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Educational Management and Leadership in Montenegro

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1 Challenges for Educational Policy in Montenegro

More than a decade after the wave of changes in Europe, the education systems of the countries of this region are again facing new challenges. Education has become an increasingly important sector of common policy and it seems that the countries wishing to achieve European standards will come under pressure to adapt their education policies to new common paradigms. Although some of the countries of the region may see this as an undesirable restriction of their newly gained sovereignty, most of them will probably use the accession process as an instrument to solve their problems. EU accession will help them to identify sooner the already existing challenges, to elaborate the appropriate answers, and to construct efficient instruments for implementing their policies (Halász 2004).

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Education is seen as a key factor of societal development (Results Educational Fund 2009), and Montenegro is continuously implementing reforms in this area in order to make the educational system compliant with modern trends and quality. In recent years, reforms have been conducted at all levels of education. The reforms were preceded by the adoption of new laws and amendments for the appropriate level of education, and for its harmonisation with EU legislation.

In this context, the vision of the Montenegrin education system is to develop Montenegro as a society of knowledge, where education, as the key factor of economic and social development, will be of high quality, flexible, efficient, with professional human resources that will have competitive knowledge, skills and competences and that will be qualified to take part in the labour market, where each individual has equal opportunities for personal and professional development. In terms of educational policy, it is necessary to take into account all the issues an educational system faces during a period of crisis (Hartley 2015).

A very important issue is the challenges that come from the labour market. Namely, significant disproportions in the labour market show a structural mismatch between supply and demand in two main forms: there is demand for personnel with specific qualifications lacking on the labour market, and there is a supply of persons with qualifications that are not required. Tough tasks therefore exist for general secondary education, vocational education and adult education in particular to overcome the structural mismatch between labour force supply and demand and to provide quality, attractive and efficient education on the path to successful employment (EPALE National Support Service for Montenegro 2016, p. 37). Knowledge currently acquired in the system of formal education is generally not sufficient to respond to all the challenges of a modern society.

Montenegrin efforts in education as regards pre-accession negotiations and compliance with European strategies in this field focus on adjusting the educational system to labour market needs. The main directions in this respect are provided by the SEE 2020 Strategy which reflects the Europe 2020 Strategy and the ET 2020 Strategy (European Commission, Europe 2020 strategy).

Starting from the challenges that education is facing, it is of great importance to create a SWOT analysis of the national education system in Montenegro to serve as an overview of the current state and to bring relevant decisions. In this regard, we provide below SWOT analyses of primary and secondary education in Montenegro (Mitrović and Melović 2013, p. 238; Pavičić et al. 2016, p. 37). Data were collected for the SWOT analyses from consultations with principals of schools in Montenegro, which are summarised in the tables below (Tables 1 and 2).

The SWOT analyses of primary and secondary education clearly show the key strengths and the internal deficiencies of the Montenegrin education system. In addition, it is possible to notice both opportunities and threats. A good number of the characteristics can be seen in the results of the research carried out in focus groups.

2 The Role and Position of Principals of Educational Institutions in the National Educational System

The role of managers and leaders gain a special dimension when we discuss the education area. It is no wonder that the *'school improvement movement of the past 20 years has put great emphasis on the role of leaders'* (OECD 2001, p. 32). Fullan (2002) has gone as far as to conclude that *'effective school leaders are key to large-scale, sustainable education reform'*. These statements are of extreme significance for educational management in Montenegro.

In order to analyse the role and position of principals in educational institutions in the national educational system, in June 2017 a focus group was formed in two segments—for primary and secondary education—with a total number of 24 members, and in-depth interviews were held with representatives of 14 educational institutions. The focus group was held with representatives of institutions of primary and secondary education with experience of running educational institutions for three or more years. The key questions posed to the participants of the focus group were:

