary schools in Croatia.

5.7. Ethical considerations

Prior to commencing the research on "The Role of School Directors in the Effective Management of Secondary Schools," all necessary preparatory steps were completed, including the submission of the concept paper, literature review, and research proposal. Each of these steps received approval from the researcher's mentor. Additionally, the researcher conducted a thorough review to ensure that this topic had not been extensively studied by other scholars.

Participants were duly informed about the nature and purpose of the study, with an emphasis that the data collected would be used exclusively for academic purposes. To uphold ethical standards, participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and respondents had the option to withdraw from the research at any point without facing any penalties.

No incentives were offered for participation, and no penalties were imposed for discontinuation. The anonymity and confidentiality of all survey respondents were strictly maintained throughout the research process, ensuring their personal information and responses remained secure at all times.

5.8. Empirical data analysis

Organizational Structure of the Doctoral Research

Challenges and potential solutions in the work of school directors and management of educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia from the perspective of the secondary school directors: Experiential insights and suggestions for improvement.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

⬇

1. Status of School Directors in the Republic of Croatia

Challenge 1: Limited legal framework for independent decision-making by school directors.

Solution: Increase the autonomy of school directors.

Challenge 2: Low social status and insufficient recognition of efforts invested.

Solution: Change the law and legal regulations (The Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools of the Republic of Croatia)

Challenge 3: Inadequate financial compensation compared to responsibilities.

Solution: Revise the salary system.

⬇

2. Competence Profile of School Directors (Scope of Work)

Challenge 1: Overload of administrative tasks instead of pedagogical leadership.

Solution: Delegate administrative tasks to support staff.

Challenge 2: Lack of specific managerial skills.

Solution: Organize mandatory training and professional development programs.

Challenge 3: Unclear definition of the scope of work.

Solution: Clearly define the competence profile of school directors.

3. Leadership Styles of School DIrectors

Challenge 1: Dominance of an autocratic leadership style.

Solution: Promote participative leadership styles.

Challenge 2: Lack of flexibility in leadership approach.

Solution: Introduce training on situational leadership.

Challenge 3: Insufficient recognition of different personal styles of teachers and students.

Solution: Develop an individualized approach to leadership.

4. Administrative and Financial Operations of the School

Challenge 1: Limited resources and budget.

Solution: Apply for national and EU funds for additional project financing within the school.

Challenge 2: Complicated administrative processes.

Solution: Digitize administrative processes to reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency.

Challenge 3: Lack of financial transparency.

Solution: Develop a financial reporting system for the school's operations that is accessible to all stakeholders.

5. School Organization

Challenge 1: Inflexible organizational structure.

Solution: Introduce decentralized management models.

Challenge 2: External influence on the school's organization.

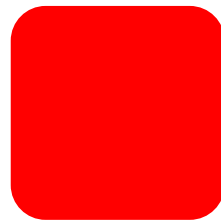**Solution**: Develop strong communication with external stakeholders .

Challenge 3: Insufficient adaptation to changes.

Solution: Develop a system for continuous evaluation of the school's organizational needs and ensure structural flexibility .

6. Human Resources Management

Challenge 1: Insufficient investment in staff development.

 Solution: Introduce annual evaluations (assessments) before making professional development plans for teachers and administrative staff.

Challenge 2: Teacher motivation issues – lack of motivation among teaching staff.

Solution: Develop reward and recognition systems for excellent performance in teaching and working with students.

Challenge 3: Inadequate selection and recruitment of new staff.

Solution: Introduce more professional selection procedures for job candidates.

Challenge 4: High teacher turnover rate.

 Solution: Increase job stability through permanent contracts and improve working conditions in schools.

Challenge 5: Conflicts among teaching staff.

Solution: Organize workshops for the development of communication and interpersonal skills.

7. Motivation

Challenge 1: Decreased motivation of teachers.

Solution: Implement task rotation and allow teachers to participate in innovative projects within the school.

Challenge 2: Lack of external motivation and recognition.

Solution: Organize competitions and awards for teachers and school directors who achieve outstanding results in their work.

Challenge 3: Lack of motivation among school directors.

Solution: Develop mentoring programs for new school directors, providing support.

8. Communication Skills and Relationships

Challenge 1: Poor communication within the school.

Solution: Organize workshops to develop communication skills among staff .

Challenge 2: Insufficient communication with parents.

Solution: Implement regular informational meetings and digital communication tools for communication with parents.

Challenge 3: Conflicts among staff.

Solution: Implement mediation programs for conflict resolution and encourage open communication among staff.

9. School Culture and School Atmosphere

Challenge 1: Insufficient involvement of all stakeholders in shaping the school culture.

Solution: Organize joint activities for students, parents, and teachers that promote unity and positive values.

Challenge 2: Passive atmosphere in the school.

Solution: Encourage innovative and creative projects led by students and teachers together.

Challenge 3: Lack of identity and recognition of the school.

Solution: Develop specific school projects and activities that contribute to the school's identity and recognition in the local community .

10. Professional training for School Directors

Challenge 1: Limited access to quality professional development trainings programs.

Solution: Increase the availability of professional programs focused on school directors.

Challenge 2: Lack of opportunities for experience exchange with other school directors.

Solution: Organize annual conferences and meetings for school directors to exchange experiences and best practices.

Challenge 3: Workload overload, preventing professional development.

Solution: Introduce the position of deputy school director to allow school directors more time for professional development and to manage their responsibilities more effectively.

11. Professional Development of School Directors

Challenge 1: Lack of ongoing support and professional development programs for school directors.
Solution: Establish regular professional development programs in collaboration with educational institutions and experts.

Challenge 2: Limited resources and finances for additional training.
Solution: Secure funding from national and EU sources for school directors' professional development.

Challenge 3: Low awareness of the importance of lifelong learning among school directors.
Solution: Encourage school directors to actively participate in lifelong learning programs.

12. Managing Change

Challenge 1: Resistance to change from teaching staff and parents.
Solution: Provide training for teaching staff to reduce resistance to change.

Challenge 2: Insufficient preparedness of school directors for managing complex changes.
Solution: Organize additional workshops for school directors on managing change and crisis situations.

Challenge 3: Lack of a clear vision and strategy for implementing change.
Solution: Develop clear plans and strategies for implementing changes, including phased implementation and tracking results.

13. School Development - Mission and Vision

Challenge 1: Lack of a clearly defined mission and vision for the school.

Solution: Work collaboratively to define the school's vision and mission by involving all staff, students, and parents.

Challenge 2: Limited autonomy for school directors in making key decisions due to administrative constraints.

Solution: Increase the autonomy of school directors through changes in legal frameworks and more responsibility in school management.

Challenge 3: Insufficient school participation in international EU projects and mobility opportunities.

Solution: Encourage school participation in international projects, exchanges, and mobility programs to improve the well-being of students and teachers and enhance the educational process.

14. Quality Assurance in Secondary School

Challenge 1: Ineffective school management impacting quality assurance.

Solution: Provide targeted training for school directors in strategic management and quality assurance practices, focusing on skills that directly impact educational outcomes.

Challenge 2: Insufficient qualifications and expertise among teachers, affecting teaching quality.

Solution: Strengthen hiring criteria and introduce continuous skill assessments to ensure that all teachers meet high qualification standards.

Challenge 3: Limited professional development opportunities for both teachers and school directors, hindering quality improvements.

Solution: Establish mandatory, regular professional development programs for teachers and directors, funded through national and EU resources.

Empirical Results

This study aimed to examine the role of **school directors of secondary schools** in the effective management of institutions in the Republic of Croatia. While comparative data were collected from Finland, Iceland, Scotland, and Bulgaria, the focus of this paper is specifically on Croatian school directors, in alignment with the study's defined scope and objectives. The analysis employed **descriptive statistics** and a **descriptive method** for interpreting the results, ensuring a clear and structured understanding of the collected data.

Participant Demographics

The survey was conducted anonymously, with **73 school directors of secondary schools** participating voluntarily. Of **N= 73**, **52.1% were women**, and **47.9% were men**. Regarding educational qualifications:

- **84.9%** of participants held a **Master's degree**.

- The remaining **15.1%** had higher qualifications, such as a **Master of Science, Doctorate, or Postdoctoral degrees**.

Notably, none of the participants had only a bachelor-level qualification (baccalaureate), which reflects the high educational standards required for this role in Croatia.

Representation by School Type

The directors represented a diverse range of secondary school types:

- **31.9%** managed mixed schools,

- **29.2%** were from vocational four- or five-year schools,

- **18.1%** served as directors of gymnasiums,

- **8.3%** oversaw private gymnasiums, and

- The remaining directors managed art schools and student residences.

Importantly, **97.3%** of the participants were directors of **state schools**. This is a significant finding, as Croatian national legislation primarily governs state secondary schools, offering no special exemptions or privileges for private institutions.

Professional Experience

The survey data revealed significant variations in professional experience among school directors:

- Over **51%** of respondents were serving their **second or third five-year term**, indicating a high level of expertise in school management.

- **39.7%** were in their **first five-year term**, representing a younger cohort of directors likely encountering the challenges of school leadership for the first time.

These findings reflect both a wealth of experience in the field and an emerging generation of school directors adapting to the demands of the role.

Visual Representation of Data

The key findings derived from the survey are visually represented in the graphs that follow, providing a comprehensive and clear depiction of the statistical data.

Conclusion

This study highlights the diverse profiles and experiences of directors of secondary schools in Croatia. The findings emphasize the directors' strong educational qualifications and varying levels of professional experience, which collectively shape their capacity to manage schools effectively. The predominance of directors from state schools underscores the applicability of national policies to the majority of secondary institutions, ensuring a consistent framework for governance and management.
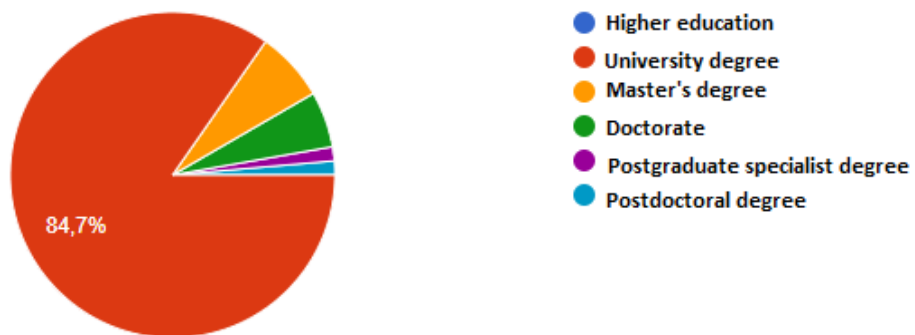
The combination of experienced leaders and newer directors creates an opportunity to foster mentorship and professional development, addressing the unique challenges faced by both groups. Future initiatives should focus on supporting directors in their roles through tailored training programs, especially for those in their first term, and encouraging collaborative networks to share best practices across school types.

These results provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to enhance the effectiveness of secondary school management in Croatia, paving the way for further research and strategic improvements in leadership practices.
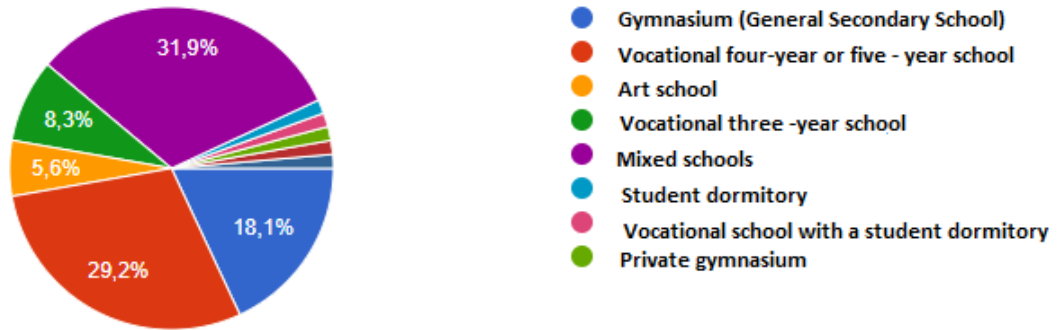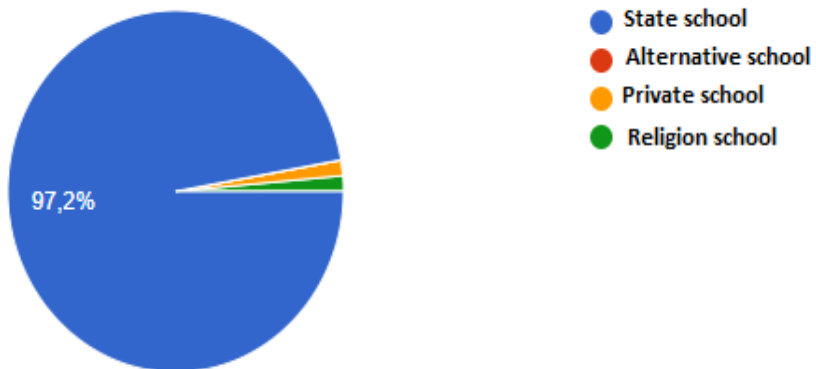
1. THE GENDER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL DIRECTORS
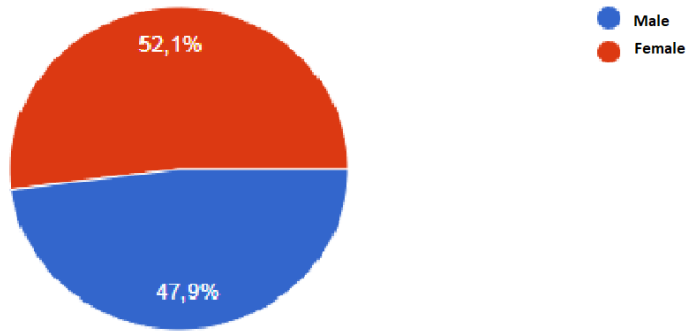
2. LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED AND ATTAINMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS ACQUIRED

3. REPRESENTATION BY SCHOOL TYPE

- Gymnasium (General Secondary School)
- Vocational four-year or five - year school
- Art school
- Vocational three -year school
- Mixed schools
- Student dormitory
- Vocational school with a student dormitory
- Private gymnasium

31,9%
8,3%
5,6%
18,1%
29,2%

4. REPRESENTATION BY SCHOOL OWNERSHIP

- State school
- Alternative school
- Private school
- Religion school

97,2%

5. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL DIRECTORS
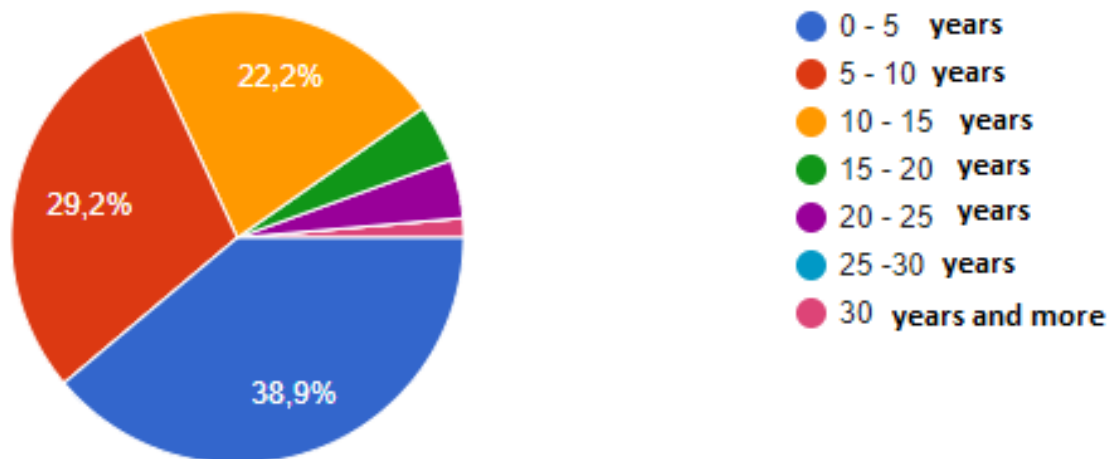
Research Questions, Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this research, aimed at contributing to the doctoral thesis titled *The Role of School Directors in the Effective Management of Secondary Schools*, was to examine the role of school directors in the overall management and leadership of secondary schools. The research is grounded in **14 key areas** that define the scope of the school director's responsibilities and is based on a questionnaire containing **30 questions**. This study sought to analyze how school directors manage various aspects of their schools, offering potential solutions and recommendations to improve their practices, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the position of school directors within the educational system.

