

Implementation of the School as a Learning Organisation: Latvian Educators' Experience

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ABSTRACT

The idea of *the school as a learning organisation* (SLO) has become a topical issue in many countries due to the rapid changes in curricula and the management of educational institutions. The process of purposeful implementation of SLO has started in the Latvian education system too. Within the framework of the project “Competence Approach to Curriculum” (School2030) implemented by the National Centre for Education (Republic of Latvia), not only the current curriculum documents are reviewed and improved, but also the introduction of SLO in general and vocational education in Latvia is realised – a school where each student’s deep learning is supported, students, teachers, school management and other staff learn individually and together, a school that is constantly changing and ready to meet the new challenges. SLO is also important for ensuring the assessment and monitoring of the quality of education. Consequently, the issue of SLO is also relevant for the Latvian State Education Quality Service in the accreditation and self-evaluation of educational institutions and the improvement of their principals’ professional competence. The aim of the research is to evaluate the mutual coherence and interaction of different levels of policy (education level, municipal level) in the successful implementation of SLO in general education in Latvia. In order to indicate the extent to which the approaches implemented at different levels of educational policy are consistent with the conceptual model of SLO, the theoretical concept of SLO is analysed in the study – key components, operating principles and preconditions for successful school transformation. The study also describes the international experience in the implementation of the SLO model, thus revealing the possible transfer of the experience of other countries to the Latvian educational context.

Keywords: learning organisation, a model of school as a learning organisation, education quality assessment, general and vocational education, education policy in Latvia

Introduction

In many countries around the world, national governments have launched education reforms aimed at transforming and streamlining school governance. As a result of these reforms, schools are expected to develop inclusive collaborative structures, improve communication channels, organise targeted staff professional development and implement learning-centered leadership (Lo, 2004). Although schools aim to prepare students to live and work in a changing world, schools do not always keep pace with societal changes. This is attributed to the fact that teachers too often do not develop the professional skills and practices that would enable them to support students' diverse learning needs. Therefore, the reforms that are implemented in the education sector are often implemented without continuity, without creating significant and lasting changes in teachers' beliefs and convictions (Fullan, 2015).

The school as a learning organisation is proposed as an alternative strategy to achieve school-wide change, to facilitate the transformation of the school governance model, to influence different aspects of the internal culture of the school organisation and to promote innovation in school governance (Stoll & Kools, 2017). Building schools into effective learning organisations or using their characteristics in school governance is also at the core of several recommendations made by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to national education policy makers (OECD, 2016; UNESCO, 2022).

Since 2016, Latvia has been working on the introduction of a new general education standard, envisaging a gradual transition to a competence-based approach to learning. This change involves not only new learning outcomes for students, but also a new approach to school governance. "A school that supports the learning of every pupil and implements a learning-by-doing approach operates as a learning organisation that changes and adapts independently to new circumstances. It is where pupils, teachers, school leaders and other staff learn individually and collectively to achieve their own and shared goals." (National Centre for Education, 2017) This means that Latvia, too, has set the national education policy goal of gradually transforming schools into effective learning organisations.

The aim of the study is to find out which professional practices characterise schools as learning organisations and how these practices are reflected in documents. In order to achieve this goal, the authors have analysed the scientific literature on the school as a learning organisation, paying particular attention to the dimensions of this model and the prerequisites for its implementation in school management, studied the experience of other countries and regions – Wales (UK) and Singapore – in implementing the principles of the school as

a learning organisation, and analysed Latvian education policy documents such as the Education Law, Education Development Guidelines 2021–2027, etc, assessing the relevance of the provisions contained therein to the principles of the learning organisation.

