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Education Policy Institutions' Comprehension of the *School as a Learning Organisation* Approach: A Case Study of Latvia

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Abstract: The economic crises of recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic and growing dissatisfaction with the quality of education have proved that national education systems throughout the world require large-scale transformations. Effective implementation of these large-scale reforms also requires highly qualified professionals. Latvia has introduced reforms targeting issues in educational philosophy, teaching content, pedagogical approach and school management. The School as a Learning Organisation (SLO) model, which envisages continuous individual and collective learning of all stakeholders involved in the education process, has currently come into the spotlight of policy makers. The SLO consists of seven dimensions: (1) developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students; (2) creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff; (3) promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff; (4) establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration; (5) embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning; (6) learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system; and (7) modelling and growing learning leadership. It is characterised by a broad set of performance indicators, the deeper understanding of which requires academic and practical knowledge. The purpose of the current study is to examine the perceptions of representatives of education policy institutions to predict the efficacy of the SLO implementation in Latvia. Three semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted with the participants and deductive and inductive content analyses were carried out. The findings showed that policy makers highlighted "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and "modelling and growing learning leadership" dimensions as the most important and best understood dimensions of the SLO. On the contrary, "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning" was the least understood dimension by education policy makers. The results of the study indicate that a comprehensive understanding of the SLO model is necessary in order to implement it effectively and for its implementation to promote the transformation of education in Latvia.

Keywords: education policy; reforms in education; transformation of education; school as a learning organisation

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1. Introduction

The transformation of the education system has become an undeniable priority and international policy concern [1–3], spurred by the global economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic [4] and growing dissatisfaction with the quality of education in different regions of the world [5]. Based on these global and local challenges, there is increasing talk of fundamental shifts in educational purpose and curricula, as well as the need for lifelong learning.

Therefore, the United Nations (UN) [6] has conceptualised four key areas of transformation in education. Firstly, it calls for providing a learning environment that supports the development of all learners in order to protect rights, promote diversity and inclusion, prevent all forms of violence and discrimination, and ensure the physical and mental health of learners. Secondly, it argues that teachers should be empowered to transform and become agents of change, which means developing teachers' capacity, agency and autonomy to deliver learning based on experience, inquiry, joy, curiosity and a desire to solve problems. This strategy, in turn, requires making the teaching profession attractive, ensuring decent working conditions, recruitment and promotion mechanisms, continuous professional development and participation of teachers in policy making. The third area of transformation concerns the digital revolution in public education, which has the potential to reduce inequalities between learners by promoting connectivity, capacities and content (the three keys of digital learning). The fourth transformation area highlights the need for greater, more equitable and efficient investment in education, including reorganising public taxation, setting social protection floors and tackling the debt crisis. In this regard, financial investments in the most remote, rural and emergency-affected communities, as well as effective public financial management, monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms, are essential [6]. By defining priorities and measures of transformation, the UN enhances governments around the world to speed up their efforts for positive change.

Qualitative education transformation is based on the national-level reforms of the countries, which are aimed at reviewing and updating those involved in the education system and their areas of responsibility. The education system and the nature of the reforms implemented in it reflect the priorities and needs of society. In situations where a country is undergoing major political, demographic or economic change, it pays attention to the education system and seeks to reform it to make it more relevant to the changing context of society [7].

Reforms in the education sector refer to educational philosophy, curriculum, pedagogical approach, didactics, school organisation, management, finance and the relationship of these elements to the development of society [8]. Reforms focus on innovations in pedagogical solutions [9,10], on developing ideas of school autonomy and decentralisation [11,12] and on revising school governance principles [13], adapting them to the rapidly changing conditions of the external environment.

The overarching goal of education reform is to expand students' opportunities to learn in formal, non-formal and informal settings, strengthen teachers' professional capacity, foster collaboration between schools and other organisations to ensure high quality, equitable and effective learning and strengthen schools' ability to adapt to new challenges of the external environment [2]. This implies that, in the context of the implementation of reforms, it is necessary to involve various actors interested in education in defining the desired model for the governance of the education system, including civil society and the private sector in the discussions [14].

Issues related to the implementation of effective teaching and learning practices are often at the centre of education reforms. However, their implementation is hampered by the lack of consensus among educators on quality performance standards and desired practices, emphasising teacher autonomy in the learning process [15]. Evaluating the effectiveness of education reforms takes considerable time, during which education policy makers and implementers mobilise, slow down, block and change strategies for implementing reforms [16]. Moreover, the chain of education reform implementers is extremely long due to the hierarchical levels of the system, and it is very wide due to the geographical dispersion of schools. This means that there is a risk of discontinuities in information about and interpretations and distortions of the nature of reforms [16].

In order to ensure the implementation of reforms in the education sector and improve the quality of education, it is necessary to define at the national level what constitutes quality education and what its outcomes are, defining both the desired school governance model and the pedagogical practices to be implemented in schools, while at the same

time acknowledging and eliminating the structural constraints that teachers and school principals face in the education system [5]. This, in turn, also implies adequate provision of financial and human resources to achieve the desired outcomes.

When implementing education reforms, it is important to pay attention to how governments implement these reforms and bridge the gap between reform goals and implementation strategies [4]. This means examining what skills and competences are brought to the forefront of the curriculum and what support is provided to schools and teachers to enable them to support students in learning the curriculum. Education reforms have proven successful in countries where national investment has been made to create a policy and educational environment conducive to success. These include appropriate governance reforms and appropriate regulatory and institutional frameworks [14].

In the context of education reform, national governments face several challenges: they lack the time and financial resources needed for the successful implementation of the reforms they have initiated; to achieve changes, means are used that relate to structural aspects of the education system—governance, finances, workforce and distribution of responsibilities—rather than to the motivation and conviction of those working in the education system. Governments are forced to seek compromises influenced by different political views and public opinion about the education system as a whole [15].

The failure of education reforms is also linked to the gap between the goals set and their achievement and between what is intended and what is actually implemented. There are several common causes of failure: lack of financial and material resources; the impact of social and political change; resistance from education system employees and organisations; lack of a supportive or favourable social climate; the influence of corporate interests opposed to change; and the unpreparedness of reforms and the contradictions embedded in them [17].

