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**DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION SUMMARY**

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**School Leadership and School Effectiveness in  
Kazakhstan: Perspectives from Principals and Teachers**

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## **List of publications**

### **List of publications connected to the topic of the dissertation**

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Nurmukhanova, D., Györi, J. (2019). School effectiveness in a changing educational context of Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, leading towards gifted education). In: *Magyar, Nevelés- és Oktatókutatók Egyesülete (szerk.) Prevenció, intervenció és kompenzáció: HuCER 2019 Absztraktkötet*, 9.

Nurmukhanova, D., Muzafarova, T. (2019). Schools as Learning Organizations: Overview of Policy Development in Kazakhstan. In: *Balázs, Németh (szerk.) Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Communities Network: Learning and Living in Diverse Communities*, 144-161.

### **Other publications**

Kovacs, H., Sin, K. K. T., & Nurmukhanova, D. (2020). The essence of purposeful partnering: Qualitative research on institutional links within EDiTE. In: *School-University Partnership: Insights from an international doctorate program on teacher education*, 55-76.

Kairat, G., & Nurmukhanova, D. (2019, July). Informal professional development of higher education teachers in Kazakhstan. In *Rural Environment. Education. Personality.(REEP)*, 12, 273-278.

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## **Abstract**

School effectiveness is a key area of interest in educational research, focusing on the factors contributing to positive student outcomes and overall school performance. Leadership is back in fashion. Education policy agendas prioritise school leadership globally. It maintains its crucial role in the debate on school effectiveness and improvement. School leadership plays a significant role in shaping the school's function, impacting students' performance and organisational effectiveness. Nevertheless, as leaders, principals need to consider their roles in building effective schools, especially with the extremely high demands that modern society places on educational outcomes. This research aims to explore and understand what an effective school stands for and what the leader's roles are from the perspectives of principals and teachers. This doctoral research is developed as an exploratory qualitative study in the context of educational reforms and developmental interventions in Kazakhstan. Theoretically, effectiveness is a complex phenomenon which has been looked at from the prism of organisational theory, exploring the structure, functioning, and behaviour of organisations as a whole. The research attempted to develop a model for the school as a learning organisation, and its leadership is to produce a system with a sound theoretical foundation and practical applicability, which led to the Competing Values Framework. The Competing Values Framework is a tool that works as a map, an organising structure, a sense-making device, an inspiration for new ideas, and a learning. The data collection comprised school visits, interviews with principals and teachers, focus groups, shadowing observation of the principals, and interviews with educational experts and policy authorities. Qualitative content analysis was provided to present the results for further discussion. The results indicate that an effective school is one that functions and learns holistically, where every dimension has duties, responsibilities, and processes but works together in synergy. For the synergy to grow and flourish, the role of the leader is essential. Thus, the study concludes that it extended the knowledge of organisational effectiveness, particularly with corresponding directions of the principal's activity. The presented results make several noteworthy contributions to the dimensions of the Competing Values Framework, enhancing the understanding of the roles of the principals and applying it to the everyday functional performance of the school leader. The key strength of the study is merging challenging and vague notions of effectiveness and leadership.

## **Absztrakt**

Az iskolai hatékonyság az oktatáskutatás egyik kulcsfontosságú területe, amely azokra a tényezőkre összpontosít, amelyek hozzájárulnak a pozitív tanulói eredményekhez és az általános iskolai teljesítményhez. Az oktatáspolitikai irányelvek az iskolavezetést helyezik előtérbe globálisan. Az iskolavezetés megtartotta meghatározó szerepét az iskola hatékonyságáról és fejlesztéséről szóló vitában. Az iskola vezetése nagy szerepet játszik az iskola funkciójának alakításában, befolyásolva a tanulók teljesítményét és a szervezeti hatékonyságot. Mindazonáltal vezetőként az igazgatóknak mérlegelniük kell, mi a szerepük a hatékony iskolák felépítésében, különösen a modern társadalom által az oktatási eredményekkel szemben támasztott rendkívül magas követelmények mellett. A kutatás célja annak feltárása és megértése, hogy mit jelent a hatékony iskola, és mi a vezető szerepe az igazgatók és a tanárok szemszögéből. Ezt a doktori kutatást feltáró kvalitatív tanulmányként írtuk meg a kazahsztáni oktatási reformok és fejlesztések alapján. Elméletileg a hatékonyság egy összetett jelenség, amelyet a szervezetelmélet prizmáján keresztül vizsgáltak, figyelembe véve a szervezetek egészének felépítését, működését és viselkedését. A kutatás megkísérelte az iskola, mint tanulási intézmény modelljének kidolgozását, melynek vezetése egy szilárd elméleti megalapozottságú és gyakorlatban alkalmazható rendszer létrehozása, amely elvezetett a Versengő Értékek Keretrendszeréhez. A Versengő Értékek Keretrendszere egy olyan eszköz, amely tervként, szervező struktúraként, értékes eszközként, új ötletek megvalósulási terepeként és tanulási céllal működik. Az iskolalátogatásokból, az igazgatókkal és tanárokkal folytatott interjúkból, fókuszcsoportokból, az igazgatók megfigyeléséből, valamint oktatási szakértőkkel és szakpolitikai hatóságokkal folytatott interjúkból állt össze az adatgyűjtés. A közreműködők kvalitatív tartalomelemzést adtak az eredmények további megvitatásával kapcsolatban. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a hatékony iskola az, ami holisztikusan működik, ahol minden résztvevő tisztában van kötelességével, felelősségével és mindez szinergiában működik együtt. A szinergia növekedéséhez és kiteljesedéséhez elengedhetetlen a vezető szerepe. A tanulmány kibővítette a szervezeti hatékonysággal kapcsolatos ismereteket, különös tekintettel az igazgatói tevékenységre. A bemutatott eredmények több figyelemre méltó szempontot adnak a Versengő Értékek Keretrendszerének dimenzióihoz, segítik az igazgatók szerepének megértését, és alkalmazhatóak az iskolavezető mindennapi funkcionális teljesítményének javítására. A tanulmány fókuszában a hatékonyság és a vezetés kihívást jelentő és homályos fogalmainak tisztázása áll.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Leadership is back in fashion. Education policy agendas prioritise school leadership to a global extent. It maintains its crucial role in the debate on school effectiveness and improvement (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). Despite the extensive research and practice to enhance school effectiveness, no coherently accepted set of guidelines concerning the school effectiveness assessment exists. Researchers in school effectiveness often aim to clarify dilemmas respecting learners' or students' education outcomes, which leads to calling the schools more accountable for being judged on the student's academic results in many cases (Botha, 2010).

