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Learning Organization Practices in Latvian Schools: Perspectives from School Staff, Students, and Parents

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze the current practice of implementing an approach to the school as a learning organization (SLO) in general and vocational education in Latvia. The OECD integrated SLO model was used to find out whether there were differences between the opinions of school staff, students, and parents on the current practice of implementing the SLO approach in schools. A concurrent triangulation design was implemented, in which qualitative (school staff, n = 38) and quantitative (students, n = 990; parents, n = 620) data were collected concurrently, followed by a separate data analysis, after which the results of the studies were merged and triangulated. One of the key prerequisites for a school to become a learning organization is leadership, which is implemented on a daily basis by the school principal or an extended school management team. The results of the study indicate that, based on the analysis of students' and parents' opinions, learning leadership is one of the weakest dimensions of the SLO. The study also concludes that students' and parents' views on learning with and from the external environment and the wider system in their educational institution are not so positive, and that there is a need to raise the awareness of the school staff of the importance of collaboration in the current implementation practice of the SLO approach. It is necessary to ensure that purposeful cooperation and joint action are implemented at the school level to achieve the common goals of the school.

Keywords: learning organization; school as a learning organization; educational leadership; educational policy



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1. Introduction

Traditional models of education are not suitable for developing the competences necessary for the 21st century [1]. Nowadays, education needs to focus much more on developing students' creative, critical approaches to problem solving and decision making, offering students a learning process where they can influence what and how they learn [2,3]. At the same time, students' interests, motivation, and wellbeing must also be taken into account in the learning process [2,3] and schools must respond to rapid policy changes and increasingly high quality requirements [4]. Consequently, schools must engage in addressing these challenges and avoid over-reliance on traditional hierarchies to ensure accountability in their implementation, to encourage and empower teachers and school leaders to help shape policy and improve pedagogical processes through local research and by building local, national, and international collaborations to improve existing practice.

Policy makers, educators, and researchers are looking for alternative strategies that can promote change at the school level and affect all aspects of school culture [5], leading to a reconceptualization of schools as 'learning organizations' [6–11]. The argument for such a transformation is that schools which are learning organizations cope more effectively with

the external environment, promote change and innovation, improve the professional performance of school staff, and promote student learning [5]. While the previous generation expected a school to develop competences that were needed for life, schools today must develop competences that will prepare students to live and work in an environment that is constantly changing, including the skills to understand and use technologies that do not yet exist [5,12]. Along with rapid changes in teaching and learning processes, governance of educational institutions, learning content, and outcomes, an approach that considers school as a learning organization is gaining momentum worldwide.

The concept of the SLO has been a topical issue in the world for more than a couple of decades; however, the challenge remains the lack of clarity of the concept, including the insufficient number of systematic empirical studies and the related lack of understanding of the key features of the concept [6,13]. There is also a lack of clear guidance on how to implement the SLO in practice [14–16]. Although different typologies are proposed that encompass multiple learning organization perspectives [16–19], what is common is that the need for SLO development is related to rapidly changing external environmental conditions, as the nature of the learning organization approach is about the collective learning of the entire group to cope with external challenges and problems. Therefore, the learning organization is a natural model of organizational management that interacts directly with the processes taking place in the external environment. Nowadays, it can be observed that education systems are increasingly decentralizing and delegating responsibilities, so the prerequisite for the success of the SLO is a culture of trust, with shared setting and implementation of goals [4]. Currently, the evidence-based SLO model proposed by the OECD [20,21] is the most widely used in practice. It is based on research by Kools and Stool [16] and consists of seven dimensions and 49 indicators characterizing these dimensions. The SLO model is focused both on the internal dimensions, for example, related to the management and governance of learning, professional development, and resources within the school, and external dimensions, which extend the school's activities and role into the wider community and relationships with other systems. Such organizations support continuous professional development of teaching and leading staff [22–25] and autonomy [26,27], with the aim of improving the learning experience and achievements of students. With major school reform in 2011, aimed at developing and implementing a 21st-century school curriculum, Wales has become a model for other countries in implementing change, including in the introduction of the school as a learning organization. The need for the development of the SLO model was justified by the results of the 2009 OECD study 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA). In this study, Welsh students demonstrated mediocre performance, so a reform project was launched in 2011 with the aim to reorganize the education system [21]. The reforms were based on the Wales education action plan, within the framework of which it was planned to achieve four education goals over the period 2017–2021, helping to create: "(1) ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives; (2) enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work; (3) ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world; (4) healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society" [28] (p. 11). To achieve these four education goals, it was necessary to transform all Wales schools into effective learning organizations, believing that school as a learning approach is the key to enabling them to implement the new curriculum [21].

Over the past decade, Greece has also been interested in implementing the principles of the school as a learning organization. Greece is one of the few countries where the compliance of schools with Kools and Stoll's [16] SLO model has been studied at the national level [29], despite the fact that the Greek education system is characterized as highly centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and formal [30–32], which in turn makes it difficult to design education policies that support innovation and the creation of new knowledge. In the case of Greece, this can be explained by the fact that educational reforms have historically been met with resistance because they can disrupt the status quo

fostered by a centralized education system [33], and this, in turn, can contribute to the hesitation of teachers to change their teaching methods, and parents may be concerned about the impact of the reforms on their children [34]. The education reform that started in 2011 gradually began to give school principals more autonomy and responsibility for the direction of school staff, continuous learning, and enhancing the quality of education. It also included autonomy in matters of innovation and in the implementation of data-driven improvements, as well as granting professional autonomy to teachers themselves, helping them to engage more in cognitive and innovation processes at the school level. However, in 2017, the OECD evaluation of Greek education policy concluded that the full transformation of schools into learning organizations was still hindered by the limited accountability of school principals and insufficient preparation and training in leadership issues, including shared learning with other school leaders.

