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ICT competence of a school leader

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Abstract. The key mission of modernising the educational system is to develop a mechanism for the stable improvement of the modern educational system, ensuring its compliance with the norms of the 21st century, the social and economic needs of the country's development, the demands of society and the individual. Information and communication technologies are becoming the main tool to be used by people not only in professional activities, but also in everyday life. The purpose of this study was to emphasise the value of ICT competence in the activities of a school principal in the era of informatisation of education. The study employed such theoretical methods as analysis and generalisation. The advantages of having an ICT competence for a school principal, as well as the ways and methods of achieving it, were presented. Proficiency in information technology at the level of information culture, including the ability to formulate information needs, search for it, evaluate it, and use it effectively, is a necessary condition for the training of a highly qualified specialist. ICT competence is one of the crucial components of professional competence. The practical significance of this study lies in the fact that school principals can acquire new competences and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of their activities. The study discussed ICT competence and the advantages of having it, as well as issues related to its improvement. The findings of this study will contribute to the development of educational policy and the design of targeted professional training programmes for school leaders

Keywords: informatisation; modern school; management; quality of education; skills

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INTRODUCTION

As the informatisation of education intensifies, the role of the school principal is becoming increasingly more significant, as they must not only have modern ICT tools for management, but also actively introduce technology into the educational process to improve the efficiency and quality of education. The ICT competence of a school leader is a vital aspect that ensures the ability to effectively use information technology to make informed management decisions, organise learning, and improve the internal processes of an educational institution. Considering the high demands on educational leaders in the digital era, the study of the level and impact of school principals' ICT competence is critical for the development of strategies for professional growth and training of modern educational leaders.

According to M.M. Bachalapur & S. Manjunatha (2022), the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education plays an essential role. Integration of ICT into both teaching and learning processes is one of the most practical solutions to educational reform. ICT competence of a school leader refers to their ability to effectively use information and communication technologies (ICT) in educational management, decision-making, and instructional leadership. According to J.J. Reang & R. Mohalik (2023), the relationship between transformational leadership styles and perceived levels of computer literacy is not always consistent. This is caused by a discrepancy in the perception of the competence of transformational leaders in relation to technology. Accordingly, based



on the reported connection between the perceived level of computer use and leadership style, the application of the components of transformational leadership for the principals of educational institutions in the context of Iran was proposed, for the purpose of transforming the educational institutions with the application of ICT. It is argued that principals who frequently utilise ICTs may lack the capacity to transform educational practices.

The school leader should feel at ease in an information environment and be able to effortlessly achieve the set specific pedagogical goals with the assistance of modern information technologies. This adds a new element to their professional training, their methodological skills – the element of “information culture”. It should organise, coordinate, and effectively manage practical work on the application of ICT in critical areas of activity of the educational institution. M.R. Gemma Rodriguez (2021) conducted a survey among school principals to analyse the current situation. The first part asked the demographic characteristics of the participants, i.e., gender, age, and educational level. The second part identified their ICT competences, which were divided into cognitive ability, skills, and attitudes. For this study, cognitive ability was defined by the participant’s knowledge and understanding of general computer uses. The skills being measured comprised Microsoft Office skills and internet and data management skills. Attitude was defined as their interest in ICT development for their schools and creating an ICT learning environment. The ICT competence of a school leader plays a crucial role in the effective management and modernisation of educational institutions.

Such decisions were made based on the results of another study conducted on ICT literacy. J. Anyanwu *et al.* (2021) noted that for an effective management of information system in a school organisation, certain levels of ICT competences are required of the principals. The competence factor plays a vital role in the implementation of management information systems, the competence of the user is hypothesised to be commensurate with the management information system applied by the organisation. Competence in this context is defined as a combination of awareness, skills and attitudes that enables an individual to perform a job to the standard required for successful performance in information management systems. It is imperative that all secondary school principals in the state acquire and embrace the use of ICT for the purpose of achieving efficient and effective administration in this digital age.

ICT competence is defined as a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to comprehend, utilise, and adapt to technological tools and digital resources. The term “ICT competence” is a broad one, encompassing a wide range of skills and abilities. These include word processing, presentation software, spreadsheets, email, internet usage, networking, communication, professional software applications, and digital tools. All these skills are considered to be essential for success in the contemporary digital world (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2020). V. Saienko *et al.* (2022) found that digital competence is a dynamic structured

combination of skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking in the field of information, communication, and digital technology. It affects the development of successful professional work, socialisation.

