

#33 (2) / 2019

ISSN: 1898-8431

HUMANUM

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NA LIŚCIE CZASOPISM  
PUNKTOWANYCH MNiSW  
(7 PKT., CZĘŚĆ B, NR 992)

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HUMANUM POWSTAŁO  
W 2008 ROKU

CZŁONKAMI REDAKCJI  
I RADY NAUKOWEJ SĄ  
UZNANI BADACZE Z POLSKI  
I ZAGRANICY

# HUMANUM



Instytut Studiów Międzynarodowych  
i Edukacji w Warszawie

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MIEDZYNARODOWE STUDIA SPOŁECZNO-HUMANISTYCZNE  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL AND HUMANITIES STUDIES

INSTYTUT STUDIÓW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH I EDUKACJI HUMANUM

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Adres redakcji i wydawcy | Publisher: Instytut Studiów Międzynarodowych i Edukacji Humanum,  
ul. Złota 61, lok. 101, 00-819 Warszawa [www.humanum.org.pl](http://www.humanum.org.pl) / Printed in Poland  
Co-editor – International School of Management in Prešov (Slovakia)  
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ŻADEN FRAGMENT TEJ PUBLIKACJI NIE MOŻE BYĆ REPRODUKOWANY, UMIESZCZANY W SYSTEMACH PRZECHOWYWANIA INFORMACJI LUB PRZEKAZYWANY  
W JAKIEJKOLWIEK FORMIE — ELEKTRONICZNEJ, MECHANICZNEJ, FOTOKOPII CZY INNYCH REPRODUKCJI — BEZ ZGODNY POSIADACZA PRAW AUTORSKICH  
WERSJA WYDANIA PAPIEROWEGO HUMANUM MIĘDZYNARODOWE STUDIA SPOŁECZNO-HUMANISTYCZNE JEST WERSJĄ GŁÓWNA

ISSN 1898-8431

Czasopismo punktowane Ministerstwa Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego w Polsce. Lista B, 7 pkt, poz. 992  
The magazine scored by Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland. List B, 7 points, pos. 992

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## Leadership in education – current international research

### Summary

This review study is concerned with an overview of current international research related to the topic: leadership in education<sup>1</sup>. The topic's importance and popularity is the underlying motivation for writing this study as it can be considered one of the keystones for successful educational institutions and policies. On the other hand, criticism is often raised due to the quality of empirical evidence which should support and verify the measures implemented into practice. The theoretical analysis includes studies published in magazines included in the WOS (Web of Science) database in the last 5 years (work was completed in October 2019) that are associated with keywords "educational/school/teacher leadership". The 75 studies were found and later analysed with regards to different points of view: geographical origin, thematic perspective and several methodological aspects. The results are discussed in the study.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, school leadership, teacher leadership, research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the OECD Report (Pont, Nusche, Moorman 2008), leadership is an important topic within educational policies in many countries and a significant subject of scientific research. Educational experts are interested in this

<sup>1</sup> The study was created as a part of Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV/ SRDA) project 17-0557 *Psychologický prístup k tvorbe, implementácii a overovaniu kompetenčného modelu rozvoja lídrov v edukácii/ Psychological Approach to Creation, Implementation and Verification of the Competency Model of Leaders' Progress in Education*.

field mainly because it represents opportunities for creating the base for necessary institutional changes which would lead to success. The interconnection between leadership and schools' improvement has been already documented in a few studies (see e. g. Leithwood et al. 2004) and Schleicher (2015) even states that 21st century schools are defined by strong leadership, confident teachers and innovative approaches. According to foreign authors, the particular interest in the leader in education (hereinafter LiE) can be categorised into two main strands. The first strand mostly includes school management (educational/school leadership) and the second strand refers to the teachers' level (educational/teacher leadership). Generally, it includes both encouraging and influencing other people in order to achieve common goals (Pont, Nusche, Moorman 2008).

## Leadership in Education: Topic's Expansion in Context

Leadership is one of the most researched phenomena in social sciences. It is because the effective functioning of any social group is determined by the qualities of its leader who is usually seen as responsible for both achievements and failures of the entire group regardless of his/her actual input or unpredictable external factors (Weber, Camerer, Rottenstreich, Knez, 2001; Bass, Bass 2008). 100 years of social psychologists' research concerned with leadership was marked by enthusiasm resulting from the popular topic and incrementally valid progress on the one hand, but by many paradigmatic shifts, false signals and contradictory findings on the other (Antonakis, Day 2018). Despite all of this, this vast knowledge base is currently considered a source for all organisational structures in various sectors and industries including education.