Portugal is also a country that has made the modernization and quality of education one of its priorities at the national level. In 2016, Portugal set out and subsequently established the National Programme for the Promotion of School Success (Programa Nacional de Promoção do Sucesso Escolar, PNPSE, 2016-19) [35], which aims to improve the quality of education and the efficiency of school governance. This program emphasizes that schools as local learning communities better understand their context, challenges, and potential, and therefore are better able to find opportunities to solve local problems and develop more effective action plans that are aligned with individual goals of students and teachers and with the goals and priorities of the school, municipality, and region. It also allows experimentation and the identification of context-appropriate pedagogical practices. In this way, local learning communities are given greater freedom and autonomy. However, despite measures to increase school autonomy at the local level, the Portuguese education system is perceived as highly centralized [4,36].

In its national education policy, Latvia has set the goal of gradually transforming schools into effective SLOs. Since 2016, Latvia has been steadily moving towards a competence-based approach to teaching in general education, which also marks the introduction of a new approach to school governance, so that a school that teaches becomes a school that learns. The direction for the implementation of the SLO approach in the education system of Latvia is defined in the national education policy planning document “Education Development Guidelines 2021–2027” in relation to one of the key characteristics of the education system of Latvia, defined as “functional transformation of educational institutions” [37]. One of the goals of the education policy of Latvia, “Sustainable and effective management of the education system and resources” requires addressing the issue of “how to ensure strategic and effective management of the education system and institutions”. The implementation of the SLO approach is identified as an important aspect of achieving this goal through change management and the development of an internal organizational culture in educational institutions [37].

In a study on school accountability, Paletta [38] points out the importance of stakeholder involvement, starting from assessing the needs and expectations of the school community, to building consensus, communicating strengths, and being accountable. Successful implementation of the SLO concept in the system of education in Latvia is based on the interaction of the following stakeholder groups:

- educators—to plan and implement teaching at school in order to align curriculum and curriculum development, to regularly analyze students’ learning achievements and find the best solutions to improve each student’s learning, to share good pedagogical practices to improve teaching, to support each student’s learning, and to implement a deep learning approach;
- the management team (incl. principals)—to ensure the environment, conditions, and opportunities for teachers to work together in a professional learning community to solve the practical problems of the pedagogical process;

- the educational institution and the founder (incl. municipalities)—to ensure strategic planning, strengthen leadership, strategic planning, effective management, and quality assessment necessary for the management of the educational institution;
- the educational institution and the local community—to stay competitive in the labor market (especially important for vocational education institutions);
- the educational institution and the parents of the learners—to more effectively achieve educational goals, ensure socio-emotional wellbeing and provide career development opportunities;
- the educational institution and other institutions (including other educational institutions, businesses, higher education institutions, etc.)—to promote mutual learning and exchange of experience with external partners, talent development, alignment of learning content and outcomes with labor market requirements (particularly applicable to vocational education institutions).

Interaction between those groups is necessary for creating a learning organization, therefore the role of leadership is an invaluable resource in the SLO design. It is based on the idea that leadership is essential in implementing a learning organization: all the individual parts of learning organizations are held together, and leadership practices are aimed at implementing sustainable school leadership [4,16,20]. Therefore, in the context of the SLO implementation, leadership should be supportive [39], inclusive and collaborative [40], shared [18,41,42] across a wide team of professionals, and should also include students and parents.

This study is carried out within the framework of the research “A model and tool to support the implementation of the approach school as a learning organization in educational institutions”, currently (from July 2022 till the end of October 2023) being implemented within the European Social Fund project “Establishment and implementation of the Education Quality Monitoring System”. The research results are intended to contribute to the achievement of the goals set in the Guidelines for the Development of Education in Latvia 2021–2027, as well as to the improvement of the assessment of educational institutions’ quality, including tasks and recommendations provided to educational institutions for enhancing education quality.

Considering the importance of the stakeholders that are involved in the educational process and in the introduction and implementation of the SLO, a contextual analysis is necessary before starting to integrate the principles of the SLO into education in Latvia. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the current practice of the implementation of the learning organization approach in general and vocational education in Latvia and to find out whether there is a consensus among the school staff, students, and parents on current learning organization practice in schools.

To achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What are the opinions of the school staff, students, and parents on the current practice of implementing the learning organization dimensions in schools?
2. Are there any differences between the opinions of the school staff, students, and parents on implementing the learning organization dimensions in schools?

In the context of this study, the term “school” refers to general and vocational education institutions whose primary function is to ensure students’ learning—gaining new learning experiences and improving learning achievements in accordance with the general and vocational education standards established in the Republic of Latvia [43,44].

2. Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the aim of the study and to answer the research questions, a concurrent triangulation design was implemented, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected, then data analysis was carried out separately and the research results were merged and triangulated afterwards (Figure 1).