One of the concepts for quality transformation and reforms in education is the model of a "School as a Learning Organisation" (SLO). It reflects the capacity of schools to change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances, as their stakeholders learn individually and together in order to implement their vision [1]. The SLO is proposed as an alternative model of school governance, which contributes to the ability of both the education system as a whole and individual schools to adapt to economic, social and structural changes caused by the external environment [13,18]. The necessity and effectiveness of implementing such a school governance model is demonstrated by the experience of several countries, such as Singapore [19,20] and Wales (UK) [1,21–23], in implementing the School as a Learning Organisation model in education policy.

The SLO model promotes the formation of norms in an educational institution that envisage continuous learning and the collaboration of all people to improve their professional performance [24]. Such educational organisations are characterised by a collaborative culture that involves all stakeholders—school principals, teachers, parents and students—in the exchange of views and making decisions [25], promoting creativity and innovation in school governance [26].

The SLO concept developed by Kools and Stoll [1] itself encompasses seven action-oriented dimensions reflecting principles, actions, tools and stakeholders that need to be mobilised towards positive school transformations. These encompass the following: (1) developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students; (2) creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff; (3) promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff; (4) establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration; (5) embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning; (6) learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system; and (7) modelling and growing learning leadership [1,13,18]. The implementation of these dimensions improves the knowledge and skills of teachers and other school staff through continuous learning that is implemented at all levels and, in the long term, improves the entire school system [27].

As the SLO is characterised by the ability to adapt and respond to rapidly changing external environmental conditions, it stimulates change and innovation [1] through continuous individual learning, group and organisational learning, team learning and collaboration, a culture of inquiry and problem solving and the creation of learning environments that foster experimentation and innovation.

Reforms in the education sector aim to create a national education policy framework that promotes the development of schools as SLOs with a shared vision of learning and achievement for all students, with high professional standards and expectations for the professional performance of students, teachers and schools and a culture of collaboration, mutual learning, inquiry and exploration [25]. In such organisations, continuous professional development [28–31] and autonomy [32,33] are supported with the aim of improving students' learning experiences and achievements.

In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science is the main institution responsible for setting education development guidelines at the national level. Its competence is not only to define the basic principles of education policy, goals, key measures for achieving the goals and performance indicators, but also to monitor their implementation at the regional and local level [34]. It is also responsible for the development and coordination of education, science, sport, youth and national language policy [35].

In the field of education, one of the most important roles is played by the State Education Quality Service, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science. Its competence includes collecting and analysing information necessary for education policy-making, ensuring quality assessment of general and vocational education (except higher vocational education), licensing education programmes and maintaining registers of educational institutions, programmes, teachers, psychologists, etc. [36,37]. The National Centre for Education also plays an important role in ensuring the quality of the education process in Latvia, providing development and expertise of professional standards, development of sample education programmes and development of teaching and methodological tools as well as organising professional development of general and vocational education staff [38]. The National Centre for Education is also responsible for leading and monitoring the "Competence-based approach to curriculum" national reform. The project envisages cooperation between several higher education institutions and the public sector with the aim of developing, validating and successively implementing such a general education content and teaching approach from pre-primary to secondary school that would enable students to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for life today [39]. Following the idea of lifelong learning, the "Competence-based approach to curriculum" project is currently a cornerstone of educational transformation in Latvia, the results of which are evaluated rather ambiguously.

A different interpretation and alignment of the SLO concept can be observed in policy documents of national importance developed by institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science, not to mention education planning documents of smaller territorial units, such as local municipalities. In a direct way, the SLO as a concept is mentioned only in the Education Development Guidelines [34], in the performance indicators of the principal of an educational institution [40] and in the materials of the nationwide project "Competence-based approach to curriculum" [41]. The concept of the SLO is not mentioned in other documents analysed, but all seven dimensions of the SLO model are open to interpretation. Although the SLO is mentioned in the main document defining the objectives of education policy, so far too little attention has been paid to the development, implementation and monitoring of practices related to the implementation of the SLO model in Latvia. This shows that a common understanding of the SLO approach has not yet been reached, either among the policy makers or among teachers and school leaders. The various interpretations of the SLO model make it difficult for schools in Latvia to implement a common vision of what changes need to be implemented in order to bring schools closer to the model of learning organisations.

The Education Development Guidelines for the period 2021–2027 [34] describe the SLO concept as the key to the functional transformation of educational institutions. It is in line with the need defined in the National Development Plan of Latvia [42] to adapt to and expand the constantly changing environment, including in the field of education [41]. According to the Latvian Education Development Guidelines, transformation in education includes diversification and adaptation of the learning environment to the needs of different target groups, such as children, youth and adults, enhancement of professional competences of management and teachers, strategic vision for the future development of the school, responsibility and autonomy, i.e., the ability to cooperate in the school environment as well as with other stakeholders, thus ensuring the transfer of knowledge and good practice as well as effective governance [34].

For the SLO model to effectively fulfil its function in the educational transformation process, it is necessary to achieve a common understanding of what characterises a school as an effective learning organisation at the national level. In 2022–2023, the ambitious educational research project "A model and tool to support the implementation of the approach school as a learning organisation in educational institutions" has been carried out in Latvia. Within the framework of this project, several research activities have been implemented, one of which is focus group discussions with three institutions involved in the development of education policy in Latvia, with the aim of exploring the perceptions of representatives of these institutions on the SLO and identifying to what extent these institutions comprehend the performance indicators of all SLO dimensions, reflecting on the implementation of the opportunities and practice of the SLO in Latvia.

2. Materials and Methods

The research sample consists of all institutions involved in the development of education policy in Latvia (n = 3), which makes the sample representative at the national level. Although the sample institutions are publicly known, the authors of the research decided to maintain anonymity considering the ethical principles.

Within the framework of the research, by purposefully addressing the institutions involved in Latvian education policy-making, which will be referred to as institution 1, institution 2 and institution 3, focus group discussions with the representatives of these institutions were conducted on a voluntary basis. The purpose of the focus group discussions was to explore Latvian education policy institutions' understanding of the SLO and to identify in detail to what extent, e.g., how often and how accurately, the aforementioned institutions raise the performance indicators of all SLO dimensions when reflecting on the SLO implementation opportunities and practice in Latvia. Within the focus group discussions, 7 codes—the 7 dimensions of the SLO model and 49 sub-codes—were searched for and analysed as performance indicators for these dimensions [1]. The inductive qualitative content analysis also led to the identification of an additional code—the characteristics of the SLO (see Figure 1).