School as a learning organisation: literature review

There is no single, all-encompassing definition of a learning organisation in the academic literature, as each definition highlights and emphasises those elements of a learning organisation that are relevant to the context in which the research is being conducted. However, researchers have concluded that what learning organisations have in common is that they need to be created in the context of a rapidly changing external environment, where the learning organisation is seen as a way in which the organisation learns to cope with challenges and solve problems by using the potential of collective learning. A learning organisation is an organisation that has the capacity to change and continuously adapt to new external environmental conditions as its members individually and collectively learn and develop their own unique way of implementing the organisation's vision (Kools & Stoll, 2016).

At the heart of a learning organisation is the learning of all the participants involved, which is acknowledged as the main reason for the organisation's existence. It is an organisation that supports both individual and collective learning and encourages its employees to share with their colleagues their vision of their individual goals and how they relate to the organisation's common goals (Marquardt, 2002). This implies that learning organisations share a number of common elements – strategic leadership and management, a highly developed internal organisational culture, effective communication systems, information and knowledge sharing systems, and multiple levels of learning (Birdthistle, 2009).

A learning organisation is characterised by the ability to create, acquire, interpret, transfer and retain knowledge, and to purposefully redesign its activities to reflect new knowledge and insights gained through the learning process. Moreover, it is important that the collective knowledge acquired during the organisation's activities is retained in the organisation's memory and reflected in the activities, norms and procedures implemented by the organisation (Garvin, 2000).

The development of a learning organisation is determined by 4 interrelated elements: organisational learning, learning at work, the learning climate and the learning structure of the organisation. Organisational learning focuses on different levels of learning, the creation and accumulation of knowledge and its use in the organisation. Workplace learning means that employees have the opportunity to learn on site in the organisation because knowledge is contextual (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, 2020). A learning climate implies that the management of the

organisation creates a positive atmosphere in the workplace that is supportive, open and helps to develop new and critical thinking patterns in employees. A learning structure requires that the organisation develops a management that is flexible and decentralised and encourages the formation of teams of employees (Örtenblad, 2004).

Dimensions of the learning organisation

Senge (1990) proposes 5 dimensions of a learning organisation:

- 1) personal mastery, in which the members of the organisation create their personal vision, care for their professional development and use their knowledge for the benefit of the organisation;
- 2) mental models, which involve an ongoing dialogue between employees that allows them to evaluate existing and develop new values, opinions and beliefs;
- 3) shared vision, which is created through collective agreement and is understood and accepted by all employees;
- 4) team learning, which is characterised by thinking collectively and learning from each other's past experiences;
- 5) systems thinking, which is related to understanding the processes within and outside the organisation and their impact on the organisation's performance.

In the context of implementing the principles of learning organisations in schools, researchers propose the concept of a "learning school". This is a school in which learning is central, and everyone learns – students, teachers and school management (Ng, 2005b). A learning school is a school that is transformed and made sustainable not through edicts, rules or instructions, but through an explicit orientation towards learning. All school-related actors are encouraged to express their vision of the direction of the school's development and contribute to the realisation of this vision (Senge et al., 2000).

Johnston & Caldwell (2001) point out that the school as a learning organisation is characterised by 4 dimensions:

- 1) effective communication channels between stakeholders;
- 2) inclusive collaborative structures within the school, and between the school and the local community;
- 3) integrated and inclusive professional development for staff; and
- 4) learning-focused leadership. The school as a learning organisation is characterised by a climate of trust and collaboration within the school; the capacity and willingness of staff to take initiative and risks; a shared and monitored school mission and professional development of staff (Silins et al., 2002).

Referring to the ideas of Peter Senge, Lo (2004) points out that a school as a learning organisation is characterised by:

- 1) personal mastery, which is linked to staff understanding of their personal goals, critical evaluation of current practices and purposeful professional development;
- 2) mental models, characterised by staff openness to change, willingness to experiment and regular reflection;
- 3) shared vision, involving a wide range of people in the formulation of the school's mission and goals;
- 4) team learning, which involves building such systems that foster collaboration among staff, harnessing the potential of informal learning;
- 5) systems thinking, characterised by the use of multiple communication channels, sharing decision-making and responsibility among school staff and understanding the changes taking place in the broader educational context.