Table 1 SWOT analysis of primary education

Internal factors	Weaknesses (–)
<p>Strengths (+)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the Constitution, primary education is obligatory and free for everybody, which is a prerequisite for raising the educational level of people in the country • There is an established network of schools to ensure the constitutional right of access to primary education • A preschool programme was introduced to prepare children for primary education which results (especially for children from vulnerable groups) in a long-term improvement in social inclusion • There is a sufficient number of teachers with an appropriate range of qualifications in primary education • There is an infrastructure for publishing textbooks, and textbooks exist for all subjects • A pedagogical-psychological service exists in the majority of schools, which is an important mechanism for improving the quality of teaching/studying • Almost all schools have their own computer classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomplete coverage of children of primary age; not all children enrol in primary school, and some leave before completing it, especially pupils from vulnerable groups • Poor conditions in some schools, especially in rural, small schools • Lack of modern ways of working in school, i.e. teachers are not sufficiently trained to apply modern concepts of teaching/studying • Pupils are overburdened, and they have an unsatisfactory level of knowledge and competence when they leave school • Insufficient good quality school textbooks • In certain cases, school activities are reduced to lessons; extracurricular activities are not fully implemented • The educational role of the school is neglected • There is only a formal evaluation of the quality of the school and teachers • Pedagogical monitoring and counselling work in schools need to be improved
External factors	Threats (–)
<p>Opportunities (+)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projection of economic development in the following decade which sees innovations as a central economic driver • Possibility of using donations and EU funds to finance changes in primary education and more broadly • Existence of mechanisms to increase support in education • Social support to students, reflected in providing transport or means of transport and accommodation for pupils who live far away from school • Foundations for granting scholarships and awards for deserving students • Furnishing and equipping schools and student dormitories • Coordination of policies and strategies related to culture and education • Fulfilling conditions for Montenegro to join the EU and benefiting from incentives to carry out harmonisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General poverty in the country, deepening gaps between urban and rural areas, vulnerable families with children, the country overburdened with debt, relatively small GDP and constant budget deficit • Total investments in education, research and development are below the EU average relative to the nominal value of the GDP of developed countries • The largest part of the allocation for education goes on salaries • Daily politics have a negative effect on education and on the decisions that are made • Inadequate evaluation of education in terms of the significance of its contribution to social development • Educational policy in Montenegro is not based on research (<i>knowledge-based policy making</i>), and research in education is not seen as a priority in the development of the social sciences

Table 2 SWOT analysis of secondary education

Internal factors	Weaknesses (-)
Strengths (+) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long tradition of grammar, vocational and art schools in Montenegro • Established network of schools with the capacity to receive a larger number of pupils • Scientific research and professional institutions and staff can solve the problems of secondary education • Sufficient staff with appropriate professional qualifications • Opportunities to continue education or begin employment upon obtaining secondary school qualification • Large population coverage • Broad network of schools and wide provision of different educational programmes • Increased attractiveness of qualification standards, learning outcomes, modular teaching and introduction of entrepreneurship in the curriculum • Support of other institutions and bodies • Experience and results gained in various projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate vocational structure and insufficient geographical distribution of school networks • Low and insufficient access, especially to grammar schools, and significantly lower coverage of pupils from vulnerable groups and underdeveloped system of support and conditions for their education • Low quality of teaching and inadequate knowledge of pupils on leaving school, resulting in them being underprepared for higher education, outdated plans and curricula, poor equipment in schools • Teachers are not well prepared for psychological-pedagogical work with pupils; they are not trained to apply modern concepts of teaching/studying • Underdeveloped system for monitoring and evaluating teachers; legal solutions for teacher development are not put into practice • Extracurricular activities are not well developed • Inadequate structure of enrolment and discrepancy of educational programmes and the economy and its needs • Unresolved issues in providing high-quality practical work outside school • Too heavy and inflexible programmes
External Factors	Threats (-)
Opportunities (+) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various standards of educational policy at the EU level have been developed and can serve as support for the overall reform of the education system • Projection of economic development in the coming decade sees innovation as a central economic driver • European funds could be targeted to reform secondary education • A need exists for high quality labour • Opportunities for secondary vocational schools to take an active part in developing a model of informal forms of secondary education and training • Conditions exist to introduce high-quality partnerships among employers and educational institutions (stimulation of employers, for example through tax incentives, to develop social partnership and to participate in the creation of a national system of qualifications, qualification standards, practice, conducting of exams, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General poverty and material deprivation of society as a whole • Total investments in education, research and development are below the EU average relative to the nominal value of the GDP of developed countries • Underestimation of education in terms of its contribution to social development • Insufficient and non-critical implementation of the positive experiences of other education systems • Difficulties in introducing proven innovations in the education system • Poor effects of the existing system of professional development of teachers, together with the insufficient social status of the profession, leading to demotivation and apathy • Insufficient financial allocations and investment in equipping schools

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1. What is the role of those who manage educational institutions in Montenegro?
2. What is their scope of duty and how do they contribute to the functioning and to the quality of the Montenegrin education system?

