Educational leadership:
Executive summary

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BACKGROUND

- As there is currently no adequate support for the professional development of principals within the education system in Serbia, TEMPUS project Master program in Educational Leadership (EdLead, 543848-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-RS-JPCR) was created with the aim of designing and implementing a high quality master program and professional development courses in educational leadership for current and aspiring school leaders in Serbia.

- The research team in charge of providing the research base for the master program performed an extensive overview of state-of-art theoretical concepts and empirical findings on educational leadership, as well as of effective education leadership programs. Then, the team undertook two studies – qualitative and quantitative – examining state of the affairs of educational leadership in Serbia, especially in the domain of professional development needs of the school principals.

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

- While there are numerous approaches and models of educational leadership, the prevalent belief today is that the integrated model offers comprehensive, pragmatic and focused view on leadership. **Integrated leadership** incorporates elements of both instructional and transformational leadership, since school leaders not only need to provide fairly direct assistance to the instructional improvement efforts of their staff, but they also need to build organizational contexts which support and enable such efforts. At the heart of the integrated leadership lie: (1) *creation of the vision and setting of direction*; (2) *understanding and development of people*; (3) *redesign of the organisation*; and (4) *management of teaching and learning*.

- Many educational systems have described the *competencies* and/or *practices* of school leaders in sets of standards in order to: enhance student learning outcomes, enhance the quality of educational leadership, clarify expectations about school leadership, and provide a framework for professional development, certification, self reflection and assessment. Standards of competencies and/or practices from Ontario, England, Scotland, Western Australia and USA mostly rely on the integrated model of educational leadership.

- **Effective education leadership makes a difference in improving learning and pupil engagement** (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005; Waters et al., 2003). Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school. Leadership influences on

student achievement are mostly indirect, exerted through their impact on school staff, culture and organization. The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning are estimated to account for about a quarter of total school effects (Halinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 in Leithwood et al., 2004). Research confirms that both instructional and transformational leadership approaches seem to be necessary for good school outcomes (Marks & Printy, 2003).

REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

- In 21 EU countries or regions training for principalship is required. This training takes place either before the appointment or within a specified period after principals' appointment. Most countries require 150-250 hours or 15-30 ECTS of formal training, and some require a full master's degree (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013). In some EU countries (e.g., the Netherlands), even though there is no formal requirement for principals to enroll in training, many principals complete a master's degree in educational leadership.

- A group of countries (e.g., England, Northern Ireland, Slovenia) has started developing and implementing a holistic, coherent approach to leadership development, which includes pre-service training, induction programs and in-service training (OECD, 2008).

- Throughout the world, a variety of training institutions at various government levels offer a variety of school leadership programs. Significant providers are universities. In Sweden, Scotland and Norway, around 30 ECTS or more taken by principals in educational leadership programs count toward master's degree (Taipale, 2012). There also exist specific public institutions in charge of preparation of principals at the national level, such as National School of Leadership in Education in Slovenia, National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in England or Ecole Supérieure de l'Education Nationale (ESEN) in France. In other countries (Sweden, Australia, Spain) municipal and regional levels are free to provide training (OECD, 2008). Private non-university providers, such as Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) in New York City area are also present (Taipale, 2012).

- There is evidence that leaders who engage in formal training programs are more effective, particularly when the training is of a high quality. For instance, 43 percent of schools led by an NCTL graduate in England raised their standards of leadership and management between 2005 and 2008, as assessed by independent inspectors, compared to 33 percent of schools not led by an NCTL graduate (Barber et al., 2010).

- Key features of **effective programs of educational leadership** do not vary much and there is considerable similarity in the nature and content of such programs internationally (OECD, 2008). Vital elements of the most effective school leadership development programs are:

  o The targeted *recruitment* of teachers with substantial leadership potential (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

  o *A coherent and standard-based curriculum* emphasizing instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management, aligned with state and professional standards (Davis et al., 2005; Sanders & Simpson, 2005).

  o *Active, student-centered problem-based learning* that integrates theory and practice and stimulates reflection; such programs include work-based learning, action research, field-based projects, journal writing, diagnostics and portfolios of evidence about practice (Bush & Glover, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

  o Professional support in the form of structured and continuous *mentoring and peer supervision* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Hobson, 2003; Luck, 2003).

  o *Practice-based learning* which includes designed and supervised internships, analysis of classroom practice, learning activities that use on-the-job observations (Darling-Hammond et al.,2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2005).

  o Learning contents and activities that fit *individual and school development plans*, as well as contextual factors that influence practice (Huber, 2004; Moorman, 1997).

  o *School-university and school-districts partnerships* focused on instructional innovation as a shared vision (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2005).

- For the purpose of informing the Master program in Educational leadership in Serbia, 14 educational leadership programs from the Netherlands, Finland, UK, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Canada, USA and Australia were analyzed in depth. In regards to the curriculum, thirteen major themes were mapped: Theories of leadership; Education policy; Educational leadership; Leading the development of organization; Quality management; Leading the development of people; Improving teaching and learning; Law and finance; Research and evaluation; Management of curriculum; Leading inclusion; Leading partnership; and Leadership in practice. Programs largely include problem-based and practice-based learning that intertwines theory and practice. They provide opportunities for matching individual development plans of the candidates with strategic plans of their schools.