The questionnaire was designed to gather detailed information to support the research. It was anonymous and voluntary, with each participant required to provide only

one response per question. The findings obtained through the responses were strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. The importance of the participants' contributions cannot be overstated, as their experiences, opinions, and insights provide a deeper understanding of the professional role of school directors and the breadth of their responsibilities within secondary schools.

School directors face numerous challenges in the day-to-day management of their institutions, particularly with the rapid changes in educational policies, technological advancements, and increasing demands from parents, students, and teachers. The role of the school director is essential for the smooth and efficient operation of a school, as the director is responsible for overseeing a variety of areas, all aimed at achieving high educational standards.

One of the primary responsibilities of a school director is to maintain high pedagogical standards. This involves supporting teachers, monitoring the quality of instruction, and encouraging innovation and professional development among the staff. The director must ensure that the teaching staff is continuously supported in their work and that educational standards are met.

In addition to pedagogical leadership, the school director also handles the administrative and financial management of the school. This includes organizing the daily schedule, overseeing the school's financial operations, and ensuring that the physical infrastructure of the school is well-maintained and conducive to learning. These administrative duties are essential for ensuring the effective functioning of the school on a daily basis.

Furthermore, school directors are tasked with strategic planning and the long-term development of the school. They define the school's vision and mission, set strategic goals, and lead initiatives aimed at improving school performance. This also involves planning

projects, fostering collaboration with local communities and external partners, and implementing changes that will enhance the school's operations and environment.

Human resource management is another critical area of responsibility. School directors are in charge of recruiting, training, and supporting the professional development of both teaching and administrative staff. They also ensure that the staff works efficiently as a team, encouraging cooperation and fostering a positive work environment.

The role of the school director extends beyond administrative and educational duties, as they must also ensure that the students have a safe and supportive environment in which to learn. This includes promoting inclusion, resolving disciplinary issues, and creating a positive school culture that supports effective teaching and learning. The school director must also engage with parents and the wider community to ensure that the school receives the necessary support and resources while also promoting the school's role within the broader social context.

Ultimately, the school director is a central figure within the school, balancing educational objectives, staff management, external relationships, and the welfare of students. Their leadership directly impacts the success of the school, as they play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience for students, supporting the professional growth of staff, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and development of the institution.

The research findings underline the multifaceted nature of the school director's role and highlight the ongoing need for effective leadership, strategic planning, and professional development to support school directors in their work. By improving their position and providing necessary resources, the effectiveness of school management and the overall quality of education can be enhanced.

The questionnaire designed for the *School Director for Secondary Schools* is structured around 14 key areas that clearly outline the specific responsibilities and challenges faced by school directors. These areas were carefully selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved in managing secondary schools, highlighting both the broader strategic responsibilities and the day-to-day operational challenges.

The 14 key areas focus on various aspects of school management, each addressing the complex tasks school directors handle on a daily basis. These areas are as follows:

1.   **Status of School Directors in the Republic of Croatia**: This area explores the legal framework, autonomy, social recognition, and financial compensation of school directors. It examines the challenges related to limited decision-making autonomy and low social recognition and provides solutions for increasing their autonomy and improving their status in the education system.

2.   **Competence Profile of School Directors (Scope of Work)**: This area defines the scope of work for school directors, addressing challenges such as the overload of administrative tasks and the lack of specific managerial skills. It emphasizes the need for clearly defined competence profiles and targeted professional development to support directors in their leadership roles.

3.   **Leadership Styles of School Directors**: Leadership plays a crucial role in school management. This area addresses the dominance of autocratic leadership styles, the lack of flexibility in adapting leadership approaches, and the need for individualized leadership strategies that cater to the diverse needs of staff and students.

4.   **Administrative and Financial Operations of the School**: This area focuses on the administrative and financial aspects of school management. It highlights challenges like limited resources, complicated administrative processes, and financial

transparency. Solutions include applying for additional funding, digitizing administrative tasks, and improving financial reporting systems.

5.   **School Organization**: School organization encompasses the structural aspects of the institution, including decision-making processes and adaptability to changes. It addresses challenges like inflexible organizational structures and external influences on the school. The solutions suggest introducing decentralized management models and improving communication with external stakeholders.

6.   **Human Resources Management**: This area covers the recruitment, development, and motivation of school staff. It addresses issues like insufficient investment in staff development, high teacher turnover, and conflicts among staff members. Solutions include introducing annual evaluations, creating reward systems, and improving the recruitment process for new staff.

7.   **Motivation**: Motivation is critical for both school directors and staff. This area addresses challenges like decreased motivation among teachers and school directors, lack of external recognition, and the need for internal support systems. Solutions include implementing task rotation, organizing competitions, and establishing mentoring programs for directors.

8.   **Communication Skills and Relationships**: Effective communication within the school and with external stakeholders is vital for successful management. This area identifies challenges related to poor communication among staff and insufficient communication with parents. Solutions include organizing workshops to enhance communication skills and implementing digital communication tools for better interaction with parents.

9.   **School Culture and School Atmosphere**: School culture and atmosphere are key to creating a positive learning environment. This area addresses challenges such as

insufficient involvement of stakeholders in shaping school culture and a passive school atmosphere. Solutions include organizing joint activities, encouraging innovative projects, and developing clear goals for the school's vision and identity.

10. **Professional Training of School Directors**: This area focuses on the need for ongoing professional development for school directors. It addresses challenges like limited access to quality training programs and lack of opportunities for networking with other school directors. The solution is to establish regular professional development programs and encourage directors to participate in exchange experiences.

11. **Professional Development of School Directors**: This area further emphasizes the importance of professional growth for school directors. It addresses challenges like limited financial resources for training and low awareness of lifelong learning. Solutions include securing funding for professional development and creating mentorship opportunities for directors.

12. **Managing Change**: Change management is a vital skill for school directors. This area identifies challenges such as resistance to change from staff and parents, and a lack of preparedness for managing complex changes. The proposed solutions include training for staff to reduce resistance, organizing workshops for directors on change management, and developing clear, phased plans for implementing change.

13. **School Development - Mission and Vision**: This area focuses on the strategic development of the school, including defining its mission and vision. Challenges include the lack of a clearly defined vision, limited autonomy for directors, and insufficient participation in international projects. Solutions include collaboratively defining the school's mission and vision, increasing director autonomy, and encouraging participation in international initiatives.

14.   **Quality Assurance in Secondary Schools**: This area addresses the importance of ensuring high standards in education. It covers challenges related to ineffective school management and insufficient teacher qualifications. Solutions include providing targeted leadership training, strengthening hiring criteria, and implementing continuous professional development for both teachers and directors.

The questions within the questionnaire were designed based on these 14 areas to ensure a clear and insightful exploration of the specificities of secondary school management and the role of the School Director for Secondary Schools. Through this structured approach, the research gathered comprehensive data on how school directors navigate their multifaceted roles and the challenges they encounter in their leadership, administrative, and pedagogical responsibilities.

In the subsequent descriptive analysis, all 14 areas have been thoroughly examined. The responses to the questions were analyzed to identify key trends, challenges, and effective practices within each area. This analysis not only provide a clearer picture of the School Director's role in managing a secondary school but also offer practical insights into how their management strategies impact the school's overall functioning and the quality of education provided. By investigating the complexities of each area, the research contribute to a deeper understanding of how secondary school directors can be better supported to improve their leadership and management practices.

These 14 areas are essential in addressing both the operational and strategic elements of school leadership, making it possible to provide recommendations and solutions that will ultimately enhance the role and effectiveness of school directors in Croatian secondary schools.

5.9. Analysis of empirical data across 14 research areas

1. Status of School Directors in the Republic of Croatia

School directors in secondary schools play a pivotal role as both professional leaders and managerial heads, ensuring the smooth operation of their institutions. They are required to fully adhere to all legal and regulatory frameworks, which, according to **69.8%** of school directors, often restrict their capacity to make independent decisions crucial for the effective functioning of their schools. Conversely, around **30%** of school directors do not share this sentiment, indicating that the legal framework does not hinder their decision-making processes.

The research conducted highlights key challenges faced by school directors while also exploring possible solutions tailored to specific aspects of their work. One recurring issue is the dissatisfaction surrounding the selection and reappointment process for school directors, which is central to their professional stability and effectiveness. Interestingly, despite this challenge, **84%** of school directors in the Republic of Croatia express a degree of satisfaction with the legislative framework governing their appointment. Only **16%** report dissatisfaction, signaling a generally positive perception of this aspect of the legal system.

The study underscores the importance of addressing several intertwined challenges faced by school directors. The restrictive legal framework is a significant concern, as it limits their autonomy in decision-making and necessitates greater trust from both the Ministry of Science and Education and local authorities. Additionally, the low social status of school directors, compounded by insufficient recognition of their efforts, calls for amendments to the Education Act to highlight the importance of their role within the educational system. Furthermore, the inadequate financial compensation relative to their extensive responsibilities poses another critical issue. A revised salary structure, which

reflects the size of the school and the complexity of tasks, is essential to ensure fair and motivating remuneration for their work.

By tackling these challenges, the status of school directors in Croatia can be elevated, enabling them to perform their roles more effectively and with greater satisfaction.
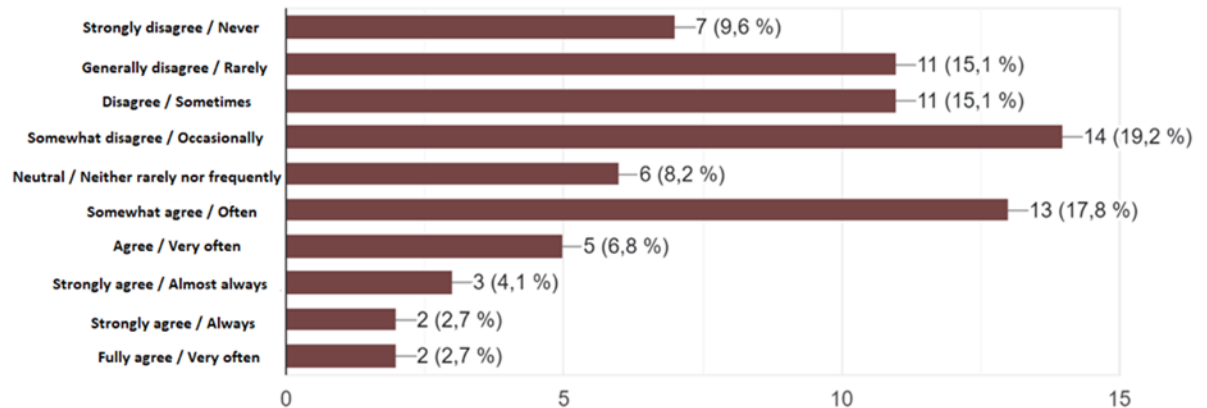
Research question 1:

Do you consider that the current legal and regulatory frameworks are restrictive in making key decisions at your secondary school
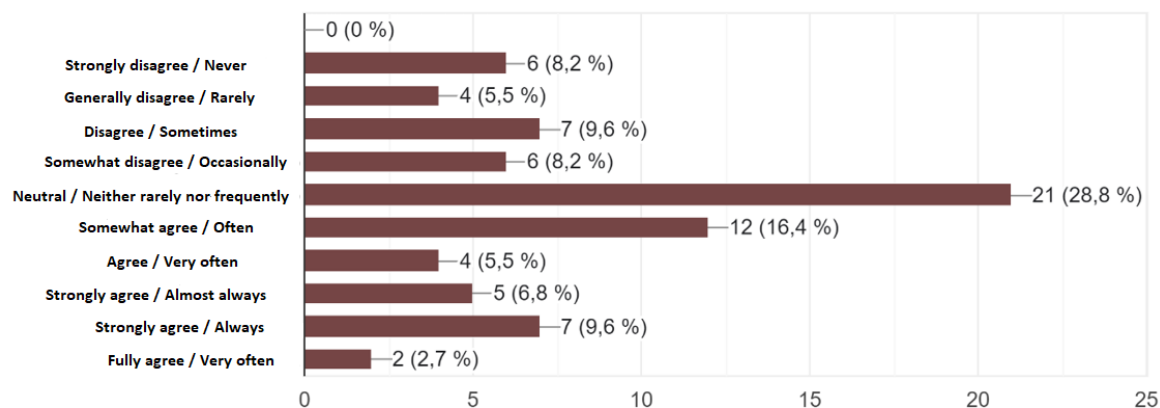
Research question 2:

Are you satisfied with the legal acts and procedure for the selection of secondary school directors?

2. Competence Profile of School Directors (Scope of Work)

School directors in secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia face a clearly defined scope of responsibilities. However, this research highlights a pressing issue: **65.8%** of school directors report being overwhelmed with administrative tasks, which significantly hinders their ability to perform as effective pedagogical leaders. This administrative burden detracts from their capacity to focus on strategic management and the development of teaching and learning within their schools. In contrast, **21.8%** of school directors do not perceive administrative tasks as an obstacle to their pedagogical leadership.

Another significant finding of this doctoral research revolves around the lack of appropriate training for managerial and leadership competencies required for the role of a school director. This gap in preparation is acknowledged by **54.7%** of school directors, who agree that they have not undergone or are not currently undergoing adequate training. On the other hand, **37%** disagree, indicating a perceived sufficiency in their preparation or training in some capacity.

The study also identifies the need for a clearer definition of the competence profile of school directors. A well-defined framework, tailored to the specific type of secondary school—such as vocational schools or gymnasiums—could help directors better understand and manage their responsibilities. This clarity would also address the ambiguity that currently exists around their scope of work, enabling them to navigate their roles more effectively.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes. Administrative tasks should be delegated to support staff, allowing school directors to dedicate more time to strategic and pedagogical priorities. Additionally, mandatory training and professional development programs are essential to equip directors with the managerial and leadership skills needed for the complexities of their role. Finally, national guidelines and legislation must define the competence profile of school directors, ensuring their responsibilities align with the unique needs of their institutions.

By tackling these issues, school directors can achieve a balance between administrative and leadership roles, enhancing their effectiveness and the overall quality of education in Croatia's secondary schools.
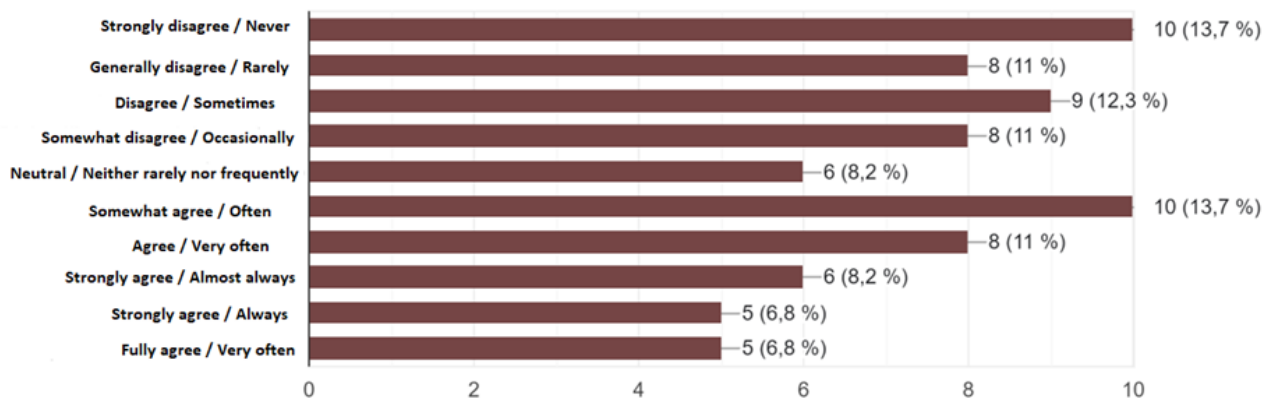
Research question 3:

Do administrative tasks hinder your ability to provide pedagogical leadership at the secondary school?
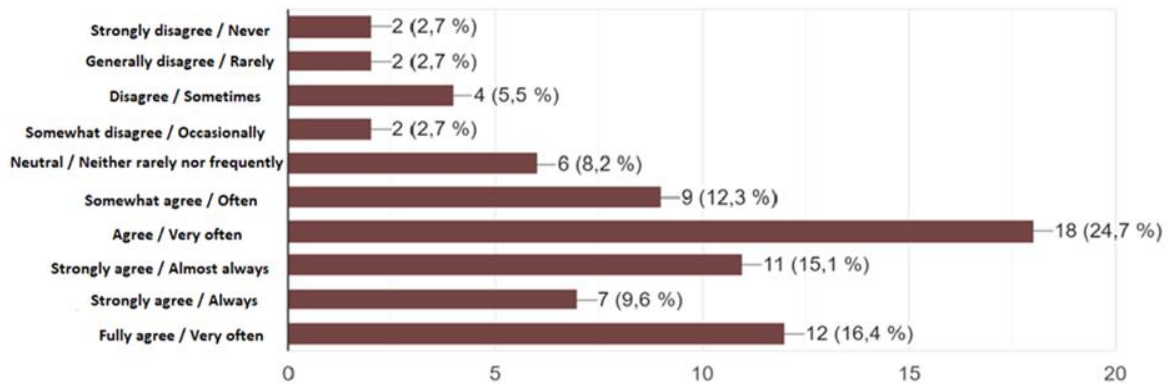
Research question 4:

Have you completed or are you currently undergoing training for managerial and leadership competencies required for the role of a secondary school director?

