

Organizational and Educational Aspects of the General Education School Principal's Activities: Historical Experience and Contemporary Challenges

Tetiana Helzhynska¹, Nataliia Chubinska²,

¹ Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Lviv Polytechnic National University, 12, S. Bandera str., 79013, Lviv, Ukraine, tetiana.y.helzhynska@lpnu.ua, ORCID: 0000-0003-3280-5199

² Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Lviv Polytechnic National University, 12, S. Bandera str., 79013, Lviv, Ukraine, nataliia.b.chubinska@lpnu.ua, ORCID: 0000-0002-4803-2453

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Abstract. The modern educational system of Ukraine is undergoing active transformations caused by both internal reforms and global challenges such as war, digitalisation, and shifting social demands. Under these conditions, the issue of professional culture of teachers and educational leaders acquires strategic importance, since the level of their managerial, communicative, and value-based competences determines the success of reforms and the effectiveness of the educational environment.

The aim of the study is to analyse the phenomenon of professional culture in pedagogical and managerial activities, to define its structural components, formative factors, and conditions for implementation in the educational context. To achieve this aim, systemic, historical-genetic, axiological, comparative, and structural-functional approaches were applied, which made it possible to trace the evolution of scientific understanding of professional culture and to identify its relation to the contemporary requirements of educational practice. It was found that professional culture is an integral characteristic of personality that encompasses spiritual and value orientations, professional knowledge, managerial competence, pedagogical ethics, and communicative culture. It is substantiated that the development of professional culture of teachers is a prerequisite for improving the quality of education and building a democratic, innovative school. Both Ukrainian and international experience were analysed, and the potential of the educational environment for cultivating professional culture among future teachers and leaders was outlined.

The results can be used in teacher training and professional development, in the design of career advancement programmes, and in the practice of educational managers. The study demonstrates that professional culture is a factor in ensuring sustainable educational development, and its formation requires a comprehensive system at the levels of state policy, institutional strategies, and personal self-realisation.

The research confirms that the formation of professional culture is a multidimensional process that integrates knowledge, values, and managerial skills. The defined guidelines provide a basis for developing new pedagogical strategies capable of ensuring qualitative changes in Ukrainian education.

Keywords: general secondary school, school principal, organisational and educational activity, educational management, upbringing, democratisation, pedagogical leadership, educational reforms.

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Introduction

The modern globalised, digitalised, and technologised world highlights the need for the modernisation of the education system, particularly in the field of its management. The issue of preparing educational leaders and managers is becoming a priority, since the quality of the educational process and its compliance with the best international standards largely depend on the effectiveness of managerial activity. The principal of a general secondary school acts as a key figure in the organisation of the institution's life, as his or her functions encompass not only organisational but also educational aspects, which involve the creation of a holistic educational environment for the development of the student's personality.

We share the position of scholars (H. Bilavych, L. Berezivska, V. Kremen, I. Ziaziun, O. Sukhomlynska), who emphasise that the quality of a school's functioning is largely determined by the personality of its leader, who is able to combine organisational and educational functions [1]. Researchers (M. Antonets, Yu. Babanskyi, V. Bondar, N. Dichek, V. Sukhomlynskyi) substantiated the importance of an innovative and learner-centred approach to school management, which became the foundation for the creation of authorial models of the educational environment [2; 6; 17]. Contemporary authors (L. Vozniuk, M. Kryvko, M. Prots) underline that, in the context of reforming Ukrainian education, the principal should be not only an administrator but also a leader of democratic change, capable of integrating the educational component into the management process [3; 8; 15].

All current regulatory documents – *The National Strategy for the Development of Education in Ukraine*, the *New Ukrainian School* concept, the *Law of Ukraine "On Education"*, and the *Concept for the Development of Teacher Education* – emphasise the democratisation of management, accountability, transparency, the fostering of patriotism, and integration into the global educational space. This requires a new level of managerial and educational competences from school principals, in particular the ability to generate ideas, form collective responsibility, develop student self-government, and provide conditions for the civic development of pupils.

Throughout history, it has been the principal who acted as the initiator and driver of innovation,

the organiser of the teaching staff, and the bearer of educational ideas. The activity of progressive leaders contributed to the emergence of authorial schools, which became centres of pedagogical innovation and the formation of moral and ethical guidelines for the younger generation. However, contemporary challenges – globalisation, digitalisation, and social transformations – necessitate a reconsideration of historical experience and the development of new approaches to the organisational and educational activity of school principals.