Some authors consider the 80's a breakthrough period in education when attention was slowly drawn to the necessary changes in schools' management preparation and development. Subsequently, the beginnings of the 21st century were particularly important once the school management emerged essentially as the main problem in educational reforms (Hallinger 2003). In the next few years, the schools' leadership became a central subject for many experts from different countries even though the topic was relatively new and still developing; thus building upon high-quality empirical data was difficult. Ärlestig et al. (2016) point out the situation in Brazil and China where the term "leadership" was rarely used in scientific studies. In contrast, English-speaking countries had a long-standing tradition of empirical and conceptual research related to management in education including leadership which is closely related to institutional management.

The analytical tool Google Trends provides evidence that the topic of "education" together with the word "leadership" is one of the most searched lexical collocations since 2004. No wonder, since countries try to adjust their educational systems to the needs of contemporary society and thus the expectations with regard to schools and their management changed.



## Leadership in Education: Some of the Problematic Research Areas

It is a known fact nowadays that LiE plays a crucial role in improving school results on various levels. The areas affected are: school atmosphere, teachers' motivation and input and the teaching process itself (Pounder, Ogawa, Adams 1995; Leithwood, Jantzi 2000; Leithwood et al. 2004). In addition to effectiveness itself, the question of LiE's conceptualization of competencies became a centre of attention. Together with attempts related to the creation of complex models (e. g. Gajardo, Carmenado 2012; NEA, NBPTS, CTQ 2014; JFF, CCSSO 2017), a need to define specific leadership aspects that are applicable and effective in educational context arose.

The idea that transformative leadership influences important organizational attitudes and results has been sufficiently validated by now (Bass 1998; Avolio 1999). Moreover, the research in an educational context shows the recognizable positive connection between transformative leadership and: (1) evaluation of school conditions together with teachers' determination to change (Fullan 2002); (2) students' results (Sun, Leithwood 2013); (3) classroom management effectiveness (Khany, Ghoreishi 2014). The evidence of other concepts' effectiveness is not that obvious (e. g. instructional, innovative, moral, servant, cultural or political relevant). It is a fact that some of them are just a "slogan" and a marketing tool (Leithwood et al. 2006; Nedelcu 2013) lacking the empirically verified theoretical framework (Dinham et al. 2011).

Furthermore, it is obvious that the LiE trend is connected to the need of specific training for teachers and managers in schools which would allow them to react efficiently in extending roles and responsibilities. In spite of enthusiasm and broad consensus among the practitioners and policymakers in regard to the impact of professional development on the improvement of a leader's knowledge, skills and abilities, it is clear that empirical evidence proving the effectiveness of training and its impact on LiE development is limited (Davis et al. 2005; Maruyama, Ryan 2014).

## Explicitly Defined Goals of the Study

The schools of the future (as depicted by international trends) are open organisations constantly learning and adapting to ongoing changes (Marsick, Watkins 1999). It is also clear that any attempts to introduce systematic changes are unsuccessful unless they are implemented on the level of education process and learning (McKinsey, Company 2007). Teachers and school managers with leadership potential thus themselves stand in the centre of attention as creators and multipliers of innovations and common visions. The recent interest in the discussed matter together with massive interest in the topic may contribute to its huge popularity which will lead to implementation of unverified facts. As Hackman and Wageman (2007) noted, no other topic from behavioural science offers such a misalignment between the richly written theory and what can actually be said about it with regard to empirical evidence (see also Bennis 1959). In this context, the goal of this paper is to explore the production of the current high-quality research and its nature using the the following questions: (1) Which countries have shown the greatest production of high-quality research within LiE recently?; (2) Which topics are discussed in the high-quality research within

LiE recently?; (3) Which type of research within LiE was done recently?. Based on the answers to the aforementioned questions, the study's conclusion will try to determine the relationship between the knowledge level within LiE and its actual quality.