To achieve the goal of the research, semi-structured interviews were used, which provide an opportunity to obtain in-depth information about the research problem, asking complementary and clarifying questions where necessary [43]. Three semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted in the period from 25 August 2022 to 28 August 2022. The interviews lasted on average 1 h and 30 min, were voluntary, were conducted remotely through video and audio recording and were subsequently transcribed. Oral informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the focus group discussions.

Content analysis of all three focus group discussions was conducted in the qualitative data processing programme QSR NVivo 12, identifying keywords characterising the SLO and coding the seven dimensions of the SLO, identifying to what extent a particular dimension is actualised as follows: (1) determining the number of coded units (unique references) for each dimension, which indicates how often representatives of institutions involved in education policy-making talk about it; (2) obtaining coverage, which indicates how succinctly or extensively the interviewed representatives of institutions reflect on it;

(3) analysing how content-accurate and detailed the statements of the interviewed representatives of institutions on each SLO dimension are according to performance indicators of the SLO defined in the sources of scientific literature [1].

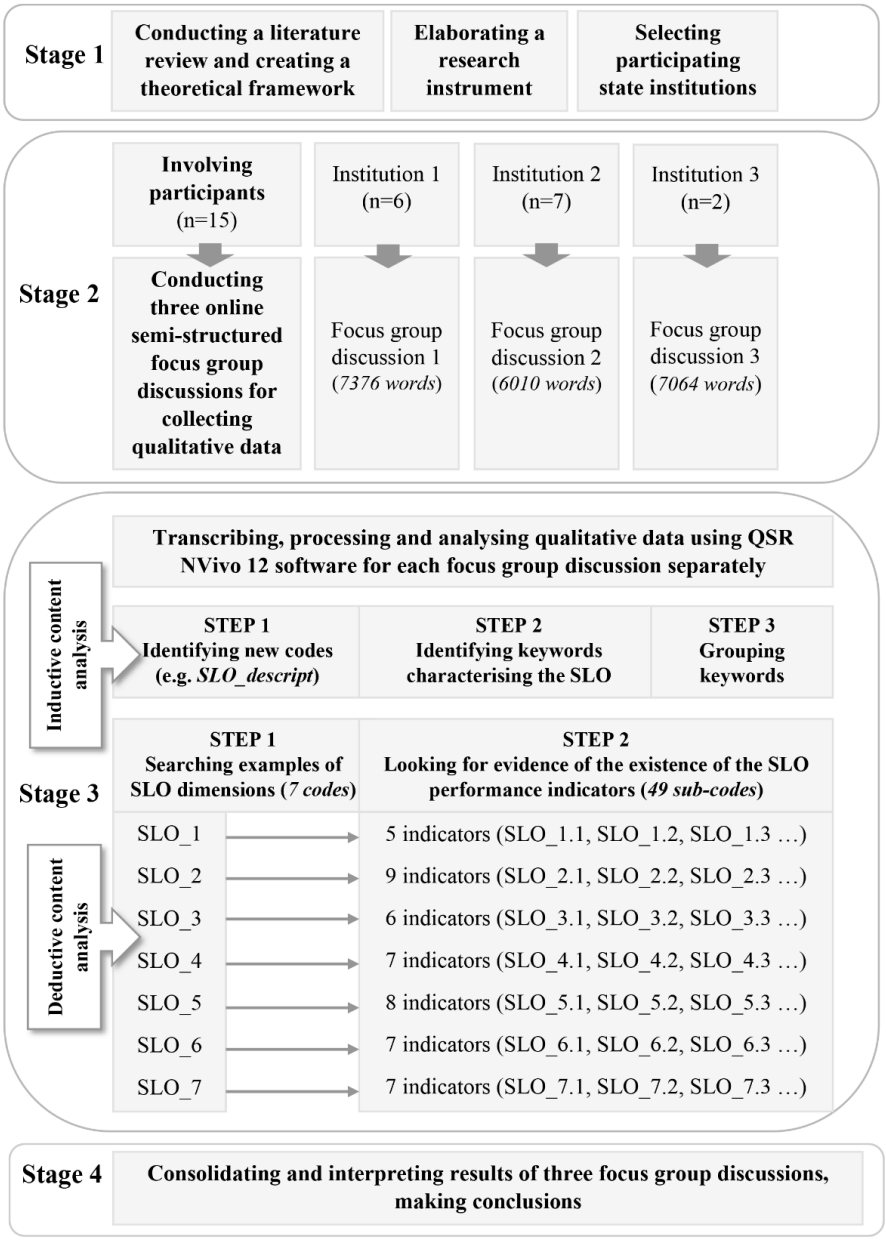


Figure 1. A visual model of the research design.

Examples of specific codes were also analysed looking for evidence of the existence of performance indicators (sub-codes) for each dimension. If a specific performance indicator was identified in the interviews of all institutions, it was considered that evidence was found; if a specific performance indicator was identified in the interview of at least one institution, it was considered that partial evidence was found; if it was not identified in any interview, it was assumed that no evidence was found.

Two-step deductive content analysis and three-step inductive content analysis were conducted concurrently. The analysis of the results for each focus group discussion was carried out separately and then the obtained data were aggregated to draw common conclusions (see Figure 1).

3. Results

As a result of the deductive qualitative content analysis, which was conducted in the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo 12 by coding three semi-structured focus group discussions with institution 1, institution 2 and institution 3, seven dimensions of the SLO were identified (see Table 1). It was found that, in all three institutions together, the most actualised SLO dimensions (with the highest number of unique references) are modelling learning leadership (n = 31) and team learning and collaboration (n = 28), while the least actualised (with the lowest number of unique references) are culture of inquiry and innovation (n = 12) and a shared vision on the learning of all students (n = 9).

Table 1. Frequency and proportion of the use of codes identified in focus group discussions.

Codes	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Total
	Count of Unique References (Coverage, %)	Count of Unique References (Coverage, %)	Count of Unique References (Coverage, %)	Count of Unique References
SLO_1 (A shared vision centred on the learning of all students)	5 (7.70)	2 (0.60)	2 (0.91)	9
SLO_2 (Continuous learning opportunities for all staff)	12 (9.18)	8 (5.14)	1 (1.45)	21
SLO_3 (Team learning and collaboration among all staff)	9 (9.51)	16 (7.35)	3 (2.92)	28
SLO_4 (A culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration)	6 (6.02)	3 (1.52)	3 (1.79)	12
SLO_5 (Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and expertise)	10 (7.13)	1 (0.80)	3 (1.58)	14
SLO_6 (Learning with and from the external environment)	5 (2.26)	14 (8.22)	3 (1.44)	22
SLO_7 (Modelling and growing learning leadership)	12 (10.86)	14 (7.20)	5 (6.66)	31
SLO_descript (The characteristics of the SLO)	6 (7.36)	7 (2.58)	5 (7.26)	18

Note. The number of unique references does not always coincide with the total number of references, as one coded unit (reference) can cover several sub-codes (i.e., performance indicators within one SLO dimension). This note also applies to all other tables.

