

Leadership and impact of international cooperation as professional development activities of educational staff

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is no longer necessary to draw attention to and stress that the professional development of educational staff is one of the main reasons for the quality of educational work. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that professional development is not influenced solely by participation in activities, the headteacher or the leadership in professional development, but also financial investments (e.g., OECD 2009). Professional development activities, which include, inter alia, participation and learning in the framework of international cooperation, are becoming increasingly recognisable and proven effective (e.g., Sentočnik 2013). Many recent European documents, e.g., Council conclusions on effective teacher education (OJ 2014/C183/05), Council conclusions on effective leadership in education (OJ 2014/C30/02), and Council conclusions on school development and excellent teaching (OJ 2017/C421/03) invite investment in the international professional development of educational staff and training staff through programmes Erasmus+, eTwinning, and other European funds. The European Commission invests considerable funding in activities that promote mobility and other forms of international cooperation; presumably the funds will even double in the future financial plan. CMEPIUS as a national agency promotes and implements several agendas and actions to strengthen international cooperation, and acts as a link between the European Commission, participating educational institutions and other organisations at local, regional, and national level. Agendas and other actions contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, the objectives of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, the promotion of European values, the sustainable development of partner countries, etc. Measures supported by the European Commission and on its behalf by the Slovenian national agency should have a positive and long-lasting impact on the involved actors and participating organisations, and on the policy systems that deal with such activities. The operation of such an institution should not be focused solely on facilitating and supporting international activities, but also and especially in monitoring of the impact of such activities, since the participation itself in professional development activities in an international space does not guarantee that there is an achievement of the objectives of individual measures, and improvements or changes in individuals, in educational institutions or at the system level.

Recent international studies involving Slovenia (e.g., Sardoč et al. 2008, EC/Eurydice 2013, EC/Eurydice 2017) show that Slovenia has exemplary possibilities and opportunities for the professional development of educational staff compared to the rest of the world; however, there are also some shortcomings that could be eliminated (e.g., Ažman et al. 2019). If Slovenia was to judge based on the absorption of European funds for training and education in the area of international mobility and strategic partnerships, it could also be argued that it is successful as it has absorbed as much as 96% of all the funds devoted to it in the last ten years by the European Union (see official website statistike.cmepius.si). More than 800 different educational institutions and other organisations and more than 28,000 individuals (from the field of school and vocational education and training) were involved in this funding. From this point of view, Slovenia is therefore effective. What is the actual impact at the level of individuals, institutions and the system? In this paper, special attention is being paid to the impact of the Erasmus+¹ programme as the central programme of international activities in the school and vocational education and training field in Slovenia in relation to professional development through international cooperation.

¹ The paper focuses on the two main actions of the programme, namely the mobility of individuals (KA1) – the mobility of school staff and staff in the vocational education and training, and partnerships for exchanges between schools and kindergartens, and to a lesser extent cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (KA2) – strategic partnerships in the field of education and training.

1. The basic premises for international cooperation as a professional development activity of educational staff

1.1 Terminology

When talking about international activities and international cooperation at the level of the educational institution, all too often concepts such as, e.g., “programmes”, “projects”, “actions”, “mobility”, “events”, etc. are used. Since such activities are often associated with financial grants, it is necessary to make applications at specified deadlines, report on them with a dynamics that differs from the established reporting at the level of the educational institution, thus there is often the impression that they indicate something unique and often unrelated to other activities of the institution. In practice, international cooperation activities need to be understood in the broader sense of the activities of the educational institution. International cooperation presents options and opportunities, activities, functions and activities to achieve the priority goals of school policy, and the goals of an individual educational institution. To a large extent, it is actually a diversified professional development activity of educational staff in the international arena, through which educational staff should increase the quality and efficiency of their work, with the aim of improving the achievements of children and pupils. Quality **professional development** (regardless of whether it takes place in the domestic or international space and in time) should include such activities *“for which teachers change their knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes and values by changing the practice of their activities in the classroom, and thus improve the learning of pupils and their achievements”* (Zavašnik Arčnik et al. 2015). In practice, professional development activities are most often related to the strengthening of knowledge and skills. People (too) often understand and limit it solely and only to the acquisition of knowledge and skills to teach their subject (e.g., English). It is also interesting that the concept of professional development in Slovene school legislation is practically non-existent, and in this type of texts many varied concepts are used alternately (e.g. expert training, up-skilling, professional training, further education, professional development, continuous education) (more about this Zavašnik Arčnik and Mihovar Globokar 2015). Typical “results” of international cooperation in the context of acquiring skills include, e.g., *“improving competencies related to professional profiles of educational staff, broader understanding of practices and policies in the area of education, better knowledge of foreign languages, higher level of digital competence, etc.”* (EC 2017).

In line with EU policy and objectives in education and training, in addition to knowledge and skills for teaching, the issues of the identity of an individual and educational staff are also at the forefront, which can be more closely linked to the individual’s characteristics, value system, temperament, and thus to his/her **personal development**. Personal development is about clarifying thoughts and feelings, understanding oneself as an individual and as educational staff in the context of Slovenia, the EU, and the world. In the wider social, cultural, economic and technological development of the EU, education and training began to take on more complex tasks, and the roles and tasks of educational staff have therefore changed, and demand from educational staff to practice a so-called new or **extended professionalism** (see, e.g., Hoyle, who wrote about this as early as in 1975), which means in practice that educational staff needs to manage themselves more effectively, and reflect in depth their views and beliefs. For effective self-management, personal maturity is required, which reflects through a variety of “components” (Musek and Pečjak 2001), which can also be linked to the

positive impact that the involvement in international cooperation activities should bring, namely as follows: a social component (e.g., respect and consideration of difference, teamwork), an emotional component (e.g., self-affirmation, independence, acceptance, self-initiative, a positive attitude towards the values of the EU), a moral component (e.g., respect for other cultures, values and norms, management of ethical beliefs), a cognitive component (e.g., setting goals, defending attitudes and beliefs, more active participation in (international/European) society). The Erasmus+ Programme Guide (EC 2017) thus contains examples of the following “results” of international cooperation activities, which can be placed in the personal development of an individual: “increased sense of initiative”, “increased self-empowerment and self-esteem”, “more active participation in society”, “better motivation for cooperation”, “better understanding of social, linguistic and cultural diversity”, *“openness to synergies”*, *“more positive attitude towards a European project and the values of the EU”*, etc.

Finally, the concept of **career development** should also be mentioned. Recent research, documents and projects in the field of education and training (e.g., EC/Eurydice 2015) are increasingly pointing out that (even in the public sector) it is necessary to begin to avoid a limited mindset about the traditional career of educational staff in terms of promotion (by name or pay), and that diversified career paths for educational staff and headteachers should be enabled. In order to provide successful careers, educational staff should be trained to lead their careers in order to be able to thoroughly know themselves and the environment, decision-making, passing proactivity (i.e. career competence), since careers schemes of educational staff should not be focused solely on the educational sector, since these schemes are no longer one-dimensional. Educational staff can successfully combine jobs, and move freely from one sector to another, as their profession is not tied only to the workplace of educational staff, and the jobs of educational staff in the future will not necessarily be the same as they are today. So career development revolves around work and/or the workplace, and not the profession, more on the trends in education and in the future, and loyalty to the institution lasts only for a limited time (more on this in Ažman et al. 2018). In the context of international cooperation, Erasmus+ programmes are in fact related to strengthening career development, as they point out that they will most likely have a positive impact on educational staff, who will be involved in them, e.g. by achieving *“increased satisfaction in their everyday work, a higher level of skills for employability and business creation, reinforcing motivation and satisfaction with their daily work, better understanding of the interaction between formal and informal education, and other forms of learning or the labour market, etc.”* (EC 2017: 119).