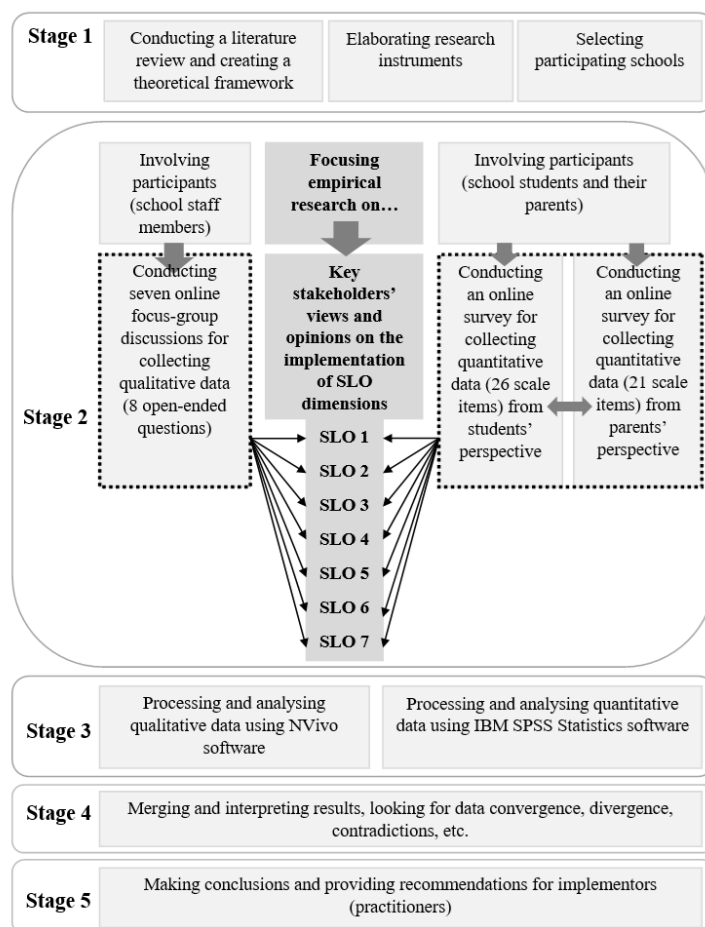


Figure 1. A visual model of the concurrent triangulation design used in mixed-method study (key stakeholders—school staff, students, and parents).

2.1. Sampling and Data Collection Methods

The research was carried out in two parts. In the first part, the qualitative data were obtained by selecting seven general and vocational education institutions according to the recommendations of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia and the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, using the non-probability convenience sampling method [45] and semi-structured interviews, which provided an opportunity to obtain in-depth information about the research problem, asking additional and clarifying questions if necessary [46].

Teachers, representatives of the administration, and support staff of three vocational education institutions and four general education institutions participated in the interviews ($n = 38$). Seven semi-structured interviews (one per school) were conducted with school staff to find answers to the questions: (a) How do school staff understand an SLO? (b) Which dimensions of the SLO are more and which are less actualized in schools? and (c) What are the practical examples of the SLO dimensions in schools? The duration of the interviews was between 1.5 and 2 h and they were conducted online on the MS Teams platform in September 2022.

In the second part of the study, quantitative data were collected by conducting a questionnaire of students of these educational institutions from the age of 13 ($n = 990$) and their parents ($n = 620$), with the aim to find out whether students and their parents had experienced the implementation of the SLO in their and their children's schools. The survey was conducted on the internet by completing specially designed online questionnaires at <https://www.questionpro.com>, accessed on 1 October 2022. The questionnaires were coordinated, with representatives of each school management participating in the semi-

structured interview. The links to the developed online surveys were sent to the school principals for distribution to students and parents using the school's electronic school management system, e.g., www.e-klase.lv or www.mykoob.lv. The survey was carried out in October 2022.

Both semi-structured interviews and the two survey questionnaires were developed using the OECD integrated SLO model [16,18]:

1. "Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students" with the aim of improving the learning and learning outcomes of all students, so that the learning process is inspiring and motivating, and is centered on the implementation of a vision in which students, teachers, parents, and the surrounding society all contribute.
2. "Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff", where the school culture supports and promotes professional learning by involving staff in identifying their own professional learning goals and priorities; learning both in the workplace and from the insights of external experts, receiving feedback, and allocating time and other resources to support professional learning.
3. "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff", where collaboration and collective learning is purposeful and takes place both face-to-face and through ICT, improving the learning experience and outcomes both for students and school staff, there is trust and mutual respect within the team, and staff are able to reflect together on how to make their learning more effective.
4. "Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration", where staff are willing to and can experiment and introduce innovations in their practice, and the school endorses and values staff initiative and risk taking, where problems and mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, staff are open to doing things differently, and students are actively involved in research.
5. "Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning", to check advancement and differences between current and expected outcomes, where examples of good and bad practice are available for all staff for analysis and the school regularly checks its operational concepts, making adjustments and updates as needed.
6. "Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system", where the school is an open system and collaborates with various stakeholders to deepen and broaden learning opportunities, as well as widely using ICT to promote communication, knowledge exchange, and cooperation with the external environment.
7. "Modelling and growing learning leadership", where school leaders are proactive and creative agents of change, exemplify learning leadership, promoting leadership, and helping others, including students, grow as leaders, ensuring the school's characteristic rhythm of learning, change, and innovation and that the school implements an integrated approach to meet students' learning and any other needs in accordance with the school's vision, mission, goals, and values.

In order to identify school staff perceptions and manifestations of the seven dimensions of the SLO in schools, eight blocks of open-ended questions were asked in the interviews: (1) How does your school develop a shared vision of learning for all students? (2) How does your school support the professional development of all staff? How is the acquired new professional experience/knowledge brought into the school? How does continuity of professional development manifest itself in your school? (3) How is the collaboration and shared learning of the whole school team implemented in your school? (4) To what extent is staff initiative supported in your school? Experimentation with new approaches/new knowledge? To what extent are students collaborative partners in all this? How active is the involvement of students in research? (5) To what extent is learning analytics implemented in the school? Please explain in a little more detail about the process/system/feedback/decision making, etc. (6) How is the learning achievement of students analyzed and their needs explored in your school? How is the overall school performance analyzed? (7) How would you describe your cooperation with other schools/parents/universities/businesses (organizations)? What is the main focus of this

cooperation? (8) Can you give a recent example where learning has led to new insights? How did this learning take place? i.e., what were the steps that enabled this learning to take place?

Taking into account that the principals and/or vice-principals of the schools also participated in the interviews, the question on the implementation practice of the seventh SLO dimension “Modelling and growing learning leadership” in the school was deliberately not asked and the assessment of this dimension was obtained by analyzing the statements of the school staff on the implementation of the other six dimensions.