In 1990, from the research on school effectiveness, it became apparent that leadership is a crucial factor in the success of education (Sammons et al., 1995). Recent studies are more advanced in finding the correlation between leadership-specific aspects and measurable learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Mulford & Silins, 2003). Studies like this concentrate on how school leaders apply leadership, which cannot be seen in isolation but holistically as a part of a broader pattern of leadership practice (Seashore et al., 2010).

As school leaders, principals encounter the challenge of improving teaching and learning to ensure students' successful academic performance. However, in this new educational era, the principal's role shifts from supporting teachers' efforts to leading teachers to achieve tangible outcomes (Lashway, 2003). Historically, possessing solid administrative and political skills was sufficient to be called an effective leader. However, the current school expectations involve different types of leadership skills from principals. This means that in addition to historically established skill pressures, principals face challenges such as budgetary cutbacks, school safety, contract supervision, data management, and marketing. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the principal is dependent on complex knowledge and skills related to organisational culture and management, and this needs not only innovative practices but also a different mindset (Elmore, 2000).

### **Problem statement**

Kazakhstan as the country of research is defined by the fact that Kazakhstan is a country in transition. Since 1991, after declaring independence, the leaders have pursued transforming the country's economy, liberating it from the grip of central planners, and opening its potential market forces. The transition has not ignored the education system embracing educational

reforms that aimed at opening educational provision to the free market and integrating the education system more closely with the international community. Given the country's economic and political ambitions in recent years, the rush to transform the education system has only intensified (AllahMorad, 2021).

The choice of Kazakhstan is particularly interesting because of its transition time of Kazakhstan, where the basis for these reforms in contemporary Kazakhstan can ultimately be found in the turmoil of the country's immediate post-independence social, political, and economic experience. The country had undergone ambitious transformations in a short period of time. It is noteworthy to observe the country's openness to brave ideas and innovations in the educational system as well as being open to Western concepts with the post-soviet experience of the past.

Transferring the effective practices of schools is one of the core objectives of Kazakhstan's educational system. This is the reason why identifying the characteristics of an effective school is an obligatory step in improving the quality of secondary education. Currently, one of the most accepted ways to collect information on effective schools is the results of final national testing and exams. They are used both officially and non-officially to evaluate the quality of schools and make the annual report (Davis & Winch, 2015; Koretz, 2002). The issue of the need for school leadership and school effectiveness research is emerging in Kazakhstan, which explains the limited published papers or almost absence of academic research in English.

The issue of the need for school leadership and school effectiveness research is emerging in Kazakhstan, which explains the limited published papers or almost absence of academic research in English. Notably, school leadership is a relatively new concept as compared with school management. The issue of approaches to rethinking the school leadership concept has been discussed at the Ministry of Education and Science level.

### **The purpose of the study**

This research is of interest in terms of studying principals' and teachers' perceptions of leadership roles and practices and how they are related to school effectiveness. From the principal's perspective, this research is valuable because it digs up the existing literature on specific school leader practices to consider if leadership effects can be associated with particular practices and behaviours.

From the teacher's perspective, the study is relevant because it provides a starting point for exploring the importance of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership and their relationship to school effectiveness.

The current research is targeted at finding out the successful patterns of leadership practices that make the schools effective in Kazakhstan. The study aims to gather data on school leaders' practices and explore how these practices address and conceptualise effectiveness. This work will investigate principals' and teachers' perspectives on leadership roles and school effectiveness to explain the relationship between these two notions.

### **Research aims and research questions**

The main goal of the current research is to understand the phenomenon of the organisation's effectiveness and the school leader's role in the context of Kazakhstan. These goals are the heart of this study; accordingly, the following aims are pursued:

- To extend the knowledge on the nature of the term of effectiveness;
- To construct a potential framework regarding the school leaders' function;
- To enhance understanding of the impact of the leader that supports effectivity.