The school as a learning organisation is characterised by continuous learning opportunities, exploration of professional practice and dialogue, collaboration and team learning, systems for knowledge accumulation and dissemination, encouragement to pursue a collective vision, alignment of action with the collective vision, strategic leadership with a focus on learning and alignment of action with the external environment (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Whereas OECD researchers in the context of the school as a learning organisation propose a 7-dimension model:

- 1) a shared vision of learning for all students;
- 2) creating and providing continuous learning opportunities for all staff;
- 3) fostering team learning and collaboration among staff;
- 4) culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration within the school;
- 5) systems for acquiring, storing and sharing new knowledge within the school;
- 6) learning from the external environment and other systems;
- 7) modelling and growth of learning management (OECD, 2016; Stoll & Kools, 2017; Kools et al., 2020).

Prerequisites for developing a school into a learning organisation

To develop a school as a learning organisation, it is necessary to achieve the formation of such internal culture of the organisation, that is based on trust among employees (Stoll & Kools, 2017). In schools characterised by high levels of trust, teachers can talk more openly about the challenges they face in their daily work and learn more effectively from mistakes (Vaessen, van den Beemt & de Laat, 2014). It involves a shift in mindset and a commitment by all school staff

to self-reflect and evaluate their professional performance. Without collective commitment, collaboration and risk-taking, it is not possible to establish a school as an authentic learning organisation (Harris & Jones, 2018).

The microclimate of relationships in the school and the dynamics of teachers' interpersonal relationships are important for the implementation of the principles of a learning organisation (Carney, 2000). It will be possible to implement the principles of the learning organisation if school staff are open to new experiences, willing to support other colleagues in their change efforts, and willing to share the knowledge and good practice accumulated in the school. It is also important to develop the skills of providing and using reflection and feedback of all parties involved (Kelchterman, 2004; Timperley et al., 2008).

The implementation of the learning organisation model in schools is linked to a change in the role of school leaders. Despite the fact that learning leadership is often shared in schools, employees are not always able to take responsibility and change the way processes are implemented unless they are supported by the school leadership. Consequently, the leadership team has a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which people can develop new behaviours and be aware that they are not expected to maintain the status quo, but to challenge established practices (Marsick & Watkins, 1999).

Another prerequisite for the implementation of a school as a learning organisation is how well the school administration implements a policy of shared leadership and responsibility in the school and how teachers are involved in issues related to school governance (Harris & Jones, 2010). The participation of school employees in the decision-making processes can increase the responsibility of teachers and other stakeholders for the achievement of organisational goals (Thoonen et al., 2011).

Research methodology

The qualitative data and information required for the study were obtained using the monographic method, by identifying, selecting and systematically analysing professional and scientific literature in English in the international databases such as EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, EMERALD, WEB of Science, etc. The aim of the literature analysis is to answer 2 research questions:

- 1) What is “school as a learning organisation” and what are the dimensions of this concept?
- 2) What are the international examples of national or regional transformation of schools into learning organisations and what can other countries learn from this experience?

To analyse the international experience of implementing the “School as a learning organisation” model, 2 examples are examined – Singapore and

Wales (UK). Singapore has been selected for the case study analysis because its education system has been ranked as one of the best in the world according to the OECD's 2018 PISA survey, with students demonstrating high academic achievement in mathematics, science and literacy (OECD, 2019). This has been attributed as one of the outcomes of the nationwide 'School Excellence Model', which has transformed schools into learning organisations (Ng, 2003). In contrast, Wales (UK) is selected for the case study because, according to the OECD's PISA 2009 survey, Welsh pupils have shown mediocre learning outcomes in mathematics, science and literacy (OECD, 2018). As a result, an education reform "Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–2021" (Welsh Government, 2017), was launched and implemented in Wales with the aim of transforming schools into effective learning organisations.