The student and parent questionnaires were structured in two parts: (1) questions for students to allow identification of the school the student attends and the stage of education (primary or secondary school), with similar questions asked of parents; and (2) 4-point scale questions (26 questions for students and 21 questions for parents, developed by the authors of this article) grouped according to the seven dimensions of the SLO [16,18]. The internal consistency of the two questionnaires and the reliability of the data obtained were tested using Cronbach’s alpha test. Overall, the internal consistency of both questionnaires (parents’ questionnaire $\alpha = 0.945$, students’ questionnaire $\alpha = 0.951$) and the reliability of the data were excellent. Cronbach’s alpha test results for the 4-point scale items (by SLO dimensions and as a whole) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Cronbach’s alpha test results for 4-point scale items within each SLO dimension.

SLO Dimensions	Students’ Questionnaire	Parents’ Questionnaire
1. Developing and sharing a vision centered on the learning of all students	0.821 (5 items)	0.633 (2 items)
2. Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff	0.859 (4 items)	0.715 (2 items)
3. Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff	0.775 (4 items)	0.719 (3 items)
4. Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation, and exploration	0.849 (3 items)	0.878 (4 items)
5. Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning	0.607 (3 items)	0.800 (5 items)
6. Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system	0.739 (4 items)	0.703 (3 items)
7. Modelling and growing learning leadership	0.646 (3 items)	0.630 (2 items)
Questionnaire as a whole	0.951 (26 items)	0.942 (21 items)

2.2. Data Processing and Analysis Methods

For the analysis of the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with school staff, the NVivo program was used. In order to identify perceptions and manifestations of the SLO, seven codes representing the seven dimensions of the SLO were searched for and analyzed during the semi-structured interviews, using deductive qualitative content analysis (looking for examples of the specific dimension). The frequency of use of the codes indicates the breadth and depth of responses by school staff to each question, implicitly also indicating what is relevant or important to school staff. Therefore, in order to identify the most relevant (most frequently mentioned) codes in the semi-structured interviews, the total numbers of coding references for seven codes were identified. As a result of the coding, no significant differences were found in the numbers of references between the semi-structured interviews, indicating that all participating schools implemented the SLO dimensions to some extent and were able to justify this with concrete examples (Figure 2).

Quantitative data, the results of the student and parent surveys, were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS software, using descriptive statistics, first by calculating the percentage frequencies for each variable. Then, the variables defined within each SLO dimension were combined into one common variable, calculating the central tendency indicators for each SLO dimension (median). The comparison of the empirical distribution of the data with the theoretical distribution was performed by applying the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. It was identified that the data did not display a normal distribution ($p < 0.05$).

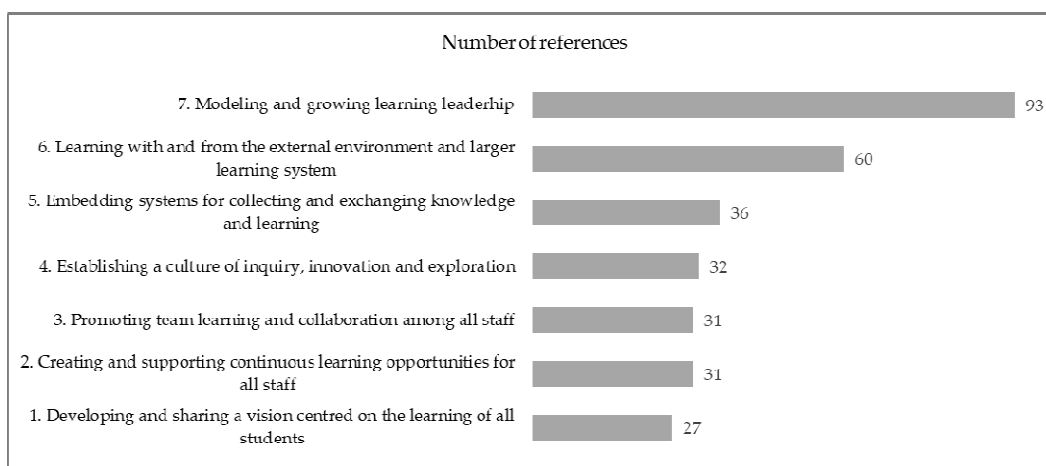


Figure 2. The number of references to each SLO dimension in semi-structured interviews with school staff.

3. Results

3.1. What Are the Opinions of School Staff on the Current Practice of Implementing the Learning Organization Dimensions in Schools?

The smallest range of responses from school staff in the interviews was found regarding the implementation of dimension 1 “Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students”. Moreover, the staff of vocational education institutions were least able to describe the manifestations of this dimension in their school. This can be explained by the school staff’s partial understanding of the essence of the dimension, since, in response to the interview questions, “How is a shared vision of learning for all pupils formed in your school? How is this achieved?”, school representatives’ answers focused mainly on the process of building a shared vision (meetings, stakeholders) rather than focusing on the core of the dimension—“students’ learning”. In vocational education institutions, the role of the student (as well as parents) in creating a shared vision was not particularly emphasized, claiming that students are already “adults”, but at the same time they emphasized the role of the Employers’ Confederation of Latvia in organizing the learning process and the competences to be achieved.

Although in the interviews on a shared vision centered on the learning of all students, school representatives were less elaborate in their answers compared with those regarding the other dimensions, the overall results revealed that most of the schools participating in the study have defined a shared and inclusive vision to improve the learning experience and outcomes of all students. However, the interviews in several schools emphasized a hierarchy—management, methodological associations, teacher, final decision—while in other interviews a horizontal decision-making model was found, where the final decision was based on a holistic approach.

Analyzing the interviews on dimension 2 “Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff”, it was found that school staff are involved in defining their own learning needs and goals, and that staff learning is based on assessment and feedback on their performance which is provided by lesson observation, feedback, and self-evaluation discussions; however, only one of the interviewed schools highlighted the regularity of this process. This shows that continuity is not separately actualized. Perhaps the concept of continuity is realized in the satisfaction of the individual’s personal professional needs, which is not time-based but needs-based. As a result of the analysis of the interviews, it was also found that the involvement of all school staff is not actualized in continuous professional development, which could indicate that support staff (e.g., school psychologist, social pedagogue, speech therapist) coordinate their own development opportunities due to the specific nature of their work.