Thus, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of ICT competence on school performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was based on theoretical and empirical research. Theoretical methods such as generalisation and analysis were used. The study was based on a systematic and existing literature review that included the collection, analysis, and synthesis of existing academic works on ICT competence in educational leadership to measure the level of ICT competence of school leaders. Theoretical sources were studied, analysed, and conclusions were drawn. The findings obtained by other researchers and the experiments they conducted served as a basis for reflection on this topic. Specifically, the basis was experiments conducted in different countries over the past five years and their results. The studies cited and the specific findings were obtained during experimental work conducted among school leaders by researchers in countries such as New Zealand, Malaysia, and Nigeria.

The formulation of the problem and the recommendations made by various researchers for its solution were reviewed. To study this issue, the method of comparative analysis was employed. To create a theoretical basis and collect data, the study explored bibliographic databases such as ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Studies that were relevant to the subject under study or analogous were analysed and the results were cited. Based on the searches, the keywords ICT in school management, ICT competences, and ICT competences in the activities of leaders were added. Thus, the method of analysing scientific literature was the preferred one. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the digital competences required for effective educational management. Additionally, the e-Leadership model was designed to investigate how digital technologies affected decision-making and school management. In this case, the data were analysed through articles covering journal articles and conference documents.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, categorised into key competence areas such as digital literacy, ICT-based decision-making, cybersecurity awareness, and professional development strategies. By synthesising multiple theoretical perspectives, the study aimed to identify widespread challenges and best practices in ICT leadership. This methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of ICT competence among school leaders by combining theoretical models with empirical evidence. The analysis aimed to synthesise theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to develop a structured understanding of ICT competence in school leadership. To ensure ICT competence and up-to-date understanding in school management, published studies from no more than the last decade were analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The globalisation of education has already necessitated the application of digital technologies. Online platforms were available for conducting classes, sharing resources, doing the assessment, and managing the day-to-day activities of academic institutions (Haleem *et al.*, 2022). Information technologies are widely used in the modern education system to transfer information and ensure mutual communication between teachers and students. The main idea of the development of the school's information space is to purposefully develop and apply the latest technologies, change the educational process, making it more individual, high-quality, and efficient.

Being at the beginning stage of the School Management Information Systems, computerisation of the school management is the basic subject of modern school management (Demir, 2006). School management information systems have greatly improved over the last two decades and most of them incorporate several crucial functions required by school administration. However, every school has its specific needs (Shah, 2014; Aliksieieva, 2024). From a leadership perspective, this is a school culture where the school leader promotes ICT for planning, developing, and sharing teaching practices, where student-centred pedagogy prevails and leadership actions are taken systematically to foster digital competence among the staff (Ottestad, 2013). O.V. Ovcharuk & N.V. Soroko (2016) found that school education should consider the necessity of utilising ICT to surmount the challenges and obstacles that arise in the teaching of various subjects. This should include the strategies employed in developed countries regarding the role of ICT in lifelong learning and in the context of competence-oriented education.

While professional development for teachers overall seems to be an established functional system, the same cannot yet be said for the professional development of school leaders. Their possibilities of professional development are not as systematically established as those of teachers (Tulowitzki, 2015). Overall, the goal of developing the information space is to ensure the availability of innovative teaching materials, digital educational resources, educational resources on the Internet for school students and teachers. The use of these resources will enable students to master new teaching methods and organisational forms of the educational process, develop basic skills in schoolchildren, actively use multimedia tools and Internet technologies in lessons and extracurricular time, and direct the intellectual potential of students to positive development. This will pave the way for students to use computer technologies for educational purposes for comprehensive development, master ways to obtain information, and acquire skills such as continuing education throughout life. On the other hand, increasing teachers' ICT skills will improve the quality of the work of the school's scientific and methodological council, subject departments, and methodological associations, find an effective solution to the problem of effective use in the educational process, and individualise teachers' activities.

There is an increasing trend of teachers and administrators utilising technology in various aspects of their daily professional activities. There is a tremendous need for leadership in the use of technology to ensure that it makes a valuable and lasting contribution to education (Leong *et al.*, 2015). Implementing ICT into schools is the responsibility of the school principal, they must ensure that the best interests of the students are served through effective ICT infrastructure and professional development of the staff (Gronow, 2007). The informatisation of education has its specific goals. These include:

1. Creating favourable conditions for access to educational, scientific, and cultural information.
2. Intensifying interaction between participants in the pedagogical process using information technologies.
3. Changing the model of education management.
4. Improving the quality of education using ICT.

The administration of any system can be considered as a process of information processing, encompassing the interaction of its constituent subsystems and the exchange of information. A general education institution is an example of an open system, where a constant exchange of information occurs not only between the managing and managed subsystems, but also with the surrounding social environment. Based on the reality of the modern information society, it is evident that to achieve a certain level of information competence, a specialist must: constantly acquire new knowledge and skills in the field of information and communication technologies; develop their communicative and intellectual abilities; carry out interactive dialogue in a single information space.