The authors have conducted a qualitative content analysis of Latvian education policy documents in order to answer the research question on how the principles of school as a learning organisation are reflected in the framework of the documents of the Latvian education system and what is their mutual coherence in the context of the implementation of the "School as a Learning Organisation" model. The 7 dimensions of the OECD's School as a Learning Organisation model have been selected as the research categories for the analysis of the documents (OECD, 2016; Stoll & Kools, 2017; Kools et al., 2020). This model has been selected because the relevance of it has been scientifically proven in practice in Wales (UK), Singapore and other countries and regions.

The following Latvian education policy documents have been analysed as part of the qualitative content analysis:

- 1) National Development Plan 2021–2027 (2020);
- 2) The Law on Education (1998);
- 3) Education Development Guidelines 2021–2027 (2021);
- 4) The Standard of the Teaching Profession (2020);
- 5) Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education and their annexes (2022);
- 6) Recommendations of the National Centre for Education project "Competence Approach in Curriculum" (National Centre for Education, 2021).

Research results

Singapore's experience in implementing the "School as a Learning Organisation" model

According to the OECD's implemented research "Programme for International Student Assessment" (PISA) in 2018, Singapore's education system is considered one of the best in the world, with students demonstrating high learning achievements in areas such as mathematics, science and literacy (OECD, 2019).

This performance has been attributed to long-term education policy reforms that have aimed to integrate the teaching of 21st century skills into the curriculum, cultivate a culture of lifelong learning, foster students' innovative, creative and critical thinking skills, broaden their learning experiences and prepare civically active learners for life in the global world (Gopinathan & Lee, 2018).

Singapore's education system is based on decentralised decision-making, which is a delegation of responsibility from the central government to the local school level and an agreement on decision-making between the school principal, teachers, parents, local community and students at the school level (Levacic, 1998; Raab, 2000). Within this paradigm, school leaders, teachers, students and parents are delegated greater freedom and autonomy in making decisions related to the use of school budget, personnel management and curriculum design to promote a learning environment that is appropriate for all students (Ng & Chan, 2008).

In 2000, in all schools in Singapore, the implementation of "The School Excellence Model" was launched, under which schools were guided to develop towards excellence through increasing their autonomy, strengthening the leadership and management skills of school principals, promoting educational innovation in schools, and increasing parental and community involvement in educational processes (Goh & Richards, 1997). This model emphasises the role of school leadership and teachers in promoting students' academic achievement, and according to it, excellence in education is defined as holistic education that ensures sustained academic outcomes rather than one-off events (Ng, 2017).

The School Excellence Model includes 9 quality criteria or dimensions:

- 1) leadership: what management systems are implemented in the school to promote student learning and excellence in academic achievement and to meet the school's responsibilities to society;
- 2) strategic planning: how the school sets relevant development goals for its stakeholders, develops an action plan and monitors progress in achieving these goals;
- 3) staff management: how the school develops and uses the potential of its staff to become an outstanding school;
- 4) resources: how the school manages its internal and external human resources to achieve its goals;
- 5) student-centred process: how the school designs, implements, manages and improves processes to ensure holistic education and student well-being;
- 6) administrative and operational outcomes: how the school achieves operational efficiency and provides a meaningful education for its students;
- 7) staff outcomes: how the school contributes to staff professional development and job satisfaction;

- 8) partnership and community outcomes: how the school works with partners and the wider local community;
- 9) key performance outcomes: how the school ensures the holistic development of students and the set educational goals (Ng, 2003).

A study published in 2019 concludes that decentralisation in Singapore's education system has encouraged flexibility and innovation in schools, while retaining government oversight has ensured that schools are held accountable for improving learning outcomes for all students. Factors such as the measures taken in schools to support the growth of every student, the professional development of teachers, and the extracurricular activities offered to students have contributed to the implementation of Singapore's "School Excellence Model" (Huang et al., 2019).