3. Leadership Styles of School Directors

The leadership style of a school director of secondary school is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness and culture of the educational institution. Based on this research, 80% of school directors in secondary schools predominantly utilize participative leadership styles, which emphasize collaboration and shared decision-making among stakeholders. Conversely, 20% of school directors still rely on an autocratic leadership style, a choice often dictated by the specific situation and the stakeholder group involved—be it students, teachers, school staff, or parents.

Flexibility in Leadership

The scope of responsibilities for a school director of secondary school is exceptionally broad, demanding a high degree of **adaptability** to address diverse challenges effectively. This study highlights that **93.2%** of school directors agree that adjusting their leadership style to the varying circumstances in a secondary school is essential for achieving optimal results. However, **6.8%** expressed partial disagreement, suggesting that some directors might struggle with or question the necessity of such flexibility.

Adapting leadership styles to situational demands is widely supported in educational leadership theory. According to Hersey and Blanchard's **Situational Leadership Model**, effective leaders assess the situation and the readiness of their followers before selecting the most appropriate style—whether it be directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating. This aligns with the study's findings, reinforcing the need for tailored approaches in school management.

Several challenges related to leadership styles were identified in this study:

1.   **Dominance of an autocratic leadership style**: While suitable in specific situations, this approach can hinder collaboration. **Solution**: Conduct training programs on participative leadership, focusing on best practices that foster teamwork and inclusivity.

2.   **Lack of flexibility in leadership approaches**: Rigidity in style can limit the director's effectiveness. **Solution**: Offer training in situational leadership to equip school directors with tools to adapt to varying contexts and challenges.

3.   **Insufficient recognition of individual differences**: Overlooking the diverse personal styles of teachers and students can impact morale and performance. **Solution**:

4.   **Encourage the development of an individualized leadership** approach that considers the unique characteristics of staff and students.

Participative leadership not only enhances collaboration but also fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, leading to improved school outcomes. Meanwhile, the ability to adjust leadership styles aligns with the complex and evolving nature of educational environments. Research indicates that leaders who can effectively switch between styles—adopting a more directive approach during crises or a participative style during strategic planning—are better positioned to achieve long-term success.

The findings on the leadership styles of school directors of secondary schools, including the percentages and their implications, are depicted in the **graphs that follow**, providing a clear and comprehensive visual summary of the results.

The study underscores the importance of **adaptive leadership** in secondary schools, emphasizing the benefits of participative approaches while recognizing the situational necessity of autocratic methods. To enhance leadership effectiveness, it is crucial to offer **targeted training** that equips directors to navigate diverse challenges, understand individual differences, and adopt flexible leadership strategies. This

adaptability is essential not only for maintaining harmony among stakeholders but also for fostering a thriving educational environment that meets the needs of students, staff, and the broader school community.
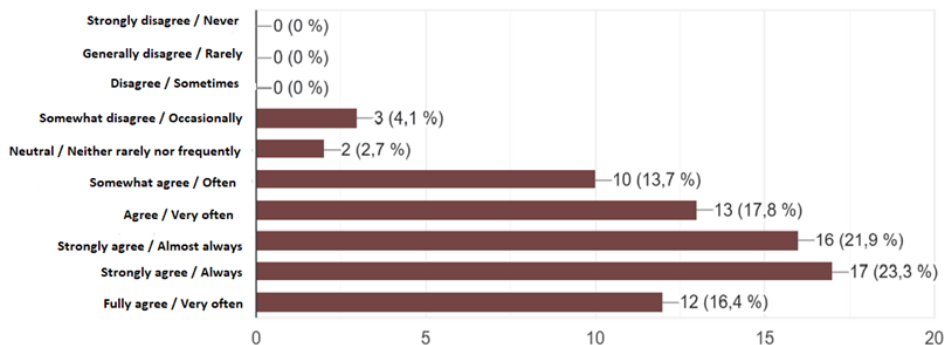
Research question 5:

How often do you use participative leadership methods compared to autocratic ones?
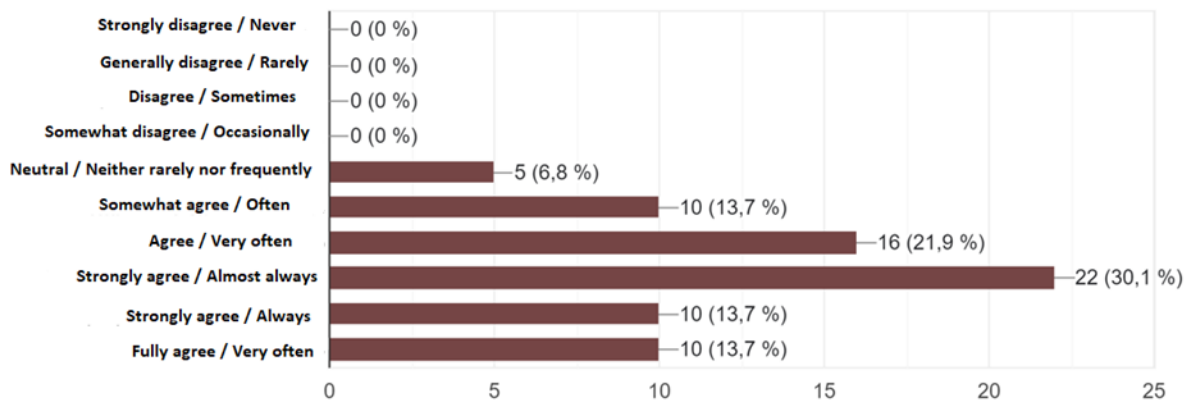
Research question 6:

Do you adapt your leadership style depending on different situations in the secondary school?

4. Administrative and Financial Operations of the School

The **school director of secondary school** plays a pivotal role in ensuring the institution's financial and administrative operations run smoothly. This responsibility is immense, especially given that most directors transition into the role from teaching backgrounds and often lack prior formal education in finance or administration. They must rely significantly on the teamwork of key collaborators such as the school secretary and accountant to handle these duties effectively.

The **budget** is one of the fundamental pillars for the successful functioning of a secondary school. While the primary funding sources are the Ministry of Science and Education and local government founders, directors are also instrumental in securing **additional budget resources**. Schools can obtain supplementary funds through activities such as renting out facilities (e.g., sports halls or classrooms), applying for project-based financing, and competing for **EU funding**. Good relationships with the local community and parents are essential for gathering donations tailored to the school's specific needs.

Despite their efforts, **26%** of school directors strongly agree, and another **26%** partially agree, that limited financial resources often hinder the effective management of schools. Conversely, **8.2%** do not see resource constraints as a significant obstacle. This divergence highlights the varying capacities of schools to adapt to financial pressures.

Solution: Applying for **national and EU funds** is a critical step toward alleviating resource shortages. Additionally, forming partnerships with private sector entities and local organizations can help generate new revenue streams.

Digitization of Administrative Processes

The administrative workload is further compounded by the necessity of managing both paper-based and digital systems. However, **89%** of school directors agree that the **digitization** of administrative processes significantly enhances efficiency, while **11%**

disagree, citing challenges in adapting to new technologies or integrating systems effectively.

Solution: Expanding digital platforms and training administrative staff to use these systems can streamline operations, reducing bureaucracy and freeing directors to focus on strategic planning.

Financial Transparency

Transparency in financial operations is another critical area of focus. Directors are accountable to multiple stakeholders, including the School Board, the Ministry of Science and Education, the Tax Administration, and internal and external auditors.

Solution: Establishing a comprehensive financial reporting system accessible to the Teaching Council, Parent Council, and other stakeholders can ensure trust and accountability. Improved communication about the school's financial health encourages parental involvement, which is crucial for fundraising efforts.

The dual focus on administration and finance requires school directors to be adept at multitasking and decision-making. For example, the integration of **digital tools** not only boosts operational efficiency but also aligns with global trends toward smart education systems. Research by Northouse (2021) emphasizes that leadership in such contexts involves strategic thinking, adaptability, and the ability to manage diverse teams effectively.

Furthermore, Goleman (2000) highlights the importance of **emotional intelligence** in leadership, which is crucial when navigating complex relationships with staff, parents, and external institutions. By fostering collaboration and maintaining transparency, directors can build a supportive and resilient school community.

The **administrative and financial operations** of a secondary school demand a balance of technical skills, strategic planning, and strong leadership. As the findings show,

most directors agree that **digitalization** and proactive resource management are essential for enhancing school efficiency. Through partnerships, effective communication, and continuous professional development, school directors can address financial and administrative challenges, ensuring a stable and productive educational environment.

Research question 7:

How often do you encounter difficulties due to limited financial resources at your secondary school?
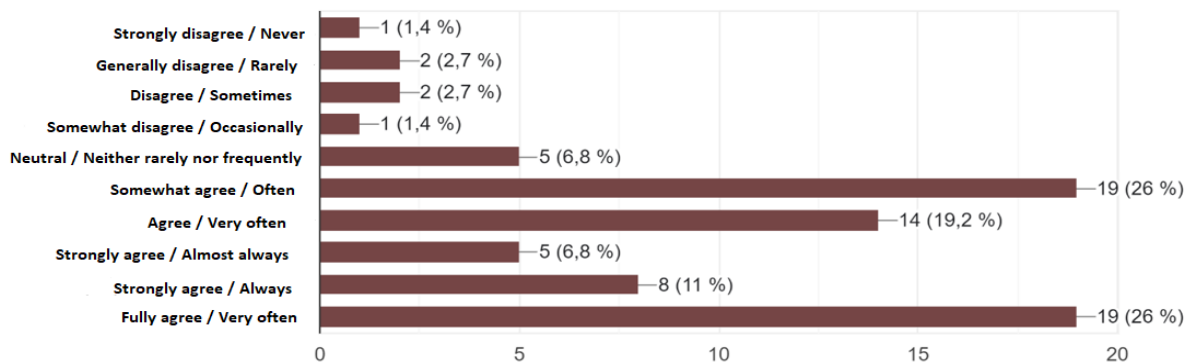
Research question 8:

Do you believe that digitizing administrative processes could improve the efficiency of the secondary school?

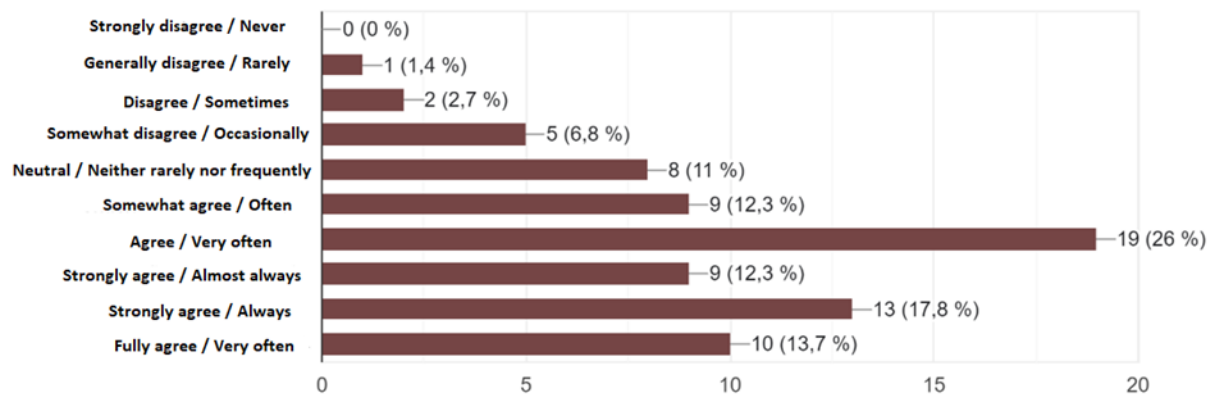| Strongly disagree / Never | 0 (0 %) |
Generally disagree / Rarely	1 (1,4 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	2 (2,7 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	5 (6,8 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	8 (11 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	9 (12,3 %)
Agree / Very often	19 (26 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	9 (12,3 %)
Strongly agree / Always	13 (17,8 %)
Fully agree / Very often	10 (13,7 %)

5.   School Organization

The organization of a school plays a crucial role in shaping its effectiveness and efficiency. It reflects the professional competencies of the **school director of secondary school** and encompasses various elements such as strategic planning, human resources management, and the engagement with external stakeholders. The structure and functioning of a school have a direct impact on teaching and learning outcomes, making school organization an essential area of focus for effective school management.

The Importance of a Flexible Organizational Structure

In this study, **74%** of **school directors of secondary schools** agreed that a **flexible organizational structure** is vital for achieving the primary goal of effective teaching and learning. This highlights the necessity for school leaders to adopt organizational models that are adaptable to changing educational demands and evolving school needs. A flexible

structure allows for quicker responses to emerging challenges, enabling the school to adjust its practices in a timely manner.

A rigid organizational framework, on the other hand, can impede progress and hinder the ability to implement changes that are necessary for school development. As noted in previous research, school organizations that are flexible tend to foster a more dynamic, responsive, and innovative environment, which is critical for improving educational outcomes (Fullan, 2007). Flexibility in organizational structure also promotes collaboration among staff, facilitates better decision-making, and helps create a positive school culture.

Engaging with External Stakeholders

The **school director of secondary school** plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining strong relationships with external stakeholders. According to the study, **89%** of school directors emphasized the importance of engaging with **external stakeholders** during the organizational process. This involvement is crucial for ensuring that the school's organizational structure aligns with the broader educational goals and needs of the community. External stakeholders may include **local authorities, ministries**, and **educational organizations**, all of whom have a vested interest in the functioning of the school.

Maintaining open communication with these groups helps ensure that the school remains aligned with national and local educational priorities, complies with regulations, and receives the necessary support to implement its strategies. Additionally, involving stakeholders in school organization can foster collaboration and mutual understanding, which can lead to better educational outcomes and more sustainable school development (Bryk et al., 2010).

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The **school director of secondary school** is responsible for a wide array of organizational tasks that directly influence the functioning of the school. These tasks include:

- **Leadership**: Developing strategic documents, fostering a supportive pedagogical environment, and ensuring compliance with legal frameworks. This task is central to shaping the vision and direction of the school.

- **Human Resources Development**: Managing **teachers**, **administrative staff**, and **parents**, and facilitating continuous professional development. This includes organizing **training sessions**, **webinars**, and **workshops** to enhance the competencies of staff and ensure they stay updated on educational best practices.

- **Collaboration**: Strengthening partnerships with **civil sectors**, other schools, and parents. Through **thematic lectures** and **projects**, school directors can address educational and parenting challenges, fostering a holistic approach to student development.

- **Quality Assurance**: Evaluating educational outcomes at all levels. This includes assessing the performance of **students**, **teachers**, and **school leadership** to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with educational goals.

Addressing Challenges in School Organization

Several challenges related to school organization have been identified in the study, and potential solutions have been proposed:

- **Inflexible Organizational Structure**: One of the challenges faced by many schools is the **inflexibility** of their organizational structure. To address this, a solution could be the introduction of **decentralized management models**, where certain responsibilities are transferred to teams within the school. This approach allows for greater

autonomy, fosters team collaboration, and enables more efficient problem-solving within departments.

- **External Influence on School Organization**: External forces, such as **local authorities**, **ministries**, and **educational organizations**, can exert significant pressure on the school's structure and operations. To mitigate their impact, **school directors of secondary schools** can develop strong communication channels with these external stakeholders. This ensures that external influences are managed effectively, and the school's goals remain aligned with broader educational policies.

- **Insufficient Adaptation to Changes**: Schools often face challenges in adapting to changes, whether they are legal, curricular, or methodological. To ensure that the school remains adaptable, it is essential to develop a system for the **continuous evaluation** of the school's **organizational needs**. This system should be designed to provide regular feedback on the effectiveness of the organizational structure and facilitate timely adjustments to accommodate changes in educational practices.

The **organization of a school** is a dynamic and multifaceted process that requires a **school director of secondary school** to be adaptable, collaborative, and responsive to both internal and external factors. The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of a flexible organizational structure, effective stakeholder engagement, and continuous adaptation to changes in educational policies and practices. By addressing the challenges related to inflexible organizational structures, external influences, and the need for greater adaptability, schools can enhance their overall effectiveness and improve teaching and learning outcomes.