It can be said with certainty that the activities of international cooperation involve the interweaving of personal, professional and career development. Sometimes the focus is more on one side than the other, and in any case it is not strictly separated. At the same time, their impact needs to be dealt with in a broader sense. At this point, a discussion regarding which concept is narrower or broader, which one is a hypernym or synonym is not going to be raised. They are only highlighted in order to understand them thoroughly and, consequently, to seek a broader impact. To avoid all inconveniences, the concept of professional development will be used consistently hereinafter, which is (the most) anchored in the Slovene speaking environment among educational staff and headteachers.

1.2 Characteristics of international cooperation as professional development activities

In the past twenty years, researchers of qualitative and effective professional development of educational staff and headteachers have opted for empirical research with the attempt to integrate professional development activities, changes in the practice of educational staff, and pupils' achievements. Research summaries (e.g., Odden et al. 2002, Archibald et al. 2011, Caena 2011) show that there are some common structural features of professional development with a positive impact. Hereinafter, the structural characteristics are summarised and associated with the activities of international cooperation.

1.2.1 Duration or length and location of professional development activities

More permanent and longer-lasting activities are more effective; researchers even calculated that the most optimal professional development activities should supposedly last between 30 and 100 hours, with intermediate activities performed by educational staff directly in their work. Research proves that one-off professional development activities (e.g., one-time teaching observation of a headteacher or colleague in a classroom, a short lecture, a one-day workshop) provide merely an instantaneous impact, but not a long-term one or one that would lead to concrete improvements or changes. In the context of international cooperation, it is therefore necessary to look for those activities that last for a long time. In practice, the activities that are proven to be most effective are carried out in educational institutions and at the workplace, as well as in the form of combinations of training outside of the institutes with testing or intermediate activities at the workplace. In the past, the understanding of the impact of professional development focused primarily on participation in activities (e.g., training) outside the educational institution (e.g., the performers were outsourcers, the stress was put more on theoretical knowledge, less on practice). Today's understanding of professional development activities focuses on specific workplace challenges, case studies, the exchange of examples of good practices, the search for "golden skills" in co-workers in educational institutions, teaching observations among colleagues, learning walks, (action) research of their own practice, formative monitoring and reflection, namely, activities that are more or less originating from the environment where educational staff operates, from their practice, concrete work, practicality. This can, of course, be a trap after too much focus on so-called craft knowledge and skills. Balance is certainly needed; in practice this means that both activities outside the institution as well as activities carried out within the institution should be promoted. The Eurydice Report on Teaching Careers in Europe (EC/Eurydice 2015) states that educational staff is most often professionally sent abroad to monitor pupils abroad (44% of educational staff who were already abroad), 40% obtained education abroad with the aim of learning foreign languages, 31% with the aim of establishing contacts with educational institutions. On average, only about 20% of educational staff goes abroad to teach, whereas even fewer, about 8%, go abroad to learn other subjects. There is no data in the study for Slovenia. Staff mobility within the scope of the Erasmus+ programme supports three types of professional development activities, namely as follows: teaching (at a partner school abroad), structured courses or training abroad, and job shadowing/observation that allow educational staff to spend some time abroad at a partner school or in another relevant organisation (EC 2017: 86). Each activity can last from 2 days to several months. In the light of the above, it can be said that the formal framework of the Erasmus+ programme in terms of length or the duration of the

activity pursues and supports those activities that are proven to be more effective. CMEPIUS research show that Slovene educational staff is mainly involved in those training courses abroad, carried out by various institutions, but they are less likely to attend job shadowing/observation and teaching, which may indicate still deep-anchored views and beliefs that what comes from outside is better.

1.2.2 Opportunities for active and cooperative learning, feedback and dissemination of knowledge and skills

A greater positive impact is achieved through activities based on cooperative, active learning and teaching (e.g., testing of acquired knowledge and skills in the classroom, group discussions, joint analysis of products, results). In terms of providing feedback, those activities that provide monitoring, feedback and upgrading (e.g., mutual reflection, action research, coaching) are more effective; above all it is necessary to combine theory and practice (the intertwinement of the knowledge of the subject content and didactic strategies), and the principle of own sense-making. Mobility activities in the international environment would therefore require, in practice, comprehensive planning and prior checking in terms of how to maximise their impact, and what types of learning learners will be involved in. If it is known in advance that education or training will mainly involve “lectures”, it can be said almost with certainty that there will be no impact in practice. At the same time, partnerships for exchanges between schools and kindergartens in the field of education and training focus primarily on activities that enable participating organisations to develop themselves as organisations and improve their day-to-day practices, strengthen the European dimension and improve the capacity to tackle the current challenges. In addition, there is a possibility of participating in strategic partnerships whose main purpose is to develop innovative results and/or to intensify efforts to disseminate and use existing results and innovative ideas and activities for the exchange between schools and decision-makers. From the viewpoint of the formal objectives framework, the Erasmus+ programme thus aims at the opportunities for active, and cooperative learning. At the same time, the key factor for effective professional development is the dissemination and use of acquired knowledge and skills. One of the aims is to provide the benefits for the wider community, not just an individual. In the context of international cooperation, not all educational staff (even if they would like to) will definitely receive education and training abroad, which does not mean that they will not be provided with information on the acquired knowledge, skills, results and a clearly planned process of transferring knowledge, skills and results at the level of the institution (and/or even the system). From the viewpoint of ensuring quality professional development, the goal is to not only have activities affecting people, practices, institutions and systems, but also for the results of the activities to be used in the long-term and are sustainable (not necessarily entirely, but perhaps at least partially). In this respect, the Erasmus+ programme also follows the structural features that have a positive impact, since so-called dissemination and exploitation of results are key elements of the application, evaluation and monitoring within the Erasmus+ international actions.

1.2.3 Interaction of international cooperation as a professional development activity with other developmental elements or factors at the level of the educational institution

International cooperation as a professional development activity represents a lever for achieving the development and operational goals of the institution. Research confirms that professional development activities are more effective and successful if they are part of the strategic priorities or national (school) policy goals, and part of a coherent development plan of the educational institution. In practice, this means that the professional development of educational staff is linked to the long-term and short-term goals of the institution's development plan, which was created in dialogue with educational staff. If the headteacher sets the development goals together with educational staff, they will buy into them, they will be more aware of why they work, and what the meaning of what they are doing is. Only based on the development plan, a plan of professional development and an annual work plan are drafted, and each educational staff member will have his/her own individual work plan, and accordingly a plan of his/her own professional development, too. This method of (target) leadership can then be sensibly linked to self-evaluation, annual interviews, and evaluation of work performance in the institution. Some research in which Slovenia also participated (e.g., Sardoč et al. 2008) show that the style of leadership and the professional development of educational staff are intertwined; dissatisfaction with professional development is higher in institutions where administrative leadership style is more present (compared to pedagogical). At the same time, attention should be drawn to the fact that shifts in practice most often occur precisely where educational staff encourages each other, monitor in real time and assess the impact. These are the so-called professional learning communities (for more information, see Stoll et al. 2006). Joint planning and commitment to common goals, real-time monitoring, evaluation and decision-making on the basis of data in a professional learning community also mean creating a common communication language both outward and inward. International cooperation as a professional development activity thus becomes more understandable and targeted; it means the departure from (*ad hoc*) "projects" to the sensible "development" of the institution through international cooperation. The activities of the Erasmus+ programme should therefore be evaluated in the light of the institution as a learning community, and the comparison of the professional development of educational staff with the strategic objectives of the institution, identifying of involvement (and support) of the school and the headteacher in the idea of international cooperation, ensuring its implementation and the sustainability of implementation. The formal framework of the Erasmus+ programme supports the staff mobility, which is "*shaped by a strategic approach, responding to clearly identified needs, ensuring that learning outcomes are properly recognised and disseminated, and widely used in the organisation*" (EC 2017: 74), with regard to strategic partnerships results are expected, which mean for example, "*a more state-of-the-art, dynamic, dedicated and professional environment in the organisation*", "*strategic planning of career development of staff in accordance with the needs of individuals and goals of the organisation*", "*enhanced capacity for action at EU level*" (ibid., p. 130).