In the context of the implementation of the School Excellence Model, it is concluded that Singapore's education system is characterised by sound human resource management policies, coherence between action policies at different levels of the education system and a culturally embedded respect for the teacher as a leader. These are factors that play a pivotal role in building a sustainable, coherent and high-performing education system. Similarly, innovation and entrepreneurship have been given a significant place in Singapore's education system and are defined as a mandatory strategic focus for every school (Ng, 2005a).

Despite the positive changes brought about by the implementation of Singapore's "School Excellence Model", Singapore's education policy has been criticised for its strong focus on students' academic achievement. While Singaporean students perform very well in international studies, these achievements are often achieved through traditional teaching and learning methods. This is due to the fact that society in Singapore is still focused on examinations, which are used to select students for the later stages of education. As a result, the education system has become a source of socio-economic inequality (Gopinathan & Lee, 2018).

The experience of Wales (UK) in implementing the "School as a Learning Organisation" model

According to data obtained from the implemented study by the OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009, Welsh pupils were performing mediocly, which led to the launch of a reform project in 2011 with the aim of reorganising the education system and implementing quality and inclusive education that meets the requirements of the 21st century (OECD, 2018). The reforms were based on an action plan, "Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21", which aimed to achieve 4 education goals between 2017 and 2021, helping to create:

- 1) purposeful and skilled learners who are ready for lifelong learning;
- 2) enterprising, creative people who are ready to engage fully in life and work;

- 3) ethical and informed citizens of the Welsh region and the world;
- 4) healthy and confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives in contemporary society (Donaldson, 2015, p. 29).

In parallel with the development of the policy documents, it was agreed between policy decision makers and schools that the successful implementation of the Action Plan requires the continuous collaboration and development of teachers, support staff, school management and all stakeholders, thus contributing to the development of a culture of learning in every school. Following the example of other countries, such as Norway, the Netherlands and Singapore, the Welsh education system defined a common goal: to transform all schools into effective learning organisations. To achieve this goal, in cooperation with the OECD, a 7-dimension model of a learning organisation was developed (Kools & Stoll, 2016; OECD, 2018; Kools et al., 2019).

To assess the impact of the changes, OECD researchers conducted interviews with school staff, education policy makers and other stakeholders in the Wales region; researched education planning documents; and developed a 69-question survey to assess a school as a learning organisation (Kools et al., 2020). In 2018, an OECD report was published which concluded that the majority of schools in Wales are on their way to implementing the school as a learning organisation model, as 58% of schools have worked with 5–7 dimensions of the learning organisation and 30% out of these schools have worked with all 7 dimensions, however, 42% of schools need to improve their implementation of the principles of the learning organisation (OECD, 2018).

OECD research data show that schools do best when it comes to team learning and fostering collaboration among staff and building systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge, while the biggest challenges are building a shared vision of learning for all students, creating a culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation, and collaborating and learning from the external environment and other systems (OECD, 2018). Although Wales is in the process of implementing education reforms that will last until September 2022, the Welsh Government already acknowledges that additional investment and contributions will be necessary for school staff to broaden their skills and vision on how school as a learning organisation functions (OECD, 2018).

Latvian experience in implementing the “School as a Learning Organisation” model

Dimension “A shared vision of learning for all students”. Latvian policy documents consider the vision of education in the context of the achievable outcomes in other fields of economic activity. For example, in the National Development Plan 2021-2027 (hereafter: NDP) and the Guidelines for the Development of Education 2021-2027 (hereafter: GDE), the vision of education

is viewed in the context of the country's economic growth, development of civil society and the issues of cultural sustainability (National Development Plan, 2020; Education Development Guidelines, 2021). However, it is not stated that every school in Latvia should develop a clear vision for student learning in the context of nationally defined education policy priorities.

