Article

School Principals in Spain: Interplay of Leaders, Teachers and Context

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the Spanish school principal figures and their future patterns of leadership and development, according to educational policies in Europe. The first part presents a comprehensive overview of the situation of school principals in Spain, according to the Spanish policy; in the second part, its real practice in a secondary school is evidenced based on the results of a conducted research. The tensions and dilemmas currently faced by school principals in Spain will be analyzed: pedagogical leadership versus management-oriented principals. The interviews carried out reveal the meaning that the different agents give to "leadership". A climate of trust and collaboration has been established between the management team, middle leaders and teaching staff, necessary conditions for the development of a shared school project and ensure its sustainability for achieve school improvement.

Keywords: principals; leadership; middle leaders; secondary schools; sustainability

1. Introduction

Leadership has been positioned as the second factor for school improvement, just behind teacher performance [1,2]. This acknowledgment is not only supported by multiple investigations carried out in different contexts, but its influence has also been recognized in organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [3,4]. Similarly, personal and organizational factors such as professional capital [5], participation and collaboration [6] have also been identified as enabling the successful implementation of leadership in schools.

More specifically to leadership, this construct has been under interpretation and modification since its irruption to the educational field. Authors such as Bush and Glover [7] and Maureira-Cabrera [8] have established a classification on leadership, highlighting the complementary of leadership in schools. Thus, they identify the following types of leadership: managerial leadership, where the principal is an administrator who manages the school; instructional leadership, where the leader's efforts are oriented towards ensuring the required conditions to improve teaching practices; transformational leadership, that seeks the involvement and commitment of the teaching staff; moral leadership, similar to transformational leadership though stronger in values; participative leadership, related to the decision-making process; postmodern leadership, that extends beyond the school's hierarchical structures; interpersonal leadership, that focuses on collaboration and interpersonal relationships; and contingent leadership, which recognizes both the coexistence of different leadership modalities and the significance of the context. Taking into account these types of leadership, it is possible that leadership modality is formulated from the coexistence of the management and other modalities implemented by other leaders, called middle leaders in the school [9].

If the history of the concept of leadership is observed [10], we can see how directive leadership (the leader is identified as a school manager), instructional leadership (focused on improving teaching practices), participatory leadership (aimed at participation in decision-making as a key to achieving school progress [11]), transformational leadership (incorporating the existence of a collective vision and the concept of participation) and other similar modalities have emerged, such as postmodern leadership, interpersonal leadership or contingent leadership. Under this umbrella of typologies emerges distributed leadership [12] that considers leadership as an organizational quality in relation to different leadership practices at different levels, although it prioritizes horizontal organizational modalities. Specifically, pedagogical leadership for learning is defined as the way in which principals promote the school's commitment to respond to the whole student community through the promotion of internal changes aimed at educational improvement [13]. There is also co-responsibility in student learning [14].

There is extensive research that has unified collaboration and leadership for the achievement of school improvement. Studies such as the one conducted by Hulpia [15], as well as that developed by Hargreaves and O'Connor [16] assert that pedagogical leadership requires a culture of collaboration in schools [17]. In order to make this happen, the management's role is decisive, requiring the empowerment, training, enhancing the prestige, improving and changing the role of school management teams or other key individuals [18,19], which allows a strong shared project in the high school [20], determined also by the prevalence of pedagogical leadership [21]. From this approach, empowerment becomes how principals trust school staff, delegating authority to them to manage and implement pedagogical decisions related to school improvement.

In this regard, a conception of the school as a learning organization [22,23], over and above the combination of multiple agents whose actions may lead to individual school improvements, implies an essential point in achieving effective pedagogical leadership [24,25].

School Principals in the Spanish Context

The sequence of many educational legislations in the Spanish context has had an impact on the management role. On one hand, there has been an effort to professionalize the management figure, according to the directives and recommendations of organizations such as the OECD [3,4]. Instead, the number of tasks principals have to address is increasing. The bureaucratic requirements are increasing even without any specific training for this purpose. New scenarios and competences of the management associated with new organizational regulations for schools are arising. As a result, school management is being restructured.

In addition, the Organic Law of Education [26] brings balance to the participatory educational model. Henceforth, each autonomous region may have its own regulations on school management. This has resulted in the creation of different school management models within the country [1].