In terms of the involvement of educational staff in international activity (mobility), according to the EC/Eurydice survey (2015), there are "*Predictive factors for the involvement of educational staff on mobility*" (factors by which it can be predicted which educational staff will take part in professional development activities abroad) – and it can be said with high certainty that international professional development activities will be attended by professional foreign language teachers, educational staff who has been involved in many professional development activities already 12 months prior to the activity abroad, and the educational staff who has more than 10 years of service. Factors that do not have any impact on whether or not the educational staff will participate in mobility, are job

satisfaction, cooperative approach to teaching, constructivist approach to teaching, costs/finance. Slovenia was not included in the survey, but data from the interim evaluation of the impact of the Erasmus+ programme (see Klemenčič 2017) show that, for example, one of the decisive factors for deciding on the mobility of educational staff in kindergartens is the lack of foreign language skills.

1.2.4 The impact of international cooperation as a professional development activity

Most evaluations of the impact of professional development measure the short-term effect, only rarely in the long-term (cf. Bubb and Earley 2011), since the measurement of the impact is a very complex process. It is about the involvement of many different factors, where it is difficult to isolate a decisive factor or to claim which factor is the most influential. Institutions often do not measure the impact if they are not really committed to doing so, and often self-assume that the impact really occurred, but they do not look for information or evidence to confirm the impact. In terms of the impact, the results must be truly lasting and not only have a very limited effect², which has been frustrating researches for decades. The most common view of the measurement of the impact is that the training of educational staff leads to their changing attitudes and beliefs, then the skills that lead to changes in their practice, and to the improvement of the achievements of children/pupils (cf. Zavašnik Arčnik et al. 2015). This is the so-called causal chain. In relation to the types of the impact, the literature highlights measurements based on products, processes and outcomes, classroom practice, personal capability and interpersonal ability, and the level of the educational institution and other institutions, the level of the system, the level involved (e.g., Earley and Porritt 2009, Frost and Durrant 2003). The most frequently quoted author in relation to the validation of the impact of professional development in education is Guskey (e.g., Bubb and Early 2011). He believes that there are five levels of the impact that lead to improved achievements of children/pupils as the most desirable result of the professional development of educational staff, namely:

1. participants' reactions (e.g., Have the participants been satisfied with the performers, materials, time, lecture room, etc.);
2. participant learning (e.g., Did the participants receive the desired/planned knowledge and skills? Have their views and their beliefs changed?);
3. organisational support and changes (e.g., What is the impact of participation in professional development activities in the educational institution?);
4. using the new knowledge and skills of the participants (e.g., Did participants use the acquired knowledge and skills in practice?);
5. learning achievements of children/pupils (e.g., What was the impact on children/pupils/high school students?).

In the evaluation practice, five levels are often combined into three: the level of educational staff (Levels 1, 2 and 4), level of an educational organisation (Level 3) and level of child/pupil (Level 5).

Educational staff and headteachers must be aware of the impact of professional development, and seek evidence (qualitative and quantitative) information about them. Among the most common qualitative sources of data on the measurement of the impact of professional development are: evaluation records, notes, focus groups, observation, self-evaluation, diaries, pictures and recordings.

² Often, educational staff returns full of enthusiasm from the professional development activities and then their good intentions eventually disappear. There is a common belief that the impact is not permanent if it is not clearly planned and persistently managed; change or the improvement becomes permanent only when it becomes anchored or a "routine", which at the level of the institution lasts at least 4–5 years.

The most common quantitative sources are: questionnaires (for headteachers, children/pupils, educational staff, decision-makers), test result analyses, quantitative data on children's performance. From research (e.g., Klemenčič 2017), it can be seen that the measurement of the impact of international projects is understood very differently.

Slovenian research on the impact of professional development at various levels is rare, related only to individual levels of education, programmes, projects, but less comprehensive, longitudinal, which practically are none. The TALIS 2008 survey (Sardoč et al. 2008), which included Slovenian educational staff and the issue of the impact of professional development, opens numerous interpretations. Namely, the research has shown that Slovene educational staff is highly educated (2nd place in the surveyed OECD countries), but the impact is small (Slovenia is below the OECD average). Slovenian educational staff reports on the major impact in those forms of professional development in which they are much less educated, and vice versa (e.g. class observation). A survey on the professional development of educational staff in Slovenia, carried out in the framework of the preparation of the White Paper (Krek and Metljaj 2011), showed that the share of educational staff involved in professional development activities is extremely high (over 90%); however, the average duration of the activity is among the lower ones and the impact of the activity is better when they take place over a longer period of time. The White Paper (ibid.) also proposes, among the solutions, to encourage longer-term professional development activities (e.g., those that take place at least 3 days or 24 hours in time).

With regard to international cooperation, an extensive survey entitled *Impact of the Lifelong Learning Programme on Primary and Secondary Education with Respect to the National Priorities* (Sentočnik 2013) was carried out in 2013. The main conclusion of the study is that participation in international projects of the EU programme positively affects both the institution and the work of educational staff and children/pupils. According to the opinion of headteachers, participation in international projects is mostly beneficial to the institution and educational staff, according to the opinion of educational staff (coordinators), the most benefit goes to the institution and pupils. The biggest shifts perceived at the institutions as a result of international cooperation were in the improved culture in the institution, the professional development of educational staff, and the non-cognitive aspect of pupil learning. In 2015, CMEPIUS surveyed the impact of international mobility on the competencies and employability of VET pupils (Grigič 2017). The research was carried out among pupils who were participants in mobility within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme between 2005 and 2015, the Leonardo da Vinci subprogramme – persons involved in vocational education and training. The research has shown that international mobility develops mainly generic or general competencies that employers are seeking from candidates. The competencies that employers usually look for in potential candidates are reliability, adaptability, co-operation, self-initiative or interest in new challenges, and ability to meet challenges. These are the “hidden competencies”, the personality features that an individual needs to perform in almost every profession, and can be placed to so-called career development or career competence (cf. Ažman et al. 2018).

2. Leadership and impact of EU programmes (LLP and Erasmus+) in relation to the professional development of educational staff – study

2.1 Aim and objectives

The focus of this paper is to study in depth the impact and leadership of international cooperation in relation to the professional development of educational staff. The objectives of the study are:

- to compare the impact of international cooperation in quantitative research with complementary qualitative research (the story of international cooperation, semi-structured interview);
- to link data on the impact with the levels of measurement of the impact of professional development;
- to put in place the impact in terms of professional, personal and career development;
- to indicate the link between the impact and the leadership of international cooperation in relation to the professional development of educational staff.

2.2 Methodology

In this study, a quantitative and a qualitative approach were used. Secondary data sources were used in the quantitative part of the study, i.e. data from the *Lifelong Learning Programme Study on Primary and Secondary Education with Respect to National Priorities*³ (Sentočnik 2013) and data from the *Interim Report on the Implementation and Impact of Erasmus+ Programme*⁴ (Klemenčič 2017). In Study 2013, a questionnaire was used, involving headteachers and educational staff – coordinators of primary and secondary schools who participated in the Lifelong Learning Programme (the predecessor of the Erasmus+ programme). 97 headteachers and 170 educational staff members from 207 primary schools (hereafter referred to as: PS) and 95 secondary schools, including 48 vocational secondary schools (hereinafter: VET), answered questions. Three levels of impact were covered in the questionnaire: the level of the institution, the level of educational staff, and the level of the pupils. Issues of impact included a 5-point rating scale⁵. In Study 2017, a questionnaire was used, involving only headteachers. Unlike Study 2013, headteachers of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools took part in this study. The questionnaire was answered by 371 headteachers (129 kindergartens, 169 primary schools, 68 secondary schools – of which 43 VET schools). The questionnaire covered only two levels of impact: the level of the institution and the level of educational staff. Questions covering issues included the same grading scale as in Study 2013. The

³ Hereinafter: Study 2013.