The role of the **school director of secondary school** in managing these organizational tasks is critical for ensuring the success and sustainability of the school. A strategic and flexible approach to school organization, supported by ongoing professional

development and strong communication, is essential for fostering an environment where both staff and students can thrive.
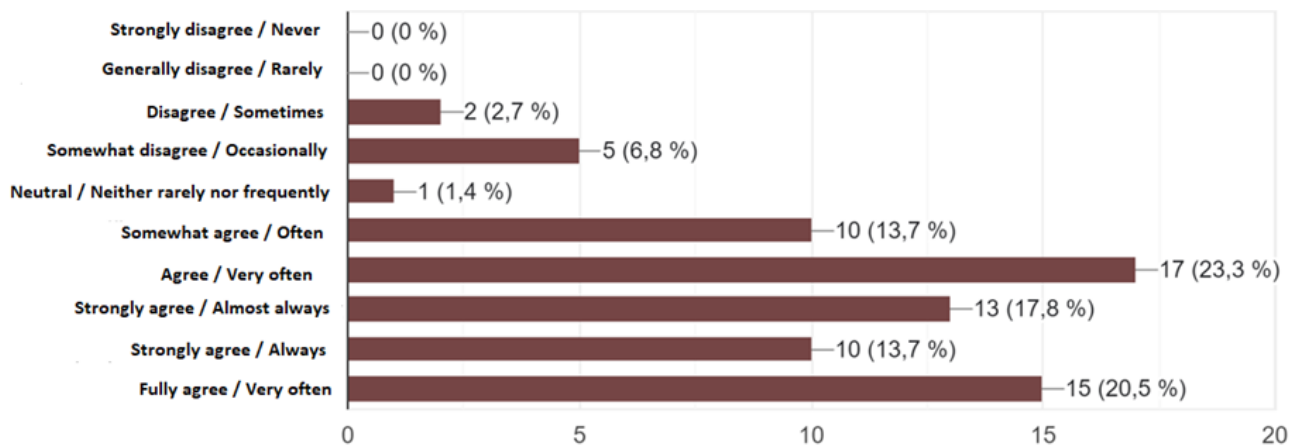
Research question 9:

Do you believe that the organizational structure of your secondary school is flexible enough to adapt to changes aimed at effective teaching and learning
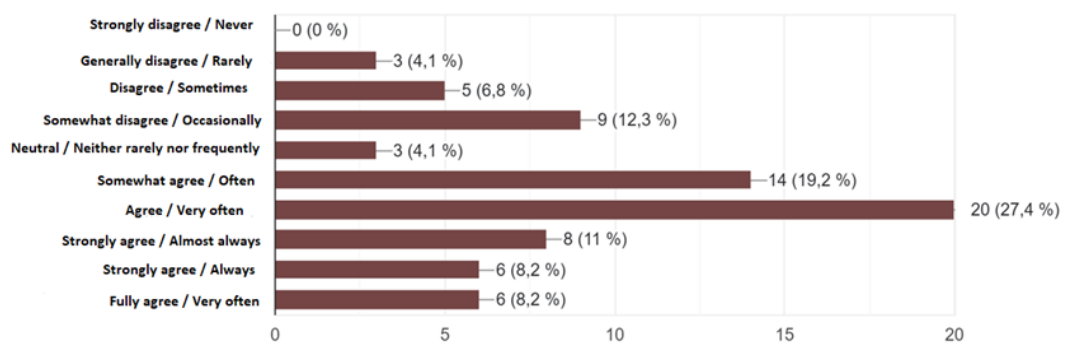
Research question 10:

Does your secondary school collaborate with external stakeholders in the educational process?

6. Human Resources Management

The field of **human resources management** within secondary schools has become increasingly challenging, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has disrupted traditional approaches to staff management and professional development, prompting the need for new strategies. According to research, **66%** of school directors feel that there is insufficient investment in the professional development of their school staff, while **34%** believe that the investment in human resources is adequate. This discrepancy underscores the differing views on how much emphasis should be placed on developing staff in the educational sector.

Managing human resources effectively is one of the greatest challenges faced by the **school director of secondary school** today, a fact confirmed by **95%** of directors in a recent survey. Human resources management goes beyond just staffing; it includes motivating employees, providing opportunities for growth, and ensuring the right talent is recruited. The evolution of educational environments post-COVID has exacerbated these challenges, as teaching methods, administrative processes, and student needs have evolved.

Solution: A robust solution to address insufficient investment in staff development involves introducing **annual evaluations** for both teaching and administrative staff. By conducting thorough assessments before making professional development plans, school directors can identify specific areas where staff need further training and support. This personalized approach helps maximize the impact of professional development programs and ensures that resources are allocated efficiently.

Motivation and Retention of Staff

Teacher motivation remains a significant issue in many schools, with a noticeable gap between the expectations of school directors and the satisfaction of their staff. **Research by Herzberg** (1966) suggests that job satisfaction is closely tied to intrinsic motivators, such as recognition and opportunities for professional growth, alongside extrinsic motivators like salary and job security.

Solution: To address motivation issues, school directors should implement systems for **reward and recognition**. These systems can recognize teachers' excellent performance in teaching and student engagement. Additionally, introducing **mentorship programs** and further educational opportunities—such as certifications or specialized training—can help increase motivation and job satisfaction. Programs that focus on career growth, as recommended by Armstrong (2006), not only improve performance but also strengthen teachers' commitment to the school. Inadequate selection and recruitment of new staff can have long-term impacts on the quality of education. The challenges in this area have been exacerbated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, as many schools are forced to hire teachers under time constraints.

Solution: To improve recruitment, school directors should introduce more **professional selection procedures** that go beyond traditional interviews. This can include **psychological testing** to assess emotional intelligence and stress management, and a thorough review of candidates' competencies. By adopting a more structured and rigorous approach, schools can ensure that they hire individuals who are well-suited to the school's culture and educational needs.

Addressing Teacher Turnover

The high turnover rate among teachers is another pressing issue. High turnover not only disrupts student learning but also increases operational costs and places a strain on the remaining staff.

Solution: School directors should focus on increasing job stability by offering **permanent contracts** to teachers, where possible, and enhancing **working conditions**. Offering **better work-life balance** and ensuring **competitive compensation** are essential for retaining quality staff. Studies have shown that improving these factors significantly reduces turnover rates and boosts job satisfaction (Shann, 1998).
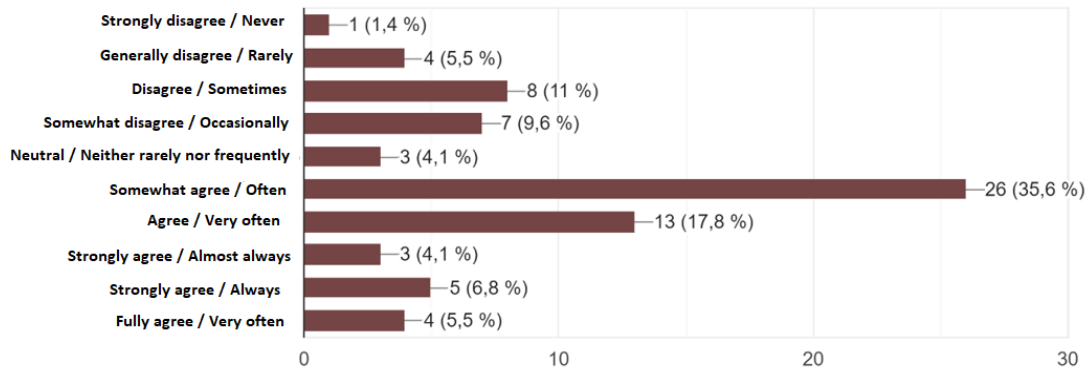
Resolving Staff Conflicts

Conflicts among teaching staff can also hinder the overall functioning of a school. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its associated stress and shifts in working conditions, has exacerbated such issues in many schools.

Solution: To manage conflicts effectively, school directors can organize **workshops** for the development of **communication and interpersonal skills** among staff. Introducing **conflict resolution systems**—especially those that are transparent and involve trained mediators—can help resolve disputes efficiently and create a more harmonious work environment. This is crucial not only for maintaining staff morale but also for ensuring that the teaching environment remains conducive to student learning.

Human resources management in **secondary schools** is undeniably a critical area for school directors. From professional development to recruitment, motivation, and conflict management, each aspect requires careful planning and execution. **95%** of school directors agree that human resources management is one of their greatest challenges, yet the solutions available—ranging from **annual evaluations** to **better recruitment procedures**—can significantly improve staff retention, satisfaction, and overall school performance. As the field continues to evolve, particularly with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, school directors must remain adaptable and proactive in addressing the needs of their staff.
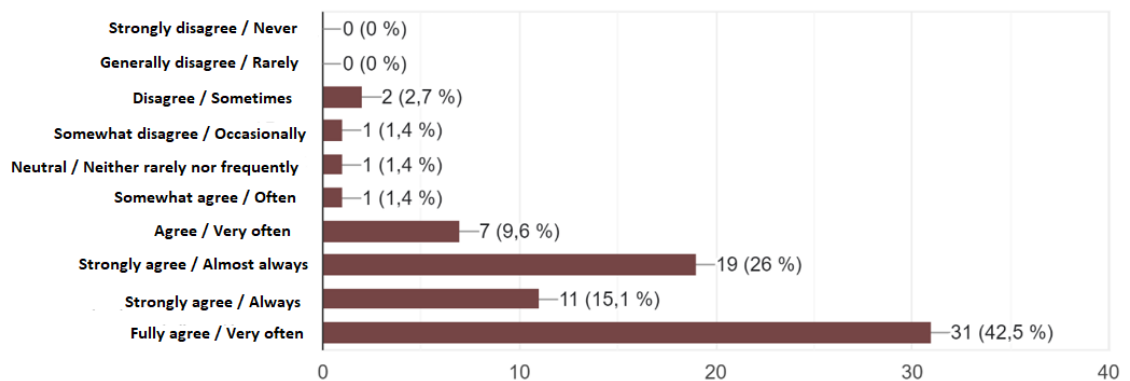
Research question 11:

Do you believe that adequate investment is made in the professional development of your staff?

Strongly disagree / Never	—1 (1,4 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	—4 (5,5 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	—8 (11 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	—7 (9,6 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	—3 (4,1 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	—26 (35,6 %)
Agree / Very often	—13 (17,8 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	—3 (4,1 %)
Strongly agree / Always	—5 (6,8 %)
Fully agree / Very often	—4 (5,5 %)

Research question 12:

Do you believe that human resource management is one of the biggest challenges in the role of a secondary school director?

Strongly disagree / Never	—0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	—0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	—2 (2,7 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	—1 (1,4 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	—1 (1,4 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	—1 (1,4 %)
Agree / Very often	—7 (9,6 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	—19 (26 %)
Strongly agree / Always	—11 (15,1 %)
Fully agree / Very often	—31 (42,5 %)

7. Motivation

Motivation is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of both **school directors of secondary schools** and teachers. In this study, the issue of **teacher motivation** within

secondary schools was explored, with an emphasis on potential solutions such as external recognition as a means of boosting teacher morale and engagement in the workplace.

According to the survey, **55%** of the school directors of secondary schools reported that they face challenges with **motivating teaching staff** in their schools. This indicates a significant issue that directly affects the productivity and quality of education in secondary schools. On the other hand, **47%** of the respondents rejected this concern, suggesting that some schools have successfully implemented measures to keep their teaching staff engaged and motivated.

One of the key findings from the study is the belief held by **80.7%** of school directors, who view **external recognition**—such as awards, public acknowledgment, and other forms of praise—as a potential way to increase teacher motivation. This finding supports the idea that teachers, like many other professionals, benefit from being recognized for their achievements, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and a higher level of engagement in their work.

Types of Motivation: Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic

In understanding motivation, it is important to distinguish between two key types: **intrinsic motivation** and **extrinsic motivation**. **Intrinsic motivation** refers to engaging in an activity for its own sake, driven by internal factors such as a sense of personal achievement, fulfilment, and passion for the work. In the context of teaching, this could mean a teacher's intrinsic desire to inspire students and foster a love of learning, rather than merely fulfilling job requirements. **Extrinsic motivation**, on the other hand, is driven by external factors such as rewards, recognition, and tangible incentives. Teachers who are extrinsically motivated may be motivated by external rewards such as salary, promotions, and public acknowledgment for their work.

The challenge in secondary schools lies in balancing these two types of motivation. While intrinsic motivation is important for long-term satisfaction and performance, **extrinsic motivation** plays a significant role in enhancing short-term engagement and addressing external pressures. For example, as indicated by the survey, the provision of **external recognition** (a form of extrinsic motivation) could have a positive effect on the overall motivation of teachers.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions

The study identifies several challenges related to motivation within secondary schools:

1.   **Decreased motivation of teachers**: This challenge is faced by many schools, where teachers may feel undervalued or disconnected from the school's mission. **Solution**: Implement task rotation and allow teachers to participate in innovative projects within the school. This can not only break the monotony but also engage teachers in creative initiatives that contribute to their professional growth and satisfaction.

2.   **Lack of external motivation and recognition**: Many teachers feel their contributions   are   not   sufficiently   acknowledged. **Solution**: Organize competitions and awards for teachers and school directors who achieve outstanding results in their work. This form of **extrinsic motivation** helps provide public recognition for teachers' efforts and achievements.

3.   **Lack of motivation among school directors**: School directors, like their staff, may also experience challenges with motivation, particularly in the context of leadership   pressures. **Solution**: Develop mentoring programs for new school directors, providing continuous support and guidance. The **Ministry of Science and Education** could also establish a

dedicated office to assist school directors in their leadership roles, ensuring that they feel supported and motivated in their challenging positions.

Motivation, particularly **extrinsic motivation**, plays a significant role in the functioning of secondary schools. **Extrinsic rewards**, such as recognition and financial incentives, help teachers feel valued and appreciated, potentially leading to higher job satisfaction and better performance. However, **intrinsic motivation** remains essential for long-term engagement, especially as it relates to passion for teaching and personal fulfilment. To optimize the work environment and outcomes for both teachers and school directors, a **balance** between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strategies is needed.

The findings of this study highlight that **teacher motivation** is a significant issue for school directors of secondary schools, with a substantial number of directors recognizing the importance of **external recognition** in enhancing teacher motivation. By implementing strategies such as **task rotation**, **competitions**, and **mentoring programs**, schools can effectively address the challenges associated with motivation, ensuring that both teachers and school directors are motivated to perform at their best. This, in turn, will lead to a more productive and positive school environment, benefiting both staff and students alike.
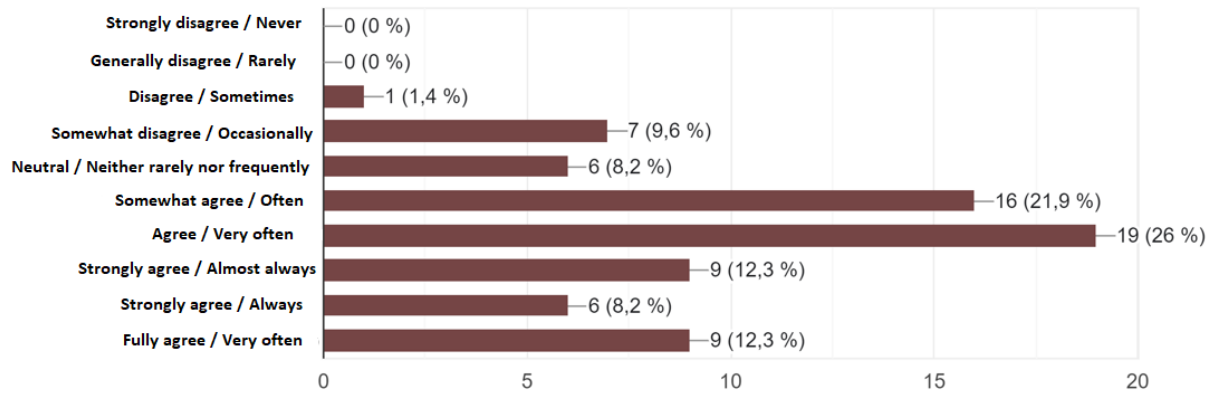
Research question 13:

Do you believe that staff motivation is an issue in your school?
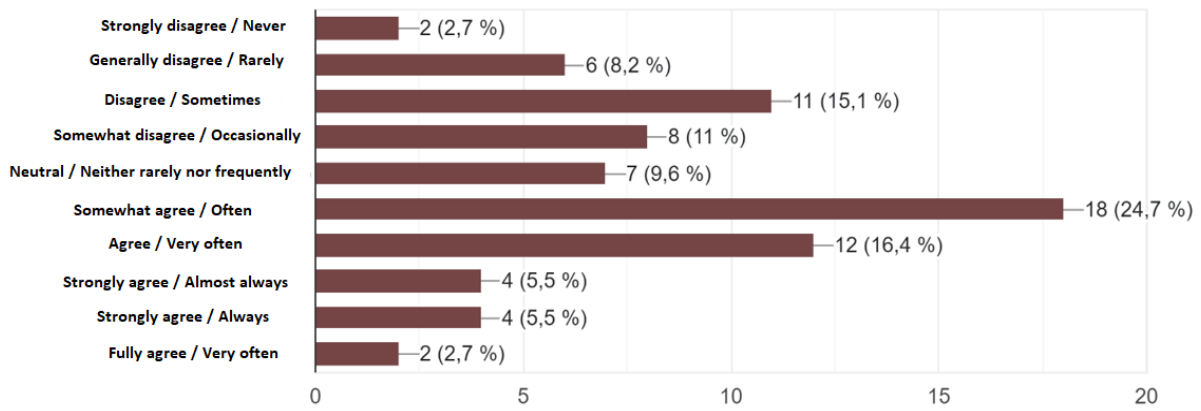
Research question 14:

Do you believe that external recognition can increase teachers' motivation at the secondary school?