Whereas the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education (hereafter referred to as the Education Quality Guidelines) state that every educational institution should have a mission, vision and values, which are defined through the involvement of all target groups, such as students, teachers, parents, etc. (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022). A similar concept is also found in the recommendations of the National Centre for Education (NCE) project "Competence Approach in Curriculum" (hereafter: NCE recommendations), which calls on every school to define and put into practice a school vision that promotes and enhances learning for every student and in which all stakeholders are involved (National Centre for Education, 2021).

The above-mentioned evidence suggests that the dimension "A shared vision of learning for all students" of the "School as a learning organisation" model is integrated in Latvian policy documents, but its reflection is not consistent and coherent. For example, Education Policy Framework documents such as the NDP and GDE refer to the vision of learning not in the context of schools as individual organisations, but in a broader context. In contrast, the Education Quality Guidelines and the NCE recommendations refer specifically to the need for schools to develop a particular vision to support the learning of all learners.

Dimension "Creating and providing continuous learning opportunities for all employees". The Law on Education of the Republic of Latvia defines the local municipality as the implementer of teachers' professional development, which is also the founder of the school (The Law on Education, 1998). This means that there is also a requirement at the local level to plan and organise teacher professional development in line with the goals set by the education policy. The NDP and GDE also include a requirement for teachers to undertake continuous professional development to support students' learning (National Development Plan, 2020; Education Development Guidelines, 2021). However, these documents refer specifically to teachers' learning, without including other school staff such as support staff and technical staff, even though the 'School as a Learning Organisation' model emphasises professional development of all employees.

The Standard of the Teaching Profession states that, in order to perform professional duties, teachers need to be skilled to regularly evaluate their own performance and to plan and implement professional development to support pupils' learning and development. Teachers are also expected to apply the latest pedagogical knowledge and innovations in their practice, which can be acquired

through continuous professional development (The Standard of the Teaching Profession, 2020). On the other hand, the Education Quality Guidelines emphasise that it is the responsibility of the school principal to provide learning opportunities for teachers, implemented both through formal learning (attending lectures, seminars, workshops, etc.) and informal professional development (teacher collaboration groups, networking with other organisations, etc.) (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the dimension “Creating and providing continuous learning opportunities for all employees” of the model “School as a learning organisation” is included in the reviewed Latvian education policy documents. However, the related normative framework emphasises only the role of teachers and school management in planning and implementing professional development, without mentioning other staff whose actions and professional performance may have an impact on pupils’ learning and well-being at school.

Dimension “Fostering team learning and cooperation among employees”. The Education Quality Guidelines indicate that schools need cooperation between teachers, jointly planning and evaluating student learning, so that teachers have the opportunity to learn from each other’s experiences. The policy document also emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the head teacher, teachers, support staff and pupils in ensuring the quality of education, innovation and the well-being of everyone involved in the education process (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022). This leads to the conclusion that team learning and collaboration is extended to a wider range of actors than the dimension discussed above, which focuses on the learning of teachers rather than all staff.

The Standard of the Teaching Profession states that teachers are obliged to evaluate their professional competence in cooperation with other colleagues, share experience and provide feedback to improve performance (The Standard of the Teaching Profession, 2020). This means that the need for informal learning to build a collaborative school internal organisational culture is emphasised, which is a prerequisite for building a learning organisation. Whereas the NCE recommendations indicate that teachers need to cooperate in order to monitor and follow the progress of all students in the learning process and ensure better learning opportunities, which is possible to implement if teachers regularly and purposefully cooperate and learn together. It also emphasises that collaboration is a way for teachers to improve their professional performance by learning from each other and from examples of good practice within the organisation (National Centre for Education, 2021).

The above-mentioned results lead to the conclusion that the dimension “Fostering team learning and cooperation among employees” of the “School as a learning organisation” model is included in the reviewed Latvian education

policy documents. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the understanding of why teacher collaboration and shared learning is necessary is similar across them, that is, it is a way for teachers to improve their professional performance and more successfully support the learning of every student.

Dimension “A culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation at school”.