⁴ Hereinafter: Study 2017.

⁵ The scale values were as follows: -2: high (long-term) negative impact, -1: low (short-term) negative impact, 0: project had no impact, +1: lower (short-term) positive impact, +2: high (long-term) positive impact.

data in both studies were processed with the SPSS software package. The values of descriptive statistics and comparative statistics were calculated.

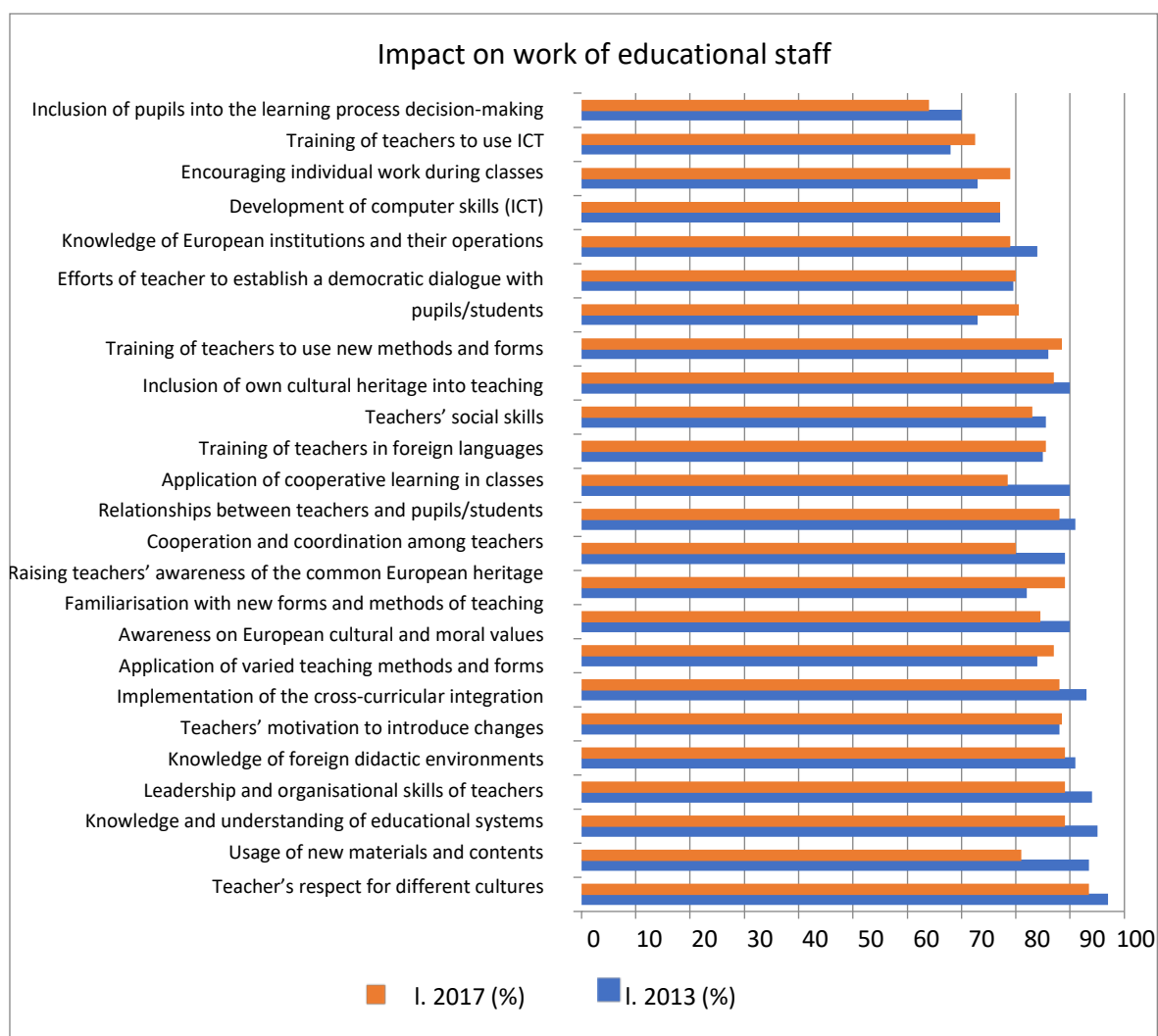
The data for the qualitative part of the study are the primary source. They were gathered in two ways, namely by analysing the document called the *Story of International Cooperation*, and with semi-structured interviews. In January 2019, four institutions were contacted for cooperation, which, according to CMEPIUS data, have been successfully strengthening international cooperation for more than ten years, and requested to record their stories of international cooperation. For this purpose, one kindergarten from the Osrednja Slovenija Statistical Region, one primary school from the Gorenjska Statistical Region, one secondary school from the Gorica Statistical Region, and one vocational school from the Osrednja Slovenija Statistical Region were selected. After they had provided records of stories, also semi-structured interviews with the headteachers of these institutions were conducted. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. For an interview, a reminder with questions was prepared in advance and some sub-questions were drafted during the interviews. The reminder with questions focused on two main themes (main ideas), namely the impact of international cooperation and leadership or coordination of international cooperation, since the assumption was that the effects are inextricably linked to the leadership or the coordination. This facilitated the analysis of the material, since only two main codes (impact and leadership) were searched for with subcodes in the stories and transcribed texts of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in February 2019.

2.3 Data analysis

2.3.1 The impact of international cooperation on educational staff

Positive impact on educational staff can be seen from the data of both quantitative studies regarding international cooperation and participation in EU projects. The fact that participation in EU projects had no negative influence or zero influence, was mentioned by a negligible number of headteachers and educational staff – coordinators. It is evident from both quantitative research studies that educational staff and headteachers place among the greatest impact at the level of educational staff (see Graph 1) *“teacher’s respect for different cultures”, “knowledge and understanding of education systems”, “leadership and organisational skills of teachers”, “knowledge of foreign didactic environments”, and “implementation of cross-curricular integration”*. The least recognised and assessed impact by headteachers and educational staff was the *“promotion of individual work in the classroom”, “training of teachers for the use of ICT”, “inclusion of pupils in decision-making on the course of lessons”, “development of computer skills”, and “training of teachers in the use of new methods and forms”*.

Graph 1: Impact on work of educational staff



Regarding the impact on the level of educational staff, it can also be noticed that the majority of the impact in the study of 2017 on average received lower grades in percentage terms. In terms of average percentages, the impact of new forms and methods of teaching (training, awareness and usage) has been most influenced, and the promotion of the National Agency (CMEPIUS) has certainly contributed to the placement of international cooperation and results in regular lessons. The impact regarding the attitude between educational staff and pupils has been reduced significantly, the reason for which may originate from a significantly reduced number of partnership projects that are based on the cooperation of the pupil – educational staff. In these items, there was an increase or decrease certainly due to significant changes in the application to call for tender in the school sector, which represents the majority share of the sample of this study (approximately 20% of the VSS institutions in 2013, and 13% of the VET institutions in 2017) (Pajnič et al. 2017).

Secondary data also show that there are differences between opinions and assessments by headteachers and educational staff, and between schools and kindergartens. There are many reasons for the lower values and the differences between values, and they should be further explored; the possibilities for this could be sought in the direction of sampling (e.g., in the survey 2017 the only respondents were headteachers, while in the survey 2013 headteachers and educational staff – coordinators were involved; furthermore, the 2012 survey only included primary and secondary schools, meanwhile the survey 2017 included kindergartens), the greater self-criticism

of the respondents in the survey 2017, a more vague distinction between various international projects (actions KA1 and KA2) and their assessment among participants, a set of impacts or absence of opinion/voice of the educational staff who were actually included in the international cooperation.

From the qualitative data of this study (story and interview) based on the point of view of the code of impact on educational staff, the following three items or sets stand out given to the number of occurrence subcodes: “communicative ability in a foreign language”, “strengthening of professional competences and their implementation in work” (e.g., new forms and methods of work, new practices) and “greater openness and tolerance” (e.g., greater tolerance, new thinking, self-initiative).