Thus, the relevance of this article is determined by the need to integrate the historical experience of school management into current educational reforms, to strengthen the educational component of the principal's activity, and to prepare school leaders as drivers of democratic and innovative change.

Literature Review

The problem of the organisational and educational activity of the principal of a general secondary school has long been at the centre of attention of both domestic and foreign scholars. As a result, a significant body of theoretical research has been accumulated, which makes it possible to reveal various aspects of the managerial and educational functions of the school leader.

From the socio-managerial perspective, the activity of the principal is viewed as a systemic phenomenon that encompasses planning, organisation, control, and educational support of the learning process. Researchers (I. Ziaziun, V. Kremen, O. Sukhomlynska, H. Bilavych, L. Berezivska) emphasise that the effectiveness of a school's functioning is largely determined by the personality of its leader, who is capable of creating the conditions for the formation of a holistic educational environment [1]. In this context, the organisational and educational activity of the principal is understood as an element of the democratisation and humanisation of education, based on the principles of partnership, collegiality, and openness.

From another perspective, within the framework of the individual-personal approach, the organisational and educational activity of the principal is interpreted as a manifestation of his or her leadership and moral-ethical qualities, which directly

influence the teaching staff and the student community. In the works of V. Sukhomlynskyi, Yu. Babanskyi, V. Bondar, and N. Dichek, attention is focused on the necessity of combining the organisational functions of the school leader with educational tasks aimed at shaping students' civic stance, developing self-government, and supporting pupils' individual talents [2; 6; 17].

Contemporary researchers (L. Vozniuk, M. Kryvko, M. Prots) emphasise that in the context of the reform of Ukrainian education, the school principal should act as a leader of innovative change, capable of integrating the educational component into the strategic management of the educational institution [3; 8; 15]. His or her competences include not only managerial and communication skills but also the ability to foster a democratic style of interaction, develop social partnership, and ensure the upbringing of students in the spirit of both national and universal values.

Studies by foreign scholars (Leithwood & Jantz; Spillane) highlight that the effectiveness of a school principal's activity is largely determined by his or her leadership qualities, the capacity to mobilise the staff, and the ability to build partnerships within the school community [9; 10]. OECD reports (2016, 2020) underline that the role of the principal is increasingly shifting from administrative supervision to strategic management and the provision of an educational environment oriented towards twenty-first century competences. This aligns with the approaches of Ukrainian scholars, who also stress the need to combine the managerial and educational functions of the school leader.

Despite a considerable number of studies devoted to the problem of school management, it should be noted that the organisational and educational aspects of the principal's activity often remain only partially addressed. There is a lack of works that comprehensively analyse the integration of managerial functions with educational tasks in the light of contemporary educational challenges, which determines the relevance of this study and the writing of this article.

Purpose

In light of the above, the aim of this article is to analyze the organizational and educational aspects of a general education school principal's activities in both historical and contemporary contexts,

to synthesize scientific approaches and the practical experience of school leaders, and to identify the key principles and current challenges driving the transformation of their managerial and educational functions.

Methodology

The article applies an original conceptual approach to the analysis of the organisational and educational aspects of the activity of the principal of a general secondary school. The study unfolds in two interrelated dimensions: on the one hand, it traces the historical experience of the formation and evolution of the principal's educational function; on the other hand, it outlines the current challenges and transformations of managerial and educational activity in the context of educational reforms. The work has a theoretical and analytical character and is aimed at systematising scientific approaches, analysing the regulatory framework, and generalising school management practices, without implying the conduct of an experiment.

In the research process, several methodological approaches are combined. The systemic approach makes it possible to consider the activity of the principal as a holistic phenomenon that integrates managerial, educational, and communicative functions. The historical-genetic approach enables tracing the changes in content and emphases in the work of the school leader at different stages of educational development. The axiological approach focuses on analysing the value foundations of educational policy, including humanism, democracy, civic responsibility, and inclusion. The use of activity-based and competence-based approaches makes it possible to distinguish the professional competences necessary for the principal to effectively organise educational work, while the leadership approach highlights his or her role as an initiator of change and bearer of the culture of the educational institution.