Interviews with school staff revealed that dimension 3 “Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff” in the participating schools is understood as joint learning (as collaboration is understood as meetings), learning from mutual lesson observation, sharing of teaching materials, joint implementation of interdisciplinary projects, use of internal school resources, collaboration in methodological groups and class groups, collaboration with support staff, development of collaborative initiatives, and the feeling of a unified “working environment” in the school.

In relation to dimension 4 “Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration”, the interviews revealed that teachers are willing and dare to experiment and innovate in their practice, which indicates a supportive and open school environment where initiatives are emphasized as opportunities rather than a burden and students come forward and willingly engage in research projects proposed by teachers. In the interviews, school staff indicated that the schools provide support and value those employees who take initiative and risks, that teachers explore their professional practice in order to improve and expand it, and, importantly, that problems and mistakes are considered opportunities to learn.

By analyzing the responses of school staff to the questions on dimension 5 “Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning”, it was concluded that although dialogue and knowledge-exchange structures exist in the interviewed schools and school staff can analyze and use different data sources to collect feedback, only one school identified a system to track and evaluate progress in implementing change. This means that the introduction of such a system is a component that needs to be actualized, and schools should be supported in its implementation.

From the interviews, it was discovered that dimension 6 “Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system” in schools is manifested as cooperation with external partners such as municipalities, education boards, and other organizations, cooperation with other schools in Latvia and with schools in other countries, cooperation with parents, cooperation with experts in the field, companies, and higher education institutions (career education event “University Fair”, attracting trainee teachers, and conducting joint research).

The manifestations and good-practice examples of dimension 7 “Modelling and growing learning leadership”, unlike the other six dimensions, were not directly asked of the school staff in the interviews, taking into account ethical considerations. The seventh dimension was coded in the characteristics of the other six dimensions and in the examples provided by the schools, looking for the characteristics based on the seventh dimension of the OECD integrated SLO model [16,20]. It was concluded that manifestations of learning-leadership characteristics can be observed as a result of the realization of the other six dimensions.

Thus, it was confirmed that the extent to which the seventh dimension is implemented can be observed in the manifestations of the other six dimensions in real processes taking place in the school. From the analysis of the interviews, it was identified that in the schools represented in the interviews, the seventh dimension is most evident in the manifestations of dimension 6 “Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system” ($n = 23$) in relation to the initiatives of school representatives in establishing cooperation with non-school institutions such as companies, and initiatives to learn from other organizations, for example, in collaboration with universities. The seventh dimension was least identified ($n = 5$) in the interviews with school staff on the implementation practices of dimension 5 “Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning” in their schools.

3.2. What Are the Opinions of Students and Parents on the Current Practice of Implementing the Learning Organization Dimensions in Schools?

Students’ responses show that dimension 1 is only partially implemented in schools. The student responses regarding the dimensions, summarized in Table 2, show that overall

42% of students could not fully confirm that the school environment and teachers inspire and motivate them to learn, that they have the opportunity to discuss their learning goals with teachers (31%), or that they feel good in their school and enjoy going to school (37%) (Table 2, see students' responses). The opinion of parents is also critical in relation to whether they know how they can get involved in their daughter's/son's school life and influence what happens at school (Table 2, see parents' answers).

Table 2. SLO dimension 1 "Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students".

Students' Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
School environment and teachers inspire and motivate me to learn	8%	34%	39%	19%	100%
I have the opportunity to participate in school in the school's development	9%	31%	35%	26%	100%
I have the opportunity to discuss my learning goals with my teachers	7%	24%	36%	33%	100%
My teachers use a similar teaching approach (teaching methods, techniques, etc.)	6%	29%	41%	24%	100%
I feel good at my school and enjoy going to school	11%	26%	35%	28%	100%
Parents' responses					
I know how I can get involved in my daughter's/son's school life and influence what happens at school	9.84%	40.65%	32.26%	17.26%	100%
It is clear to me what outcomes the teachers and the school management expect from the students	7.58%	21.29%	45.48%	25.65%	100%

A similar situation was also discovered in relation to dimension 2, where 11% of students completely disagree and 30% students agree to some extent that in the lessons they analyze their work and discuss how to improve it. Moreover, students' responses do not show that teachers believe that students can achieve good results nor that they motivate them to do better (Table 3, see students' responses). While only 64% of parents have had the opportunity to discuss successes and failures in their child's upbringing and receive support, 31% of parents are not confident whether teachers at the school learn to support students' learning more successfully (Table 3, see parents' responses).

Despite the positive practices mentioned by school representatives in relation to dimension 3, not all students experience this team learning and collaboration in their school. This is revealed in the evaluations of the dimension's indicators of students' opportunities to collaborate and learn together with and from other students and of mutual respect and cooperation in lessons. At the same time, the survey results also show that 28% of students are still afraid to ask teachers for help during lessons, but 24% of students have not experienced or have minimally experienced teachers' support during learning (Table 4, see students' answers). However, parents' views are even more critical; overall, 65% of parents do not feel that they have the opportunity to collaborate with the parents of their daughter's/son's classmates, 53% of parents do not feel that they have the opportunity to participate in the training offered at school for parents (e.g., courses, seminars, webinars), and overall 31% of parents experience a lack of opportunities for collaboration with their daughter's/son's teachers (Table 4, see parents' answers).

Table 3. SLO dimension 2 “Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff”.