As a result of the inductive content analysis, an additional code "The characteristics of the SLO" was identified, which reflects the general perception of the representatives of the institutions on the nature of the SLO. The named keywords can be grouped into three directions: (1) related to the management of the organisation, e.g., *competent leader, management model, organisation of the educational process, system/community, data-based decisions*; (2) describing the internal environment of the school and the culture of the organisation, e.g., *collaboration within the organisation, shared and continuous learning, support and respect*; and (3) related to 'going beyond' the walls of the organisation, e.g., *collaboration with other schools, organisations, companies, networking, etc.*

3.1. Dimension of "Developing a Shared Vision Centred on the Learning of All Students"

Code SLO_1 ("A shared vision centred on the learning of all students") was identified nine times in all three focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 5), institution 2 (n = 2) and institution 3 (n = 2) (see Table 2). When analysing to what extent the SLO_1 dimension performance indicators were mentioned when the interviewees reflected on the opportunities and practice of the SLO implementation in Latvia, it was found that representatives of all three institutions talked about the SLO_1.4 performance indicator

in relation to the understanding of the vision as a result of joint work. For example, institution 1 suggested that "[. . .] *the goal is communicated in a way that not only teachers and school management, but also the students and parents understand, they understand it, but it is a common goal and in fact a shared responsibility for achieving that goal*". Meanwhile, the representative of institution 3 stressed the strategic role of the heads of institutions in involving different parties in defining the vision: "[. . .] *the heads of institutions define strategic issues in a democratic governance process, which would be both the mission and the vision, which they talk about on their part and really involve widely all parties to define and use it as a resource in the management processes*". The representative of institution 2 also emphasised that one of the keywords of the SLO concept was "*the willingness of everyone to look in the same direction, in the direction of achieving the goals*".

Table 2. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students".

Dimension SLO_1 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 32))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
A shared and inclusive vision aims to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes of all students (SLO_1.1)	4 (7.11)	-	-	Partly
The vision focuses on a broad range of learning outcomes, encompasses both the present and the future, and is inspiring and motivating (SLO_1.2)	2 (1.30)	-	-	Partly
Learning and teaching are oriented towards realising the vision (SLO_1.3)	1 (3.40)	1 (0.14)	-	Partly
Vision is the outcome of a process involving all staff (SLO_1.4)	1 (0.58)	1 (0.47)	1 (0.46)	Yes
Students, parents, the external community and other partners are invited to contribute to the school's vision (SLO_1.5)	1 (0.58)	-	2 (0.91)	Partly
Count of unique references	5	2	2	

Other performance indicators were only partially actualised (only one or two institutions talk about them). For example, institution 1 actualised performance indicators SLO_1.1, SLO_1.2 and SLO_1.3, stating that "*in principle, we should not deviate for a moment from the main objective, which is the student's learning outcome. We expect that if a school implements these types of practices, students learn more. To achieve the result, it is necessary to ensure the maximum possible involvement of every child in the learning process and to give them the maximum possible support*".

3.2. Dimension of "Creating and Supporting Continuous Professional Learning for All Staff"

Code SLO_2 ("Continuous learning opportunities for all staff") was identified 21 times in all three focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 12), institution 2 (n = 8) and institution 3 (n = 1) (see Table 3). When analysing the extent to which the SLO_2 dimension's performance indicators were actualised by reflecting on the opportunities and practice of the SLO in Latvia, it was found that the SLO_2.8 performance indicator was actualised by representatives of all three institutions: "[. . .] *the team supports each other and,*

in my opinion, the time resource is very important, so in a school as a learning organisation there should be time allocated only for teachers for mutual collaboration and learning activities".

Table 3. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Creating and supporting continuous professional learning for all staff".

Dimension SLO_2 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 36))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
All staff engage in continuous professional learning (SLO_2.1)	-	1 (0.31)	-	Partly
New staff receive induction and mentoring support (SLO_2.2)	-	1 (1.31)	1 (1.45)	Partly
Professional learning is focused on student learning and school goals (SLO_2.3)	1 (0.69)	2 (1.02)	-	Partly
Staff are fully engaged in identifying the aims and priorities for their own professional learning (SLO_2.4)	2 (1.41)	3 (2.82)		Partly
Professional learning challenges thinking as part of changing practice (SLO_2.5)	3 (0.86)	1 (1.27)	-	Partly
Professional learning connects work-based learning and external expertise (SLO_2.6)	6 (4.20)	2 (0.37)	-	Partly
Professional learning is based on assessment and feedback (SLO_2.7)	2 (0.63)	1 (0.28)	-	Partly
Time and other resources are provided to support professional learning (SLO_2.8)	1 (0.56)	1 (1.31)	1 (1.45)	Yes
The school's culture promotes and supports professional learning (SLO_2.9)	4 (3.51)	1 (0.33)	-	Partly
Count of unique references	12	8	1	

The other performance indicators were only partially addressed, as they were only mentioned by representatives of one or two institutions. For example, the representatives of institution 2 considered that the "*SLO is a school where everyone learns, from the staff to the pupils, parents are also involved, maybe even other members of society are involved*", thus raising performance indicator SLO_2 in their reflection. On the other hand, both institution 2 and institution 3 touch upon the topic of support for novice principals, partly addressing performance indicator SLO_2.2. For example, the representative of institution 2 pointed out the following: "*Various coaching methods are used. I think it makes a difference because you can see that the general way of thinking about running an institution is changing. It certainly helps the young people in their daily work where they have not had such experience before*". The representative of institution 3 pointed out that "*currently the system has been established where the heads of educational institutions, once they have been appointed, have two years to learn to understand what it means to be a head, and they have 60 h of training, followed by 40 h of mentoring*".

It should be noted that institution 1 representatives highlighted performance indicator SLO_2.6 the most in their reflection, linking it also to other indicators of this dimension, stating that "[. . .] *the best development of professional competence a teacher can gain in his own school from his colleagues*" (SLO_2.6), "[. . .] *there is no better way to become a good teacher than to get valuable feedback from your colleagues*" (SLO_2.6 and SLO_2.7) and "[. . .] *in professional*

development. . . you need modelling, you need doing, you need feedback and then positive changes happen, then beliefs and value system also change" (SLO_2.5, SLO_2.6 and SLO_2.7).