Strongly disagree / Never	0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	1 (1,4 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	7 (9,6 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	6 (8,2 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	16 (21,9 %)
Agree / Very often	19 (26 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	9 (12,3 %)
Strongly agree / Always	6 (8,2 %)
Fully agree / Very often	9 (12,3 %)

8. Communication Skills and Relationships

Effective communication and strong relationships are vital components of successful school management, particularly for the **school director of secondary school**. These elements not only contribute to the efficient functioning of the school but also play a crucial role in fostering a positive and collaborative environment among staff, students, and parents. The challenges in this area are often subtle yet impactful, affecting both internal school dynamics and external relations with parents.

Internal Communication Among School Staff

In this study, we examined the state of communication among school staff. **35.7%** of school directors of secondary schools reported that communication within their school was ineffective. This percentage reflects a significant portion of schools where internal communication issues may hinder collaboration and the smooth operation of daily activities. On the other hand, **64.3%** of the respondents disagreed with this statement, indicating that most schools have relatively functional communication channels among

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staff. This contrast highlights the variability in communication practices, suggesting that there is a need for targeted interventions to address these issues where they exist.

The importance of effective internal communication cannot be overstated. Research has consistently shown that strong communication skills among staff contribute to a better working environment, increased efficiency, and more effective decision-making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). When communication is poor, misunderstandings and inefficiencies often arise, affecting not only the staff but also the overall quality of education provided to students.

Communication Between School and Parents

In contrast to the internal communication challenges, the study revealed a highly positive outlook regarding the communication between the **school** and **parents**. **95.9%** of school directors expressed satisfaction with the communication between the school and parents. This is a significant finding, suggesting that the majority of schools have established effective channels for involving parents in their children's education and maintaining an open dialogue regarding academic progress and other school matters. Only **4.1%** of school directors expressed dissatisfaction with this communication, indicating that while challenges may exist, they are not widespread.

The positive relationship between schools and parents is crucial for the success of students. Effective communication with parents ensures that they are well-informed and actively involved in their child's educational journey. Research supports the idea that strong parental involvement positively impacts student achievement and behavior (Epstein, 2001). Schools that communicate regularly with parents tend to foster a sense of trust and cooperation, which can ultimately enhance the school community as a whole.

Another challenge identified in the study is **conflict among school staff**. This issue can be particularly detrimental to the overall atmosphere in a school, as unresolved

conflicts often lead to a toxic work environment and hinder collaboration. **Solution**: Implementing **mediation programs** for conflict resolution could be a valuable tool in this context. Encouraging open communication and providing staff with the necessary skills to resolve disputes in a constructive manner can improve relationships and contribute to a more positive and productive school culture. Encouraging team-building activities and providing regular opportunities for staff to communicate in a non-judgmental environment can help reduce the likelihood of conflicts arising.

The Importance of Communication Skills

Effective communication is central to all aspects of a school's functioning. **Communication skills** include the ability to listen actively, express ideas clearly, and foster a climate of openness and trust. For **school directors of secondary schools**, these skills are particularly essential as they must facilitate communication between staff, students, and parents. Moreover, good communication skills help prevent and resolve conflicts, ensure that all stakeholders are informed, and promote a collaborative working environment.

As the study demonstrates, the **development of communication skills** among school staff is critical. Organizing **workshops** focused on improving these skills can help create a more effective communication environment within schools. In addition, **digital communication tools** can be utilized to streamline communication between parents and schools, making information exchange quicker and more efficient.

The findings of this study indicate that while internal communication among school staff remains a challenge for some school directors of secondary schools, the relationship between schools and parents is generally positive. There is a clear need for **professional development** focused on communication skills, both within the school and in interactions with parents. By addressing communication issues through targeted interventions such as

workshops, mediation programs, and digital tools, schools can improve both internal and external relationships, fostering a more supportive and collaborative environment.

Effective communication is key to school success, and as research suggests, when communication is strengthened, it leads to better outcomes not only for staff but also for students (Hargreaves, 2003).
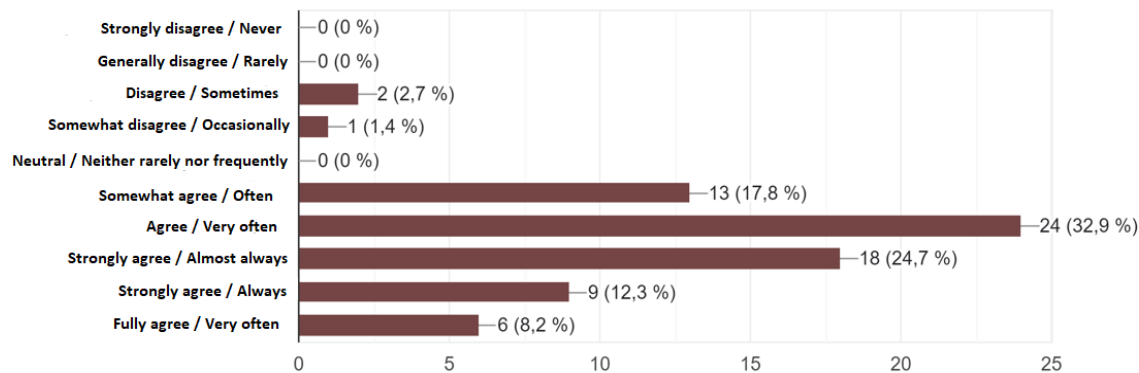
Research question 15:

How often do you assess that communication among staff at your school is ineffective?
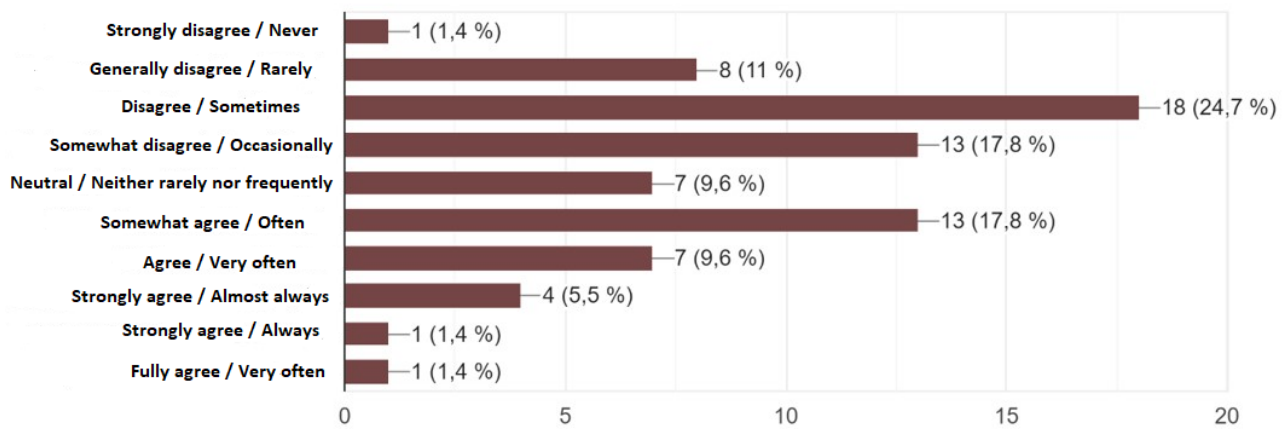
Research question 16:

Do you believe that the communication between your school and parents is satisfactory?

Strongly disagree / Never	0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	2 (2,7 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	1 (1,4 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	0 (0 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	13 (17,8 %)
Agree / Very often	24 (32,9 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	18 (24,7 %)
Strongly agree / Always	9 (12,3 %)
Fully agree / Very often	6 (8,2 %)

9. School Culture and School Atmosphere

The **school culture** and **school atmosphere** are integral components of the educational process. A positive, clear, encouraging, creative, and supportive school culture fosters an environment where both students and staff feel valued and motivated. This atmosphere not only affects daily interactions but also contributes to the school's overall identity, defining how it is perceived by the community and external stakeholders. As a key responsibility of the **school director of secondary school**, establishing and maintaining such an environment is critical to ensuring the long-term success and effectiveness of the institution.

According to the research, **87.6%** of **school directors of secondary schools** believe that **students**, **teachers**, and **parents** need to be more involved in shaping a positive school culture and atmosphere. This finding highlights the collective responsibility of all parties in fostering an environment of mutual respect, innovation, and support. The engagement of these stakeholders is essential because it creates a shared sense of ownership and commitment to the values and goals of the school. In contrast, **12.4%** of school

directors disagreed with this notion, potentially indicating challenges in effectively involving parents or creating sufficient opportunities for active participation.

A positive school culture is vital for student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and community involvement. As noted by Hallinger (2003), **effective school leaders** create environments where students and teachers can engage in meaningful interactions, and where both educational and social development are prioritized. By involving all stakeholders, school directors can cultivate a **culture of collaboration**, where open communication and mutual respect are central values.

When it comes to the responsibility of the **school director of secondary school**, **93.2%** of the directors in this study believe they are directly responsible for fostering and maintaining the school culture and atmosphere. This reflects the importance of leadership in guiding the values, behaviours, and norms within the school. As leaders, school directors set the tone for what is acceptable and valued within the school community. They influence the educational climate through their actions, decision-making, and by modelling expected behaviours.

School culture is not a passive outcome but an actively shaped entity that requires ongoing attention from school leadership. **6.8%** of school directors disagreed with the notion that they are solely responsible, suggesting that some may view the development of school culture as a shared responsibility with teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. However, the preponderance of agreement emphasizes the pivotal role of the school director in leading cultural change and creating an environment conducive to learning and personal growth.

There are several key challenges that school directors face in fostering a positive school culture and atmosphere. Below are some of the most prominent challenges, along with potential solutions:

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- **Challenge 1: Insufficient involvement of all stakeholders in shaping the school culture**

Solution: To address this, school directors can **organize joint activities** involving students, teachers, and parents. These activities, such as collaborative workshops, school events, and family engagement programs, can help promote unity and positive values within the school. A shared sense of purpose among all members of the school community is essential for creating a culture of inclusion and mutual respect. According to Kotter (1996), engagement and communication are key elements in fostering positive organizational change, and they play an important role in building school culture.

- **Challenge 2: Passive atmosphere in the school**

Solution: To overcome a passive school atmosphere, **innovative and creative projects** should be encouraged, with active participation from both students and teachers. These projects could focus on problem-solving, community outreach, and school improvement initiatives. Establishing **clear developmental goals** for the school is also essential, as it provides a roadmap for action. Goals such as improving **quality communication**, ensuring **clear task distribution**, and fostering **constructive dialogue** can energize the school community and create a more dynamic and motivated environment (Leithwood, 2001).

- **Challenge 3: Lack of identity and recognition of the school**

Solution: Developing specific school projects and activities that contribute to the school's recognition in the local community is critical for enhancing its identity. These projects could include student-led initiatives, community outreach programs, or partnerships with local organizations. Additionally, **defining clear school foundations** through the school's **mission** and setting goals that lead to the school's **vision** can help establish a strong and coherent school identity. As Schein (2010) suggests, **organizational culture** is rooted in

the shared values, assumptions, and goals that guide an institution's activities. A school with a clear mission and vision can build a strong sense of identity both internally and externally.

The **school culture** and **school atmosphere** play a central role in shaping the educational experience for students, teachers, and the broader school community. As the primary leader of the institution, the **school director of secondary school** must take an active role in shaping and maintaining these aspects of school life. Engaging all stakeholders, fostering innovation, and clearly defining the school's identity are critical steps in building a positive and supportive environment. The research findings underscore the importance of involving students, teachers, and parents in the creation of a school culture that reflects shared values and goals. By addressing challenges such as insufficient stakeholder involvement, a passive atmosphere, and a lack of identity, school directors can contribute to a vibrant, dynamic, and successful educational environment.
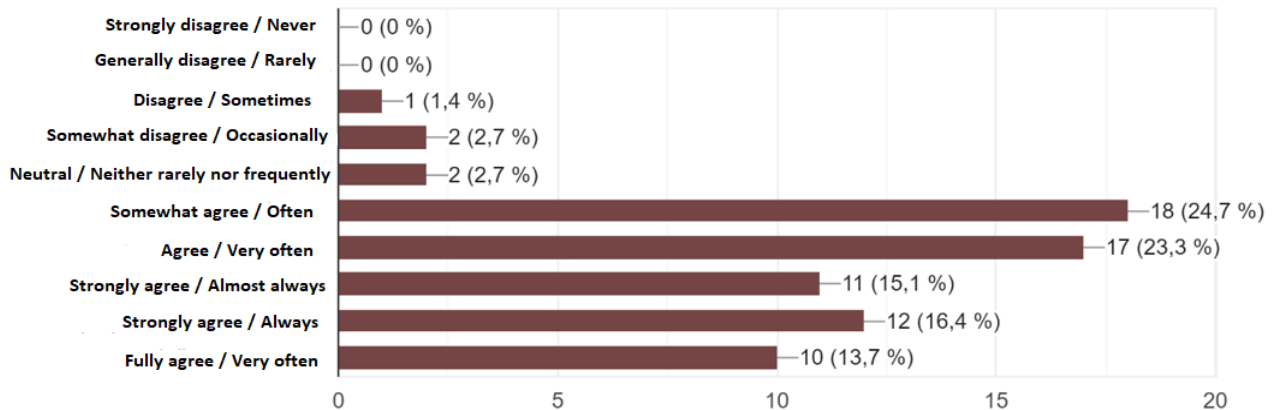
Research question 17:

Do you believe that students, teachers, and parents should be more involved in creating a positive school culture and school climate?
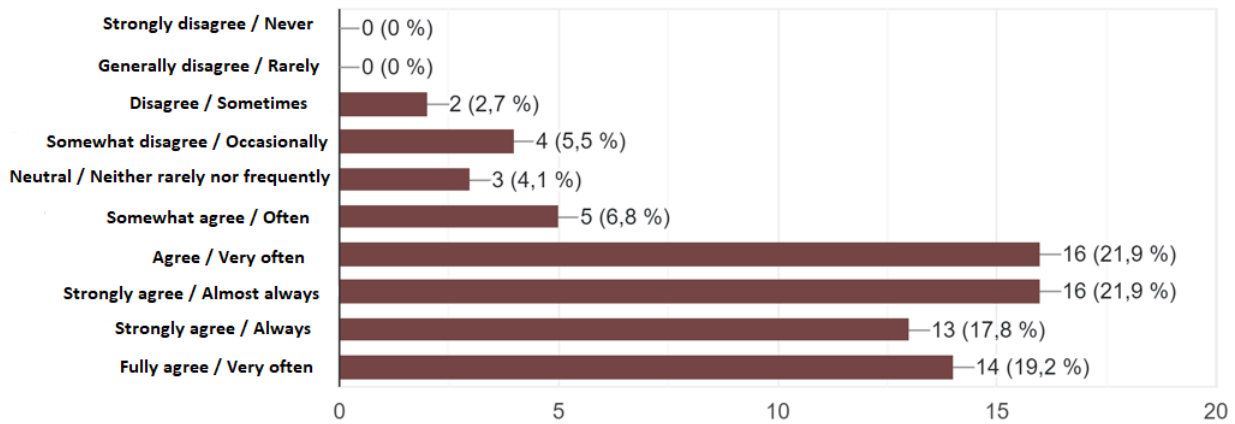
Research question 18:

Do you consider that school directors, as leaders of educational institutions, are responsible for school culture and the school climate?