Students’ Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
In the lessons, we analyze our work and discuss how to improve it	11%	30%	36%	23%	100%
I see that my teachers continue to learn as well	9%	31%	35%	26%	100%
Teachers believe that I can achieve good results	7%	24%	37%	33%	100%
Teachers motivate me to achieve higher results	11%	30%	30%	28%	100%
Parents’ responses					
Teachers at this school learn to support students’ learning more successfully	6%	26%	39%	29%	100%
At parents’ meetings or individual meetings with teachers, I have the opportunity to discuss successes and failures in my child’s upbringing and receive support	11%	25%	32%	32%	100%

Table 4. SLO dimension 3 “Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff”.

Students’ Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
I have the opportunity to collaborate and learn together with and from other students	5%	20%	39%	36%	100%
There is mutual respect and cooperation in lessons	5%	23%	44%	27%	100%
I am not afraid to ask teachers for help if I cannot cope with a task	8%	20%	32%	40%	100%
Teachers help and support me if I don’t understand something in the learning process	4%	20%	39%	36%	100%
Parents’ responses					
I have the opportunity to collaborate with the parents of my daughter’s/son’s classmate	29%	36%	22%	14%	100%
I have the opportunity to collaborate with my daughter’s/son’s teachers	5%	26%	38%	31%	100%
I have the opportunity to participate in the training offered by the school for parents (courses, seminars, webinars)	21%	32%	26%	21%	100%

From the students’ point of view, dimension 4 is partially implemented in these schools. In total, 7% of students disagree and 36% students agree to a small extent that teachers listen to students’ opinions and suggestions (Table 5, see students’ answers). Parents’ answers also show that this dimension is relatively poorly developed in schools. Parents’ responses reveal that schools do not or only minimally support parents’ initiatives in improving the school’s work, and also that the school does not sufficiently introduce parents to the school’s goals, priorities, and innovations in teaching (Table 5, see parents’ answers).

The results of the students’ survey show that dimension 5 also needs to be significantly strengthened in schools. Although students feel that they are aware of the assessment criteria and regularly monitor their own progress, more than half of students (55%) could not confirm or could only minimally confirm that teachers ask them for their opinion on how they could learn better in class (Table 6, see students’ answers). On the other hand, parents’ responses indicate insufficient collaboration between the schools and parents, both

in relation to their daughters'/sons' strengths and challenges in their learning, and in connection with improving the school's work (Table 6, see parents' answers).

Table 5. SLO dimension 4 “Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation, and exploration”.

Students' Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
Teachers listen to my opinion and suggestions	7%	34%	35%	23%	100%
Teachers are understanding and mistakes are considered part of the learning process	6%	26%	39%	29%	100%
Teachers use different teaching methods to help us learn better	7%	26%	38%	29%	100%
Parents' responses					
The school introduces parents to its aims and priorities for the school year	11%	25%	35%	28%	100%
The school introduces parents to the latest trends and innovations in the implementation of the learning process	14%	28%	32%	25%	100%
The school supports the initiative of parents in improving the school's work	11%	37%	32%	20%	100%
Teachers effectively use information communication technologies in lessons	4%	21%	45%	29%	100%

Table 6. SLO dimension 5 “Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning”.

Students' Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
I regularly monitor my academic results and progress, e.g., by following the records in the electronic register “E-klase” or “Mykoob”	3%	12%	28%	57%	100%
I know the assessment criteria	5%	18%	37%	40%	100%
Teachers ask my opinion on how we can learn better in class	20%	35%	26%	18%	100%
Parents' responses					
The school regularly asks for my opinion and suggestions on how to improve its work	32%	34%	22%	12%	100%
The school provides me with timely information about my daughters'/son's academic results, e.g., in the form of records in E-klase/Mykoob	2%	8%	32%	58%	100%
I know who to contact at school if I have any questions or concerns	5%	15%	33%	48%	100%
Teachers help me understand my daughter's/son's strengths and challenges in the learning process	15%	35%	30%	20%	100%
Teachers follow common requirements for assessing learning achievement and are consistent	7%	28%	42%	23%	100%

The implementation of dimension 6 focuses on the use of external partners' experience in the teaching and learning process, but the results of students' and parents' surveys only partially indicate the implementation of this dimension in their schools. For example, 26% of students completely disagree and 35% agree to a small extent that they have guest

lecturers who come to their lessons to share their experiences and that students can learn from them. Almost the same proportion of students (26% disagree, 33% agree to a small extent) could not confirm or only minimally confirmed that lessons are held outside school, for example, in a museum, library, or business (Table 7, see students' answers). A similar situation was also revealed in the parents' survey, as 60% believe that the school does not offer or only minimally offers seminars/webinars for parents. Schools' cooperation with other institutions or organizations to expand learning opportunities is also generally perceived by parents as insufficient (Table 7, see parents' answers).

Table 7. SLO dimension 6 "Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system".

Students' Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
I have the opportunity to take part in various activities at school, such as singing in a choir, playing in an orchestra, doing sports, etc., to develop my talents	8%	19%	28%	45%	100%
I have the opportunity to be involved in different projects	7%	27%	32%	34%	100%
Guest lecturers come to our lessons to share their experiences and we can learn from them	26%	35%	22%	17%	100%
Our lessons also take place outside the school, e.g., in a museum, library, or enterprise, etc.	26%	33%	20%	20%	100%
Parents' responses					
The school offers educational seminars/webinars for parents	22%	38%	25%	15%	100%
The school offers opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom, e.g., by participating in extra-curricular activities	5%	24%	35%	35%	100%
The school cooperates with universities, companies, and/or governmental or non-governmental organizations to deepen and expand learning opportunities	7%	33%	32%	27%	100%

Students' perceptions of dimension 7 in their schools indicate a lack of learning leadership in schools. In total, 71% of the students surveyed could not confirm or only minimally confirmed that they participate in the formation of the school's social life, while 53% of the students indicated that they could not or could only minimally make suggestions or proposals to the management of their school (Table 8, see students' answers). Within this dimension, a lack of cooperation between school management and parents is also revealed, as overall 31% of parents completely disagree and 33% of parents agree to some extent that the school uses their professional experience to improve students' academic achievement and broaden their learning experience (Table 8, see parents' answers).