## 2. METHODS

The presented review study is a theoretical type of descriptive research study as it introduces a systematic review with regard to new knowledge based on existing facts. The analysis includes 75 research studies published in the last 5 years in the most prestigious database, Web of Science (WOS). The searching for studies took place in October 2019 and included only magazine databases (excluding monographs, chapters in monographs and articles in almanacs) and the studies were found via the keywords “educational/school/teacher leadership”. After a detailed research of study abstracts, six were excluded because they treated the LiE topic only indirectly. Therefore the final analysis includes 69 studies.

The WOS database was selected because of the strict process of peer-review and the lowest number of published works with suspicions of predatory practices (Macháček, Srholec 2016). After establishing the definitive number of studies, the principles of both qualitative and quantitative content analysis were applied.

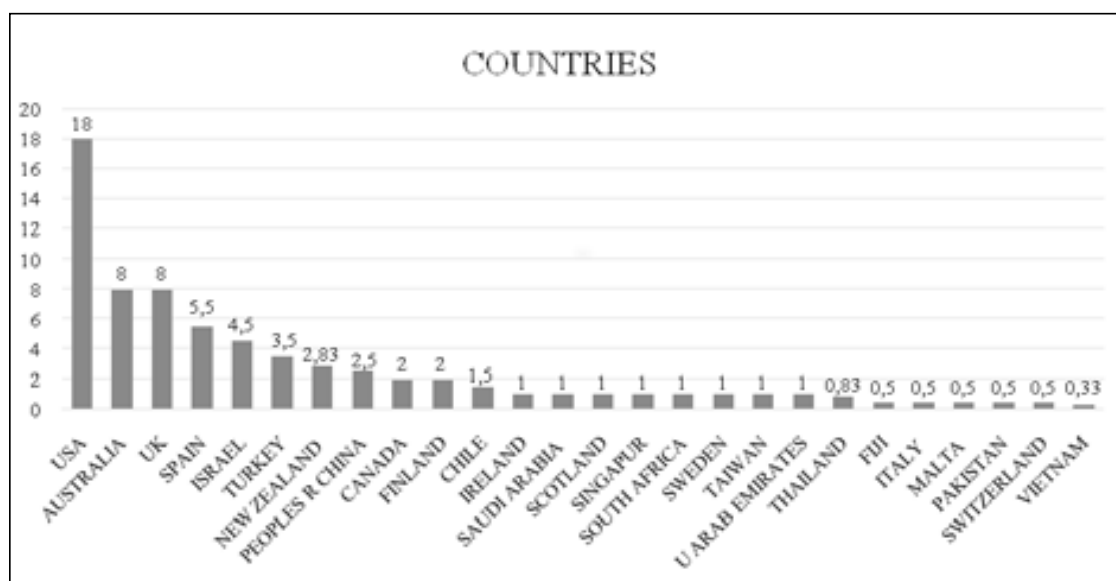
The validation of the qualitative analysis results was guaranteed by two independently categorizing coders.

## 3. RESULTS

The first research question tried to identify the countries that have recently shown the greatest production of high-quality research within LiE (in the last 5 years). Every study that was incorporated into the analysis ( $N = 69$ ) represented one entire unit, but only a portion of the unit was assigned to study's co-authors who came from different countries (this means that the entire unit was distributed between the number of the different countries of origin if needed, regardless of the number of authors).

The results of the first analysis are presented in Graph 1. Three countries with the highest portion regarding production of the research within LiE are: USA ( $f = 18$ ), Australia ( $f = 8$ ) and UK ( $f = 8$ ). In the last 5 years, authors from English-speaking countries ( $n = 6$ ) wrote approximately 58% of the total number of published high-quality studies within LiE in spite of the fact that these countries together represent roughly only one fourth of the total number of countries included in the research (26 countries with reported production of results in the last 5 years were compared). The WOS database has not registered any Slovak or Czech article about LiE published in the magazine during the given period.





**Graph 1.** Production of research in the last 5 years with regard to geographical origin according to WOS database.

The second research question is concerned with thematic content analysis of the high-quality research within LiE in the last 5 years. In the Table 1, the results presented clearly show that the three most frequent themes are associated with the next areas: (a) conceptualization of LiE ( $f = 13$ ), (b) preparation and development aspects ( $f = 12$ ) and (c) influences and impacts of LiE on different conditions of school operations, on their members and on their students ( $f = 10$ ). Other important themes are: analysis of educational policies connected to LiE ( $f = 9$ ), production of research within LiE linked chronologically with a certain geographic area ( $f = 7$ ) and last but not least, interest in schools' directors ( $f = 6$ ).

