

# World School Leadership Study (WSLS): Research and Monitoring of School Leaders' Profession

In a rapidly changing society, education and schools are faced with diverse challenges. Over the past decades, the New Public Management and local management of schools seem to have shaped educational policies, school reform, and school improvement in many countries. School leadership for ensuring and developing the quality of schooling has become more crucial and complex than ever before. As a result, school leaders' practices and their work effectiveness and efficiency have become a major concern for policy makers and educational authorities. Their health, resilience and well-being have become a major concern for school leader associations. Despite a large number of studies underpinning the importance of school leadership for school effectiveness and improvement (e.g. P. Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Huber & Muijs, 2010; May, Goldring, & Huff, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008), so far very few studies have examined school leaders' functions, practices, work conditions and their impact on school quality development as well as on their own health and resilience. Contingency approaches, being aware of context on various levels and different areas, are small in number, even if many research findings can be very well explained by various kinds of fit, in particular person-environment fit. Moreover, there is a lack of international comparative studies that systematically examine these topics and their interdependency on a global scale.

This planned study was already presented at the European Conference on Educational Research ECER of the European Educational Research Association EERA (2016, 2017, 2018, 2024) with Jim Spillane as discussant, at World Educational Research Association WERA (2020, 2023, 2024) and American Educational Research Association AERA Annual Meeting (2017, 2020, 2021), the Asia Leadership Roundtable ALR (2017, 2019), and the World Education Leadership Symposium WELS (2017, 2019), International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement ISCEI (accepted for 2025).

## Aim and research questions

The purpose of the World School Leadership Study (WSLS) project is to research and monitor the profession of school leadership nationally and internationally.



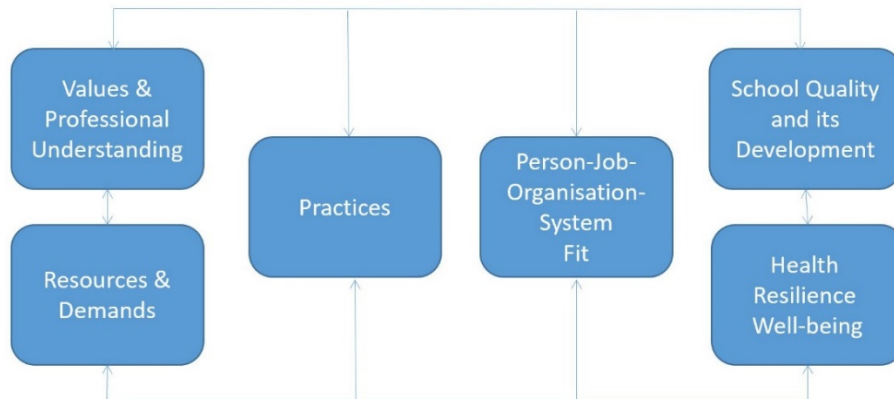
The data will be analysed and reported nationally with an ideographical perspective and internationally with a comparative perspective. Two levels of research questions guide the research.

### *Level 1 Research area-specific questions:*

1. **Resources & demands:** What kinds of resources and demands are available on personal, organisational and system level that support or restrain school leaders' practice? How are these resources and demands experienced by the school leaders? How is the balance between resources and demands?
2. **Health, resilience, well-being:** What are the school leaders' perceptions on their own health? How resilient are school leaders? How is school leaders' work-related well-being?
3. **Values & professional understanding:** How are different professional values and professional understandings deemed important to school leaders, organisation and system? How do they align or misalign with each other?
4. **Practice:** What practices do school leaders prefer? What practices do school leaders experience as strain? How do school leaders spend their time at work?
5. **Person-job-organisation-system fit:** How do school leaders fit to their job, organisation and system? How is the balance between different fits?
6. **School quality and its development:** How do school leaders perceive school quality and its development?
7. **Challenges of school and school leaders:** Which are the greatest challenges for school leaders and how do they affect their work and health?

## Level 2 Cross research area questions (some examples):

1. What are school leaders' cognitive appraisal of the resources and demands on personal, organisational and system level?
2. How do the demands and resources impact on school leaders' practices, health, resilience, well-being and their efforts to develop school quality?
3. How is the person-job-organisation-system fit related to school leaders' practice, to health, resilience and well-being, as well as to the school quality and its development?
4. How do school leaders' professional values and understanding correspond to the demands and resources on the three levels?
5. How are school leaders' professional values and professional understanding related to school quality and its development?
6. How do school leaders' health, resilience and well-being transform into resource, affect their practice and affect school quality and development?
7. How do challenges in school leadership affect school leader practices and school quality?
8. How can the findings be compared in a cluster of countries or internationally? (Possible perspectives for comparison: high stakes versus low stakes systems, centralized versus decentralized systems, autonomy of schools, market orientation versus public system perspective, key values)



## Implications

The results of the WSLS are expected to have implications on different levels. First, the findings will illuminate how different resources and demands at the system, organisational and personal level affect school leaders' health resilience and well-being as well as the school quality and its development. Second, based on the national data gathered, it is possible to conduct international comparisons so that the similarities and differences across countries can be highlighted. Third, WSLS aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to inform policy makers, to advise school leaders' recruitment, training, and professional development, and to improve the work conditions for school leaders in various countries.

## Research design and research organization

The data will be collected using a mixed-methods approach. The International common design of the study comprises a country report (document analysis and expert interviews) and an online survey. The optional part of the study includes further focus in-depth studies, the end-of-day log and interviews or case studies.

The WSLS is conducted by an international research consortium that includes international scholars in the field of educational management and leadership and experts in areas such as health and specific research methodology and analytical techniques who will work collaboratively to conduct the study, disseminate findings and draw attention to implications for practice. In this way, the consortium as a whole covers a range of areas within social science and can be characterised as interdisciplinary. The work related to the international research collaboration, data collection, data handling and international comparative data analyses is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Stephan Huber, Chair of Excellence Leadership, Quality Management and Innovation, Department of Educational Research, Linz School of Education, Johannes Kepler University Linz and Head of Leadership University of Teacher Education Schwyz, Switzerland. Country partners are responsible for funding the national research conducted in their own countries.