School management research in Spain is contextualized by autonomous communities because they are the ones with the authority in the area of education. The generated knowledge responds to the needs and policies developed in each jurisdiction. In the case of Catalonia, research links specific educational policies with the leadership model of management teams [27–29]. The necessity of attending to the training of management teams and specifically of training in leadership are questions addressed in the context of Andalusia [30,31] and Valencia [32]. In addition, attention is drawn to the need to develop new methodologies for such training [33,34]. Along similar lines, but in the context of Madrid Community, the aim is to characterize the leaders of the successful schools of this region. In this regard, they approach leadership from a general perspective to characterize successful experiences [35] or more specifically, identifying a type of distributed leadership made up of four dimensions: distributed leadership practices; shared decisions; mission; vision and professional development [36].In the case of Andalusia, the Andalusian Education Law [37] strengthens the levels of participation in schools, empowering the teaching staff, thereby undermining the management and the School Board. In turn, it represents an advance for the pedagogical management and promotes the

coordination and teamwork through the creation of Technical Teams for Pedagogical Coordination (TTPC) and the creation of heads of new Competence Departments (designated by the management).

In addition, greater importance is given to the professional development of teachers, with the following key new areas of action: (a) ability to personalize an organizational structure and (b) subordinating autonomy to responsibility for results. Finally, greater autonomy is granted in making decisions that concern schools.

Regarding the choice of management, the Spanish scenario implies a particular and specific way of election of school principals by colleagues, with limited autonomy. It has generated a school culture that does not encourage—and sometimes even impedes—school principals from exercising pedagogical leadership. However, influence by current trends that emphasize the role of educational leadership [3,4] has promoted a progressive convergence of educational policy. This is evidenced by the new legislative regulations, such as the Organic Laws of Education [26,38,39] which introduces in the article (132), as a novelty, "exercising a pedagogical leadership as one of the competencies of the headteacher".

It describes the relationships and transactional and interplay devices between school principals and their colleagues who have elected them. It also describes the leadership distribution processes within the organizational structure of a secondary school. A "transactional" model, in which the relationship between leader and followers is characterized by a contractual exchange transaction, is not favorable to the exercise of pedagogical leadership, which sometimes requires transforming the existing school and organizational culture. This paper includes an illustration of this issue through interviews carried out in a secondary school, with the school principal and other relevant middle leaders, in the achievement of sustainable schools oriented to educational goals.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper emerges from a more extensive research that used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The purpose was to analyze the management's leadership ability, while examining also the potential of other educational agents for assuming leadership and beginning processes of change in the school organization. In the present manuscript, we will present the findings obtained in one case study, using qualitative techniques; in particular, six interviews will be analyzed [40].

Likewise, the main objectives of the research are the following:

2.1. Research Objectives

- Understanding the leadership role profile of the Spanish principals.
- Identifying potential leaders in secondary school.
- Examining how school leaders promote teacher professional development through educational sustainability to achieve better schools.

2.2. Sample

The qualitative and cross-sectional study uses a sample selected for convenience. The interviews were conducted at a secondary school, located in the city of Granada, under favorable socio-contextual conditions. This school is part of a national project of public high schools in which leadership and decision-making for educational improvement are encouraged. In addition, 85% of the teachers are permanent, which provides a vision of the future in terms of challenges and educational projects. Indeed, the school has a strong management team, with a well-established educational project and extensive experience. In Spain, heads of studies are in charge of instructional issues in schools. They are the second most powerful figure within the school. Regarding the heads of department, they are responsible for the coordination among teachers included in a specific educational department. In particular, six interviews were carried out with school leaders, including the school principal, the head of studies and four heads of department. All of them had a wide experience in management and leadership positions, as well as more than fifteen years of teaching experience.

2.3. Procedure

The contact with the school was by phone. interviewees were asked to be part of the research and they were invited for a meeting where they were informed about the research purpose and where they signed their informed consent. The selection of department heads was conditioned by the results obtained in the adaptation of the Distributed Leadership Inventory (DLI) questionnaire [41] showing adequate levels of validity, reliability and cultural equivalence with a Cronbach's alpha of 93. The interview was elaborated according to the opinion of experts in leadership and educational improvement. It was also decided that the categories of the interview should be: Support and Supervision, Students' Learning, Shared Professional Learning, Ability for Leadership, Cooperation in the Management Team, Teaching Staff Commitment and Shared Educational Project (Table 1). The interviews took place in the workplace during the interviewees' free time to ensure privacy.

Table 1. Categories of the interview questions.