**Table 1.** Analysis of thematic focus of research within LiE

Directors - different aspects of LiE	
(f)6	<i>Cultural influences</i>
	<i>Leadership style</i>
	<i>Specific development</i>
	<i>Working in special environment</i>
	<i>Identity of director as a leader</i>
	<i>Determiners of fluctuation</i>
Delimitation/implementation of certain type of LiE	
(f)13	<i>Culturally responsive LiE</i>
	<i>Instructional LiE</i>
	<i>Transformative LiE</i>
	<i>Distributive LiE</i>
	<i>Comparison of different models of LiE</i>

(f)13	<i>Development of efficient LiE model for implementing changes at schools</i>
	<i>Development of LiE model for inclusive environment and the need for social equality</i>
	<i>Development of LiE model for school representatives – middle management</i>
	<i>New approach to complex conceptualisation of LiE</i>
	<i>Examples of good practice of implementation of LiE at schools</i>
<b>Functional aspects of leadership in school environment (impacts, correlations)</b>	
(f)10	<i>Teachers' satisfaction with work</i>
	<i>Organizational variables</i>
	<i>Students' results</i>
	<i>Digital technologies</i>
	<i>Overall change of organization</i>
	<i>School's micro-policy/relations</i>
<b>Preparation of LiE – developing aspects</b>	
(f)12	<i>Preparation of inclusive leaders</i>
	<i>Professional programme of development</i>
	<i>Adaptation and initiation programmes</i>
	<i>Ethical principles during preparation</i>
	<i>Programme for leadership preparation of postgraduate students</i>
	<i>Programmes for leadership preparation of directors/teachers in countries</i>
	<i>Chronological development of programmes in countries</i>
	<i>Methods of financial support for LiE and for changes' sustainability</i>
<b>LiE in specific conditions (environment)</b>	
(f)5	<i>Dialogic Leadership in community schools</i>
	<i>LiE - English-language teachers for non-native speakers</i>
	<i>LiE – Physical education teachers in culturally diversified classrooms</i>
	<i>Relational leadership in community schools</i>
	<i>Culturally relevant leadership in different contexts</i>
<b>Geographical and chronological map of LiE research results' production</b>	
(f)7	<i>Comparison of two areas</i>
	<i>General international map of knowledge production</i>
	<i>Knowledge production in one geographic area</i>

Leader's personality and identity	
(f)5	Values/motivation/personal traits/characteristics
	Emotions
	Building of confidence
	<i>Identification with reforms on personal level</i>
	<i>Methods of self-reflection</i>
Analysis of educational policy within LiE	
(f)9	<i>Critical analysis of the research</i>
	<i>Examples of the reforms' implementation at schools</i>
	<i>Development of innovations' implementation and schools' autonomy strengthening</i>
	<i>Students' results in the context of educational policy</i>
	<i>Analysis of the educational policy in a certain country</i>
	<i>Professional standards</i>
Developing the measuring tool	
(f)2	Measuring of specific type of leadership
	Measuring of one's own developmental progress

The last area of analysis focused on methodological aspects published in LiE studies included in the WOS database. In Table 2, the presented results point to the fact that theoretical methods prevail in the research (61%) while its substantial part consists of studies lacking a systematic (scientific) approach ( $f = 16$ , 38%). Quantitative analyses were found in 12 empirical studies (meta-analyses and mixed empirical and selected theoretical-empirical research) which represents 17% of the total production of high-quality research results during the evaluation period. Qualitative analyses were found in 13 empirical studies which represents 19% of the total production of high-quality research results during the evaluation period. At the same time, two methodological studies were found.