To implement the aforementioned approaches, various methods were employed. Historical-pedagogical analysis made it possible to identify the regularities in the development of the organisational and educational function of the school leader, while comparative analysis allowed for the juxtaposition of traditional and innovative models of school management. Content analysis of scientific and regulatory sources enabled the identification of leading trends in

theory and practice; structural-functional analysis helped reconstruct the internal logic of the principal's activity (goals – tasks – functions – results); and the generalisation of pedagogical experience contributed to the systematisation of effective managerial and educational practices.

The source base consists of the works of domestic and foreign scholars in the field of pedagogy and educational management, regulatory documents (laws, concepts, state standards, strategies for the development of education, methodological recommendations), as well as school management documentation – educational work plans, development programmes, regulations on student self-government, and principals' reports. Particular attention was given to materials reflecting the experience of authorial and experimental schools, where innovative approaches to management and education were integrated.

When selecting sources, priority was given to those capable of revealing both the educational functions of the principal and their relationship with managerial decisions. Preference was given to works that made it possible to trace the historical dynamics of the principal's role, contained descriptions of specific procedures and mechanisms of educational work, and reflected current trends in democratisation, digitalisation, inclusive policy, and the development of civic education. Materials of questionable reliability or those lacking scientific or regulatory verification were not included.

In this study, the organisational and educational activity of the school principal is interpreted as a set of managerial decisions and practices that encompass the development of a strategy for educational work, the organisation of processes and coordination of the teaching staff, the support of student self-government, partnerships with parents and the community, the creation of a safe and inclusive environment, the provision of civic and moral-ethical education, as well as the regulation of the school's communication and digital policy.

The research procedure included several sequential stages: the search for and selection of relevant sources; the initial coding and systematisation of materials; the comparison of historical and contemporary approaches; the analytical synthesis of the obtained data and the modelling of the principal's

activity structure; and the verification of the consistency of findings through the triangulation of different types of sources.

The scope of the study is limited to the role of the principal of a general secondary school in Ukraine; the peculiarities of management in other types of educational institutions were not analysed. The work has a theoretical and analytical character and is not based on empirical surveys or experiments. At the same time, it is important to take into account that the regulatory framework is dynamic, and certain provisions may change over time.

The application of the leadership approach in this study is grounded in the works of international authors, in particular K. Leithwood and his colleagues (Leithwood et al.), who argue that the principal, as a pedagogical leader, acts as a driver of educational change, shapes value orientations, and organises the educational environment. Similar ideas are developed by J. Spillane and the OECD, who conceptualise school leadership as a multidimensional process that integrates organisational, educational, and social components [9].

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of academic integrity: all sources used are either publicly available or properly cited, interpretations are supported by references to relevant documents and scholarly works, and no personal data were involved.

Results and Discussion

The conducted study has shown that the organisational and educational activity of the school principal has a long history and is closely interconnected with the socio-political transformations of society. Historical analysis made it possible to distinguish several stages of its development. In the pre-Soviet period, the emphasis was placed on moral and religious education combined with the cultural traditions of the community; the principal acted as an intermediary between the school and the social environment. During the Soviet era, an administrative-ideological model prevailed, in which the principal was primarily responsible for the implementation of centralised educational programmes and the control of discipline.

With the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, the process of humanisation and nationalisation of education began. During this period, the school

principal increasingly acquired the status of organiser of the educational environment, and the opportunity emerged to develop individual educational programmes integrated into the life of the institution. The contemporary stage is characterised by new challenges: the democratisation of management, the digitalisation of education, the need to create a safe and inclusive environment, and increased attention

to civic and patriotic education. Under these conditions, the principal appears not only as an administrator but also as a pedagogical leader, capable of coordinating partnerships with students, parents, and the local community.

The evolution of the functions of the school leader can be summarised in the form of a comparative table (Table 1).

The Evolution of the Organizational and Educational Functions of a General Education School Principal

Period	Main functions and emphases	Characteristic features of management
Pre-Soviet (before 1917)	Organisation of moral and religious education; mediation between the school and the community	Close connection with cultural and spiritual traditions; upbringing in the spirit of community values
Soviet (1917–1991)	Ideological education; control of discipline; implementation of centralised programmes	Administrative-command style; collectivist values; lack of school autonomy
Independence period (1990s – early 2000s)	Humanisation and national-patriotic education; development of authorial programmes	Departure from ideologisation; autonomy in defining goals; focus on personal development
Contemporary stage (from 2014 – present)	Leadership in creating a safe, inclusive, and democratic environment; digitalisation of educational work	Partnership with students, parents, and the community; emphasis on civic and value-based competences

A comparison of traditional and contemporary models of management demonstrates profound changes in the educational policy of the school. Whereas in the past the emphasis was placed on

discipline and normativity, today the focus is on partnership, humanistic values, and the integration of educational work into the institution's development strategy (Table 2).