School administrators play a crucial role in mediating the integration of technology into the educational system. Thus, a school head in this situation can either inhibit or facilitate the usage of computers in the classroom. Their attitude will determine the school's attitude towards technology as well (Amador & Amador, 2022). Methodological support and the use of information and communication technologies play a massive role in educational activities, and therefore it is crucial to have the opportunity to disseminate pedagogical experience in this area, making the necessary knowledge available to everyone. School administrators, particularly the school principals, should encourage the use of ICT in teaching and learning by giving teachers the freedom to design teaching and learning activities with the help of technology (Baharuldin *et al.*, 2019). Preliminary research indicates that ICT competence is a significant predictor of technology leadership behaviours, such as an inclination to promote new ICT initiatives (Bassellier *et al.*, 2003). A leader who has the capacity to utilise ICT competently will be able to introduce innovations in management, including effective school management, increase the motivation of the teaching staff, improve the school rating, and competently implement the IT policy. This is precisely why the following approaches can be found in the studies of some researchers.

M. Afshari *et al.* (2008) noted that the improvement of technology leadership is dependent on two key factors. Firstly, the principal must develop proficiency in the utilisation of technology. Secondly, they must provide leadership in its application for administrative, instructional, and learning functions. In fact, the principal must possess up-to-date knowledge in the domain of education. The effectiveness of the school principal's work is determined by professional competence in establishing the content of education, in ensuring the connection between education and the development of the individual, in the quality of education and its practical focus. The orientation of the school principal towards the personality-oriented goals of education is also an indicator of the improvement of professional competence. H.S. Lindsay *et al.* (2009) came to the following conclusion in their research. For ICT competence, both ICT knowledge and ICT experience (e.g., participation in ICT management and ICT projects) were investigated. The findings showed that ICT knowledge was linked to school leaders' intention to champion ICT in their schools. However, the findings did not provide support for the link between ICT experience and intention to champion. Thus, although school leaders appeared knowledgeable in most of the domains assessed, the study found that they were not as actively involved in ICT management and ICT projects, hence were limited in their "hands-on" experience with ICT management (Hassan *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, teachers' ICT competence is the quality of a specialist, formed throughout one's professional activities. It is also necessary to distinguish between ICT literacy and ICT competence. ICT literacy is determined as knowledge of what is a personal computer, software products, their functions, and capabilities, knowledge about the existence of computer networks (including the Internet). ICT competence is not only the use of various information tools (ICT literacy), but also its effective using in teaching activities. To form the basic ICT competence, one needs:

1. Development of positive motivation to use ICT.
2. Availability of ideas about PC operation and didactic capabilities of ICT.
3. Mastering the methodological foundations for visual and teaching materials using Microsoft Office (Dzhurylo & Shparyk, 2019).

Considering the prevailing theories concerning competences in this area, it is essential to pay particular attention to the theories that address the acquisition of such competences. In this case, it is necessary to turn to cognitive theory. Many distinct styles of leadership are suitable in attempting to integrate ICT in unique settings (Zahrl, 2002). Teaching methods have didactic functions, as they: familiarise learners with new material, enable them to strengthen the acquired knowledge, enable the control and assessment of the degree of knowledge mastery (Figurska & Sokol, 2016). Learning the material, understanding it, and applying the acquired knowledge is the process of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge is acquired by repeating, analysing, and applying it in practice. Thus, the process

of knowledge acquisition is based on the cognitive path. The acquisition process consists of four stages. Perception, understanding, consolidation, and application. The application stage here is related to practice and is the crucial stage. Only at this stage does the acquired knowledge become conscious, and the necessary skills and habits are formed (Huseynzade *et al.*, 2021).

These criteria and levels of knowledge acquisition found wide application in pedagogical practice and for scientific purposes in assessing the quality of knowledge acquisition. Information technology competence of manager is a personal formation that includes a motivational and value attitude towards the informatisation of management, information management, and software and technical knowledge and skills, professionally significant personal qualities (independence, creativity, reflexivity, lack of fear of using computer tools) and is manifested in the manager's ability to use a computer as a management resource (working definition). Despite the significance of ICT competence in the management of a school principal, it is evident that there is an absence of a systematic approach to this issue. The authors of the present study contend that the development of ICT competence in a manager is a process that enables not only the mastery of fundamental skills for working with technology, but also their integration into management practice. There are main stages of ICT competence:

1. The value of using ICT. Firstly, the manager understands the significance of information technologies for effective management. At this stage they analyse the advantages of using ICT in the educational or organisational process.
2. Training and basic skills. This includes the following daily tasks: mastery of the fundamentals of computer use, Internet navigation, office programme proficiency, and basic communication tools (e.g., email, messaging platforms, video conferencing systems).
3. Special tools and their integration into the management process. At this stage, the manager studies special systems used for management: electronic document management, planning and reporting systems, analytical tools. Having acquired the skills necessary, ICT is actively applied to daily management: automation of administrative processes, organisation of distance learning
4. Assessment of the effectiveness and optimisation of the use of technology. The manager analyses how successfully digital tools are used. At this stage, the outcomes are monitored and evaluated, the ICT implementation strategies are adjusted, experience is exchanged with colleagues, and adaptation to new requirements is carried out.
5. Leadership and digital culture. At the final stage, the manager, apart from using ICT to increase management efficiency, becomes an initiator of the development of digital skills among teachers. The creation of a digital culture in the enterprise promotes the continuous updating of knowledge and the implementation of innovative solutions.

These stages are interconnected, and the transition from one to another can be accompanied by continuous

self-education and adaptation to changes in the technological environment. This approach facilitates the establishment of a strategic foundation for sustainable development. This approach is analogous to the process of acquiring knowledge, and each stage corresponds to a cognitive process. The competence in the field of information technology and computing offers the possibility of creating new products and services which can markedly improve the quality of life and better living conditions (Atesh, 2013).

Thus, the ICT competence of a manager depends on the informatisation of society and education. If these processes are not adequately developed, the manager will be unable to demonstrate their expertise in this domain. The criterion of school prestige includes the social status of the school: participation of students and teachers of the school in competitions, olympiads, conferences, competitions; outflow of students to other educational institutions; admission of graduates to higher educational institutions. Satisfaction of students and their parents with the quality of education provided by the school: comfort, security of the student's personality, their attitude towards the main aspects of life at school; satisfaction of teachers with the content, organisation, and conditions of work; satisfaction of parents with the results and conditions of education and upbringing of their child, their place in the school community.

By analysing existing frameworks and best practices, the study identified the key digital skills needed by school leaders to foster innovation, support teachers, and improve student learning outcomes. It was proved that the modern school leader needs to have strong ICT skills to address the challenges of digital education, and that through effective use of technology, they can optimise school management, improve teaching and learning, and create a future-ready learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that to become information competent, a person must be an active subject of communication

processes. The purpose of mastering information competence lies in the development of an active, independent, creative personality capable of self-fulfilment and self-actualisation. The information competence of the individual and the information competence of society are mutually developing objects that enrich each other. Thus, the personal level of information competence depends on the level of information competence of society, which is determined by the information competence of its members.

The study found that the ICT competence of a school leader is a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in management and educational activities. ICT competence is acquired through the search, analysis, systematisation, and use of information. Furthermore, this concept can also include information flow management, document management, digital security skills, data and personal data protection, and interaction with colleagues, parents, and students. The level of use of the latest information technologies in management falls behind the overall pace of informatisation of education. Specific opportunities and options for using the latest information technologies in the management of a mass general education institution require research, updating, and experimental testing. Prospects for further research include the development of in-service training programmes for school leaders in ICT competence, as well as the analysis of cybersecurity in schools and the development of tools for self-assessment of ICT competence of school leaders.

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ІКТ-компетентність шкільного керівника

Анотація. Ключовою місією модернізації системи освіти є розробка механізму стабільного вдосконалення сучасної освітньої системи, забезпечення її відповідності нормам 21 століття, соціально-економічним потребам розвитку країни, запитам суспільства та особистості. Інформаційно-комунікаційні технології стають основним інструментом, яким користуються люди не лише у професійній діяльності, а й у повсякденному житті. Метою даного дослідження було підкреслити значення ІКТ-компетентності в діяльності директора школи в епоху інформатизації освіти. У дослідженні використано такі теоретичні методи, як аналіз та узагальнення. Представлено переваги володіння ІКТ-компетентністю для директора школи, а також шляхи та методи її досягнення. Володіння інформаційними технологіями на рівні інформаційної культури, що включає вміння формулювати потреби в інформації, здійснювати її пошук, оцінювати та ефективно використовувати, є необхідною умовою підготовки висококваліфікованого фахівця. ІКТ-компетентність є однією з найважливіших складових професійної компетентності. Практичне значення цього дослідження полягає в тому, що директори шкіл можуть набути нових компетенцій та розвинути більш комплексне розуміння ефективності своєї діяльності. У дослідженні було розглянуто ІКТ-компетентність та переваги її володіння, а також питання, пов'язані з її вдосконаленням. Результати дослідження сприятимуть розвитку освітньої політики та розробці цільових програм професійної підготовки керівників шкіл

Ключові слова: інформатизація; сучасна школа; управління; якість освіти; навички