**Table 2.** Analysis of methodological focus of research within LiE

Theoretical research	
(f)42	<i>Review study of literature</i>
	<i>Review synthesis of studies</i>
	<i>Systematic review study</i>
	<i>Systematic conceptual approach to the theory development</i>
	<i>Critical essay</i>
	<i>Review study of literature – unsystematic (lacking methodology)</i>
	<i>Integrative review e study</i>

Empirical qualitative research	
(f)9	<i>Self-study</i>
	<i>Multiple case study</i>
	<i>Case study</i>
Empirical quantitative research	
(f)4	<i>Meta-analysis</i>
Empirical mixed research	
(f)5	<i>Evaluation study</i>
	<i>Action research</i>
	<i>Comparison of schools</i>
Theoretical-empirical research	
(f)7	<i>Combination of review study and questionnaire</i>
	<i>Combination of review study and multiple case study</i>
	<i>Combination of review study and evaluation</i>
	<i>Combination of review study and ethnography</i>
Methodological research	
(f)2	The measuring tool's development
	Tool's development and its testing

## 4. DISCUSSION

The discussion is led in the context of several presented findings.

- 1. Authors from English-speaking countries wrote approximately 58% of the total number of published high-quality LiE studies in spite of the fact that these countries together represented roughly only one fourth of the total number of countries included in the research.** The abovementioned finding corresponds with statements of Årlestiga et al. (2016) that these countries have a long-standing tradition of empirical and conceptual research with regard to management in education including leadership which is closely related to institutional management. Even according to other authors, the Anglo-Saxon scientists have provided major contributions to production of LiE research since the 80's (Hallinger, Bryant 2013; Walker, Hallinger 2015). Only in the 90's, publications (other than Anglo-Saxon) started to appear (Hallinger, Hammad 2017). As stated further by Hallinger (2019), the Asian, African and Latin-American literature increasingly constitutes a significant part of knowledge production in the last 5 years.
- 2. Slovakia does not have any LiE articles published in the magazine and included in WOS database during the given period.** This finding can't be considered surprising as public, scientific and political discourse has not yet integrated the leadership concept in Slovakia as an explicit part of school management (see

e. g. professional standards of directors), nor are innovations put into practice through the teachers – leaders. In fact, even the opposite trends could be considered. The existing empirical evidence suggests that Slovak teachers have taken the “counter-reforms” stance. Research conducted in 2015 with a sample of 954 teachers shows that as many as 81% of teachers think that society does not give priority to education and 85% cannot see any significant positive changes in education after 1989 when the socialist regime in Slovakia fell and the democratic era began. At the same time, as many as 43% of Slovak teachers would like to revert to the system in place before 1989 (Porubský et al. 2016).

3. **The three most frequent themes were associated with these areas: conceptualization of LiE, preparation and development aspects of LiE and finally, influences and impacts of LiE on different operating conditions of schools, on their members and on their students.** This finding is in accordance with the paper’s starting points and implemented overview of literature within this topic since the authors of this paper recognized these themes as crucial at the beginning. At the same time, many authors point to the fact that the relationship between articles about the topic and clearly verifiable positive impacts on educational practice (quantified functionality of competency models, evidence of positive impacts of the implemented methods and training forms and LiE development) is unbalanced and argues against exactness (Leithwood et al. 2006; Nedelcu 2013; Davis et al. 2005; Maruyama, Ryan 2014). Our analyses support these claims. The LiE field is characterized by prevailing theoretical frameworks of research (even often unsystematic), especially when tackling the questions about conceptualisation of LiE’s theoretical approaches and their competency frameworks, but at the same time, the lack of documentation of effects may be observed even in questions about LiE’s preparation and development (if some evaluation study exists, its character is rather qualitative and the positive impact is verified rather on subjective level, not on the performance-related objective level). The vast meta-analyses were mostly concerned with verification of positive impacts with regard to indicators such as students’ achievement, teachers’ satisfaction with their work and selected organizational variables. Once again, the conclusion supports the documented starting points which point out that quantitative empirical evidence has been focusing especially on those studies which present LiE’s positive impacts on different operating conditions of schools and their members.
4. **It was found that theoretical methods prevail in the research (61%) and that its substantial part consists of studies lacking systematic (scientific) approach (f = 16. 38%) – quantification of phenomena is a procedure used with less frequency in both theoretical and empirical studies.** Within the context of this conclusion, it is necessary to mention that many theoretical review studies evaluated quantitative researches as well. Yet, it would be inappropriate to talk about sufficiently proven positive effects in many researched areas because meta-analytical methods were not applied. The future endeavours of researchers should be directed to these questions.

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