In order to fulfil the objectives of this ambitious research, several research questions were developed to find the analytical and conceptual framework:

1. How do principals and teachers understand the effectiveness of the school as an organisation?
2. What are the perspectives and beliefs regarding the roles of the school leader?
3. What is the school leader's role in improving school effectiveness?

The research questions are set to serve as a guide for the rest of the study and support the main objectives and the research problem statement. The questions will be the basis for developing the research design and the interview questions. Theoretically and empirically, each question will be addressed in the following parts of the dissertation to construct the whole picture into a meaningful set of lessons and recommendations.

### **The organisation of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organised following the requirements of the Eötvös Loránd University to pursue a doctoral degree and to support a respective presentation of the research work done within the scope of *School effectiveness and school leadership in Kazakhstan: Perspectives from principals and teachers*. The overall structure of the study takes the form of seven chapters, including this introductory chapter.



This paper first gives a brief overview of approaches to understanding school effectiveness. It encompasses literature on the complexity of the concept and key characteristics of effective schools. It further embodies readings on organisational aspects of effectiveness, incorporating segments of leadership. Next, the paper reviews the literature on defining leadership, comprising the dimensions of leadership and school leadership paradigms. The main issue addressed in the first chapter is developing the framework for the research that merges school effectiveness and leaders' roles.

The following part of the dissertation provides a brief overview of the case of Kazakhstan, namely past intervention in understanding effectiveness and leadership.

The third part presents the research findings, focusing on the three key themes set by the research questions in the context of Kazakhstan. By providing these results in the given context, readers will be able to examine the data structure, exploring the given themes from the perspectives of principals, teachers, and educational experts.

The fourth part of the dissertation begins by laying out the research design and methodology. It brings scientific theoretical theories along with the fundamentals of the qualitative research approach. This part also provides information on data collection procedures, participants, and data analysis. Importantly, this section of the dissertation offers an outline of ethical considerations and limitations.

The fifth part presents the findings of the interviews and focus group discussions, with quotes from principals, teachers, and educational experts underlying them.

The sixth part analyses the results of interviews and focus group discussions undertaken during the current study. It provides an overview of the knowledge gained from the entire research. A deliberate discussion emphasises the concept of effective school as a complex phenomenon, and four quadrants of the Competing Values Framework of the analytical structure are considered. Furthermore, the chapter offers lessons learned for schools and recommendations for principals.

The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical and empirical strands to sum up the answers to the questions asked and includes a discussion of the implications of the findings for future research in this area.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

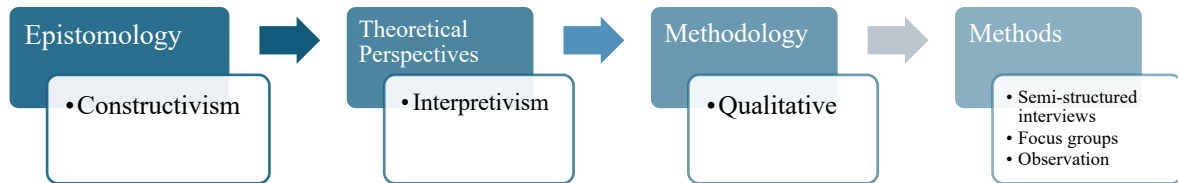
### **Theoretical framework**

The given study will incorporate qualitative research design in the context of Kazakhstani secondary schools. There is a reasonable consensus that qualitative research is a

naturalistic, interpretive approach to understanding the meanings people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values, etc.). In particular, ‘how people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the motifs of qualitative research’ (Bryman, 2003, p. 8).

According to Crotty (2020), a research process can be grounded on four basic elements: epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods.