Interviewees pointed out the impact at the level of educational staff in terms of improved **communication skills in a foreign language and strengthening self-confidence**. For example:

“Projects helped to overcome many embarrassments, supported the linguistic and social competence of employees ... the fear of communicating in a foreign language has disappeared ... communication in a foreign language is no longer an obstacle for the employees ...”

(primary school)⁶

“In the first place, teachers and pupils have become accustomed to the fact that a pupil or teacher from another country can come to class at any time and they are able to communicate with them in a foreign language with self-confidence and easily.”

(gymnasium)

“Even those who had problems with the language at the beginning ... the first concern “Oh my, I do not know the language” ... Now, we all have found that this is not an obstacle, but a learning process of the language ... but then we have realised that the Turks really do not know the language ...”

(kindergarten)

In the context of **strengthening professional competences**, it has been highlighted:

“International project cooperation has brought many innovative practices into the kindergarten ... we started with the introduction of ICT in educational work ... we have gained a lot of knowledge and new skills, which we are now successfully introducing into educational work and transferring to colleagues ... we have met know new methodologies of work with children ...”

(kindergarten)

⁶ Legend: primary school – primary school headteacher, kindergarten – kindergarten headteacher, gymnasium – gymnasium headteacher, VET – secondary vocational school headteacher.

“International cooperation is reflected in the introduction of new work forms and methods, including modern technologies ...”

(VET)

“We have equipped all the playrooms with a powerful internet connection, modern computer equipment, we use interactive whiteboards, and we are also thinking about robotics for the youngest.”

(kindergarten)

The biggest impact on educational staff was strung in conjunction with **openness, tolerance, new views, and broadness**. For example, headteachers have stressed:

“In these years, we learned the most about ourselves, for example, that slippers really are something special, that we have many options to make creations, and that the most important thing is to cooperate. It is now clear to us that others see us as friendly and accessible, that we are very, and also too critical, and that we have a lot to show and share with others.”

(kindergarten)

“A new aspect of cooperation has been brought to our attention; various cultures have enriched our knowledge of the diversity of Europe.”

(primary school)

“I think that international cooperation reflects the broadness of their thinking and work.”

(VET)

“The greatest concrete, intangible change is the much greater openness and tolerance of educational staff, and their willingness to accept project work methods.”

(gymnasium)

Based on the wording of impact items, unfortunately it is not always clearly evident and possible to determine the type of impact at the level of educational staff, namely for the impact which relates (only) to “learning” (of professional workers) or (also) “the use of (acquired knowledge and skills) in practice”. For example, in some cases, statements clearly reflect the use, such as “*the use of new materials and contents*”, meanwhile for example “*awareness of new forms and methods of teaching*” reflect (only) the level of learning. Sometimes categorisation is not possible at all, such as in the item “*social competences of educational staff*”. From the point of view of the types of impact, educational

staff should use as much of the learned and acquired knowledge and skills as possible in practice, thus improving the achievements of pupils in the long run. This is a long-term goal of professional development as such. At the same time, it should be noted that the impact related to “practical use” is visible in the long run and depend on the support that an individual has in the institution, which means that such effects should be measured longitudinally. Also a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative part of the study shows that the impact in the qualitative part of the research is more concretised, more clearly defined, and the division between “getting” and “using” is clarified. This indicates the need for data on the impact at the level of educational staff to be obtained with both types of research.

Impacts regarding professional, career and personal development of educational staff

Initially, it was pointed out that the activities and impact of international cooperation represent a mix of personal, professional and career development. If trying to categorise the impact on educational staff from a quantitative part of the research, it can be quickly established that this is actually the impact that can be placed in all three “types of development” (e.g., “*respect for different cultures*” in personal development, “*use of cooperative learning in class*” in professional development, and “*leadership and organizational skills*” in career development). Based on the average percentage, it is not possible to identify a specific pattern of movement in a positive or negative sense in relation to the “type” of development. Based on the qualitative part of the research, it can be observed that the interviewees highlight several impacts at the level of educational staff in connection with his/her personality development (e.g., tolerance, acceptance, respect, self-confidence, confirmation, cooperation, openness, broadness). It may be a development of the characteristics not devoted much attention to from the point of view of educational staff, or were taken for granted, while it can be argued that special attention has been given to them recently from the pupils’ point of view (e.g., discussion on the educational aspects of children and pupils). At the same time, some studies on the impact of international cooperation on VET pupils (e.g., Grigić 2018) show that pupils in international mobility considerably develop “generic competences” (e.g., self-initiative, flexibility, responsibility, openness).

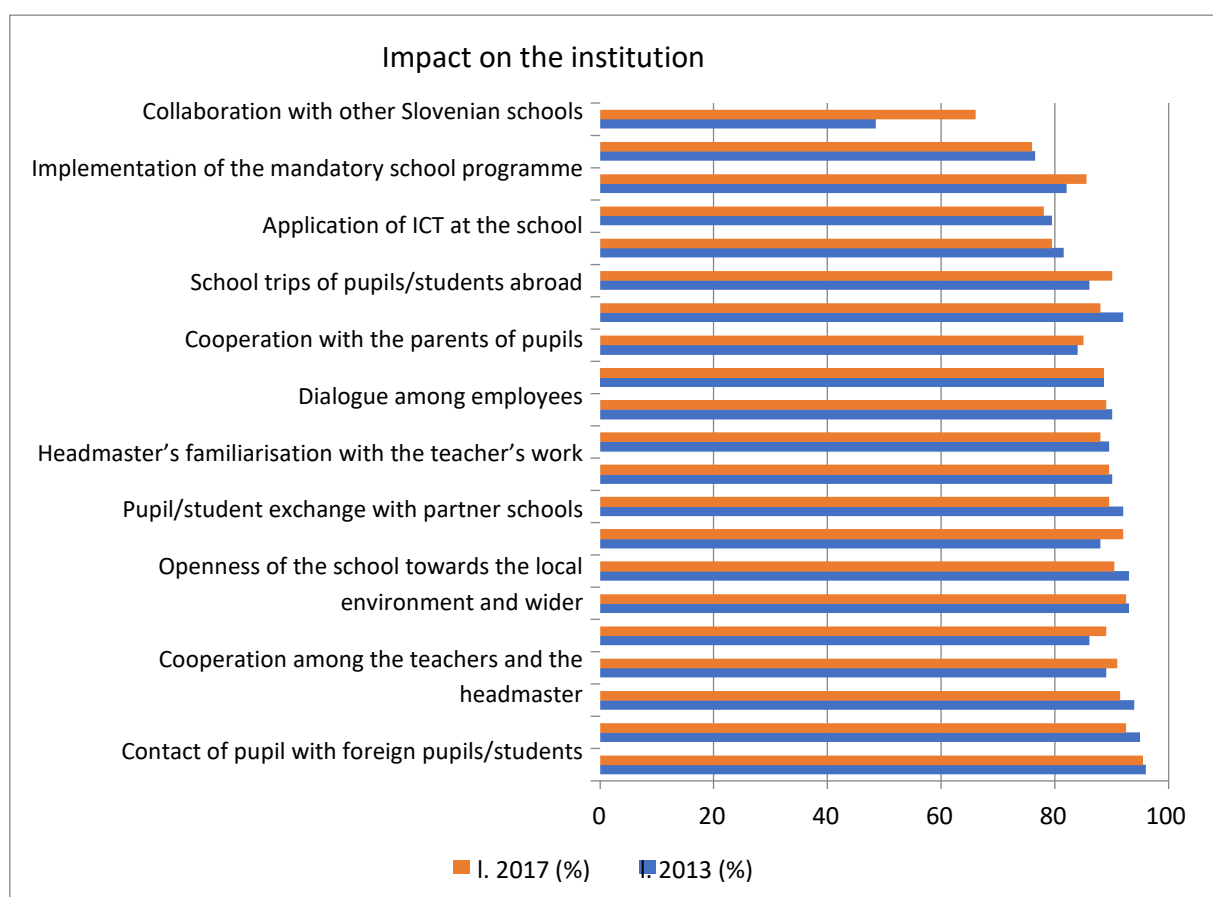
Impacts on the level of impact measurement in relation to educational staff, institution, pupil