10. Professional training for School Directors

In the field of education, continuous **professional development** is essential for improving the effectiveness and performance of **school directors of secondary schools**.

However, the existing structure for professional training programs in Croatia and many other regions often falls short of providing the necessary support for these educational leaders. One of the main objectives of this doctoral research is to investigate the programs available for **school directors** to improve their leadership skills and the impact of these programs on school management and outcomes.

According to Croatian legislation, **school directors of secondary schools** are not required to have any prior managerial experience or specialized education before taking up the role. This lack of prerequisite training poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of school leadership. Despite this, **38.3%** of school directors report having access to quality professional development programs. This finding suggests that while some programs are available, the overall accessibility and quality of training remain inconsistent across schools.

Training programs for **school directors** often cover various areas of leadership, management, and school improvement, but the fact that **38.3%** of directors report dissatisfaction with their access to these programs highlights a gap in the system. The need for more targeted and comprehensive training is evident, especially considering the range of challenges that school directors face daily, from managing staff and resources to navigating educational reforms and community relationships.

Solution: To address this challenge, it is recommended to increase the availability of professional programs tailored specifically to **school directors**. This can be achieved through cooperation with **domestic** and **international institutions** to develop and expand training opportunities. International collaborations can provide access to best practices and innovative leadership models, ensuring that **school directors** are equipped with the necessary skills to adapt to the evolving demands of the education sector.

Another challenge identified in the research is the lack of sufficient budget allocation for professional development programs. **26%** of surveyed school directors agree that their school has a sufficient budget for their professional development, but the remaining **74%** of directors feel that the resources are inadequate given their needs. This is a critical issue, as professional development often requires investment in workshops, conferences, and external training programs, all of which can be costly.

Solution: To address the issue of insufficient funding, it is essential for educational authorities to prioritize the development of school leadership. This can involve setting aside dedicated funds for the professional development of **school directors**, ensuring that training opportunities are not hindered by financial constraints. According to Fullan (2001), funding for leadership development is a key factor in improving educational outcomes, as well-trained school leaders have a direct impact on teaching quality and student success.

Another critical challenge is the limited opportunities for **school directors** to exchange experiences and best practices with their peers. Leadership can be an isolating role, and without avenues for collaboration, directors may struggle to implement effective strategies or solutions to common problems. This gap in peer learning and knowledge sharing can hinder the growth of both individual leaders and the educational system as a whole.

Solution: Organizing **annual conferences** and **meetings** for **school directors** can provide a platform for exchanging experiences, learning from one another, and sharing effective practices. These gatherings can be used to foster a sense of community among school leaders and create opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. According to Day (2000), the exchange of ideas and experiences among school leaders enhances professional development and contributes to the overall improvement of schools.

Finally, the demanding workload of **school directors** often prevents them from dedicating time to their own professional development. The responsibilities of managing school operations, staff, students, and external stakeholders can leave little time for reflection, learning, and growth. As a result, many school directors find themselves overwhelmed, leading to burnout and ineffective leadership.

Solution: One potential solution to alleviate this burden is to introduce the position of **deputy school director**. This role would provide support to the **school director**, enabling them to delegate certain tasks and focus more on strategic planning and professional growth. Having a deputy would also allow the **school director** to manage their workload more effectively, ensuring they have time for continuous learning and development. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), distributing leadership tasks within the school can lead to improved school performance and greater sustainability in leadership.

The findings from this research highlight the significant challenges that **school directors of secondary school's** face in accessing professional training, managing their responsibilities, and ensuring continuous development. The lack of mandatory managerial experience and limited access to quality training programs underscore the need for systemic change in how **school directors** are supported throughout their careers. By addressing these challenges—through increased availability of training programs, better funding for professional development, more opportunities for peer collaboration, and improved workload management—education systems can empower **school directors** to become more effective leaders and improve the overall quality of education.
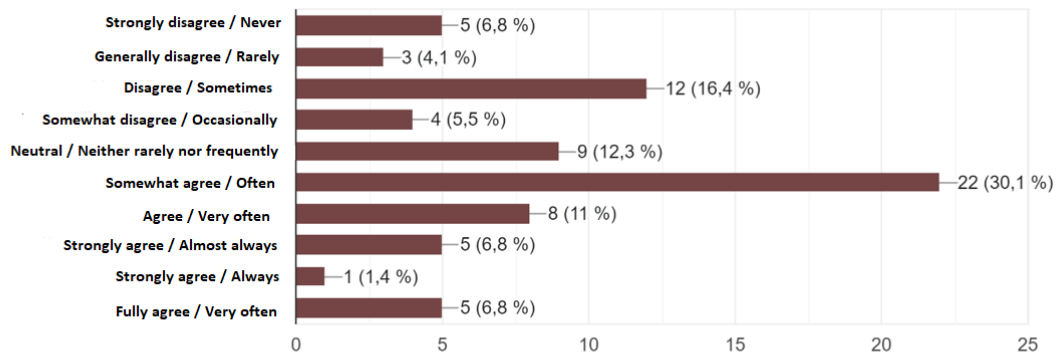
Research question 19:

Do you consider that you have access to high-quality professional development programs for secondary school directors?
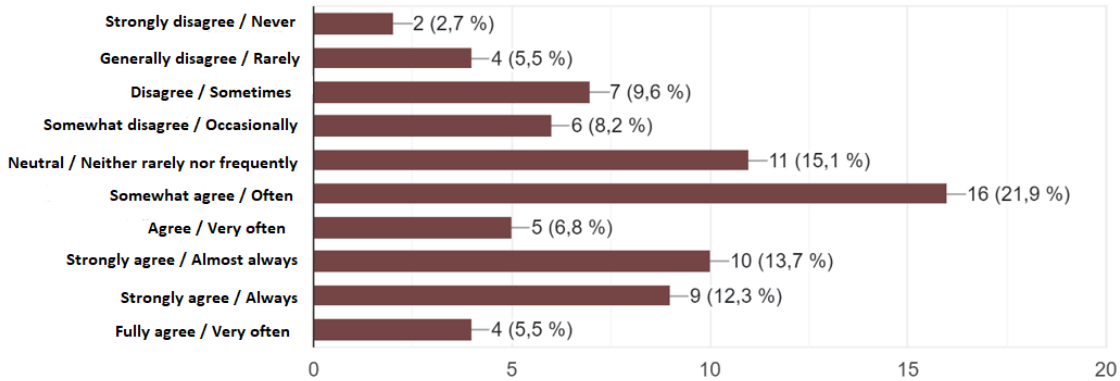
Research question 20:

Do you believe that your secondary school has a sufficient budget for the professional development of school director, considering the needs?

11. Professional Development of School Directors

Professional development is crucial for ensuring that **school directors of secondary schools** are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead their institutions effectively. This doctoral research explored the professional development needs of **school directors** and revealed significant insights into their satisfaction, challenges, and potential solutions. The findings highlight that professional development is not just beneficial but essential for improving the **quality and effectiveness** of secondary schools.

The research shows that **76.7%** of **school directors** are satisfied with their own professional development in their role as leaders of secondary schools. This finding suggests that, while many school directors feel they have received adequate professional support, there remains a large group that may not have had the same experience. A critical issue lies in ensuring that all **school directors** have access to high-quality, ongoing professional development opportunities.

Solution: To address this issue, it is necessary to establish **regular professional development programs** tailored specifically for **school directors**. These programs should be developed in collaboration with educational institutions and experts, ensuring that **school directors** have the opportunity to enhance their skills, knowledge, and leadership effectiveness. Regular training will also provide **school directors** with tools to manage the complexities of their roles, which increasingly require adaptability and innovation.

A significant finding in this research is that **89%** of **school directors** believe that investing in their professional development is directly correlated with an increase in the quality and effectiveness of their school's operations. This is an important realization, as the leadership capabilities of **school directors** are integral to the overall success of the school. **School directors** who are well-prepared and continuously improve their skills are

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better able to navigate challenges and foster an environment conducive to high-quality education.

Solution: It is essential to secure funding from both **national** and **EU sources** for the professional development of **school directors**. Financial support will ensure that **school directors** can participate in high-quality programs without financial constraints. Additionally, well-funded programs are likely to attract experts and provide more opportunities for **school directors** to expand their professional networks, stay updated on educational innovations, and share best practices with peers.

While the majority of **school directors** acknowledge the importance of professional development, some challenges still persist. These include a **lack of ongoing support and professional development programs**, **limited resources** for additional training, and a **low awareness of the importance of lifelong learning** among some **school directors**. The scarcity of resources and the absence of regular, structured support programs make it difficult for **school directors** to continuously improve their leadership skills and adapt to the evolving demands of the education system.

Solution: To address these challenges, it is vital to foster a culture of **lifelong learning** among **school directors**. Encouraging **school directors** to actively participate in **lifelong learning programs** and providing them with **mentoring opportunities** can significantly enhance their leadership capabilities. As evidenced by Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), mentoring programs have been shown to improve leadership skills by allowing **school directors** to learn from experienced mentors, thereby accelerating their professional growth.

The findings from this research underscore the importance of continuous **professional development** for **school directors** and its direct impact on the overall effectiveness of secondary schools. While a significant number of **school directors'**

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express satisfaction with their professional growth, challenges such as **limited resources** and **insufficient support programs** must be addressed to ensure all leaders have access to the tools they need to succeed. By investing in professional development programs, securing funding for training, and promoting **lifelong learning**, educational systems can foster a generation of highly effective **school directors** who will lead secondary schools to greater success
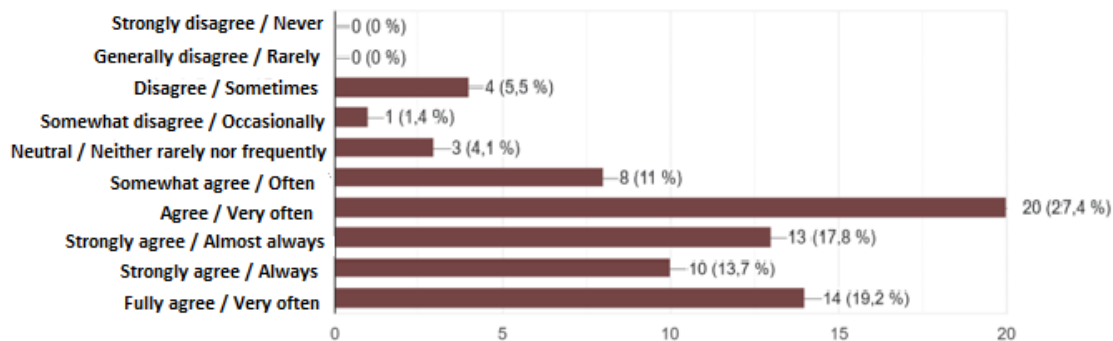
Research question 21:

Are you satisfied with your own professional development in your role as a secondary school director?
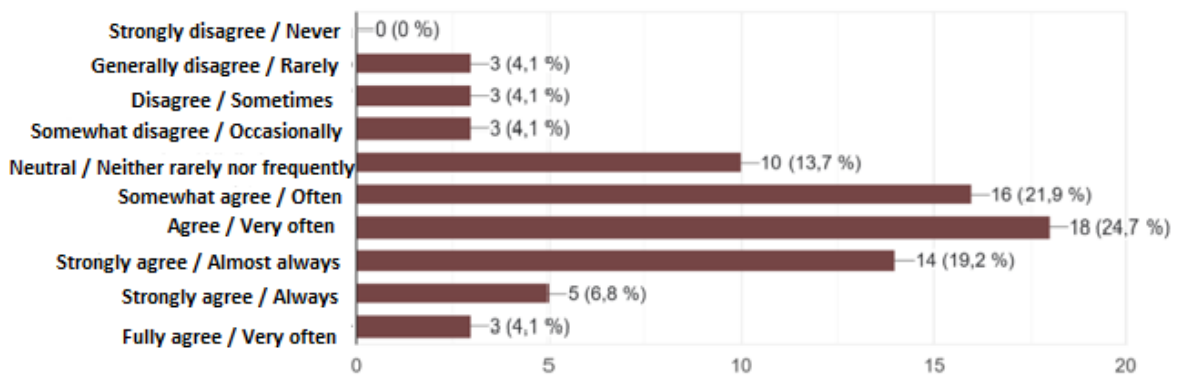
Research question 22:

Do you believe that investing in the professional development of school directors is correlated with an increase in the quality and effectiveness of the secondary schools?

12. Managing Change

The Greek philosopher **Heraclitus** famously stated, *"The only constant in life is change."* In today's fast-paced and technologically advanced world, this statement resonates more than ever, especially for **school directors of secondary schools**, whose daily responsibilities require them to manage a variety of changes, often unexpected. Change is an inevitable part of the educational environment, and the ability to navigate these changes effectively is crucial for the success and sustainability of a school.

According to the findings of this doctoral research, **26%** of **school directors** reported experiencing resistance to change from teaching staff and parents. On the other hand, **74%** of school directors disagreed with this notion, suggesting that they did not face significant resistance when introducing changes in their schools. These figures highlight the varying experiences of **school directors** when managing change and emphasize the importance of fostering an environment conducive to change.

Solution: To address resistance, it is essential to **provide training** for teaching staff aimed at reducing their resistance to change. The training should focus on the benefits of change, the role of teachers in the change process, and how they can contribute to the school's growth and adaptation. As Kotter (1996) asserts, change is often resisted due to fear or misunderstanding, so proper communication and training can significantly reduce this resistance and improve acceptance.

One of the key findings in this research is that **80.8%** of **school directors** believe they have a solid strategy for implementing changes within their schools, while **19.2%** disagree with this statement. This suggests that while the majority of **school directors** feel confident in their ability to manage change, there remains a group that may lack the necessary preparation and strategic approach to effectively lead their schools through periods of transition.

Solution: To bridge this gap, **additional workshops** and training sessions should be organized for **school directors** to help them better manage complex changes and crisis situations. These workshops could focus on developing leadership skills specific to change management, including decision-making, crisis communication, and team collaboration. As noted by Fullan (2001), effective change management requires leaders to be well-prepared and equipped with the tools and knowledge to guide their institutions through transitions.

The research also reveals that **80.8%** of **school directors** believe they have a clear strategy for implementing change, while **19.2%** do not. This indicates that while most **school directors** have a strategic plan in place, there is a need to further refine and clarify these plans to ensure they are comprehensive and adaptable to changing circumstances.

Solution: To ensure successful implementation, **school directors** should develop detailed, clear plans and strategies for change, including **phased implementation** and

tracking results. A well-articulated plan provides clarity and direction, helping all stakeholders understand the rationale behind changes and their role in the process. According to change management experts such as Beer and Nohria (2000), organizations that engage in systematic planning and continuous monitoring of the results are more likely to experience successful transformations.

Change is an unavoidable part of the educational landscape, and **school directors of secondary schools** must be equipped to manage it effectively. The findings of this study highlight the **importance of a clear strategy** for implementing change, the **need for training** to reduce resistance, and the **value of preparedness** in handling complex transitions. By addressing these challenges through training, developing clear plans, and ensuring consistent communication, **school directors** can lead their schools through change successfully, fostering an environment of continuous improvement and adaptation.
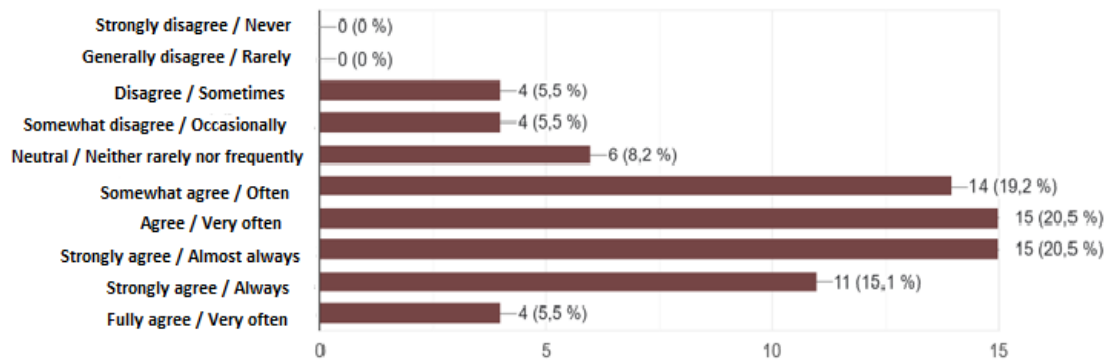
Research question 23:

Do you feel resistance to changes from the teaching staff and parents?
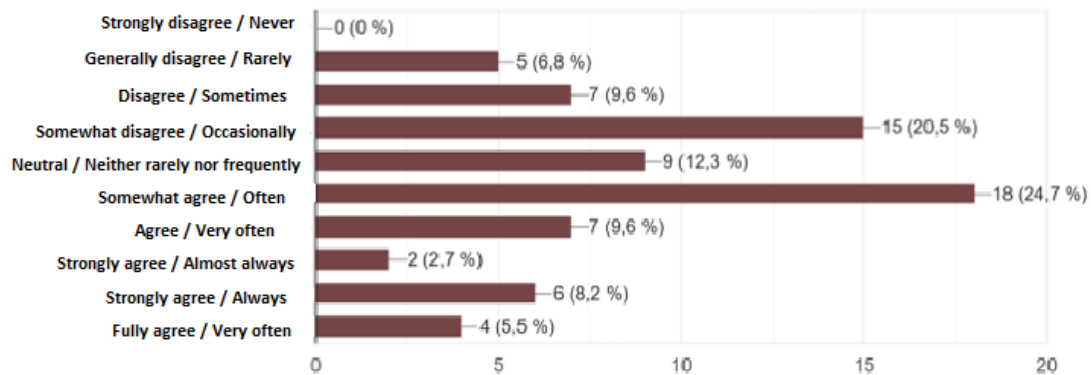
Research question 24:

Do you believe that you have a clear strategy for implementing changes in your secondary school?