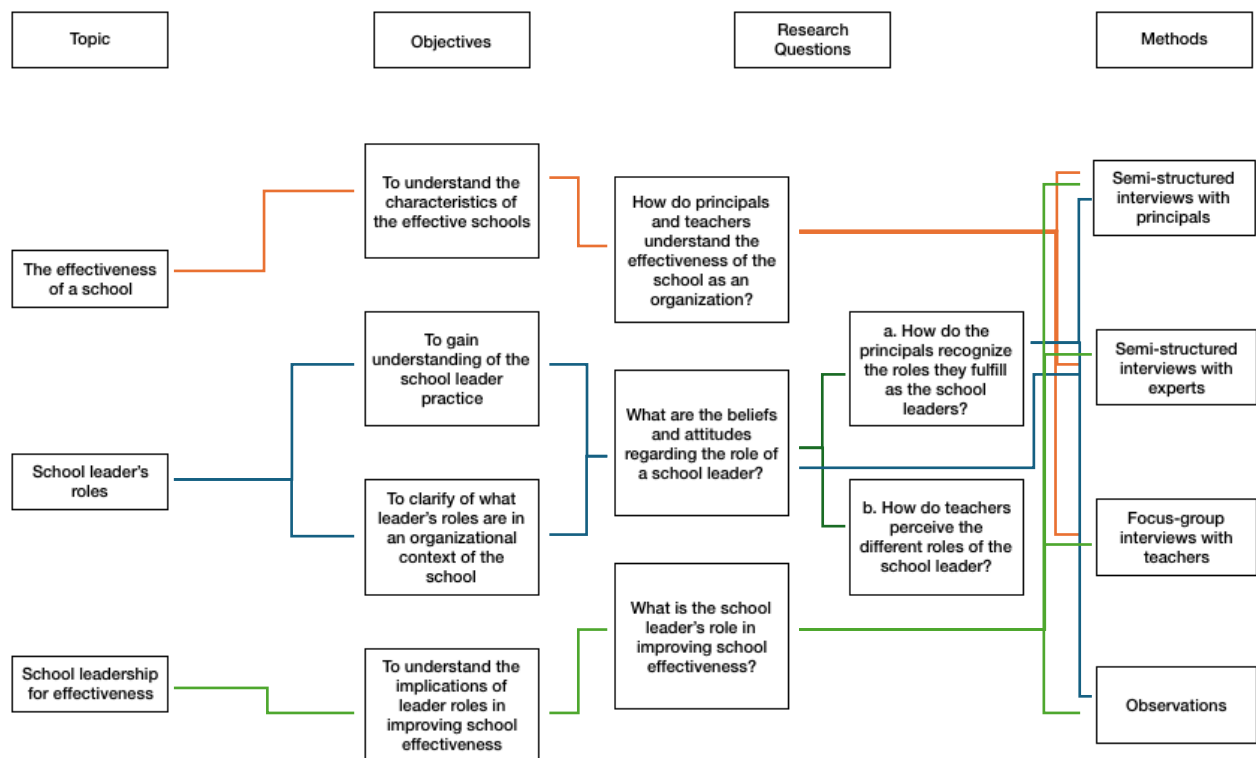
Figure 1. Research Paradigm



Source: author

Qualitative research theory constructs a guiding strategy for the data arranged in orderly patterns and determines the meaning and insight into the meaning-making (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The methodology is “the science of finding out” – a subfield of epistemology – that leads to scientific analysis (Babbie, 2008, p. 4).

Figure 2. The research outline



Source: author

The research outline represents an abstract and digested perception of the study framework and how the links have been composed. The outline is considered to be a basis and a starting point, as it is important to note that interrelation of the given aspects of the research are more compound than introduced.

## **Research methods**

### ***Interviews***

The qualitative interview is a crucial ground for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It gives a unique access to the reality of people who, in their own words, describe their activities, experiences and opinions. It is a ‘powerful method of producing knowledge of the human situation, as demonstrated by historical interview studies’ (Kvale, 2008, p. 9).

As a distinguishing research method, the interview pursues several purposes. As a research device, it helps to convert the information from research subjects into data: “By providing access to what is ‘inside a person’s head’, [it] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)” (Tuckman & Harper, 2012, p. 244). Second, interviews can be applied to assess the research questions or hypotheses or to propose new ones; moreover, as an explanatory tool to determine relationships and variables (Cohen et al., 2007). Third, the interview is possible in conjunction with other methods the research is undertaking (Cohen et al., 2007). In the same vein, Kerlinger (1970) notes that the interview can be used to explore unexpected results, validate other methods, or analyse the motivations of the respondents and the reasons for responding the way they do.

As the current research lies in exploring and investigating the phenomena of effectiveness and leadership, the interview is an access to the meaning-making that evolves from the respondents’ experiences. The scarcity of literature on school leadership and effectiveness in the context of Kazakhstan shows that the concept in the research arena of Kazakhstan is relatively new. This illustrates the importance of interviews advantage as a tool to explore current experiences, views and perspectives. The interview provides control over the process so the researcher can guide it in different directions.

The research method of semi-structured interviews offers exceptional benefits as it can fit many valuable tasks, especially when some open-ended questions require follow-up queries (Newcomer et al., 2015). A semi-structured interview is one of the most effective ways to collect data in terms of its flexible nature, with a prepared but not fixed set of questions and

follow-up questions that can be asked during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). That is why a semi-structured interview is ‘flexible, accessible and intelligible and, more importantly, capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organisational behaviour’ (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246).

The dialogue in a semi-structured interview can ramble around the topics on the agenda compared to a standardised structured survey where the conversation is stuck to precise questions. As a result, it may delve into new topics and unforeseen directions, which makes the method quite valuable in terms of becoming dynamic, vivid, and lively conversation to explore the phenomenon (Newcomer et al., 2015).

Kazakhstan is a country of interest. Schools are the right environment and will be the right place to find interviewees. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewee to intervene quickly and go deep into a topic, given the interviewee's context and expertise.

### ***Focus group***

The focus group context is different from an interview, basically because the interaction between group participants generates data. Participants not only present their own experiences, views and beliefs, but they also hear from other people. The role of a researcher bears a hybrid nature: partly, it involves the role of a moderator who controls the agenda, and partly, it consists of the role of a facilitator who assists the process of discussion (Ritchie et al., 2013). ‘Focus groups ... require the participants to give certain types of contribution, and they need the interaction to be organised in specific ways. In this sense, they are situations of formal interaction. However,... moderators attempt to generate a situation where interaction seems fluid and spontaneous’ (Puchta & Potter, 2004, p.28).