3.3. Dimension of "Promoting Team Learning and Collaboration among All Staff"

The code SLO_3 ("Team learning and collaboration among all staff") was identified 28 times in all three focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 9), institution 2 (n = 16) and institution 3 (n = 3) (see Table 4). When analysing the extent to which the SLO_3 dimension performance indicators were actualised when reflecting on the SLO implementation opportunities and practice in Latvia, four performance indicators (SLO_3.1, SLO_3.2, SLO_3.3 and SLO_3.6) were actualised in the focus group discussions of all three institutions.

Table 4. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff".

Dimension SLO_3 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 40))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
Staff learn how to work together as a team (SLO_3.1)	3 (3.04)	4 (1.29)	1 (1.68)	Yes
Collaborative working and collective learning face-to-face and through ICTs are focused and enhance learning experiences and outcomes of students and/or staff practice (SLO_3.2)	6 (6.53)	7 (4.54)	1 (0.65)	Yes
Staff feel comfortable turning to each other for consultation and advice (SLO_3.3)	2 (2.06)	1 (0.87)	1 (0.60)	Yes
Trust and mutual respect are core values (SLO_3.4)	1 (1.04)	4 (0.83)	-	Partly
Staff reflect together on how to make their own learning more powerful (SLO_3.5)	1 (0.22)	-	-	Partly
The school allocates time and other resources for collaborative working and collective learning (SLO_3.6)	1 (0.36)	2 (1.10)	1 (0.65)	Yes
Count of unique references	9	16	3	

The most frequent and most extensive discussion among the representatives of the institutions is on the performance indicator SLO_3.2, linking it also to the other performance indicators of this dimension. For example, "[. . .] *mutual learning within the institution—learning from each other, trusting, sharing—I think [is] a very important aspect that would characterise this, that in a school as a learning organisation, teachers are not isolated in their classrooms and it is not a situation that they do not let anyone in to observe their lessons and they do not give their experience to anyone else, but they are open and share what they have, they participate in mutual activities with the best*" (Institution 1 for SLO_3.2 in relation to SLO_3.3 and SLO_3.4); "[. . .] *mutual communication and a positive microclimate in the institution are important, which contributes to the fact that teachers and representatives of the administration cooperate with each other and complement each other's knowledge*" (Institution 2 on SLO_3.2 in relation to SLO_3.3 and SLO_3.6).

The SLO_3.5 performance indicator was identified in a focus group discussion with representatives of institution 1, where it was mentioned that the SLO is based on "[. . .] *shared thinking about better solutions to guide and support each child's learning*". The performance indicator SLO_3.4 was raised in two discussions (with representatives of institution 1 and institution 2): "[. . .] *the approach of the school as a learning organisation should promote a microclimate and positive relationships* [. . .] *promote culture and attitude issues*" (Institution 2).

3.4. Dimension of "Establishing a Culture of Inquiry, Exploration and Innovation"

Code SLO_4 ("A culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration") was identified 12 times in all three focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 6), institution 2 (n = 3) and institution 3 (n = 3) (see Table 5). When analysing the extent to which the SLO_4 dimension performance indicators were raised when reflecting on SMO implementation opportunities and practice in Latvia, one performance indicator (SLO_4.4) was actualised in the focus group discussions of all three institutions: "[. . .] *everyone is learning how to shape learning by offering through innovation that I learn this and I guide [students] in a direction of what is new in the world, because in this way I also build my learning culture*" (Institution 1); "[. . .] *following the processes around, and that includes innovation*" (Institution 3). The other performance indicators were only partially addressed, that is, by representatives of one or two institutions. Regarding performance indicator SLO_4.1, institution 3 representatives shared examples of good practice in schools in Latvia: "*If we talk about governance processes, the principal of school X together with his colleagues have developed data-based governance, it is a extremely specific approach and I think that their example certainly will not fit most educational institutions, but this is one of the rare cases where our colleagues have put an "excellent" rating on governance processes in some criteria, which means that they see innovation in data mining and management processes related to governance*".

Table 5. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Establishing a culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation".

Dimension SLO_4 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 45))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
Staff want and dare to experiment and innovate in their practice (SLO_4.1)	-	1 (0.52)	1 (1.04)	Partly
The school supports and recognises staff for taking initiative and risks (SLO_4.2)	1 (0.57)	1 (0.52)	-	Partly
Staff engage in forms of inquiry to investigate and extend their practice (SLO_4.3)	2 (3.08)	1 (0.29)	-	Partly
Inquiry is used to establish and maintain a rhythm of learning, change and innovation (SLO_4.4)	1 (0.45)	1 (0.70)	2 (0.75)	Yes
Staff have open minds towards doing things differently (SLO_4.5)	-	1 (0.29)	-	Partly
Problems and mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning (SLO_4.6)	2 (2.12)	-	-	Partly
Students are actively engaged in inquiry (SLO_4.7)	1 (0.38)	-	-	Partly
Count of unique references	6	3	3	

Institution 1 representatives believe that in the context of the SLO "[. . .] *it is necessary to remove the artificial aura that we have put over the teacher, that he cannot make mistakes, because he, just like the student, learns from mistakes, learns in the process*. . ." (SLO_4.6), because it is necessary to ensure a school climate and environment where "*teachers are able to analyse their own work and are able to reflect on the work of their students and understand what support needs they have and also dare to name them out loud and tell the management and colleagues that support is needed on a particular issue*" (SLO_4.2 and SLO_4.6). According to the representatives of institution 2, school staff should be encouraged "*to be motivated to be better and to provide better support to students, that is, to look for the right approaches and in this way to move towards the goa*l". (SLO_4.3 and SLO_4.5).

3.5. Dimension of "Embedding Systems for Collecting and Exchanging Knowledge and Learning"

Code SLO_5 ("Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and expertise") was identified 14 times in all three focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 10), institution 2 (n = 1) and institution 3 (n = 3) (see Table 6). As a representative of institution 1 pointed out in the discussion, "*everything related to the use and management of data is a very challenging block*", thus it was currently difficult to judge the actualisation of the performance indicators for this dimension, as two performance indicators (SLO_5.2 and SLO_5.8) were not actualised in any focus group discussion and all other indicators were partially actualised, except SLO_5.4, indicating a relatively low actualisation of the systemic and data-based improvement dimension.