The theory of the impact of professional development focuses on the relationship between the effects of educational staff and the impact on the level of the institution and the end user, namely pupil. The distinction between the levels of measurement facilitates the identification of the various types of impact for which the international cooperation activity to produce for a particular target audience or level was expected. If at the level of educational staff there is a need to anticipate the impact related to raising (professional) competencies, changing attitudes and beliefs and the use of acquired competences in the class, the impact at the level of the institution should be sought in organisational changes and improvements, and the impact at the pupil level in their improved (non)cognitive learning achievements. Among all three levels of impact are overflow, interweaving and interdependence. A study by Eva Klemenčič (2017) found, among others, that the level of the impact of professional development of educational staff is significantly linked with other variables at the level of the institution (e.g., culture, recognisability in the environment, cooperation with others).

Positive impact on the institution can be seen from the data of both quantitative studies regarding international cooperation and participation in EU projects (see Graph 2). From both quantitative

research studies, it is substantive that teachers and headteachers place “teacher contacts with foreign teachers”, “school recognisability in the environment,” “work and coordination among teachers”, “ability of employees to communicate in a foreign language”, and “headteacher’s support to teachers” among the highest impact at the institution level. As the lowest recognised and assessed impact at the level of the institution, headteachers and educational staff list the “cooperation with other Slovenian schools” and “the implementation of the compulsory school programme”. Similarly at the level of educational staff, it is evident that the majority of the impact in the study of 2017 is somewhat lower than the average percentage. In terms of average percentages, the impact of the “cooperation with other Slovenian schools” and the “sense of belonging of employees to common goals” were the most significant. The reasons for this could be sought in the greater awareness of headteachers on the importance of joint planning of work both inside and outside the institution (see, e.g., numerous projects and training courses of the National School of Leadership in Education and the National Education Institute Slovenia, which highlight the importance of joint development planning, introduction of changes and improvements), enhanced cooperation between the National School of Leadership in Education and CMEPIUS in the training of (future) headteachers and the new, more demanding way to apply in the field of school education, which requires the applicant to view activities developmentally and comprehensively.

Graph 2: Impact on the level of institution



From the qualitative data of the present study (story and interview), there are three subcodes standing out according to the code of the impact on the institution, namely “cooperation”, “recognisability” and “enabling”. All interviewees, both in the interview as well as in international

story, highlighted the **strengthening of cooperation**. For example, they have pointed out the following:

“International projects have greatly intervened in the functioning of the school, we have encouraged a lot of colleagues to cooperate, and the broadness of project objectives have allowed each participant to find an area of interest.”

(primary school)

“... how cooperation with employers is taking place. We did not have any of this in this way, and when we first visited Finland and worked with a teacher who conducts practical training in companies, we found that their connection is based on their former pupils. We have always contacted management of the institution, but now we are also looking for our former pupils who help us introduce our pupils, introduce and pave the way into the company, and of course, they are also mentors for our pupils.”

(VET)

Three interviewees emphasised **recognisability**, but at different levels or in different forms:

“The first keyword I associate with international cooperation and my school is recognisability. Indeed. When the pupils or ninth-graders of the primary level come to us on an open day, they are already asking me where they will go.”

(gymnasium)

“And have we always informed the public, called the press, it was published in local newspapers, the mayor ... I think it is really great that it is like this ... we are one municipality, one mayor, one priest, one headteacher ... basically the school breathes with the whole environment ... this is not a project of an individual person ... this is not a project of a teacher who thought of this ... no, no, the entire local community is part of this ...”

(primary school)

“The result of our work as well as the international engagement of our kindergarten is also an excellent inclusive practice, which was recognised by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, as our kindergarten was selected as one of eight examples of excellent inclusive practice. At their invitation, the inclusive practice of our kindergarten was presented at three international conferences in Brussels, Brno and Lisbon, and hosted and organised an expert meeting for experts from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which was held in Slovenia in June 2016.”

(kindergarten)

“Maybe also when we find that the European space is somewhat of an extension of Slovenia, where we can take things differently with each other’s experience. It is not necessary that

everything we have found abroad could be transferred to our space, but actually, in many areas we have received confirmation that we are doing something right. For example, this applies to work with pupils with special needs.”

(VET)

In the **enabling/support** subcode, the element of financing (other activities) and the opportunities for the socially de-privileged pupils to go abroad were identified.

“... and also from a financial point of view, we have acquired additional resources, which enable us to develop further, education of educational staff as well as higher standard for our children ...”

(kindergarten)

“This was the first long trip abroad for many pupils.”

(primary school)

“Another thing that I associate with international cooperation and schools is that we are achieving things in a socially de-privileged environment. So the pupils, all of them, basically have the opportunity to go somewhere.”

(gymnasium)

Other impact at the level of the institution, which was mentioned by the headteachers, was: “we have created a large network of partners”, “due to international cooperation we quickly follow the new developments as a school”, “we have acquired project leadership skills”, “international cooperation is part of the development plan”, “we have introduced peer to peer help”, “we are implementing a language camp for foreign pupils as a model of good practice”, “we have employed a part-time coordinator for international cooperation”, etc. It can be again claimed that the qualitative part of the study gave a more concrete and clearer impact than the quantitative study.

From the point of view of the causal chain of impacts, it is expected that the professional development of educational staff will influence the improved achievements of pupils. It would be illusory to expect that this impact would always be immediately apparent in pupils; it can usually be seen only through time or is the result of a multi-generation work. According to headteachers and educational staff, international activities have an impact on pupils. In the quantitative survey in 2013, the greatest impact on pupils was seen in the “*awareness and knowledge of different cultures*”, “*interest in other European countries and their culture*”, “*desire to work with peers at home and abroad*”, and “*respect for diversity*”. In the qualitative research that was carried out, all headteachers emphasise, in particular, the “strengthening of the communication capacities in a foreign language”, for example, “communication in a foreign language is no longer a barrier for pupils” (primary school), “pupils easily communicate in a foreign language” (gymnasium), “children learn about the cultures and languages of other countries” (kindergarten), “language competence” (VET). At the same time,

they include: “openness”, “respect”, “broadness”, “competence development in the field of ICT”, “friendships”, “team work”, etc.

“The biggest added value of the project was the language camp for pupils in Poland, which is an extraordinary example of good practice, and we are still running it every two years.”

(primary school)

It can be said that measuring and recognition of the impact of professional development as an international activity is a very complex process. It is often generalised that professional development activities have helped to improve practice, but at the same time it is often unknown to what extent and with what impact, which may be misleading. In addition, managers (headteachers, coordinators, leadership teams) are not able to know why and how the activities were important, so they often do not know how to proceed. So so-called project activities remain on the surface, and employees have the feeling that they are in for a “new project” every year. In this way, international cooperation as a form of professional development can not be internalised. This leads to an important element, which is the leadership of international activity studied as an additional code in the qualitative part of the study.

2.3.2 Leadership of international cooperation

The 2013 study points out that standing out among the factors that have a positive effect on the sustainability and impact strength, are the role of the headteacher or how the headteacher places work in projects in the life and work of the institution, how he/she builds the culture of cooperation, and encourages mutual professional support and commitment to the common development goals of the institution. In institutions where headteachers did not clearly emphasise the interaction of international cooperation with the objectives of the institution, educational staff often questioned the effects of this type of cooperation.

In this study, the factors of international cooperation leadership were looked for through semi-structured interviews and international stories. With the help of questions, the four most common subcodes in the texts were found as follows: the beginning of international cooperation, the leader/coordinator of international cooperation, the institution’s involvement in international activities and the needs of the institution for an effective international cooperation.