Traditional and Innovative Models of the Organizational and Educational Activities of a School Principal

Criterion	Traditional model	Innovative model
Management style	Administrative-command, control-oriented	Leadership and partnership, cooperation-oriented
Educational priorities	Discipline, adherence to rules, collectivism	Humanism, democracy, inclusion, civic orientation
Role of the principal	Administrator, executor of top-down directives	Leader of change, organiser of the educational environment
Place of educational work	Formal, secondary sphere	Integrated into the school's strategy, equal to teaching
Student self-government	Formal, limited in authority	Active, real participation in decision-making
Interaction with parents and the community	One-way communication, accountability	Partnership, joint projects, volunteering
Use of technologies	Minimal, traditional forms	Digitalisation, development of media literacy, digital citizenship
Educational environment	Focus on standards and discipline	Creation of a safe, inclusive, and democratic space

In the twenty-first century, the idea of pedagogical leadership is acquiring particular relevance. Researchers emphasise that the activity of the school principal can no longer be limited to administrative or supervisory functions. The essential roles of the modern head of an educational institution are those of a manager, a leader, and an expert. This means that the principal must combine the strategic vision and organisational skills of a manager, the charisma and ability to motivate the staff as a leader, and the competence of an expert who relies on professional knowledge and the capacity to make informed decisions.

Thus, the contemporary school principal must implement an effective, child-centred paradigm of education, grounded in universal and national values, in order to contribute to the building of civil society. The school is increasingly transforming from an institution that merely transmits knowledge into an educational institution that creates the conditions for the formation of personal competences necessary for successful self-realisation.

In the organisational aspect, the activity of the principal should be based on the principles of democratisation, partnership, collectivity, openness, and efficiency in decision-making, while also taking into account social circumstances in the development of the concept of the modern school. As emphasised by M. Yevtukh and V. Haluzynskyi, the main principles of managing a general secondary school remain statehood, democracy, publicity, openness, and regionality [7].

In the educational dimension, the activity of the school principal encompasses:

- the formation of value orientations among pupils, with an emphasis on morality and spirituality;
- the acceptance of the national idea as a defining factor of the educational process;
- the involvement of the teaching staff in the development of civil society;
- the development of students' responsibility for their own life trajectory and professional self-determination;
- the creation of an inclusive and comfortable environment for every pupil;
- the harmonious integration of learning, upbringing, development, and socialisation of the individual.

A comparison of historical experience with contemporary international models demonstrates the universality of trends in the development of the organisational and educational activity of school principals. For instance, in many countries (OECD, 2016), emphasis is placed on the transition from centralised control to a democratic style of management, which contributes to greater school autonomy and strengthens the educational component. At the same time, research by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) shows that the leadership roles of the principal (manager, mentor, partner) are crucial for fostering students' civic engagement and uniting the teaching staff.

In the context of war, Ukrainian schools face unprecedented challenges. The principal must not only ensure the safety of the educational environment and the organisation of shelters but also support the psychological well-being of students and teachers who are experiencing traumatic events. The war has sharpened the issues of patriotic education, the development of resilience and solidarity within the student community, and has strengthened the importance of partnerships between schools, parents, local authorities, and volunteer organisations.

Another challenge has been the mass migration of pupils and teachers. This requires the principal to demonstrate flexibility in management, to organise the educational process with consideration for remote learning, to adapt newly arrived students, and to create an inclusive environment in which every child feels protected. The effective use of digital technologies has also become crucial: under conditions of instability, distance and blended learning have shifted from auxiliary practices to the leading form of educational organisation. The principal acts as the coordinator of these changes, ensuring a balance between the quality of education, educational tasks, and the psychological support of students.

Thus, the results of the analysis confirm that in the twenty-first century, the organisational and educational activity of the school principal goes beyond administrative functions and acquires strategic significance in shaping the modern educational environment of the school.

Conclusions

As a result of the conducted theoretical and analytical study, the essence of the organizational and educational activities of a general education school

principal has been clarified, revealing it as an integrated set of managerial, communicative, and leadership actions aimed at creating a holistic educational environment. Historical analysis has demonstrated the evolution of the principal's role: from the administrative-disciplinary model that prevailed during the Soviet period to the contemporary understanding of the principal as a pedagogical leader capable of integrating educational objectives into the institution's development strategy.