QUALITATIVE STUDY

- The qualitative research was done with the aim of gaining insight into the barriers faced by school principals in Serbia, their potential solutions, as well as the competencies that the principals need in order to improve their performance. Participants in the research were: (1) principals, teachers and school counselors from pre-schools, primary and secondary schools

in Serbia. There were ten 6-8 participant focus groups coming from urban and suburban schools in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Niš; (2) heads of the regional school authorities, representatives of the local government, the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation and the Institute for the Improvement of Education. There were 7 interviews with these representatives. Considering the sample, the prevalent perceptions in this report are those of school employees.

- Results of the analysis indicate two broad categories of **barriers** to effective school leadership in Serbia: (a) *barriers related to the system* as a whole; and (b) *barriers related to the school* as an organization. System-level barriers refer to: (1) insufficient and insecure school funding; (2) employment policy and evaluation of teachers' work; (3) inadequate selection of school principals and lack of their continuing proffessional development; (4) legislative issues, (5) mismatch between work of different institutions; and (6) negative image of educational institutions in society. At the school level, the participants said that the barriers stem from principals, teachers, parents and other school staff.

- A variety of potential **solutions** was proposed by the participants. Within the responses that referred to good practices in schools, most related to the improvement of teaching quality and motivating and rewarding good teachers. The main suggestions within the system-level responses were harmonization and changes of laws and bylaws and implementation of clear procedures. Also elaborated were: depolitization of selection of the principals; creation of an institutionalized training for school principals lasting at least a year, with strong emphasis on pedagogical competencies, alongside induction phase and licensing; formalization of distributed leadership in schools; introduction of an accountability system – rewarding and sanctioning – for teachers; introduction of pay grades for teachers and principals, and so on.

- Participants' responses about the **competencies** which school principals need to have fall into 9 categories: (1) *instructional leadership*; (2) *development and management of human resources*; (3) *organizational development*; (4) *communication competencies*; (5) *knowledge of the education system(s) and direction of education policies*; (6) *law and administration*; (7) *financial management*; (8) *project management*, and (9) *establishing identity as a leader*.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

- The quantitative study focused on the needs assessment for improvement of principals' competencies from their point of view. The sample consisted of 200 principals from Belgrade, Vojvodina and Central Serbia (129 elementary school principals and 71 secondary school principals). The designated questionnaire asked principals to assess (a) how

important they perceived specific tasks to be as part of their overall duties and (b) the extent to which they perceived the need to improve their knowledge and skills in order to perform those tasks more effectively. All tasks were divided in six categories corresponding to six domains of the Serbian Standards of competencies for school principals.

- The results show that most of the principals that took part in the study (a) perceive that all tasks specified in the instrument (and, by extension, in the Standards of competencies) represent important professional duties of principals, and (b) state that **they either mostly need or very much need to improve their knowledge and skills on these tasks**. On average, over two thirds of principals (67.60%) mostly need or very much need the improvement on the tasks listed. Furthermore, all domains of Standards are, to a certain extent, equally perceived as those where development of knowledge and skills is mostly or very much needed (Figure 1). On *each* of 82 tasks in the instrument, more than half of principals placed themselves in the "mostly need improvement" or "very much need improvement" category.
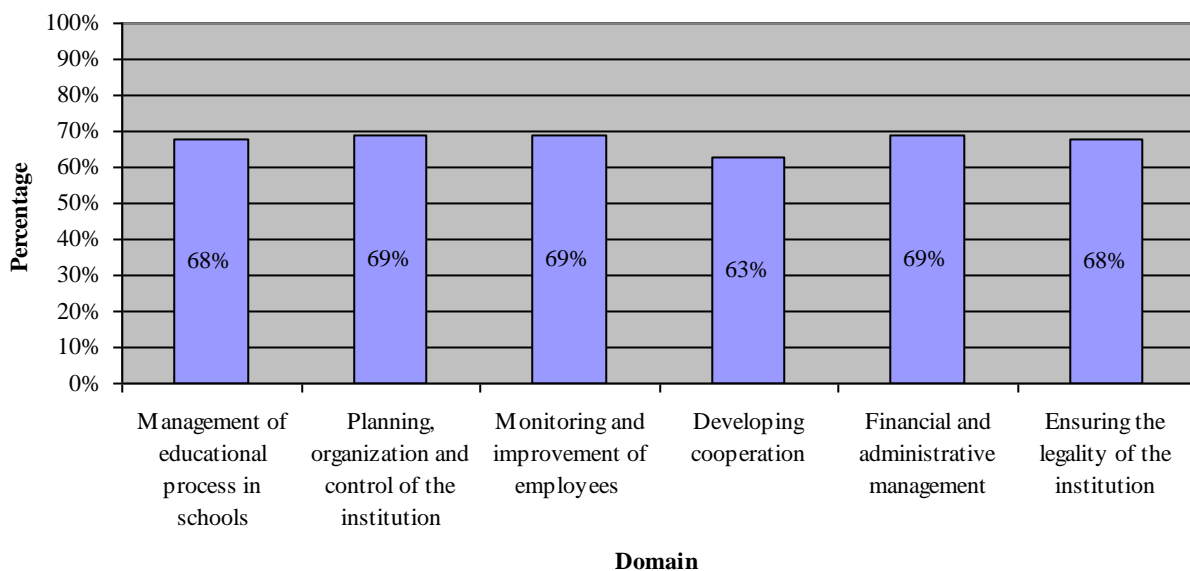

Figure 1. Percentage of principals who mostly or very much need to improve their skills and knowledge in each domain of the Serbian standards for competencies of school principals.

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- Based on the overview of state-of-art theoretical and empirical studies, effective educational leadership programs, and results obtained from two research studies, a conceptual framework for the master program in educational leadership in Serbia was created.

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