In relation to the **beginnings of international cooperation**, the cooperation with the headteacher and his/her support, cooperation with individuals (at home and abroad/networking) and participation in seminars were highlighted. Some sections of the texts that relate to the subcodes are listed above.

“If I were a mentor to a beginner in international cooperation, I would first ask him/her if he/she was motivated for international cooperation, because it is important that the headteacher supports the projects – is the facilitator. And then I would advise him/her to find and create a team that will begin to tackle with the areas. In any case, there must be a teacher of a discipline subject, a foreign language teacher, a teacher of Slovene, teacher of mathematics, that is, from different fields that he/she interconnects afterwards. I would suggest that she/he have a team consisting of various teachers.”

(VET)

“At the beginning, there were not many training sessions on project leadership, so we were fortunate enough to learn a lot from our colleagues from abroad, especially Scandinavia, where professional project coordinators were already present.”

(gymnasium)

“I was lucky to start off with a contact seminar. It is important to go to these contact seminars, that Europe supports this.”

(gymnasium)

“This (the beginning of international cooperation) was at the beginning of my function as a headteacher; after the first term, my colleague, with whom I share the same personal attitude, and I started working together and we started thinking ... both of us had already undertaken education through Pestalozzi or Erasmus ... she (coordinator) participated in training offered by CMEPIUS, and I also went when it was organised for headteachers...”

(primary school)

“The initiative was given by the headteacher. So I first applied for education abroad, for a ten-day seminar of early foreign language teaching in Norwich, England. There I made contact with institutions that were interested in the same topic. Together with the headteacher we determined that it is logical to apply the project with a topic that we are already familiar with (early language learning).”

(kindergarten)

From what the interviewees say, it is evident that the **leader/coordinator of international activities** usually is not alone. They are exposed to cooperation with the headteacher, to setting up the team and need to have some of the characteristics important for leading international cooperation. In both secondary schools, regular (part-time) employment of coordinators for international co-operation is highlighted since the scope of international activity exceeds the ability to perform this work in addition to regular work. Find some wording below.

“Two project coordinators, who carried out this work in addition to their regular work, were responsible for the successful implementation of the projects. It has been agreed that they would have a weekly schedule adjustment (Friday) and that classes would be conducted on the remaining days.”

(VET)

“Considering that we are a big school, and when we saw that I could not additionally impose only two people who managed the mobility of pupils in addition to their regular work with other projects, we employed a coordinator from the funds of the market activity.”

(VET)

“The coordinator must be inclined to accept challenges, as well as and defeats. He/she must know that he must not give up, but above all, he/she must have communication skills, both in Slovene and in English.”

(VET)

“It is also a great achievement that in addition to the implementation of projects, we managed to ensure the part-time employment of the project coordinator since the current scope of activities at school strongly exceeds the work that the coordinator can do during his/her regular teaching obligations. We are proud that we were able to rename one of the small offices to “project office”.”

(gymnasium)

“We really work together with our colleague (co-ordinator), we complement each other and cover each other’s backs ... At the beginning, we did not expand the team but we engaged one of our Slovene teachers ...”

(primary school)

“I honestly would not cope if I would have to act as a coordinator as well as headteacher in as school that is big as ours. This requires a whole person ... X and I are a really ideal combination for this, because I come from the natural science field, and you have to be a little more of a social scientist to apply ... you need to have a strong team.”

(primary school)

“Since it is nice to involve a team, it is a good idea to have a team at the institution so that a person is not alone. Well, and the support from the leadership. This is very crucial. The headteacher has always supported us.”

(kindergarten)

From the viewpoint of the various factors of the **institution’s involvement in international activities**, the headteachers pointed out the method of selecting educational staff for international cooperation activities, the way of disseminating acquired knowledge and skills among that skilled educational staff who does not go abroad, the way of selecting the content/topics/objectives of international cooperation activities, and its placement in planning and implementation at the level of the institution. Some examples of wording are provided below for a better explanation.

“I choose people who want to participate in international projects ... the teacher himself/herself has to find out that he/she wants something more, because in my opinion, a

teacher who does not associate with external institutions, either on a national or international level, will no longer be a useful teacher in ten years. His/her knowledge is stagnating ...”

(VET)

“... because within the teams, they are connected to one another and one who comes into the team, then he/she informs the others about what he/she has seen and how, what he/she thinks would be great to be brought in our space.”

(VET)

“The teachers have become skilful and managed to do most of this in class, not in the afternoon. This means that they are increasingly seeing it as an enrichment of the class, not as additional work ... They have found that this is important and does not impede the classes.”

(gymnasium)

“Most of the activities that we perform at school, either as a preparation in order to take a product somewhere or to make a presentation, or as part of the project that we host, never included only those pupils who will go somewhere but the entire class.”

(gymnasium)

“The international cooperation of the school, the care for quality teaching, the development of personnel, and the provision of quality working conditions are some of the key points that were included into all development plans of the school.”

(gymnasium)

“Basically, we always invite them all (teachers), we ask them at the conference, whether they would like to or not, and if we see that there is interest, then the coordinator confirms our readiness, otherwise we do not.”

(primary school)

“It is tough if you are a little ahead of your time. It happened to me twice when I was headteacher, that I brought to school a topic which I thought was crucial, but people did not understand it. And two years later, when this phenomenon became universal, both in Slovenia and elsewhere, the collective was ready for it.”

(primary school)

“We always draw on the contents from everyday work and the life of the kindergarten.”

(kindergarten)

“In fact, initially we thought that it would be best for us to be the coordinators, because then we would have control, we have had in mind something in terms of leadership, we thought that if we are coordinators, we have more influence on the content and quality of the performance itself ... Well, in our third project, we decided to do this (not to be coordinators), and we felt, at least me personally, a great deal of stress. Well, then we learnt about these differences, that in fact, we as partners are able contribute to quality.”

(kindergarten)

“At the teacher’s conference or at the team meeting, we first give the option for people to participate.”

(kindergarten)

“Our continuous professional education is planned in a slightly different way, we are looking for the strengths of each person, and we always ask through professional teams what kind of topic is current ...”

(kindergarten)

In the light of identifying **the needs of an institution for effective international cooperation**, the headteachers have often highlighted the above factors, so only two statements below, which stand out particularly in terms of direct response to the question were highlighted.

“For effective international cooperation, the institution needs teachers who are ready to work outside of working hours (and are not wondering in which pillar their work fits), even at home, we also need a network of partner schools (mutual partnership) and support (and reward and praise) of the school leadership.”

(VSS)

“Good organisation of work and a lot of cooperation between teachers. The great gain is the possibility of using a monthly fee for the part-time employment of a coordinator, so that the organisational procedures take place in a smooth and seamless manner.”

(gymnasium)

3. Findings and recommendations to headteachers

If the training of educational staff in the process of professional development shall really occur and have an impact on pupils, changes must take place in several areas that are not linearly related to one another. Experts advocate cyclical models of professional development. Expert Sarah Bubb (2013) has developed a model of professional development based on nine interconnected levels in three domains, namely the domain of preparation, the domain of learning and the domain of improvement. Below are the findings and recommendations to the headteachers to strengthen international cooperation as a form of professional development in relation to the above three domains (preparation, learning, improvement), and it is important to highlight (which is certainly not a coincidence) that all applications for Erasmus+ projects follow the process and logic of the said domains.