The focus groups and in-depth interviewees gave the following results:

- Public institutions in the field of preschool education, pupils' dorms, pupils' and students' dorms, postsecondary non-tertiary vocational schools and adult education providers are governed by school boards. The focus group participants believe that: 'the Governing Board recognises that high-quality preschool experiences help children aged 3-4 to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes necessary for a successful transition into the elementary education programme'. This statement corresponds to documents in this area (Preschool/Early Childhood Education 2017, p. 3; The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990) in which it is stated that such programmes should provide developmentally appropriate activities in a safe, adequately supervised, and cognitively rich environment.
- In recent years, research has confirmed that school boards contribute to more successful education systems (Firestone and González 2007; Hightower et al. 2002; Honig and Coburn 2008; Leithwood 2010; McLaughlin and Talbert 2003; Miller 2010; Saatcioglu et al. 2011; Sheppard et al. 2013). In Montenegro, primary schools, grammar schools and secondary vocational schools which carry out publicly valid educational programmes are governed by school boards. While school boards are granted wide latitude in governing their schools, they are subject to numerous state laws and regulations (Illinois Association of School Boards 2016, p. 3). Depending on the type of activities of an institution and its size, the statute of the institution defines the number of members of the school board or governing board, yet this number cannot be less than five, or more than seven. The participants of the focus group gave their opinion on the significance of school boards. They argue that 'if there is to be meaningful and sustained systems-level change among many schools, the

pressure and support of an effective school board is essential'. This corresponds to the opinion of Sheppard et al. (2009) who conclude that school boards matter a great deal in achieving effective public school systems. However, success is difficult to sustain when key leaders leave the school.

- The participants of the focus group argue that 'high-quality school boards give high priority to differentiating management (which is the administration's job) from governance – which is their job and they highly respect that difference'. Similarly, Shields (2007, p. 17) suggests that for school board members to be credible they must be perceived as accountable and committed to their mandate and their electorate; they should ensure a level of openness and transparency that allows people to have trust in the work done; they should demonstrate a responsiveness that ensures that decisions and actions occur within reasonable timeframes. On the other hand, focus on leadership as a major influence on student outcomes and school improvement tends to diminish the attention given to governing boards which, in some jurisdictions, play an important role in setting the direction of schools and colleges (Bush 2017).
- The meetings of a school board may be attended by a student representative. Members of the school board are elected for a period of four years. Effective board members are often those who have proven successful in their particular vocations or callings and who have demonstrated a genuine concern for community improvement (Trustee Orientation Manual 2010, p. 13). School boards in Montenegro make decisions by a majority vote of all members, unless the statute of an institution provides that certain issues are decided otherwise. On the other hand, some authors have observed that there is a clear link between school boards and financial and academic outcomes (Saatcioglu et al. 2011; Stoica and Safta 2013). The focus group participants conclude that 'the success of school boards is reflected in the management of ambiguities that arise as a result of external pressures such as government mandates, monitoring district progress and maintaining individual schools accountable for student learning'.