Table 6. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning".

Dimension SLO_5 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 50))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
Systems are in place to examine progress and gaps between current and expected impact (SLO_5.1)	1 (0.62)	-	-	Partly
Examples of practice—good and bad—are made available to all staff to analyse (SLO_5.2)	-	-	-	No
Sources of research evidence are readily available and easily accessed (SLO_5.3)	1 (0.49)	-	-	Partly
Structures for regular dialogue and knowledge exchange are in place (SLO_5.4)	4 (4.13)	1 (0.80)	1 (0.65)	Yes
Staff have the capacity to analyse and use multiple sources of data for feedback, including through ICT, to inform teaching and allocate resources (SLO_5.5)	2 (1.43)	-	1 (0.43)	Partly
The school development plan is evidence-informed, based on learning from self-assessment and updated regularly (SLO_5.6)	3 (1.45)	-	2 (0.94)	Partly
The school regularly evaluates its theories of action, amending and updating them as necessary (SLO_5.7)	3 (1.07)	-	-	Partly
The school evaluates the impact of professional learning (SLO_5.8)	-	-	-	No
Count of unique references	10	1	3	

Most of the performance indicators of this dimension were raised in the focus group discussion with institution 1 representatives: "*It is clear that the SLO can be built if we have the data and the tools to properly obtain the data, select the data* [. . .]" (SLO_5.3); "[. . .] *decisions are made based on data, and shared learning takes place in different combinations for both management and teachers according to what is needed in each team to move towards the goal*" (SLO_5.4 and SLO_5.6); "[. . .] *data-based decision-making, building development solutions allows continuous improvement of the school as the SLO*" (SLO_5.6 and SLO_5.7).

3.6. Dimension of "Learning with and from the External Environment and Larger System"

Code SLO_6 ("Learning with and from the external environment") was identified 22 times in all focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 5), institution 2 (n = 14) and institution 3 (n = 3) (see Table 7). When analysing the extent to which the SLO_6 dimension performance indicators were actualised, reflecting on the opportunities and practice of the SLO in Latvia, it was found that one performance indicator of school networking and collaboration (SLO_6.5) was brought up in the focus group discussions of all three institutions, linking it also to other performance indicators within this dimension: "[. . .] *in the mutually determined thematic area, schools cooperate, support each other methodologically and share experience*" (Institution 2 on SLO_6.5 in relation to SLO_6.1); "[. . .] *it is essential that teachers are constantly part of some kind of large networks, which means that they are in networks and very often change comes to them through different kinds of networks and external experiences, and they also do not "hold a candle under the dowry", they very often also share their own experiences*" (Institution 3 on SLO_6.5 in relation to SLO_6.3); "*the school needs to build cooperation with families, with external networks and with external organisations, building this kind of ecosystem*" (Institution 1 on SLO_6.5 in relation to SLO_6.2, SLO_6.4 and SLO_6.6).

Table 7. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Learning with and from the external environment and larger system".

Dimension SLO_6 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 54))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
The school scans its external environment to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities (SLO_6.1)	-	4 (2.01)	1 (0.31)	Partly
The school is an open system, welcoming approaches from potential external collaborators (SLO_6.2)	1 (0.43)	2 (1.16)	-	Partly
Partnerships are based on equality of relationships and opportunities for mutual learning (SLO_6.3)	-	-	2 (1.13)	Partly
The school collaborates with parents/guardians and the community as partners in the education process and the organisation of the school (SLO_6.4)	2 (0.71)	2 (1.30)	-	Partly
Staff collaborate, learn and exchange knowledge with peers in other schools through networks and/or school-to-school collaborations (SLO_6.5)	4 (1.97)	3 (2.57)	1 (0.69)	Yes
The school partners with higher education institutions, businesses and/or public or non-governmental organisations in efforts to deepen and extend learning (SLO_6.6)	1 (0.43)	5 (3.45)	-	Partly
ICT is widely used to facilitate communication, knowledge exchange and collaboration with the external environment (SLO_6.7)	-	2 (1.00)	-	Partly
Count of unique references	5	14	3	

3.7. Dimension of "Modelling and Growing Learning Leadership"

Code SLO_7 ("Modelling and growing learning leadership") was identified 31 times across all focus group discussions as follows: institution 1 (n = 12), institution 2 (n = 14) and institution 3 (n = 5) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Results of coding the performance indicators of the dimension "Modelling and growing learning leadership".

Dimension SLO_7 Performance Indicators (after [1] (p. 58))	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Evidence Found
	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	Count of References (Coverage, %)	
School leaders model learning leadership, distribute leadership and help grow other leaders, including students (SLO_7.1)	1 (1.71)	1 (0.86)	2 (4.66)	Yes
School leaders are proactive and creative change agents (SLO_7.2)	2 (0.68)	6 (3.04)	2 (0.82)	Yes
School leaders develop the culture, structures and conditions to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange (SLO_7.3)	5 (5.39)	3 (1.59)	-	Partly
School leaders ensure that the organisation's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values (SLO_7.4)	4 (5.28)	-	-	Partly
School leaders ensure the school is characterised by a "rhythm" of learning, change and innovation (SLO_7.5)	1 (0.78)	3 (1.84)	2 (1.86)	Yes
School leaders promote and participate in strong collaboration with other schools, parents, the community, higher education institutions and other partners (SLO_7.6)	1 (0.43)	4 (2.01)	-	Partly
School leaders ensure an integrated approach to responding to students' learning and other needs (SLO_7.7)	2 (2.74)	1 (0.42)	-	Partly
Count of unique references	12	14	5	