Research interviews in both individual and focus group patterns have a purposeful intention of considering a communicative symmetry where the researcher can balance the expertise, knowledge, and experience of the interviewee’s (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). A Focus group is used as a qualitative method that brings valuable insights within the group of people with a focus on a specific topic, which leads to various answers even in the most homogenous group (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

According to Casey and Krueger (2000), a focus group provides “a more natural environment than that of the individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in real life” (p.11). Focus group interviews set a goal to collect high-quality data in a social context (Patton, 2014) that helps to explore a specific issue from the point of view of the participants of the research (Khan & Manderson, 1992). The

method has advantages in terms of being a valuable research instrument when there is a lack of substantial information about the topics. Focus group interview provides “a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014, p.140). Moreover, focus groups are essentially favourable when the research aims to find out the individual’s understanding and experiences about a certain topic and the reasons behind a particular way of thinking (Kitzinger, 1997).

Focus group interviews suit the current research for the group conversation dynamic where new topic fields can appear and develop in their flow. Because of group dynamics, the group individuals can feel the atmosphere and be more open, diminishing shyness and control.

### ***Shadowing observation***

Observation offers insight into interactions, processes and behaviours that go beyond understanding conveyed in verbal accounts. It can provide rich data in its own right and understanding that other forms of data collection would miss. Observation can also be used creatively with different forms of data in ways that make it ‘crucial for research design, data collection and interpretation of data’ (Mack, 2005, p.15).

As an observational technique, shadowing can be interesting for the given research. A qualitative shadowing technique evolved and significantly impacted the study of team leaders in a learning organisation. The main focus of the method is not to reveal the leader’s day shaped by the actions performed but to discover the ins and outs of perspective forming those actions in the context of the organisation (McDonald, 2005).

It involves a researcher closely following a member of an organisation over a set period (McDonald, 2005). Shadowing has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to organisational research through detailed data gathered in comparison with many other approaches. ‘Coupled with the fact that shadowing research does not rely on an individual’s account of their role in an organisation, but views it directly, means that shadowing can produce the sort of first-hand, detailed data that gives the organisational researcher access to both the trivial or mundane and the difficult to articulate’ (McDonald, 2005, p. 457).

The literature review on shadowing shows that it has been used in the social sciences. Even though it is insufficient in the management literature (Bonazzi, 1998; Perlow, 1998, 1999), shadowing was adopted by other vocational disciplines like education (Polite et al., 1997), social work (Stanley et al., 1998), information studies (Hirsh, 1999; Orton et al., 2000) and (Vukic & Keddy, 2002). Shadowing has been used in combination with other research methods like in-depth interviews (Polite et al., 1997; Stewart et al., 1980; Walker et al., 1956)

but also has been used in combination with other observation methods (Bonazzi, 1998; Perlow, 1998, 1999), diaries (Perlow, 1998, 1999) and telephone and postal surveys (Stanley et al., 1998). Even though the aim of using several methods is not triangulation, it is often a pluralistic and rich perspective on the research context (Bonazzi, 1998; Stanley et al., 1998).

Based on the purpose of the shadower, three forms of shadowing can be distinguished within the social science literature: “to learn for themselves or experimental learning, to record behaviour with a view to discovering patterns in it, and to investigate roles and perspectives in a detailed, qualitative way” (McDonald, 2005, p. 461). The most relevant approach in the current study is - shadowing as a means of understanding roles and perspectives.

The research that uses shadowing as a means to attempt to view the world from an individual perspective is close to the approach of experimental learning but differs in the significant aspect of the shadower’s purpose (McDonald, 2005). The shadower who is trying to acquire insight into a role to enhance their practice pursues experimental learning. At the same time, the one who attempts to see through the eyes of another for research purposes is categorised as the understanding of the roles and perspectives (McDonald, 2005). There are few studies in this category; however, it is underpinned by a qualitative epistemology and has the greatest potential for extending the current organisational research.

What needs to be added in the majority of the papers is a consideration of the methodological implications of employing shadowing techniques. Moreover, many studies do not distinctly determine the epistemological viewpoint that supports the research design. This is in considerable comparison to the management of either the quantitative structured observation techniques communicated in the leadership literature (Hunt et al., 2013; Martinko & Gardner, 1985) or the more traditional participant observation techniques recognised in the social literature (Filstead, 1970; Taylor & Dunnette, 1976).

Shadowing observation has made a big step from being used as a neutral measuring and recording (quantitative) tool to the ways of generating a narrative first to develop and then share insight into a role (qualitative) (McDonald, 2005). As experts from a different (research) community, they are ‘perspective taking’ through their shadowing. They hope to appreciate and articulate the distinct roles, views and contributions of those they study (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995, p. 358).

## **Research Participants**

The sample for the qualitative research views the school as an organisation in the context of Kazakhstan. The sample for this research includes the following educational representatives:

- Educational experts
- School principals
- School teachers.