- School boards establish a wide variety of policies and standards concerning what the schools are expected to accomplish in areas such as the curriculum, transportation, building maintenance, staff development, student services, labour relations, human rights, and community relations (Hamilton School District Governance 2012, p. 12). The school board in Montenegro is responsible for the adoption of annual work programmes, the annual work plan and reporting on its implementation, the review of programme results and extra-curricular activities, the adoption of statutes, acts on internal organisation and job systematisation and other by-laws, the adoption of the annual financial plan, the adoption of interim and annual financial statements, and resolving, in the second instance, the rights of employees, students, and users of services, in accordance with the law.
- An institution is managed by a principal. The administrative role of the principal ‘evolves from that of the practising teacher, with added technical and administrative duties, to that of the full-time manager and developer of human, financial and physical resources’ (OECD 2001, pp. 20–24). In the Montenegrin educational system, a principal submits a performance report to the school board at least once a year, and more frequently if required. The principal of a public institution is appointed and dismissed by the minister. A principal’s term of office is four years. A principal of an institution is elected on the basis of a competitive public selection procedure and a submitted public institution development programme. In terms of the principal’s activities, these are usually considered as internal functions (Bush 2016). In this respect, the participants of the focus group emphasise that ‘principals and leaders take on a range of professional activities concerning teaching and learning, with the support of the strategic and operational resource management, notably finance and staff’.
- The principal manages the institution and is responsible for planning, organising and managing the work of the institution, the rational and efficient execution of the curriculum, and ensuring equal rights to education. Similar to the above, in other countries, such as the Netherlands, ‘school headmasters (principals) are responsible for the

quality of their schools' as well as for 'all personnel matters, including hiring and firing, staff appraisal, and union negotiation' (Mulford 2003). Principals and others in schools need to 'become coalition builders as much as managers of the internal running of schools themselves' (OECD 2001, pp. 26–27). Fullan (2002, p. 20) argues that we will 'not have a large pool of quality principals until we have a large pool of quality teachers', while the focus group representatives point out that 'school improvement depends on a number of principles that greatly promote the conditions necessary for the sustainable reform of education in a complex, rapidly changing society'.

Besides an explanation of the formal role of decision makers, the focus group also gave important answers with regards to the efficiency of educational management and leadership in Montenegro. They point out that the 'lack of effective leadership in state schools contributes to indiscipline among students and teachers and falling academic standards'. This is consistent with similar research carried out in other countries (National Policy on Education 2016, p. 13).

Further, the participants of the focus group emphasise that 'in order to meet global challenges, the school leader should strike an appropriate balance between a larger number of factors in the relationship between school and environment'. This opinion is confirmed by research carried out by Mulford (2002), who argues that in order for the school leader to meet global challenges there is a need to achieve a greater balance between constant change and continuity, dependence and independence, individualism and community, and homogeneity and heterogeneity.

On the other hand, research carried out in twelve English schools (Day et al. 2000, p. 29) which were recognised for their efficient leadership identified seven tensions (challenges) which the principals face. These tensions 'focus not only on maintaining and consolidating what the schools have already achieved, but also on managing challenges related to improving their potentials'. Managers and leaders in the Montenegrin education system face similar challenges. The participants of the focus group emphasise that 'challenges in education grow every day, so it is necessary for the concept of change management to be

applied so that schools can adapt more easily to intensive changes which occur every day’.

The focus group in Montenegro showed that, although they have the same starting positions, ‘leaders in educational institutions develop different leadership styles, because of which they achieve different results’. In decentralised school settings, principals have the autonomy to develop two very different leadership models (Riley and Louis 2000, p. 216):

- a more hierarchical and directive model; or
- a more inclusive model which brings teachers in particular and the local school community into the frame, which can also be recognised in the case of the educational system of Montenegro.

With reference to leadership styles in educational institutions in Montenegro, the participants of the focus group declared that they ‘prefer the inclusive model, which is better perceived by pupils and the broader public’. Similar to the above, another study (Mulford et al. 2004) shows that if decision makers in schools are perceived as collegial, cooperative and consultative and offer adequate opportunities for participation, this will more likely lead to a positive perception by pupils of the school and teachers, rather than if decisions are made from above, in other words, if there is a hierarchical or directive model, which does not encourage the broadly distributed participation of teachers (Vennebo 2016).

Teachers’ perception of principals’ behaviour is of significant importance here. The focus group believes that ‘taking into account teachers’ perception of the principals’ behaviour is in direct correlation with the support which the principals have when they bring strategic and operational decisions’. Such a perception stands out as an important determinant of leadership. Similar to the above, teachers’ perceptions of school leaders’ empowering behaviour and psychological empowerment (Lee and Nie 2015) correspond to the views of the focus group in Montenegro.