The identification of needs, a snapshot of the situation, setting goals and planning the achievement of goals can also be included in the **preparation** from the point of view of international cooperation. The qualitative study can be summed up by stating that the public educational institutions involved in the study started their own way of international cooperation with individual enthusiasts, who, however, certainly had the support of the headteacher (if that was not even the headteacher himself/herself). Perhaps the transparent planning (especially at the institution's level) was not sufficient at the beginning, but it is evident that it was more closely linked to the identified (long-term) needs of the institution (e.g., introduction of early learning, new approaches and methods). For successfully implemented "projects", headteachers, coordinators and/or individual educational staff for the selected content/topic also sought consent from fellow colleagues (e.g., at pedagogical conferences, professional activities). The international activities were thus not carried out in an uncontrolled manner but were part of the activity of the institution, and educational staff was given the opportunity to join. A modern educational institution must act as a learning community (see, e.g., the special issue of the magazine *Vodenje v VIZ (Leadership in educational institutions)*, 3/2018), and the role of the headteacher when introducing changes and improvements, especially from the point of view of support and breadth of view, is crucial (cf. Fullan 2010). The headteacher should be aware that professional development and international cooperation do not usually occur automatically, but if they do, they do not abstain in the long run, as such, and do not produce the desired effects at the level of the institution and pupils, so they should be planned (cf. Bubb 2013, Erčulj 2011). In this part, both the needs of the institution and the needs of educational staff in relation to pupils' needs (or curricular goals) need to be identified. **International cooperation in itself cannot be an objective, but an activity aimed at achieving the goals of the institution, that is, to facilitate and strengthen the professional development of educational staff. In practice, this means that the "projects" of international cooperation are not carried out due to the (number of) projects as such or the motivations of individual educational staff, but in the light of strengthening the achievement of the goals that were set at the level of the institution for the next few years or annually. This means that individual, organisational, and short-term and long-term needs are connected and balanced.** In order to achieve e.g. the goal of improved reading literacy, also international activities that will support this goal were chosen because it is believed that only domestic activities do not provide sufficient or equal support as if also knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that were strengthened/gained abroad were included. At the same time, education abroad always brings some things that education at home cannot bring, for example, communication in a foreign language,

intercultural environment or an authentic learning environment, and a move from the comfort zone and the zone of the familiar. With international projects, also such activities are planned to achieve goals that may not be possible in Slovenia (while there are already examples of good practices abroad). Educational staff often identifies what they want instead of what they really need. Too often, headteachers in institutions also give in to the desires of an individual, which may not reflect a complete picture of an institution or area. Planning international professional development is a demanding job in terms of content and logistics, that can not be performed by the headteacher alone. The interviews indicate that the headteacher forms a special smaller team, and in the long term appoints a coordinator of international activities, and exploits the possibilities of training performed by various institutions (e.g., CMEPIUS). Quality international professional development is planned with the idea of learning and improving for the entire collective and pupils (and potential other stakeholders).

The domain of **learning** includes the realisation of the activities of international professional development, and the emergence of new learning or impact. On the basis of data from a quantitative and qualitative study, it can be argued that the activities of international cooperation, according to the headteachers and educational staff – coordinators, have a positive impact (on professional workers, the institution and pupils). Based on the wording of impact items in quantitative studies, unfortunately it is not always clearly evident and possible to determine the type of impact at the level of educational staff, namely whether this is the impact which relates (only) to “learning” (of professional workers) or (also) “the use of (acquired knowledge and skills) in practice”. A qualitative study has shown that performing measures can lead to more concrete verbalisation of the impact, which allows us a clearer planning in the future. It can be concluded that the impact exists, but it should not be maintained at a general level, but look in more specific forms at the level of the institution (and also the system) and in stakeholders who are affected by the impact. Thus, the limitation of this study is mainly shown by the fact that the impact was not reported by educational staff who was involved in international activities, but by headteachers and/or coordinators who have a wider overview on the level of the institution, but not necessarily on concrete changes/improvements at the level of educational staff in the classroom. It is important that the planned activities of international professional development are diverse and such that provide the greatest impact. Among such activities, for example, long-term teaching abroad, multiple/sequential job shadowing or visits to a (related, comparable) workplace abroad, training that lasts for at least several days/weeks in a row, formation of partnership that, with project work in the international environment, aims towards a common goal or result (e.g., designing of new modules, subjects, curricula), team teaching abroad, etc. are considered. Regardless of the location and duration of the professional development activities, it is important that participants in any of the activities have the opportunity to actively share experiences, ask questions, integrate into forms that require group resolution of problems, exploration opportunities to exceed the search for solutions solely and only in one class and/or one environment, experiencing and testing of experiential learning (e.g., role games), coaching that empowers a participant to search for their own solutions, etc. (Archibald et al. 2011, Caena 2011). In the context of mobility, Slovene educational staff mostly attends training sessions, but visits workplaces or teaching to a lesser extent. **The headteacher should strengthen the training, which is collaborative, experiential, active. He/she should promote job shadowing visits abroad, emphasising that education within the scope of a workplace without a clear plan and (intermediate) reflection will definitely not produce the desired impact, which requires training (both by the one who is given lessons, as well as the one is giving lessons). At the same time, it is important for the headteacher to be aware that international professional development does not mean merely acquiring new knowledge and skills, but perhaps even more importantly the**

expansion of views and the strengthening at the level of relationships (respect for other cultures, tolerance, self-esteem, etc.). Particular emphasis should be placed on intercultural competences, which strengthen most when in relation or in contact with foreign culture, preferably in a foreign environment. This is also confirmed by the primary and secondary data of this study. If, therefore, the domain of learning is more linked to facilitating professional development in the international context and its impact, the domain of improvement is one that relates to concrete transfer into practice and changes.

The domain of **improvement** involves, in particular, the transfer of learned into practice and the dissemination of the impact for improvements at the level of the institution (and, potentially, the system). Quantitative studies cannot provide a complete insight into this domain. From the qualitative part of the study, it is possible to identify the methods of transferring the acquired knowledge and skills, and the changed attitudes and/or beliefs among educational staff, which relate primarily to some already established school mechanisms that involve the whole collective or its individual levels (e.g., expert working groups, pedagogical conferences, meetings). International cooperation providers at the institution monitor and evaluate the impact of international professional development at various levels and from the time perspective (i.e. during the implementation of the activity, after returning to Slovenia, longitudinally after some time). In order to provide change, it is crucial that they anchor, which means that the impact is monitored and evaluated till it does become “routine” and it is no longer recognised as “project activities”. Monitoring and evaluation should be supported by concrete displays, wording, based on evidence (Bubb and Earley 2011). **Mechanisms should be established at the institution level to promote and ensure the dissemination of acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs at the institution (between educational staff) and outside the institution (between institutions at local, regional and national level, in cooperation with other public educational institutions, etc.). Educational staff who has been abroad and/or hosted foreign educational staff must share their experience with others, that is their professional responsibility. Testing of new methods and techniques and experimenting with pupils must be a planned and mandatory mechanism of international professional development** (cf. Zavašnik Arčnik et al. 2015). The support of the headteacher (and other educational staff) is crucial for the transfer of acquired knowledge, skills, and experience. This also requires a clear understanding of the impact of the feelings and sensations of educational staff, especially in terms of gaining their self-esteem and confirmation of their own ability and capabilities (cf. Hargreaves 2005).

According to the latest data from the European Commission⁷, the funds for international cooperation in the Erasmus+ programme in the new perspective will increase almost threefold. So far, Slovenia has successfully used funds. The study data (e.g., OECD 2012) show that the absorption of large amounts of funds does not guarantee impact or effects. Sustainability is primarily provided by willingness, support, dedication, cooperation, example, and positive attitude. The decision on international cooperation and the involvement of headteachers and educational staff in international activities is influenced primarily by their subjective conceptions, attitudes and beliefs that are deeply anchored. Because they are implicit, headteachers and educational staff need language and space to be able to understand them and become explicit, which in practice means creating the conditions for confronting “old” beliefs and attitudes with “new ones”. International cooperation is certainly one of the activities that can significantly contribute to the erosion of subjective conceptions, the

⁷ Available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3948_en.htm, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32121/erasmus-2021-2027-more-people-to-experience-learning-exchanges-in-europe>.

movement of uncertainty boundaries and, above all, the expansion of the horizons of headteachers and educational staff.

4. References

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