The results of the study on pupils' and parents' opinions show that parents' evaluation of the SLO dimensions is generally slightly lower than pupils'. Parents were more critical than pupils about the implementation of dimension 3 "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and dimension 1 "Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students" in their children's schools. At the same time, the analysis

of students’ and parents’ opinions revealed that learning leadership is one of the weakest dimensions of the SLO.

Table 8. SLO dimension 7 “Modelling and growing learning leadership”.

Students’ Responses	Completely Disagree	Agree to Some Extent	Agree to a Large Extent	Completely Agree	In Total
I participate in shaping the social life of the school, such as organizing events	41%	30%	15%	14%	100%
I can express my suggestions and proposals to the school management	17%	36%	28%	19%	100%
Students have the opportunity to take part in subject-specific Olympiads and competitions	3%	16%	27%	54%	100%
Parents’ responses					
I have the opportunity to participate in the school’s parents’ meetings and express my opinion	8%	18%	28%	45%	100%
The school uses my professional experience, e.g., by inviting me to career days, class trips, etc.	31%	33%	22%	14%	100%

3.3. Are There Any Differences of Opinion between School Staff, Students and Parents in Implementing of Learning Organization Dimensions in Schools?

When assessing which SLO dimensions are addressed more and which less in educational institutions, it was found that the views of school staff differ significantly from those of students and parents on the implementation of dimension 7 “Modelling and growing learning leadership” (Table 9).

Table 9. Number of references and descriptive statistics results: A pivot table.

SLO Dimensions	School Staff (n = 38)	Students (n = 990)	Parents (n = 620)	
		Number of References	M_e	M_e
Modelling and growing learning leadership	93	2.00	2.50	
Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system	60	2.5	3.00	
Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning	36	3.00	3.00	
Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation, and exploration	32	3.00	3.00	
Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff	31	3.00	3.00	
Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff	31	3.00	2.00	
Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students	27	3.00	2.5	

As the data in Table 9 show, school staff expressed themselves most extensively about learning leadership (93 references found), while students felt the implementation of this dimension in school only to a small extent ($M = 2.00$). Parents also experienced learning leadership only partially at their daughters’/son’s school ($M_e = 2.50$). The results of the research revealed that school staff expressed themselves quite extensively about dimension 6 “Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system”

(60 references found), but in students' opinions this dimension was only partially implemented in schools ($M_e = 2.50$). At the same time, the results of the comparative analysis (Table 9) reveal that according to both the assessment of parents and school staff, dimension 1 "Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students" is the least actualized in schools. This is evidenced by the lowest number of references in the school staff interviews on the manifestations of this dimension (27 references found), as well as the average rating of parents of only 2.5 points ($M_e = 2.5$) out of a maximum possible 4 points. In addition, compared with students, parents were also more critical regarding the implementation of dimension 3 "Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" in their children's schools.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the research show that currently the views of different stakeholders, such as school staff, students, and parents, differ on how the SLO dimensions are implemented in practice in educational institutions in Latvia. In comparison to the school staff's assessment of learning leadership in their schools, the results of the student and parent surveys reveal that learning leadership is the most controversially assessed dimension: while the school staff expressed themselves most extensively about dimension 1—learning leadership (93 references found), meanwhile, students only to a small extent ($M_e = 2.00$) and parents only partially ($M_e = 2.5$) experience the implementation of this dimension at school. Consequently, one of the most important prerequisites for building a school into a learning organization is leadership, which is implemented by the school principal or the extended school management team in their daily work. The responsibility of the school management team is not only to obtain diverse data on how the school is doing and what the learning needs of stakeholders are, but also to organize the financial, administrative, and human resource management for the realization of a unified school vision. School principals in Portugal spend more time working with teachers, encouraging them to collaborate and take more responsibility for student learning achievements [47], and although the leadership issue in Portugal is gradually being addressed in matters of both collaboration and direct work with teachers, school leadership still lacks the knowledge, skills, and training opportunities that could enhance their understanding of quality leadership, including learning leadership [48]. In the school as a learning organization, the principal is expected to create a learning environment and infrastructure in the school that is characterized by purposeful, regular, and systematic professional development, the formation of a culture of collaboration and feedback, as well as support for the parties involved, such as students, parents, teachers, representatives of the local community, etc., to meet their individual learning needs [15,49]. A study in Greece found that the dimension of learning leadership has the most significant impact on the development of schools as learning organizations, assessing the role of the school principal in introducing a culture of continuous learning under certain prerequisites, with more autonomy and relevant competencies [29]. Recent research findings [15,29,50–54] have shown the criticality of educational leadership in enforcing and sustaining learning organizations as open self-organized systems. Consequently, one of the most important prerequisites for making schools in Latvia into SLOs is leadership, which "must be much more than management" [4], (p. 52). Therefore, a priority for the school management team should be to create the conditions for supporting teachers' leadership [4,39,54], fostering students' leadership [16], and ensuring that parents and the wider community are highly engaged and committed [16,55].

Learning with and from the external environment takes the form of cooperation with external partners, such as municipalities, education boards, and other organizations, cooperation with other schools in Latvia and with schools in other countries, cooperation with parents, and cooperation with professionals, businesses, and higher education institutions. At the same time, it has also been found that students of these educational institutions and their parents have ambiguous opinions about the implementation of the dimension of learning with and from the external environment and the wider system in

their educational institution. The school staff expressed themselves relatively extensively (60 references found), and parents overall largely perceive ($M_e = 3.00$) the implementation of this dimension in schools. However, from the students' perspective, this dimension seems to be implemented only partially ($M_e = 2.50$) in schools.