Analysing to what extent the SLO_7 dimension performance indicators were brought up when reflecting on the SLO implementation opportunities and practice in Latvia, it was found that three performance indicators (SLO_7.1, SLO_7.2 and SLO_7.5) were brought up in all three institutions' focus group discussions, where the emphasis was on school leaders' multiple skills and general competences. Although performance indicator SLO_7.1 was mentioned in all three discussions, it was most often raised in a relatively narrow way, that is, as a delegation of responsibilities to vice-principals, sometimes in the context of the concept of shared leadership. The most frequent indicators of this dimension were raised in the focus group discussions with institution 1 and institution 2: "[. . .] *school management must have the ability to plan strategically, but if I think about it, this is one of the most essential qualities of a manager. Or a school leader has to be a person who follows the latest discoveries and innovations, but in reality a leader should have this quality a priori in order to be a school leader*" (Institution 1 on SLO_7.4 and SLO_7.5); "*I would like to say that our principals, definitely mostly are leaders and agents and instigators of change in their schools*" (Institution 2 on SLO_7.2); "[. . .] *a leader is by nature someone who is able to inspire, engage, excite and does not stand in the way of achieving goals, [he] must also have a certain amount of creativity and the ability to see beyond his own field, to look beyond, what are the activities that are transferable and adaptable to completely different contexts, but implementable in an educational institution*" (Institution 1 for SLO_7.2 and SLO_7.3). In the focus group discussion with institution 3, the data literacy of school leaders and their ability to proactively lead change processes and introduce innovations was raised: "[. . .] *institutional leaders know how to lead development based on data and they also know how to select the data to work with and how to advance that development, they are often ambitious, and they are able to define the*

innovations they want to introduce, and therefore they know how to build change processes and they follow these change processes in their implementation using data" (SLO_7.2 and SLO_7.5).

From the perspective of the results of the inductive content analysis, the dimensions that are most relevant are SLO_7 ("Modelling and growing learning leadership"), emphasising the role of leadership in process development; SLO_6 ("Learning with and from the external environment and larger system") in relation to building collaboration with organisations outside the school; and SLO_3 ("Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff"), emphasising collaboration among school staff, improvement and quality enhancement. On the other hand, the key words do not identify systems for knowledge accumulation (SLO_5) and innovation (SLO_4). These findings partly correspond to the deductive content analysis results regarding the most and the least evident understanding of the above-mentioned SLO dimension performance indicators.

Summarising the deductive content analysis results of policy makers' beliefs regarding the concept of the SLO (Figure 2), the main highlights are as follows:

1. The most evident is the understanding of performance indicators of SLO_3 ("Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff"), followed by the understanding of resultative indicators of SLO_7 ("Modelling and growing learning leadership").
2. Less evident is the understanding of SLO_5 performance indicators ("Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning"). There is no evidence regarding two resultative indicators, SLO_5.2 ("Examples of practice—good and bad—are made available to all staff to analyse") and SLO_5.8 ("The school evaluates the impact of professional learning").
3. Moderately evident is the understanding of performance indicators of all other dimensions, e.g., SLO_1 ("Developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students"), SLO_2 ("Creating and supporting continuous professional learning for all staff"), SLO_4 ("Establishing a culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation") and SLO_6 ("Learning with and from the external environment and larger system"). There is evidence regarding four performance indicators, such as SLO_1.4 ("Vision is the outcome of a process involving all staff"), SLO_2.8 ("Time and other resources are provided to support professional learning"), SLO_4.4 ("Inquiry is used to establish and maintain a rhythm of learning, change and innovation") and SLO_6.5 ("Staff collaborate, learn and exchange knowledge with peers in other schools through networks and/or school-to-school collaborations"). Evidence was found partly regarding all other performance indicators of SLO_1, SLO_2, SLO_4 and SLO_6 dimensions.

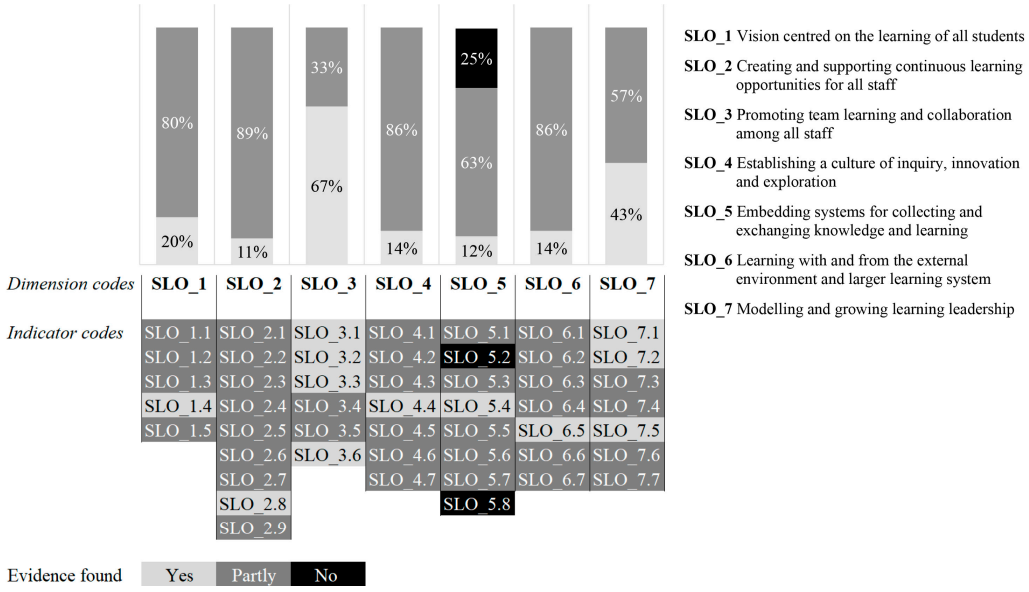


Figure 2. Summary of the deductive content analysis results.

The figure visualises which performance indicators of the SLO dimensions have been found to have evidence and what is their percentage of the total number of indicators in each SLO dimension.

4. Discussion

The SLO theoretical model requires the implementation of seven dimensions and their 49 performance indicators as part of the transformation of the school governance model [1,18]. The data obtained in this research show that, in focus group discussions with the education policy makers in Latvia, 37 performance indicators of the SLO dimensions were identified partially or not identified at all. Thus, for example, the data on the SLO dimension "A shared vision centred on learning of all students" show that one of the five performance indicators was fully actualised in the reflection of the education policy makers in Latvia on the opportunities and practice of the SLO in Latvia. Since the main goal of the implementation of the SLO is to ensure the expansion of the learning experience of all students and the improvement of academic performance, the partial actualisation of this dimension may create limitations for the successful implementation of the SLO as a system-wide school management model in all educational institutions in Latvia.

Therefore, it is important to raise the issue of education reforms and the transformation of the school governance model ensuring the learning of all students at the level of education policy in Latvia in order to avoid a situation where reforms in the education sector are implemented but their relationship to students' learning outcomes and experiences is not outlined. At the same time, linking education reforms to students' learning also determines the necessity to actualise other dimensions of the SLO in the national policy, such as the continuous professional development of all school employees. In this context, the role of teachers in the implementation of change is particularly highlighted, as their professional performance and attitudes towards the reforms undertaken in the education sector determine how successful or unsuccessful they will be [4,27,44,45].