The conceptualisation of school effectiveness is the first step in understanding the leadership roles within. Therefore, educational experts are important to collect information that helps alongside the literature on school effectiveness and school leadership in Kazakhstan. As the concepts are relatively new in the country, educational experts, including policymakers, play an important role in revealing the current situation and the perspective on further development in the educational system. Educational experts are the ones who initiate the changes in the educational hierarchy. The question of the role of middle management and parents in schools may be raised. Middle management is not included in the impact of the social-political and historical background of the country, where the school system is seen as quite hierarchical. It means that the principal plays a central role in organising the leadership in the school. The long history of top-down management determines the middle management, and the principal's leadership directly influences teachers' performance.

School principals are essential in school development and are direct players in the school leadership concept. Interviewing school principals will show the elements of implementation of effective school development and the performance of school leader's roles. Hence, it was crucial to interview the school and involve this category of professionals in the research.

The school teachers can also be considered the core of the research, and incorporating their voices on their development, practice, and challenges, as well as on their experience and leadership insights, was evident.

Additional categories were considered in the planning phase of the current research; those include students and parents, but they were not included in the current research. There are substantial rational justifications for the decision not to include these stakeholders, as the scope of the study targets principals and teachers on their views on effectiveness and leadership. At the same time, students and parents as a community are indicators for the achievements of schooling and teaching (OECD, 2016). Moreover, the timeline and research

framework enables the analysis that comprises a comprehensive understanding of the core of the issue, which in this case is effectiveness and leadership. Therefore, expanding the variety of participants within the framework of the research and rigid time settings would considerably restrain the general quality of the study.

### **Data collection and procedures**

The procedure of data collection comprised three steps to follow. The initial phase consisted of gathering the existing information through the literature review. For this phase, information was also collected through educational experts and policymakers. The interviewees were selected based on their expertise and competence within the topic of school leadership and effectiveness in Kazakhstan. The plan was supported and encouraged by supervisors and permitted by the ethical committee. The collaboration with the experts and policymakers was done through semi-structured individual interviews.

The data collection from the experts included interviews with four experts, two with international backgrounds directly dealing with leadership in schools. One of the experts is the representative from the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, who was involved in current educational reforms and research on school effectiveness. It was consulted on what schools to choose for the research.

The second phase included contacting the school principals via e-mail, providing thorough information on the purpose of the study, a brief overview and scope, permission to conduct the research and ethical considerations, including confidentiality and procedures. During the visit to the schools, first, the meeting with the principals took place. The principals introduced their schools to the time for conducting interviews, and focus groups and principal observations were planned. The principal provided information on the potential candidates for focus group interviews. Specifically, the ones who have been teaching for a long time already and the ones who also shared teaching and leadership positions at the same time, like the head of the department or coordinators.

The core of the third phase involved conducting the school-based interviews, focus groups and shadowing observation of the principal. After the initial visit, each school was contacted to arrange interview dates. The school provided emails to all the teachers for further consideration of the concrete participants and contacted them to set the date. The interviews were appointed at times when all 6 participants could attend, and they were all conducted face-to-face—the translated interview questions, together with the purpose of the research and brief overview, respectively.



The complete picture of the data collection included three schools, and the number of individuals taking part in the research included altogether.

*Table 1. Overview of research participants*

Participant type	Number of participants
Educational experts and decision makers	4
School leaders	3
Teachers	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

*Source: author*

The conclusive decision of the number of interviewed participants followed the core idea of a sample of around 30 is a competent medium-sized subject pool that can provide “the advantage of penetrating beyond a minimal number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when researchers are faced with time constraints” (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p. 9). In this respect, Creswell (2012) suggests involving 20-30 participants for the qualitative research, disregarding the methodology.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues in educational research are to be treated with thoughtfulness and gravity as they may caution against the validity of research to unplanned technical and administrative issues (Cohen et al., 2007). The central ethical dilemma that researchers face is balancing between demands placed on them in pursuit of truth and their subjects’ rights and values. Ethical concerns may arise from the different spheres examined by social researchers and the methods used to achieve valid and reliable data (Cohen et al., 2007). This shows that every stage of the research sequence stems from ethical issues.

Before initiating the data collection, the methodological design, including the interview and focus group questions, was submitted to the Ethical Committee of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) for approval to conduct. The request to access the research sites was made by the Research Department of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Management Company. On receiving approval from both sides, the school principals were informed about the research, the data collection and analysis processes, and the ways in which personal data would be protected. The information was sent to the respondents by e-mail, and the GDPR form was signed in

person before every interview and focus group. The respondents were asked if they understood and consented to participate in the research.

Informed consent has been defined as “the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions” (Diener & Crandall, 1978, p.156). This notion involves four elements: competence, voluntarism, complete information, and comprehension. *Competence* stands for qualified and responsible individuals who will make adequate decisions if they are given relevant information. *Voluntarism* requires the principle that informed consent ensures the participants freely choose to participate (or not) in the research and grants that risk awareness is undertaken voluntarily. When the respondent is fully informed of the consent, it represents the entire *information* element. However, in practical terms, it is not realistic that researchers inform their participants about everything, for example, when researchers are not fully aware of everything regarding the investigation. When subjects fully understand the nature of the research project and are aware of potential risks and complications, it enhances the *comprehension* element (Cohen et al., 2007).

At the analysis stage, the school data was completely anonymised, mainly while providing quotes from the interviews, respondents and schools were numbered: Teacher 1, School 1. The data was stored as textual documents, audio files (voice recordings), and written notes on a personal laptop. After transcription, the audio files of the interviews were deleted.