It has been revealed that the key principles of modern organisational and educational activity are humanism, democratisation, inclusion, civic orientation, and partnership with parents and the local community. Particular importance is attached to ensuring a safe educational environment, developing student self-government, and fostering media and digital literacy in line with current challenges.

The systematisation of modern approaches and practices demonstrates that the effectiveness of a school's educational work depends on the principal's ability to act as a leader of change, a coordinator of interaction among all participants in the educational process, and a bearer of value orientations. The organisational and educational function ceases to be secondary or auxiliary and becomes a strategic component of educational management.

Thus, it can be concluded that the organisational and educational aspects of the activity of school principals in Ukraine today require consideration not only within the framework of daily practice but also in the broader context of educational policy and reform. Further research should be directed towards the development of models for assessing the effectiveness of principals' educational activities, the generalisation of best leader-

ship practices in innovative schools, and the search for ways to adapt historical experience to the conditions of contemporary social transformations.

The results of the analysis confirm the importance of integrating best international practices of pedagogical leadership into the Ukrainian context. According to the conclusions of the OECD (2020), the school principal is the main guarantor of the quality of the educational environment and a bearer of the values of democratisation and inclusion. This corresponds to the position of Leithwood (2008), who argues that the principal, as a leader of change, not only coordinates the educational process but also shapes the moral and value-based foundation for the development of the younger generation.

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Організаційно-виховні аспекти діяльності директора загальноосвітньої школи: історичний досвід і сучасні виклики

Тетяна Гельжинська¹, Наталія Чубінська²

¹ Кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент, Національний університет “Львівська політехніка”, вул. С. Бандери, 12, 79013, Львів, Україна, tetiana.y.helzhynska@lpnu.ua, ORCID: 0000-0003-3280-5199

² Кандидат педагогічних наук, Національний університет “Львівська політехніка”, вул. С. Бандери, 12, 79013, Львів, Україна, nataliia.b.chubinska@lpnu.ua, ORCID: 0000-0002-4803-2453

Анотація. Сучасна освітня система України перебуває у стані активних трансформацій, що зумовлені як внутрішніми реформами, так і глобальними викликами, пов’язаними з війною, цифровізацією та змінами суспільних запитів. У цих умовах питання професійної культури педагогів і керівників закладів освіти набуває стратегічного значення, оскільки від рівня їхньої управлінської, комунікативної та ціннісної компетентності залежить успішність реформ та ефективність функціонування освітнього простору.

Мета дослідження – проаналізувати феномен професійної культури у педагогічній і управлінській діяльності, визначити її структурні компоненти, фактори формування та умови реалізації в освітньому середовищі. Для досягнення мети застосовано системний, історико-генетичний, аксіологічний, порівняльний та структурно-функціональний підходи, що дало змогу простежити еволюцію

наукових уявлень про професійну культуру та визначити її зв'язок із сучасними вимогами до діяльності педагогічних працівників. З'ясовано, що професійна культура виступає інтегральною характеристикою особистості, яка охоплює духовно-ціннісні орієнтири, професійні знання, управлінську компетентність, педагогічну етику та культуру комунікації. Обґрунтовано, що розвиток професійної культури педагогів є неодмінною умовою підвищення якості освіти та формування демократичної, інноваційної школи. Проаналізовано вітчизняний та зарубіжний досвід, окреслено потенціал освітнього середовища для виховання професійної культури у майбутніх учителів і керівників.

Результати можуть бути використані у процесі підготовки й підвищення кваліфікації педагогічних кадрів, під час розробки програм професійного розвитку, у діяльності освітніх управлінців. Доведено, що професійна культура педагогів є чинником забезпечення сталого розвитку освіти, а її формування потребує цілісної системи на рівні державної політики, закладів освіти й особистісної самореалізації.

Дослідження підтверджує, що формування професійної культури є багатовимірним процесом, який інтегрує знання, цінності й управлінські навички. Визначені орієнтири створюють підґрунтя для розробки нових педагогічних стратегій, здатних забезпечити якісні зміни в українській освіті.

Ключові слова: загальноосвітня школа, директор школи, організаційно-виховна діяльність, управління освітою, виховання, демократизація, педагогічне лідерство, освітні реформи.