Further, the focus group participants showed concern in the area of teachers’ autonomy, where they emphasised that ‘a certain number

of teachers do not have enough self-respect and rely on the principal's consent, even though they have the authority to independently make some kind of decisions'. This is why one of the important questions the principals face is when to delegate authority. Another question is how to gauge the readiness of teachers to take on the role of leadership (Tahir et al. 2016). On the other hand, Sarafidou and Chatziioannidis (2013) identified a rather high participation of teachers in decisions concerning pupils and teachers, but a low degree of participation in managing decisions, which was confirmed by the results of the focus group in Montenegro. Focus group participants believe that in the future it will be necessary for 'teachers to cooperate with principals when discussing the decision-making process and improvements to the quality of the education system'.

Another research topic is related to the identification of key segments which the principals should focus on for the sake of the long-term prosperity of the school:

- Individual support—providing moral support, showing appreciation of the work of individual staff and taking their opinions into account.
- Culture—promoting an atmosphere of care and trust among staff, setting the tone for respectful interaction with students, and demonstrating a willingness to change practices in the light of new understandings.
- Structure—establishing a school structure that promotes participative decision making, supporting delegation and distributive leadership, and encouraging teacher decision-making autonomy.
- Vision and goals—working toward full staff consensus on school priorities and communicating these to students and staff to establish a strong sense of overall purpose.
- Performance expectation—having high expectations for students and teachers to be effective and innovative.
- Intellectual stimulation—encouraging staff to reflect on what they are trying to achieve with students and how they are doing it; this provides opportunities for staff to learn from each other and models continual learning in their own practice.

It is also important to mention that it is necessary to work on preparing school leaders, especially through the professional development of newly assigned principals (Shun-Wing and Sing-Ying 2015), an opinion with which all the focus group participants in Montenegro agree.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the principals of educational institutions have a very important role in the national education system in Montenegro. A key issue in the education system, as certain experts (Bollaert 2014; ENQA 2009) point out, is quality assurance (QA). There are various types of participants at various education levels and their task is ultimately to contribute to the functioning and quality of the Montenegrin education system.

3 Best Practices/Benchmarks of Educational Institutions in Montenegro

Within the focus group, examples of best practice in certain segments of education in Montenegro were analysed. The focus group participants determined that ‘examples of best practice are represented in all segments of education in Montenegro’. For example, in the area of primary education, we can mention the Public Institution (PI) ‘Anto Djedovic’ from Bar. This school cooperates with the local community in designing the curriculum in such a way that 20% of the teaching content for all subjects is influenced by the suggestions of the local community. Alternatively, community needs may be addressed by integrating the content suggested by the local community into the syllabi of the existing subjects and giving it importance by allocating a larger number of teaching hours for it to be covered (Anto Djedovic School 2016). To accomplish this, a special cooperation plan was made with representatives of the local community. It was agreed that the school itself would plan possible activities and content in teaching areas, as well as certain days allocated for visits, sport and recreational activities. Cooperation with the local community also foresees cooperation with certain facilities, institutions and organisations through various projects. A plan was drawn up to achieve cooperation with the following entities (Anto Djedovic School 2016):

- Cooperation with institutions and organisations which, through various cultural manifestations and competitions, develop pupils' interest in cultural events (Cultural Centre, library, gallery, museum).
- Cooperation with the Red Cross through participation in humanitarian activities, competitions in First Aid, art and literature competitions, various lectures, workshops, etc.
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, through lectures on safety in traffic, hiring school policemen and support in achieving pupil safety.
- Cooperation with the Community Health Centre through various educational lectures of physicians, systematic check-ups, regular vaccination, and also by raising the standard of hygiene and facilities in the school.
- Cooperation with the municipality of Bar through participation in sports events, art and literary competitions, through numerous donations for improving the school, and other events.
- Cooperation with secondary schools, through information and presentations, and opportunities to enrol in secondary school—visits and lectures.
- Cooperation with a state-owned infrastructure company in charge of maintaining public parks and with a local agricultural company through greening the school yard and decorating the school premises.
- Cooperation with non-governmental organisations, donations and gifts for children, especially for children with special needs.
- Cooperation with the Employment Agency regarding professional and career information.
- Cooperation with the media, both printed and electronic, and Radio Bar, in providing information on school and other events.