It is unrealistic to identify and foresee all potential ethical issues or determine the moral code of the researcher’s behaviour. Still, it is hoped that all these considerations will enable a greater awareness to approach the research project and secure the protection of research subjects at a maximum level.

## **Limitations**

As with any other research, this one determines the possible limitations. The research limitations comprise limited contexts, contextual notions, and linguistic contexts.

The limitation regarding the data collection in this study was due to limited permission of the Kazakhstani part, resource restrictions, and the pandemic situation; the information was collected from the school contexts, which are considered effective. This determined an essential understanding of how principals, teachers, and educational experts perceive effectiveness and leadership.

The study involves schools from the network of highly competitive, state-funded learning institutions known as Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). This can limit this

research since the state schools are not autonomous in dealing with school leadership and effectiveness. NIS schools are different from other private schools in terms of the way they function in a general sense. However, NIS acts in accordance with the state curriculum standards, as all other Kazakhstani schools do. What makes these schools exceptional for study is that they are far more flexible in innovation and adapting to student needs.

Moreover, the school facilities, funding levels, and teacher qualifications are superior. Even though the government exclusively provides the funding, NIS operate autonomously, which, in theory, allows them to pilot modern education trends, the most successful of which will be implemented nationwide. This is the main grounding that makes these schools an exciting subject to explore in the frame of effectiveness and leadership and a promising avenue for further research considerations.

The research topic and contextual notions are also some of the limitations. If leadership phenomena in Kazakhstan were investigated to some extent, in particular, school leadership and school effectiveness were explored quite scarcely, both theoretically and practically. Hence, the experiences in existing research are not subject to direct application and contrast with the current study.

Linguistic context was another limitation that had been handled during the study. According to Tsang (1998), “communicating in the respondent’s language is of paramount importance because the respondent may not be able to express their ideas in an unfamiliar language fully. Moreover, speaking the same language as the respondent helps to establish a good rapport. Second, the issue of cultural understanding comes into play” (p. 511). Consequently, the interviews were provided in the responded languages: Kazakh, Russian and English. That means that the interviews were translated into English to be quoted in the present study. This may cause language issues as translations always differ slightly from the original. Nevertheless, the translations were carried out with high quality and attention.

## **BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH**

### **Effectiveness criteria: towards Competing Values Framework**

The fundamental goal of developing a model for the school as a learning organisation and its leadership is to produce a system with a sound theoretical foundation and practical applicability (Baráth, 2017).

For the purpose of developing the model, in the previous chapter, there was an attempt to explore the theoretical background of learning organisations and study the relevant research on organisational learning by Argyris (1997) and organisational learning by Senge (1990a).

Baráth (2017) depicts what factors are crucial as input for establishing a learning organisation model (Pol et al., 2011, 2013; Senge, 1990a; Silins et al., 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 1996) and what influences the efficiency of the link between leadership and school effectiveness (Day et al., 2009; Seashore et al., 2010). Marsick and Watkins (2003) proposed seven dimensions, namely “continuous learning, inquiry and dialogue, collaboration and team learning, people empowerment for the people dimension, environmental connection, embedded systems, and strategic leadership.” A number of research projects confirmed that the schools characterised by the characteristics of a learning organisation tend to react to challenges more promptly: their effectiveness increased (Corcoran & Goertz, 1995); trust, collaboration and workplace learning became significant elements of the organisational culture (Horváth & Feketéné Dr Szakos, 2014), and the functioning network was considered vital (Hidding & Catterall, 1998; Huber, 1991). Based on the comprehensive organisational examination of the theoretical models, the organisational culture and effectiveness analysis can be built on the Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) with the exploration and analysis of the behaviour competencies of the organisation’s key players (Baráth, 2013). The learning organisation profile provides the empirical basis for developing the framework (Anka et al., 2015).

The Competing Values Framework has been one of the 40 most critical organisational frameworks in the history of business and management (Ten Have et al., 2003). For more than 25 years, it has been researched and tested in organisations by a group of leaders from leading business schools and corporations (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Quinn, 1988; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Nowadays, hundreds of organisations worldwide use the Competing Values Framework because of the factors that account for high organisational performance (Cameron et al., 2014).

The Competing Values Framework is a tool that works as a map, an organising structure, a sense-making device, an inspiration for new ideas, and a learning system. Researchers have implemented it in many aspects of organisations, like value outcomes, organisational culture, effective leadership, core competencies, decision-making, and human resources (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). To put it another way, the framework aids leaders in working more consistently and more conscientiously to improve their organisations’ performance and value creation (Cameron et al., 2014).

One core function of the Competing Values Framework is to assist the progress of interpreting an unsettled and ambiguous environment in an effective and rational way. The framework makes it possible to coordinate different spheres in the situation in ways that create value rather than destroy value. In this regard, the Competing Values Framework is an

approach to thinking which means interpreting or coaching a complex phenomenon. Moreover, the framework works as a tool to develop a set of competencies and strategies that involve complexities being taken into consideration. The Competing Values Framework can provide the intent point, as well as a defined and consistent interpretation system, enabling effective leadership in dynamic change conditions (Cameron et al., 2014).