In the Standard of the Teaching Profession, although the use of the term “innovation” does not appear directly, it is emphasised that the teachers are professionals who explore and study the learning needs of their students. Therefore, the teacher is expected to carry out research activities that allow the learning process to be adapted to students with different learning needs (The Standard of the Teaching Profession, 2020). The GDE, on the other hand, contains an indication that it is important for teachers to experiment in order to improve the quality of education at school (Education Development Guidelines, 2021), but similar references are not found in other Latvian education policy documents.

The Education Quality Guidelines state that it is important for teachers to use the knowledge and skills acquired through professional development activities, thus implementing innovations in their performance. It is also important for teachers to use the results and findings of current research in the field of education and to use information communication technologies to enhance student learning. Whereas at the school level, it is discussed that schools need to gather a variety of data in order to conclude what changes should be made and how to implement them in the organisation (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the dimension “A culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation at school” of the “School as a learning organisation” model is indirectly integrated into the Latvian policy documents, as some of its elements, such as the study of professional practice and the collection of diverse data, are mentioned in them. However, the policy documents currently lack a direct indication on which innovations and in what way teachers should implement in their daily practice, therefore, the implementation of innovations is left entirely to the schools and not regulated at the national level.

Dimension “Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning”. All of the reviewed Latvian education policy documents describe in detail what data a school needs to collect in order to define development goals and priorities, and to set qualitative and quantitative outcomes for ensuring the quality of education. They also specify what data collection methods should be used to enable teachers and the school to self-evaluate their performance, for example, questionnaires, lesson observations, focus group discussions, document analysis, etc. The Education Quality Guidelines state that education quality monitoring is carried out by the educational institution and its head, the municipality as the school founder and the National Service for Quality in Education (Guidelines for

Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022). This means that the quality of education offered at a school is determined by diagnosing and evaluating both the performance of the individual pupil and the professional activities of the teacher, as well as the professional activities of the school head.

In turn, the NCE recommendations indicate that the task of the school staff is to introduce innovations in their work, perceiving problems and mistakes as a learning opportunity, and to involve students in researching and learning about the school as an organisation, thus creating a common understanding of the meaning and essence of change in the school. Schools are also expected to monitor and evaluate the quality of the education offered in the school, defining measurable outcomes and self-assessing their progress in relation to the goals set (National Centre for Education, 2021).

The above mentioned findings suggest that the dimension “Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning” of the “School as a learning organisation” model is included in the Latvian policy documents, but it is too general. For example, the policy documents specify which data collection methods a school should use to evaluate its performance and plan the changes to be made, but do not explicitly indicate how the obtained data should be analysed in order to draw conclusions about the need for a change in the organisation.

Dimension “Learning with and from the external environment and larger systems”. In the Latvian policy documents examined in the framework of the study, learning from the external environment is understood as the school’s cooperation with various partners, such as businesses, local government, professional communities and higher education institutions, with the aim of improving the quality of education. The Standard of the Teaching Profession states that the teacher’s task is to organise a learning process in which pupils have the opportunity to act in real-life situations (The Standard of the Teaching Profession, 2020). However, this is attributed to student learning, not teacher learning, narrowing the understanding of teacher professional development as taking place in the school environment rather than outside it, learning from the experience of other organisations.

The Education Quality Guidelines state that it is the school principal’s responsibility to encourage and organise cooperation with the local community and businesses to learn from their experiences. “The [school] head ... initiates cooperation with other institutions to ensure high quality learning achievements and the qualitative implementation of educational programmes.” (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022). This means that the principal has a responsibility to build purposeful cooperation networks with other organisations, and as a result of this cooperation to improve both the school’s governance model and the quality of teaching, as well as broaden the learning experience of students and teachers.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the dimension “Learning with and from the external environment and larger systems” of the “School as a learning organisation” model is included in Latvian education policy documents. However, its elements as a specific field of professional activities of a school are described in more detail in documents that have a recommendatory character, such as NCE recommendations, rather than in the Law on Education (Law on Education, 1998), where the norms are mandatory for schools to comply with. This means that learning from the external environment and larger systems in the Latvian case is more associated with desirable and encouraged behaviour, but it is not seen as a mandatory prerequisite for improving school’s performance and transforming it into a learning organisation.

