**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** The article deals with the question of educational leadership and the understanding of that notion. That problem is relevant in the discussions on contemporary education, which is demonstrated by numerous publications concerning such areas as pedagogy, sociology of education or management. The attributes ascribed to an educational leader (personality traits, attitudes, values, etc.) are varied and arise from different experience of the authors and the applied research perspectives. The article presents the results of studies describing the characteristics of an ideal educational leader.

**Methodology:** The aim of the presented studies was to attempt to identify the set of traits ascribed to a contemporary educational leader and determine to what extent the respondents identify those traits as the ones they themselves possess. The studies have been based on the opinions and experience of the participants in the education system in Poland – graduates of senior secondary schools (2017). As the analysis of relevant literature on the subject does not allow one to present a uniform set of qualities of an ideal educational leader, the authors of the presented studies have selected 34 traits that are most frequently mentioned in scientific papers. Subsequently, during the first stage of the studies, a group of 22 experts was asked to select 17 descriptive categories (half of the presented set) that, in their view, most accurately describe an ideal educational leader. Afterwards, a sample of 108 respondents (graduates) was provided with a survey questionnaire where, using a five-point Likert scale, the participants evaluated the occurrence of a given trait/ quality in the following contexts: A pedagogue – an ideal leader; A pedagogue – a leader from the past; Self-assessment with respect to a degree of possession of the listed qualities. The studies were conducted in Google Forms technology with the randomisation of all the studied qualities of a leader for each of the questions and each of the respondents. The constructed non-random purposive sample consisted of the graduates of general education, technical and vocational senior secondary schools from cities with population exceeding 500,000 inhabitants. Men constituted 27.8% of the sample.

**Findings:** According to the respondents, the key traits in this case (a pedagogue – an ideal leader) included the ability to motivate others, psychological and pedagogical sensitivity and being a moral authority. The results relating to the educational leader from the past show a slightly different order of the key qualities resulting from the respondents’ own experience. The first place was taken by high intellectual capabilities. It was followed by the ability to motivate others and being a moral authority. When conducting self-assessment with respect to the listed leadership qualities, the participants indicated that the qualities they possessed to the greatest degree included psychological and pedagogical sensitivity, the ability to interpret other people’s expectations and the ability to plan the necessary changes. The achieved results also show that the averaged ( ) self-assessment regarding the degree of possession of all the leadership qualities in comparison to the qualities ascribed to an ideal leader is lower by 21.97%. At the stage of designing the studies, it may have been expected that more significant differences would be revealed between the imagined ideal type of a leader and the self-assessment of the graduates with respect to leadership predisposition/qualities.

**Value Added:** In summary, the applied quantitative method of measurement allows one to confirm the accuracy of the set of leadership qualities determined on the basis of the relevant literature on the subject. According to the opinions of the graduates taking part in the study (former participants of leadership relationships), it correctly describes an educational leader. That knowledge may have practical application, especially in the conscious building of leadership in the educational environment. This is because it may be assumed that the stronger the correspondence of the set of qualities of an educational leader with the expectations of the followers, the better the chance for the creation of an effective leadership relationship.

**Recommendations:** The perspective of the “followers” who have their own individual experience with respect to relationships with “educational leaders” seems to be worth exploring further. The analysis of available publications on the subject in question gives grounds for posing a question to what extent the postulated image of the educational leader has any empirical foundations and to what degree it is rather a speculation or intuition of numerous authors.