## **DISCUSSION**

Understanding school effectiveness is a big ambition of this research. The literature review and interview data show that the concept of effectiveness is multifaceted and has different dimensions to approach in practical terms. The literature review also indicated the importance of understanding the differences between effectiveness and efficiency. In terms of language, effectiveness and efficiency are two words in Kazakh, so it was essential to clarify what effectiveness means. The difficulty of differentiating these terms follows this. Therefore, effectiveness was the main topic to explore and investigate.

According to West-Burnham (2010), the vision considers the direction for all aspects of the organisation, serves as a guide for planning, demonstrates the work of individuals, is a bridge for effective communication and announces the organisation to the external world.

In short, an effective school knows what it is and where it goes. To be so, it needs a strong leader. The leader with a clear vision based on the school leads at all levels, transfers these needs into goals, monitors how it works, and intervenes in a mediate and corrective manner.

The results in this chapter indicate that an effective school functions and learns holistically, where every dimension has duties, responsibilities, and processes but works together in synergy. For the synergy to grow and flourish, the leader's role is essential.

The Competing Values Framework was used as the conceptual framework for structuring the leader roles and functions. Four quadrants are formed by the fundamental effectiveness theories and horizontal dimensions, where every dimension establishes a set of roles, strategies and competencies that leaders may use to foster value creation.

Since this century began, Kazakhstan has undergone fundamental educational transformation and change. To enter the competitive economic market, the quality of education is essential (Nurmukhanova & Muzafarova, 2019). There are concerns raised by the literature on leaders' roles in promoting and reinforcing effective school service. In Kazakhstani context in particular: improving the quality of education (Milovanova, 2010; Valieva, 2010), leading resilient to stress (Kondrashkin, 2010), school management organisation, responsibility

distribution (Dozortseva, 2011), and many other topics for discussion and further research. Moreover, “the art of leadership can be attained by experience and success; high performance of a leader dependent on the ethical values of the headteacher” (Zhaksylykova, 2010, p. 13). This leads us gradually towards the next part of the lessons learned and further recommendations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The final concluding thoughts serve to highlight the study's main points, indicate the learning results from theoretical and practical parts, and emphasise the value of the current research and further implications for the research.

The core of any research is to ask valuable questions and find the answers. The current study put forward quite ambitious questions to be answered and perhaps raised more questions than preliminary have been planned. However, by researching the three questions, the study tried to elaborate on the core concepts of school effectiveness and school leader roles in Kazakhstan. The deliberations developed many valuable points for the discourse of what is considered an effective school, including approaches for conceptualising this phenomenon. Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this research, it is now possible to state that an effective school is a learning school that develops as an organisation in all spheres and layers. The study has shown that the school leader is indeed the principal and impacts the school's learning and development.

Already in the literature review, the dissertation was challenged by complex theories of effectiveness, namely the development of educational effectiveness research and different approaches to defining the characteristics of an effective school. This is made evident by the higher value and novelty of the current study and potentially be a tool for creating further guidance for school principals. Additionally, a significant element of the organisational learning context has brought the Competing Values Framework as a lacking puzzle for the complete analytical framework in studying principals' roles and value drivers. The findings are all climaxed by the fundamental empirical notion that school principals' activity is a specific field of study, which can be perceived from individual, teacher and policy perspectives. The results by itself stand for the argument that effective school leadership is a complex phenomenon.

The research extends the knowledge of organisational effectiveness, particularly with corresponding directions of the principal's activity. The presented results make several noteworthy contributions to the dimensions of flexibility and stability, and an internal and

external focus. In all four directions, the present study enhanced the understanding of the Competing values framework and applied it to the everyday functional performance of the school leader. The key strength of the study is merging challenging and vague notions of effectiveness and leadership.

Finally, no research goes without limitations, and this research is no exception. Limitations of limited contexts, contextual notions, and linguistic contexts were initially stated. The biggest challenge was due to the permission to access public schools. As a consequence, only Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and the private segment were accessible for the research, as well as the pandemic situation, which provided restrictions on resources and movement. Contextual notions are, at the same time, a strength and a weak point of the research. Hence, the research has value and novelty, but at the same time, the research topic needs to be investigated in the Kazakhstan context. Therefore, the experiences in existing research are not subject to direct application. Linguistic context comprises three-language data to be analysed and cannot fully express the ideas due to language specifics.

The study meaningfully contributes to the necessity of gaining a qualitative understanding of the specific principal's work in the context of the organisational effectiveness of the school. Nevertheless, this research has thrown up many questions that need further investigation. While the scope of the study has been Kazakhstan's, investigating this phenomenon in other countries would add a further understanding of different contextual realms and similarities.

This includes implications for further research:

- More broadly, research is also needed to be conducted in public schools, possibly a comparative study between so-called effective schools and public schools;
- Considerably more work will be needed to consider the quantitative or mixed method approach for the current research topic;
- A natural progression of this work is to analyse other stakeholders' opinions: students and parents;
- Another possible area of future research is the individual motivational factors of the principals;
- What is needed is a cross-national study involving other countries;
- More information on social and historical aspects of the educational system could produce interesting findings;
- It would be interesting to assess the effects of gender, age, and experience on leadership.

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