The focus group points out that 'the mentioned example can serve well as a benchmark for other schools in Montenegro'.

In the area of secondary education, an example of best practice can be the Public Institution Secondary Vocational School 'Spasoje Raspopovic' from Podgorica, which has a modern teaching process, using various methods and techniques and applying modern teaching tools and aids, based on combining theory and practice, i.e. school

with employers and professional associations. In fact, the school enjoys well-developed cooperation with the local community, involving numerous partners, among which the following stand out (Vuksanović 2011, p. 10):

- Inpek, a company involved in the production of bread, pastry, dough, etc. Partnership support from Inpek primarily concerns providing conditions for carrying out practical work in the vocational programme for bakers.
- The newspaper publishing company Pobjeda. In this company, it is possible for pupils to do practical work and have professional practice in the vocational programme for printing technicians and graphic technicians.
- A state-owned company responsible for maintaining public parks. In this company, pupils studying to be nursery florists and horticulture technicians do practical work and have professional practice.
- Plantaze, a company founded in 1963, involved in the production of wine and table grapes and peaches, the production and distribution of wine and grape brandy, fish farming, catering and retail. Pupils can engage in practical work in this company, one of the best, most successful and prestigious Montenegrin companies, which adequately prepares them for the future labour market or for further education.
- The Institute for Public Health offers support to the school in providing professional practice for pupils studying to become chemical lab technicians and general technicians.

Given the above, the participants of the focus group emphasise that ‘it is not rare that employers offer work to those pupils who stand out during the practical teaching process’ and thus ‘this school can serve as a benchmark for other secondary schools in Montenegro’. The principles held by the school are compatible with strategic documents with regards to professional education (Strategy of Development of Professional Education in Montenegro 2015–2020; Strategy and Development for Support to Gifted Pupils 2015–2019), as well as examples of good practice in other countries (Sahlberg 2007).

As an example of good practice, we can also mention intensive activities in the area of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship in Montenegro is represented from elementary to higher education. Within professional education, the subject Enterprise is introduced in the area of economics, and the subject Entrepreneurship is introduced as a compulsory subject in all educational programmes in professional education (around 120 programmes). Entrepreneurship centres have been founded in four secondary schools as support to young people with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial studies, and entrepreneurship clubs have been set up as extracurricular activities (Ministry of Education 2016). In addition, competitions for the best business plan are organised, and Montenegrin pupils and students achieve significant results in the European market. As the best example in this segment, we can mention the results achieved in the European competition EuroSkills. Participants from Montenegro won first place in the area of entrepreneurship at the biggest and most prestigious European competition in various disciplines—Euroskills 2016 (EuroSkills 2016 Results 2016).

We can therefore conclude that there are good examples in all segments of education in Montenegro. However, it is necessary to look to the development strategies and examples of good practice from other countries (Lasonen and Young 1998), especially those which have a similar education system to that in Montenegro. We especially draw attention to the possibilities of applying knowledge in the SME sector, which is today dominant in most of the economies, and the experiences of Montenegro in this part correspond to certain neighbouring countries, such as Croatia for example (Dabic et al. 2016).

4 Conclusion

The backbone and main driver of education reform in Montenegro is high quality education. Such a desire has resulted in the application of a range of mechanisms for quality control, so that quality can be measured and raised at all education levels. The reforms were preceded

by legislative amendments and changes for the appropriate level of education, and for its harmonisation with EU legislation.

Montenegro has prepared and conducted extensive reform of the education system—at preschool, primary, secondary and higher education levels—in the last 15 years. The strategic goals of the education reform (School Development Plan—Instructions 2011, p. 5) are of a developmental nature and they form a component part of the process of the social, political and economic transition of Montenegro in the context of global change. This corresponds to the education trends which are represented in the European education area.

In order to meet global challenges, school leaders should strike a balance between a large number of factors in relationships between the school and the community. The research conducted confirms that although they have the same starting positions, leaders in educational institutions develop contrasting leadership styles, on account of which they achieve different results.

Viewed in the long term, education constitutes a key aspect of democratic political culture and plays an essential role in improving the rule of law, and, consequently, in raising the economic and social standard of citizens in Montenegro.

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