The lowest actualisation indicators are currently related to the SLO dimension "Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning", although the successful implementation of this dimension can provide the opportunity to implement other SLO dimensions. This can be explained by the fact that, in the context of the reforms undertaken in the education system in Latvia, not enough examples of good practice have yet been identified which would make it possible to judge how schools implement the performance indicators of this SLO dimension. The data obtained in the research can also be explained by the fact that the issues of digitalisation, changing the school governance model and interdisciplinarity have been highlighted in the education system in Latvia relatively recently. Therefore, the responsibility of not only school leaders but also education policy makers to offer practical, data- and experience-based solutions for the implementation of the SLO dimensions in the practice of every school in Latvia increases. In addition, the experience of other countries, such as Finland, shows that the implementation of educational reforms affecting the school governance model is a time-consuming process, as it involves various elements such as building and strengthening a culture of professional collaboration in schools, decentralising the education system, increasing school autonomy, etc. [46].

In the context of the transformation of the education system in Latvia and the implementation of the SLO [34], the question of how to ensure a common understanding among policy makers and to accumulate examples of good practice in the implementation of the SLO dimensions is an urgent issue, the solution of which is needed to ensure a system of mutual learning and knowledge accumulation not only within individual schools, but within the entire education system. Without taking into account the mutual interaction of the specific performance indicators within the SLO dimensions, there is a risk that ignoring or interpreting specific indicators differently may undermine the opportunities to implement changes to Latvia's school governance model that are in line with SLO's scientific model.

In the focus group discussions conducted as part of the study, the performance indicators of two SLO dimensions, "Modelling and growing learning leadership" and "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff", were the most highlighted. The data on the SLO dimension "Modelling and growing learning leadership" can be explained by the tendency in the education policy of Latvia to emphasise the role and responsibility of school leaders in ensuring quality education and in developing schools into learning organisations. Moreover, school leaders are the direct target group of education policy makers, with whom they have the most extensive contact and direct reporting relationships. This also explains the relatively comprehensive representation of the performance indicators of this SLO dimension in the responses of policy makers, which is highlighted in the context of the implementation of the principle of shared leadership and gradual decentralisation in the education system of Latvia. The importance of collaborative relationships and shared leadership in the transformation of schools into learning organisations is also supported by other studies [47–51], emphasising the individual and collective role of school leaders and teachers in the implementation of learning for all students and professional development of teachers, where such leadership ensures coherence and stability of change.

On the other hand, the relatively high score of the SLO dimension "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" can be explained by the fact that, in the context of the ongoing reforms in the education system in Latvia, where a gradual transition to the implementation of the competence-based approach in the curriculum is taking place, the need for collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the education process is being emphasised. Moreover, this need is highlighted not only at the level of a single school, but also within the wider education ecosystem. So, for example, collaboration between teachers at the school level in terms of defining common learning outcomes and developing common plans within a subject area is seen as a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of the initiated reforms. Furthermore, collaboration as an effective component of the learning process in Latvia has also been highlighted in previous education policy evaluation reports [52]; thus, education policy implementers in Latvia have developed a deeper understanding of the role of collaboration and collective learning in the processes of change in education. However, the obtained data also show that not all performance indicators of this SLO dimension are actualised to their full extent by the education policy implementers in Latvia, e.g., regarding the shared reflection of school employees on improving their own learning. This means that at school level in Latvia it is important to think about the development of individual and collective reflection skills of school staff, the practical application of which can have a positive impact on the quality of shared learning of school employees and promote the implementation of the school's defined vision, mission and values in practice.

The performance indicators of other SLO dimensions, such as "Learning with and from the external environment and larger system", show the moderate rate of actualisation in the responses of the education policy makers in Latvia. This can be explained by the extensive involvement of non-school institutions and organisations in education processes in Latvia in the form of organising guest lectures in schools, implementing cooperation projects with companies, signing long-term cooperation agreements with universities, participating in events organised by state institutions, etc. These activities are publicly available and strengthen public awareness of the SLO and its interaction with other types of systems. In addition, the institutions responsible for the implementation of education policy in Latvia are directly responsible for ensuring that decision-making on education reform issues is based on cooperation and data.

The moderate actualisation of the performance indicators of the SMO dimension "Establishing a culture of inquiry, exploration and innovation" is explained by the fact that the education policy makers in Latvia have relatively limited exposure to the internal environment of schools and their organisational culture, which makes it difficult to identify examples of good practice in the culture of innovation and exploration in schools. At the same time, it should be noted that, in a study on SLO in Greece in 2020 [53], which was

based on the SLO model developed by Kools and Stool [1], this dimension was removed by reallocating its performance indicators to other SMO dimensions or abandoning them entirely. This raises the question of whether the scientific formulation and justification of this dimension of the SLO has been successful, as its understanding is limited both by researchers and policy makers. If the performance indicators of this SLO dimension could be defined and communicated more clearly to stakeholders, its performance could also be improved at the level of practical examples, and this would be applicable to both educational research and its practical implementation in education policy.

The authors of the study conclude that a partial or insufficient understanding of the performance indicators of each SLO dimension may negatively affect the opportunities to implement the SLO model in practice, despite the fact that it is one of the strategic goals of the education policy of Latvia [34,40,41]. The results of the study show that, in reflecting on the opportunities and practice of the SLO in Latvia, there is still no consensus among education policy makers on what is meant by each dimension of the SLO scientific model and its performance indicators. Such results can be explained by the fact that the need to implement the SLO as a unified school management model in Latvia has only been raised in the context of the launch of the project "Competence-based approach to curriculum" in 2016.

This means that time is required to gain a coherent understanding of the content of all SLO dimensions and their performance indicators and to draw data-based conclusions on which SLO performance indicators are a priority in the context of Latvia in order to transform schools into learning organisations. A similar study with the involvement of policy makers would be necessary in 2030, when the students who started school in 2018 with the practical implementation of the project "Competence-based approach to curriculum" will have graduated from secondary school. This would enable an in-depth understanding of how the SLO model has been implemented in Latvia and to reflect on the challenges that promote and limit the opportunities for the implementation of this model in school management practice in Latvia.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Academic Ethics Codex of the University of Latvia (decision No. 2-3/46, 26 April 2021).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Due to legal and ethical reasons, we cannot share the raw or processed data required to reproduce the above findings at this time.

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