Response	Value
Strongly disagree / Never	0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	4 (5,5 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	4 (5,5 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	6 (8,2 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	14 (19,2 %)
Agree / Very often	15 (20,5 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	15 (20,5 %)
Strongly agree / Always	11 (15,1 %)
Fully agree / Very often	4 (5,5 %)

13. School Development - Mission and Vision

The development of a school is closely linked to its **mission** and **vision**, which provide clear guidance for its future direction and the achievement of its educational goals. These elements are integral to the **school development plan**, which serves as a roadmap for continuous improvement. In this context, the **school director of secondary schools** plays a central role in articulating, developing, and executing the school's mission and vision, ensuring they align with both internal goals and external expectations.

Mission and Vision: A Foundation for School Development

This doctoral research revealed that **93.2%** of **school directors** believe their school has a **clearly defined mission and vision**. This suggests that most **school directors** see these elements as critical for school development. However, **6.8%** of **school directors** disagreed with this statement, indicating that there may be some schools where the mission and vision are not fully articulated or communicated, which could hinder the overall development of the school.

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Solution: To ensure the effective development of the school's mission and vision, it is essential for **school directors** to **collaborate** with teachers, students, and parents in the process of defining and refining these key concepts. As Kouzes and Posner (2017) argue, leadership that involves the broader school community fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, making the vision more powerful and impactful.

One significant challenge identified in this research is the **limited autonomy** of **school directors** in making key decisions due to administrative constraints. This limitation can hinder the **school director's** ability to make swift decisions that are in the best interest of the school and its community. A lack of autonomy can also undermine the director's ability to implement changes and innovate within the school.

Solution: Increasing the autonomy of **school directors** is essential for fostering effective leadership and promoting the overall development of the school. This can be achieved through changes in the **legal frameworks** that govern school management, as well as by providing **school directors** with more **responsibility** and flexibility in decision-making. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) point out, empowering school leaders with the autonomy to make decisions is crucial for creating a school culture that values innovation and continuous improvement.

The Importance of International Projects and Mobility

The research also highlights the significance of **international projects and mobility** for school development. According to the findings, **91.8%** of **school directors** believe that their school's participation in international projects and mobility programs significantly contributes to its development. This participation not only enhances the school's reputation but also provides valuable opportunities for students and teachers to engage with different cultures and educational practices. However, **8.2%** of **school**

directors are either uncertain or do not believe in the importance of such participation, which suggests a need for greater awareness and encouragement in this area.

Solution: **School directors** should actively **encourage participation** in international projects, exchanges, and mobility programs, as these experiences can greatly enhance the **well-being** of both students and teachers and contribute to the **educational process**. According to international education scholars, such programs offer opportunities for professional development, cross-cultural exchange, and the enrichment of the curriculum (Jackson & De Lange, 2013). By expanding the scope of these initiatives, schools can foster a more dynamic and globally aware educational environment.

In conclusion, the **mission** and **vision** of a school are critical elements that guide its growth and development. **School directors** play a vital role in shaping these elements and ensuring that they are clearly defined and communicated. Furthermore, **autonomy** in decision-making and **participation in international projects** are key factors that influence the overall success of a school. By addressing the challenges related to these areas and implementing the proposed solutions, **school directors** can drive significant progress and foster an environment that supports innovation, collaboration, and the well-being of all members of the school community.
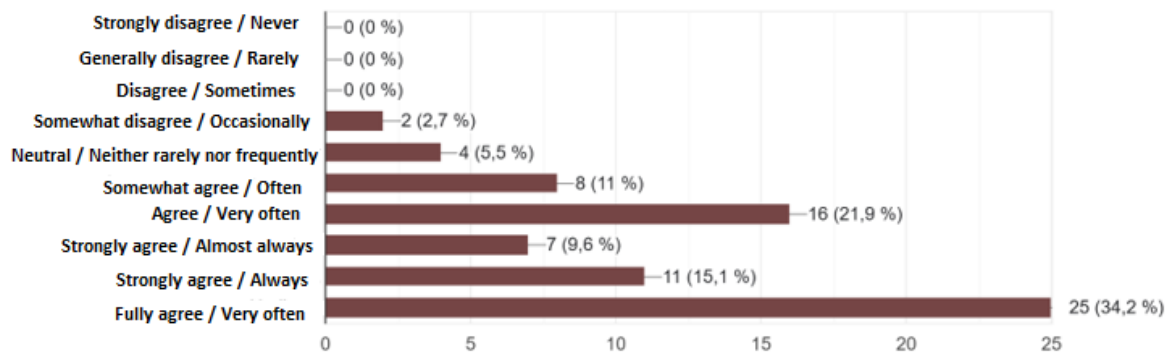
Research question 25:

Do you believe that the mission and vision of your secondary school are clearly defined?
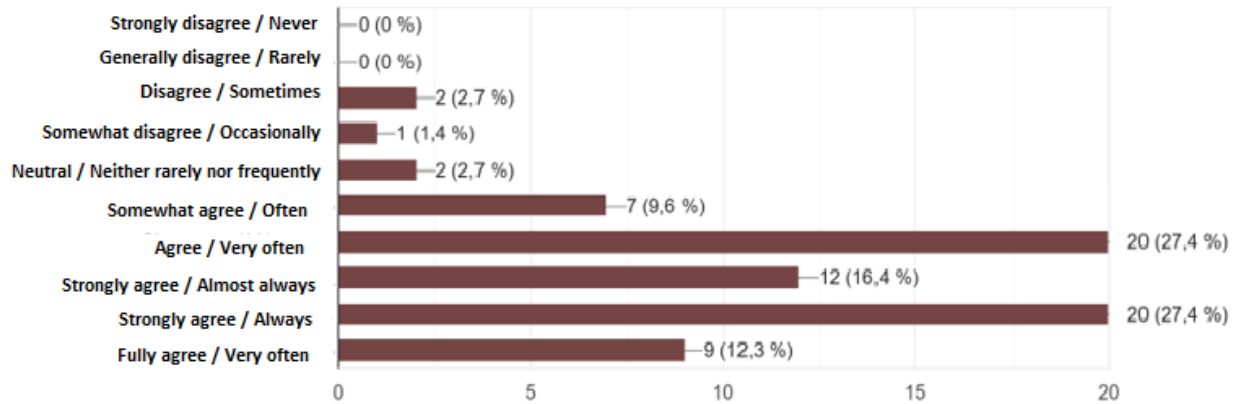
Research question 26:

Do you believe that participation in international projects and mobility contributes to the development of your secondary school?

14. *Quality Assurance in Secondary School*

One of the most challenging and demanding areas of work in the educational system is quality assurance in secondary schools. It is widely acknowledged that quality assurance is a critical component in the success of educational institutions, yet legal regulations in this area remain somewhat unclear and lacking precise guidelines. Many authors and practitioners engage with quality assurance, emphasizing its importance, but the clarity in legal frameworks and implementation practices is still lacking. This area, however, holds significant potential for growth and improvement. For the purpose of this doctoral research, four questions related to quality assurance were included in the survey for school directors of secondary schools.

According to the survey, 91.8% of secondary school directors believe that effective management and leadership by the school director contribute significantly to ensuring the quality of secondary schools. This highlights the central role of the school director's leadership in fostering a quality-focused school environment. However, 8.2% of the directors either somewhat agree or remain neutral on this point. Furthermore, an overwhelming 95.9% agree that the qualification and expertise of teachers are critical to ensuring the quality of education, with only 4.1% disagreeing. This finding underscores the importance of teacher qualifications in shaping the overall quality of the educational experience. Every single respondent (100%) agreed that improving school infrastructure contributes to enhancing the quality of secondary schools. This highlights the undeniable connection between the physical environment of the school and its overall effectiveness.

The research also emphasizes the necessity of continuous professional development for both teachers and school directors. An impressive 97.2% of school directors agree with the assertion that high-quality professional development for both teachers and school directors is essential for effective management and the improvement of school quality.

However, 2.8% of respondents were neutral or only somewhat agreed with this statement. This finding supports the hypothesis of the doctoral research, which advocates for targeted professional development as a critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of secondary schools.

Quality assurance in secondary schools encompasses a variety of factors, including leadership, teaching, infrastructure, and professional development. The European Commission (2020) emphasizes that effective quality assurance frameworks are essential for driving improvements in education systems. These frameworks not only ensure that standards are met but also encourage a culture of continuous improvement and accountability. School directors must navigate the complexities of these frameworks, balancing compliance with the need for innovation and flexibility.

One major challenge to ensuring quality is the ineffective management and leadership at the school level. A lack of strategic leadership, vision, and a clear understanding of quality assurance practices can impede school development. This is why targeted training for school directors is critical. The training should focus on strategic leadership, quality assurance practices, and how to implement systems that directly impact educational outcomes, including teaching quality and school environment. Robinson et al. (2008) suggest that school leadership has a profound impact on student learning, with effective leadership improving both teacher performance and student outcomes.

Another issue is the insufficient qualifications and expertise among teachers. Without well-qualified teachers, even the most effective leadership cannot guarantee quality teaching. To address this, it is crucial to strengthen hiring criteria and introduce continuous skill assessments. Teachers must be equipped with the skills to handle diverse classroom needs, and their professional development must be continuously assessed to ensure high standards are met. According to Hattie (2009), teacher effectiveness is one of

the most significant factors influencing student achievement, highlighting the importance of recruiting and retaining qualified educators.

Lastly, there is often a lack of professional development opportunities for both teachers and school directors. This gap can hinder the ability of schools to make quality improvements. Establishing mandatory, regular professional development programs is essential. These programs should focus on new teaching methodologies, school leadership best practices, and quality assurance mechanisms. Investing in professional development through national and EU resources is crucial for building a sustainable culture of improvement in schools. Day (2000) argues that continuous professional development for educators is necessary to keep up with changes in teaching and leadership practices.

In conclusion, quality assurance in secondary schools is an ongoing challenge that requires a multi-faceted approach. Ensuring effective school management and leadership, well-qualified teachers, and continuous professional development opportunities are essential steps toward achieving and maintaining high educational standards. By addressing these challenges, schools can foster an environment where both teaching and learning are continuously improving, benefiting students, teachers, and the broader educational system.
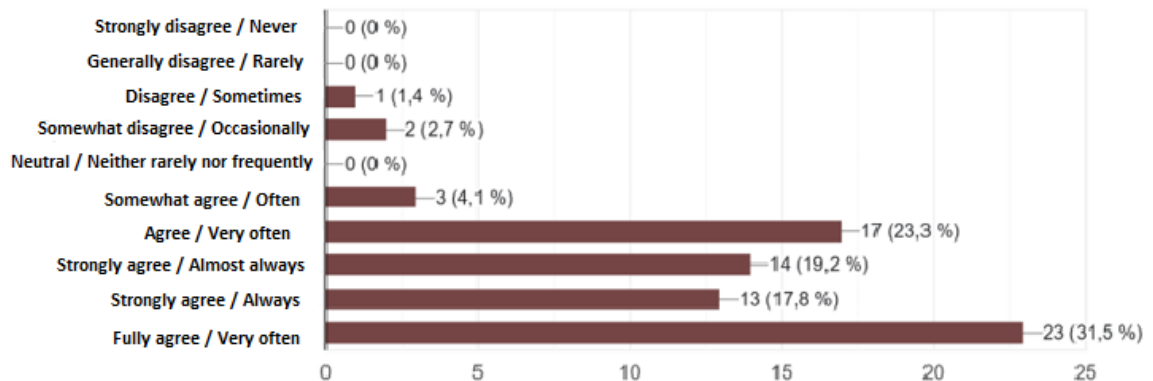
Research question 27:

Do you believe that effective management and leadership by the school director contribute to ensuring the quality of secondary schools?
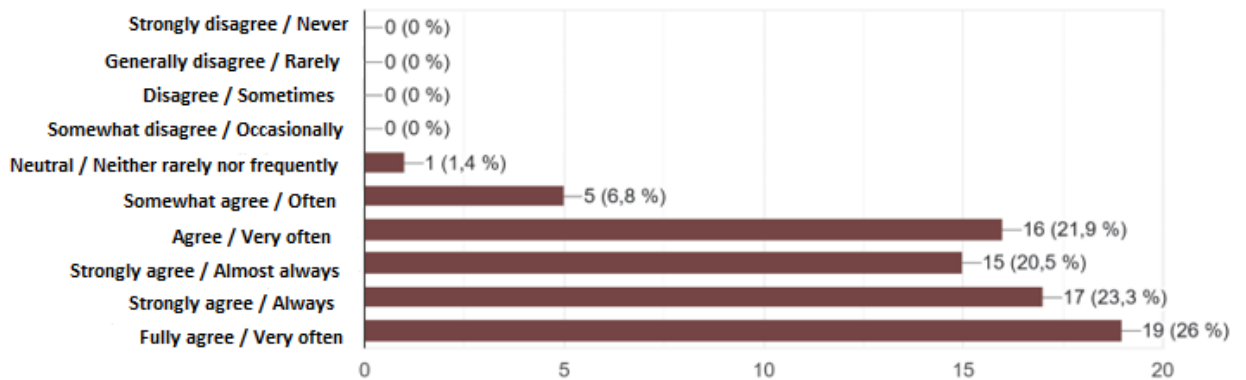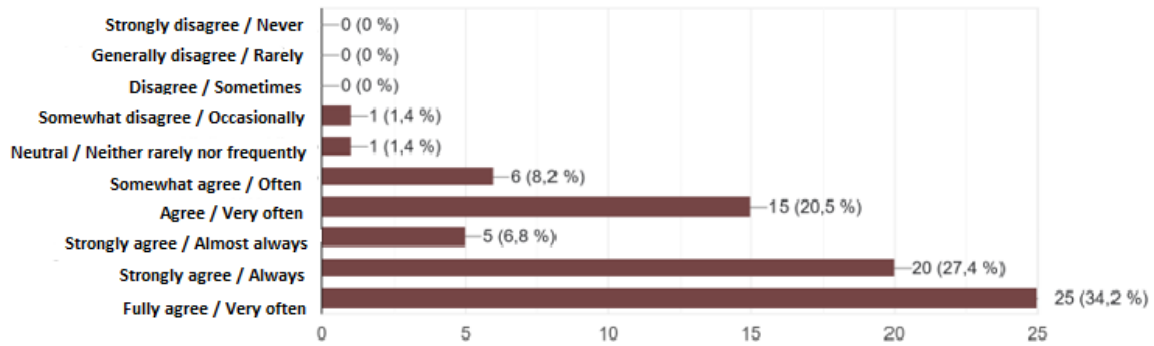

Research question 28:

Do you believe that the qualifications and expertise of teachers are crucial for ensuring the quality of teaching?

Research question 29:

Do you believe that improving school infrastructure contributes to ensuring the quality of the secondary school?

Strongly disagree / Never	0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	0 (0 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	1 (1,4 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	1 (1,4 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	6 (8,2 %)
Agree / Very often	15 (20,5 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	5 (6,8 %)
Strongly agree / Always	20 (27,4 %)
Fully agree / Very often	25 (34,2 %)

Research question 30:

Do you believe that professional development for teachers and school directors contributes to ensuring the quality of the secondary school?