Dimension “Modelling and growing learning leadership”. The Standard of the Teaching Profession states that teachers are active participants in the school governance, proposing their own ideas and solutions to problems (The Standard of the Teaching Profession, 2020). This means that a teacher is a professional who takes the lead in initiating the necessary changes and improvements in an organisation to promote student learning. In contrast, the NCE recommendations regarding the modelling of learning management refer to self-regulated learning, which is attributed to the learning of students rather than teachers and other school staff (National Centre for Education, 2021).

The Education Quality Guidelines include the indication that the school principal “leads mutual learning and teamwork, which enables the opportunity to collect, accumulate and publicise knowledge creation and learning experiences, provides the support functions of the methodological centre for other educational institutions” (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022). This means that the school principal, in a school as a learning organisation, not only takes responsibility for managing the administrative and economic processes, but also provides methodological support to teachers. In this way, the understanding of the role of the school principal is significantly expanded, with a focus on their own learning and that of other professionals. “The head of the school knows how to provide professional and growth-oriented feedback to his employees” (Guidelines for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education, 2022), thereby demonstrating the ability to manage learning.

This means that the dimension “Modelling and growing of learning leadership” of the “School as a Learning Organisation” model can be found in Latvian education policy documents. However, it is primarily understood as the leadership implemented by students in organising self-regulated learning, and the role of the school leaders in guiding their own and other staff members’ learning. As for teachers, the focus is on their involvement in solving school-level challenges and proposing ideas, with less emphasis on the teachers as professionals

who purposefully guide not only their students' learning, but also their learning, which means defining their individual learning needs and demonstrating an example of lifelong learning.

Conclusions

All 7 dimensions of the “School as a learning organisation” model can be found in the Latvian educational policy documents, which shows that in the case of Latvia, similarly to the foreign examples discussed in the study, there is a gradual progress towards the transformation of schools into learning organisations. However, the planning of Latvia's education policy in the context of the learning organisation does not take place in a single, unified system, as there is no direct consistency and coherence between the different policy documents. This refers both to the interpretation of the concepts used in the policy documents and to the priorities set for the implementation of changes in school governance and ensuring the quality of education. Therefore, it would be recommended to harmonise the norms contained in policy documents and agree on a collective understanding of what is meant by a learning organisation and its functioning dimensions in the Latvian context.

The authors' analysis of Latvian education policy documents shows that there are elements of the “School as a learning organisation” model that are included and explained in a broad and comprehensive way, such as teacher professional development and team learning and cooperation. This could be explained by the fact that the implementation of these dimensions has been a priority of education policy for a long time and is equally applied to both teacher and student learning. Therefore, professional practices included in these dimensions are easier to understand and teachers have personal experience of participating in the implementation of these dimensions.

However, there are also dimensions of the “School as a learning organisation” model that are only superficially addressed in Latvian education policy documents or are only included in a few policy documents, such as modelling and growing learning leadership and a culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation in schools. This could be explained by the fact that the understanding of these dimensions is related to professional practices that have been less frequently implemented in Latvian schools, and more education of educational staff and society is required in order to realise the importance of these dimensions in improving the quality of education.

Moreover, the concepts used in these dimensions, such as “innovation”, provide wide interpretation possibilities, which prevents the possibility of reaching a consensus on how their implementation could look like in the practice of Latvian schools. Therefore, it would be recommendable to develop a model of

a learning organisation that would be tailored specifically to the Latvian education context, reaching as much consensus as possible on the importance of each dimension for improving the quality of education and the practical manifestations of teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders.

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