The example of Portugal points to an approach that promotes greater school collaboration on a broader regional scale [36,47]. As the SLO is essentially a social enterprise, thinking together comes into play in developing a shared vision [18], (p. 12); however, from the point of view of school staff, developing a shared vision that focuses on learning for all students (dimension 1) is the least highlighted dimension (27 references). Comparing students' and parents' perspectives on how much they perceive the implementation of this dimension in the school, it can be concluded that the parents' viewpoint confirms the weak practice of developing a shared vision that focuses on learning for all students in the school. More than half of the surveyed parents do not know (9.84%) or know to a small extent (40.65%) how they can become involved in their daughter's/son's school life and influence what happens at school. In turn, students are slightly more positive on this issue. The results of the OECD's study on the evaluation of the SLO model of Wales also found that schools face the greatest challenges in developing a shared vision centered on the learning of all students, with only 53% of schools reporting that their school had developed a vision that focuses on the learning of all students and learning with and from the external environment, revealing that collaboration with external partners such as parents needs to be improved, particularly in the secondary school phase [21]. At the same time, this study revealed that in developing a shared vision centered on the learning of all students, schools use data from students' and parents' surveys, which raises the question for further discussion whether surveys are an effective way for schools to identify the needs of their stakeholders, such as students and parents, and involve them in developing a shared vision of the school.

Within the scope of this study, only one of the schools participating in the research identified a system to track and evaluate progress in the implementation of change. The results of the survey of students and parents also revealed that the system of knowledge and learning (dimension 5) in schools still needs to be improved. More than half of students could not even partially confirm that teachers ask students how they could learn better in lessons. Also, the majority of parents could not confirm that the school regularly asks for their opinion and suggestions for improving the school's work. This means that the implementation of the system is a component that needs to be actualized and schools in Latvia should be supported in the introduction of the system. At the national level, for the implementation of a unified data management and analytics system, attention should be paid to the practice of Greece, which offers a centralized tool for collecting data on private and public educational institutions at pre-school, primary, and secondary levels, which is used at school, regional education authority, and ministry levels [29,30,56]. The significance of developing comprehensive systems of feedback collection has also been stressed by Bain [57] when talking about the basis of efficient school community management. According to him, feedback systems (including peer observation, teacher and student feedback, etc.) provide sufficient knowledge about learning and teaching implementation practices, confidence in decision-making mechanisms, accountability, distribution of control between teachers and students, knowledge about successes and failures to learn from, and empowerment of all stakeholders in the work system as a contribution to school improvement [53,57]. OECD experts have also recommended the development of an evaluation system in Portugal in which all teachers have the opportunity to observe and give feedback on the work of other teachers. Currently, in Portugal, teacher observation is only practiced when a teacher's skills are rated above 'good' in the formal evaluation process. Otherwise, peer observation is rare [36]. The results obtained in the study allow us to conclude that more effective use of data analytics in school is needed at all levels in the implementation of SLO practice. It is necessary to strengthen the understanding of stakeholders—school staff, students, and parents—of the importance of

data in the education process and to develop the skills to collect, analyze, and interpret diverse data in order to make data-based progress measurements and define the future development needs of the school.

It is also essential to create a common understanding among school staff about the concept of the SLO and its role in improving the quality of education in Latvia. School leaders, in turn, should play the role of change agents, and through this role, implement school leadership practices that focus on systemic improvements in school performance, including “data-driven decision-making, school benchmarking, and technology-oriented staff employment” [51] (p. 66–670). In order to successfully implement the current changes in education in Latvia, which aim to introduce the SLO as an effective school management model in Latvia, it is important that parents and students are involved in decision making and the implementation of effective practices within the framework of learning leadership. In this way, it is possible to ensure that there is purposeful school-wide collaboration and joint action to achieve the common goals of the organization. The differences identified in the study in stakeholders’ perspectives on the implementation of the SLO dimensions in practice allow us to conclude that the school management should more purposefully monitor the progress of the initiated changes and regularly obtain feedback from the involved parties on whether and how they experience the initiated changes at the school level. Within the framework of education reforms carried out in Finland, which aim to promote the joy of learning and the experience of the meaning of learning for students, foster engagement, the development of critical thinking, and learning to learn, promote transversal skills, as well as to develop schools as learning communities, it was concluded that the creation of shared meaning by involving the general public facilitates a common interpretation of the reforms and thus provides a tool for building curriculum coherence and strengthening their sustainability [58–60]. Furthermore, the opinions of students and parents were respected in the design of the new learning content, and the survey data provided rich food for thought for the reform implementers, which were later analyzed in depth in the expert discussions shaping the reform [61]. In this way, stakeholders are given the opportunity not only to make suggestions for implementing change in the school, but also to take ownership and responsibility for the implementation of specific changes for the transformation of the school into an effective learning organization.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Following the objectives of the education policy makers of Latvia to introduce the learning organization approach into school management in Latvia, based on the results of this study, it is planned to develop a model of a school as a learning organization in accordance with the educational context of Latvia in both general and vocational education, to carry out its validation in schools in Latvia, and to propose a unified framework of a school as a learning organization that can be implemented in the system of education in Latvia. In the process of the validation of the SLO model, it is planned to carry out evaluation considering possible impediments (e.g., internal school environmental factors, school culture, staff attitude to change, staff demographic characteristics, etc.) that potentially hinder SLO practice in schools in Latvia.

The results of this study cannot be generalized, but they provide a first insight into the extent to which learning organization practices are implemented in the schools participating in the study in Latvia. Although the triangulation of data was ensured within the framework of this research, allowing evaluation of learning organization practice in schools also from the perspective of students and parents, the use of two different measuring instruments (questionnaire for students and parents; interview for school staff) to some extent limits the in-depth statistical analysis of the data. For the evaluation of the SLO model in Latvia, it is recommended to use a single measurement instrument, such as a questionnaire, to assess the experiences of all stakeholders, which would allow in-depth statistical analysis of the data and enable development of recommendations for the introduction, implementation, and strengthening of SLO practices in schools in Latvia.

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