Strongly disagree / Never	0 (0 %)
Generally disagree / Rarely	0 (0 %)
Disagree / Sometimes	0 (0 %)
Somewhat disagree / Occasionally	0 (0 %)
Neutral / Neither rarely nor frequently	1 (1,4 %)
Somewhat agree / Often	6 (8,2 %)
Agree / Very often	17 (23,3 %)
Strongly agree / Almost always	11 (15,1 %)
Strongly agree / Always	15 (20,5 %)
Fully agree / Very often	23 (31,5 %)
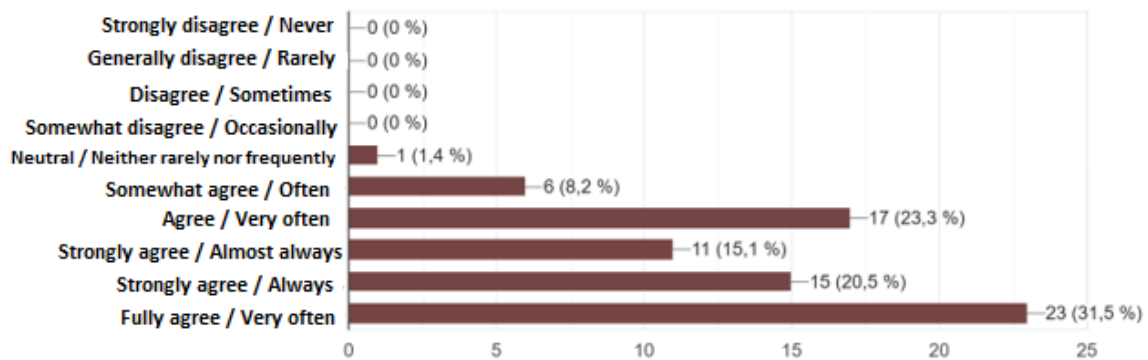
Considerations and survey conclusions

This doctoral research, **"The Role of School Directors in the Effective Management of Secondary Schools "**offers an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities faced by school directors, alongside an analysis of their professional profiles, leadership styles, and the organizational dynamics they navigate according the 14 main fields of their work.

Demographics and Educational Background

The survey reveals that Croatian secondary school directors are highly educated, with 84.9% holding master's degrees and 15.1% possessing advanced qualifications as doctorate degree and specializations. This high standard underscores the professional rigor expected of directors, but it also highlights the need for specialized training tailored to the unique challenges of school leadership.

Professional Experience

Over half of the directors have served multiple terms, showcasing a wealth of experience. However, nearly 40% are in their first term, representing a younger cohort that may require targeted mentorship and support to navigate the complexities of the role.

Status of School Directors in Croatia

The research highlights the dual role of school directors as professional leaders and managerial heads. While 69.8% of directors report restrictive legal frameworks limiting their decision-making autonomy, 30% believe these regulations are not a significant obstacle. Furthermore, despite dissatisfaction with the appointment and reappointment processes, 84% of directors express satisfaction with the legislative framework governing their roles. The study calls for systemic changes to elevate the status of school directors, including revisions to the Education Act, increased financial compensation, and enhanced trust from authorities.

Competence Profile of School Directors

The research underscores a significant challenge: 65.8% of school directors feel burdened by administrative tasks, which detract from their pedagogical leadership. Additionally, 54.7% of directors report insufficient managerial and leadership training, emphasizing the need for comprehensive professional development programs. Defining a clear competence profile tailored to specific school types is also essential to enable directors to balance administrative and strategic responsibilities effectively.

Leadership Styles of School Directors

The study reveals that 80% of school directors predominantly use participative leadership styles, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making. However, 20% rely on autocratic approaches, which can hinder teamwork in non-crisis situations. Flexibility in leadership is deemed crucial by 93.2% of directors, aligning with educational leadership theories. The research advocates for targeted training in situational leadership and individualized approaches to enhance directors' adaptability and effectiveness.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms, including legislative amendments, mandatory training programs, and a clearer definition of directors' roles and competencies. By reducing administrative burdens, fostering participative leadership, and recognizing the multifaceted responsibilities of school directors, Croatia can empower these leaders to drive meaningful improvements in secondary education.

Administrative and Financial Responsibilities

Secondary school directors, often transitioning from teaching backgrounds, face the dual challenge of managing financial and administrative operations without prior formal training in these areas. They depend heavily on support from key staff, including school secretaries and accountants. Effective budgeting is essential, with funding sourced primarily from the Ministry of Science and Education and local governments. Directors

also play a pivotal role in securing additional resources through facility rentals, project-based financing, and EU funding, as well as fostering strong community and parental support for donations.

Despite these efforts, 52% of directors report that limited financial resources hinder effective management, while 8.2% view these constraints as less significant. To address this disparity, schools can apply for national and EU funds, form partnerships with private entities, and diversify revenue streams.

A majority (89%) of directors recognize the efficiency gains from digitizing administrative processes, while 11% cite challenges with system integration or adaptation. Expanding digital platforms and providing staff training can streamline operations, reduce bureaucratic burdens, and allow directors to focus on strategic initiatives.

Effective management of administrative and financial operations requires directors to balance technical expertise, strategic planning, and leadership skills. Digitization, proactive resource management, and transparent communication are key strategies for overcoming financial and operational challenges. By fostering collaboration and pursuing continuous professional development, school directors can ensure a stable and efficient educational environment, meeting the needs of students, staff, and the broader school community.

School Organization

A flexible organizational structure is essential for achieving effective teaching and learning. Survey findings indicate that 74% of school directors value adaptability in their schools' structure, which fosters responsiveness to emerging challenges, promotes collaboration, and enhances decision-making. Furthermore, 89% of directors emphasize the importance of engaging external stakeholders, such as local authorities and educational organizations, to align school objectives with broader educational priorities. However,

challenges like rigid structures and external pressures necessitate solutions such as decentralized management and strong communication strategies with stakeholders.

Human Resources Management

Managing human resources has become increasingly complex, especially post-COVID-19. The study reveals that 66% of directors consider investment in staff development insufficient, while motivation and retention of staff remain critical issues. Solutions include conducting annual staff evaluations to tailor professional development programs, implementing reward and recognition systems, and improving recruitment processes through comprehensive candidate assessments. Addressing teacher turnover through better work-life balance and job stability is also vital for maintaining a consistent and motivated workforce.

Motivation

Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, plays a pivotal role in the performance of teachers and school directors. While intrinsic motivation drives passion for teaching, extrinsic factors such as awards and public recognition significantly enhance morale. According to the study, 80.7% of directors support external recognition to boost teacher motivation. Proposed solutions include organizing competitions, task rotation, and mentorship programs for school leaders, fostering a supportive and engaging work environment.

The study underscores the importance of adaptable school organization, strategic human resource management, and balanced motivation strategies in secondary schools. By addressing identified challenges and implementing effective solutions, school directors can create an environment conducive to staff and student success, ensuring sustainable school development and improved educational outcomes.

Communication Skills and Relationships

Effective communication is essential for successful school management. The study found that while 64.3% of school directors report effective internal communication, 35.7% identify significant challenges, suggesting a need for targeted interventions to improve staff collaboration. Conversely, 95.9% of directors expressed satisfaction with school-parent communication, highlighting its positive impact on fostering trust and parental involvement.

Solution: Workshops to enhance communication skills and digital tools to streamline interactions can address internal communication challenges. Mediation programs for conflict resolution and team-building activities can further promote a positive working environment.

Professional Training for School Directors

Professional development opportunities for school directors remain inconsistent. Although 38.3% of directors report access to quality training, many highlight gaps in availability and budget allocation. This lack of systemic support, combined with no mandatory managerial training, limits directors' preparedness for leadership roles.

Solution: Collaboration with national and international institutions can expand access to tailored training programs. Increased funding and annual conferences for experience-sharing can further enhance directors' professional development. Introducing deputy director roles may help manage workloads, enabling directors to prioritize strategic planning and self-improvement.

School Culture and Atmosphere

A positive school culture is central to educational success, with 87.6% of directors emphasizing the need for stakeholder involvement. However, challenges such as insufficient engagement, a passive school atmosphere, and a lack of identity persist.

Solution: Joint activities involving students, teachers, and parents, along with innovative projects, can energize the school environment. Defining a clear mission and vision enhances the school's identity and fosters a sense of community.

The findings underscore the importance of effective communication, continuous professional development, and a positive school culture in secondary school management. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, school directors can build collaborative, dynamic, and efficient educational environments that meet the evolving needs of students and communities.

Professional Development of School Directors

Professional development emerged as a cornerstone for effective school leadership. While 76.7% of school directors expressed satisfaction with their professional growth, a significant minority highlighted gaps in training access and quality. Additionally, 89% of respondents recognized a direct correlation between professional development and improved school operations.

Challenges and Solutions:

1. **Inconsistent Access to Training:** Establishing structured, high-quality programs tailored for school directors is essential. Collaborations with educational institutions can enrich these opportunities.

2. **Funding Constraints:** Securing national and EU funds can ensure equitable access to professional development without financial barriers.

3. **Limited Lifelong Learning Culture:** Promoting mentorship programs and lifelong learning initiatives will foster continuous improvement and prepare directors for evolving educational demands.

Managing Change

The dynamic nature of education requires school directors to navigate changes effectively. While 80.8% of directors reported confidence in their strategies for change implementation, resistance from staff and parents remains a concern for some.

Challenges and Solutions:

1. **Resistance to Change:** Training programs for teaching staff to highlight the benefits and processes of change can foster acceptance.

2. **Strategic Gaps:** Workshops on crisis management, decision-making, and team collaboration can equip directors to handle transitions more adeptly.

3. **Unclear Implementation Plans:** Developing phased, detailed change management strategies ensures clarity and stakeholder alignment.

The findings underscore the importance of investing in the professional growth of school directors and equipping them with robust change management strategies. Addressing gaps in training, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, and providing the necessary resources are critical steps toward empowering school directors. By doing so, educational systems can ensure that secondary schools remain adaptive, innovative, and effective in meeting the needs of students, staff, and the broader community.

Mission and Vision: A Pillar for Development

The research found that 93.2% of school directors agree that a well-defined mission and vision are essential for school development. However, 6.8% of directors expressed concerns about the lack of clarity in these elements. Collaborative leadership involving teachers, students, and parents is proposed as a solution to foster ownership and alignment with the school's goals. Administrative constraints, including limited autonomy for school directors, emerged as a significant challenge. Addressing this through policy reforms to

grant greater decision-making power is recommended to enhance innovation and adaptability in school leadership.

Quality Assurance: Challenges and Opportunities

The study revealed that 91.8% of school directors view effective leadership as a cornerstone of quality assurance in secondary schools. Teacher qualifications were deemed vital by 95.9% of respondents, while 100% agreed on the importance of improving school infrastructure. Continuous professional development was highlighted as a critical need, supported by 97.2% of school directors. Challenges include unclear legal frameworks, insufficient strategic leadership, and gaps in professional training. Solutions include targeted leadership training, rigorous teacher hiring practices, and mandatory professional development programs to align teaching standards with evolving educational needs.

International Projects and Mobility: Enhancing Educational Excellence

Participation in international projects and mobility programs was recognized by 91.8% of directors as a significant contributor to school development. These initiatives promote cultural exchange, professional growth, and curriculum enrichment, although 8.2% of directors remained sceptical. Expanding awareness and access to such programs is recommended to create globally aware educational environments.

This research underscores the multifaceted role of school directors in steering secondary schools toward success. By addressing the challenges related to mission and vision, enhancing quality assurance mechanisms, and promoting international engagement, school directors can create dynamic, innovative, and high-performing educational institutions. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of effective school management and provide actionable solutions for fostering excellence in secondary education.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights the multifaceted role of secondary school directors in Croatia, who balance administrative, financial, and pedagogical responsibilities within a framework of national policies and educational standards. When considering the role of secondary school principals across all segments of their work, we conclude that school directors have four primary roles, along with numerous secondary roles and demands. The four main roles are: being a good organizer, communicator, motivator, and risk taker and responsible individual.

ROLES OF SCHOOL DIRECTOR

MOTIVATOR

COMMUNICATOR

ORGANIZER

RESPONSIBILITY AND RISK TAKER
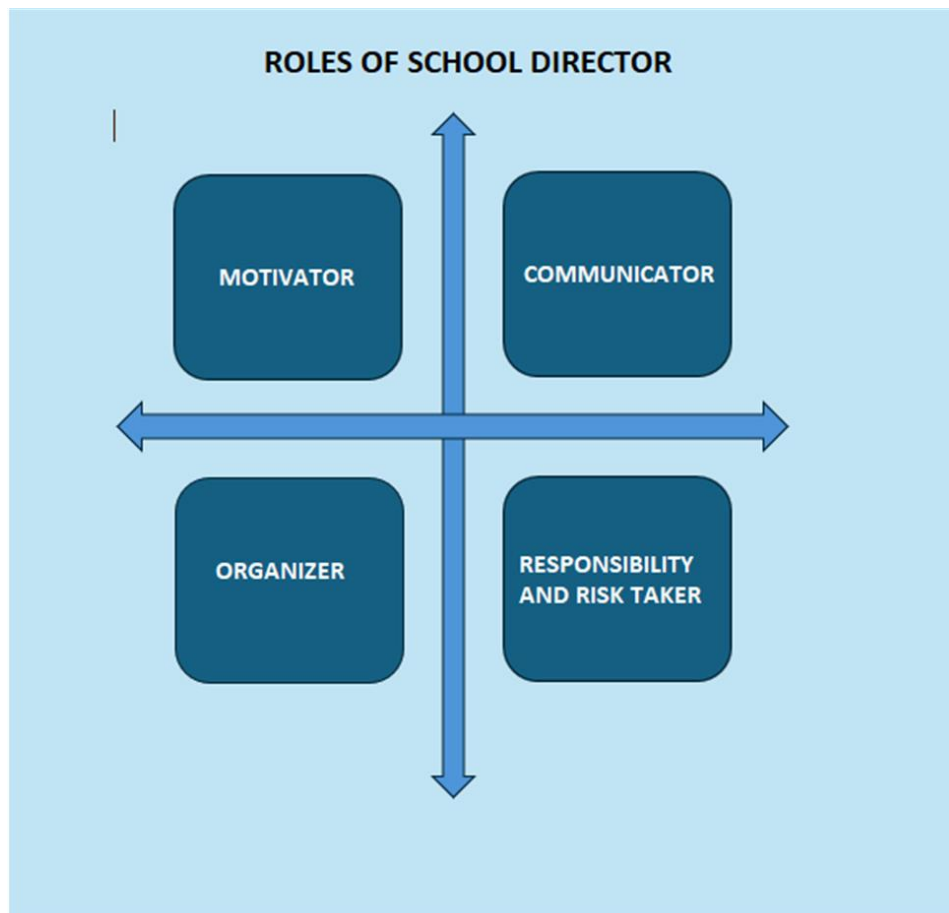
School directors for secondary schools can increase their effectiveness in managing secondary schools. Through this doctoral research, many interesting insights were gained, challenges were studied, and possible solutions were provided. The hypotheses of this research were confirmed, and it is crucial in the future to continue working on researching the areas of the work of school directors for secondary schools in terms of effective management and their improvement through the educational system, but also through improvements in their direct work at both the school and collegial levels. Strategies include reducing administrative tasks through delegation and digitization, implementing tailored professional development programs, and revising policies to provide greater autonomy.

The findings provide guidelines for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to strengthen the role of school directors for secondary schools in secondary education. Future initiatives should focus on the following:

1. **Leadership Training**: Establishing comprehensive training programs in situational leadership, financial management, and strategic planning to equip school directors for secondary schools with the skills needed for their multiple roles.

2. **Policy Reform**: Advocating for legislative changes to grant school directors for secondary schools' greater autonomy while ensuring accountability and transparency.

3. **Mentorship and Collaboration**: Facilitating mentorship networks and collaborative forums where experienced school directors for secondary schools can support newcomers, fostering an exchange of best practices.

4. **The organization of councils connecting education and the economic sector.** Additionally, it was found that it is not easy to predict all situations that secondary school directors encounter, but managing change and continuous professional development is crucial for applying acquired knowledge in the school management practice of school directors.

Teamwork is part of the participatory management style of school directors recommended, although the readiness to make decisions is essential and is also a characteristic of a quality school director for secondary schools. In conclusion, everything we do, every challenge, is crucial to turning it into benefits for our students, teachers, school staff, parents, and the wider community.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS

- KNOWLEDGE, TRAINING, BEST PRACTICES
- TEAMWORK AND DECISION MAKING
- TURN CHALLENGES INTO BENEFITS

"Effective management is not just about processes and systems; it's about people. The key to change lies in the hands of the individual who leads with vision and inspiration." — John Maxwell

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