Category	Interview Questions
Ability for Leadership	What is leadership to you? Do you consider that there are leaders in this school? Who are these leaders here? What qualities should a good educational leader have? There are different types of leadership: transactional, instructional, bureaucratic... What leadership modality would you find here? What is empowerment for you?
Teaching Staff Commitment	Do you consider teachers to be generally involved in the school's issues? Do you show interest in improving your practices? Do you have initiatives or make proposals to include projects, innovative methodologies...? In general, are teachers reticent about introducing innovations in their practices, participating in projects...? What are the school dynamics like? What are the classes like?
Shared Professional Learning	Are there spaces to improve teachers' teaching practices? What processes arise to learn professionally? Are there spaces for exchanging teaching practices? How are the communication relationships between teachers? Do principals promote professional learning in the school?
Cooperation in the Management Team	How often do you meet? How often does the TTPC meet? What issues come up in these meetings? Who usually takes the lead in doing these meetings? Do you have a lot of difficulties in setting/arranging the date of these meetings?
Students' Learning	In high school there is a strong belief of teachers being very independent and sticking to their classes, subjects and students, is it so here? You have a lot of meetings about bureaucratic issues and others more academic and you are overwhelmed I imagine. But in the midst of all this hustle and bustle, do you often exchange opinions on how to tackle a problem, talk about some strategy that's worked for you... or not? What do you think is most important about the students' learning? What do you do to suit their needs?
Support and Supervision	If you had to assess the role of the management team, what would you say? How is conflict resolution dealt with at the school? When there is a problem at the school, I suppose you meet to discuss and make an approximate decision, what to do... How often do you meet? What are these meetings like? How do you favor the development of teachers at a formative level? Do you think they feel motivated/satisfied with these trainings? And in general? Is this school the only one you have worked in?
Shared Educational Project	How is decision-making approached at the school? Does this coordination allow you to achieve the school's aims? What are your aims? How do you do it? The school plan includes, at least in theory, the school's identity, but do you think there is a common project in this school? Do you think that the actions of the school's departments and teachers are in line with this? Have you been working in other high schools before? Given your experience, do you think it is easy to work here with the staff of the school? Finally, do you think that the school is working well in terms of coordination? What would you need to improve?

2.4. Data Analysis

For analyzing interview data, a pre-interview categorization was established according to the main topics found in the literature. However, by transcribing the interviews, new categories were identified that had not been considered in the beginning. In broad terms, a double categorization process was carried out: a wider one, in which complete fragments were selected, and a narrower one, in which more precise ideas were associated. After this categorization, we proceeded to estimate the frequency of these categories with the NVivo 12 Plus software. Also, discourse analysis [42] was carried out with the NVivo 12 Plus software in order to offer a reliable and reasonable overview of the studied school's context.

3. Results

The findings are structured in three sections. Firstly, a description of the categories used for the interviews is provided. Subsequently, the frequencies found each category during the interviews are explained. Lastly, the discourse analysis is presented, based on the six interviews carried out.

3.1. Defining Interview Categories

The first section provides a characterization of the categories that were analyzed through the interviews, in order to have a deeper understanding of the results found. In particular, it shows the definitions of the following seven categories: Support and Supervision, Students' Learning, Shared Professional Learning, Ability for Leadership, Cooperation in the Management Team, Teaching Staff Commitment and Shared Educational Project.

3.1.1. Support and Supervision

The category Support and Supervision refers to the ability of staff who hold an important organizational charge (management team, area manager or head of department) to ensure the effective functioning of the school, while providing support to teachers for improving their practices and addressing the conflicts they face.

> *"The director has too many bureaucratic obligations that sometimes are a real impediment when it comes to establishing relations with teachers. Thanks to the presence of the head of studies, many issues are resolved."* (HD1)

3.1.2. Students' Learning

When the Student Learning category was constructed, it was intended to include issues such as methodologies used by teachers, academic results, quality of learning, difficulties and progress of students in their teaching and learning processes, as well as the epistemological perspective on which the design of educational processes was based.

> *"The high school has several common projects aimed at achieving the highest possible attendance and understanding the concerns and aspirations of the students."* (HD3)

> *"For example, we have a project to help the school move towards the interests of the students. Thanks to the work of the whole educational community, where the students are located, the working atmosphere is improving every day."* (Principal)

3.1.3. Shared Professional Learning

This category concerns the organization's ability both to regenerate itself and to enhance the professional growth of its teaching staff. This generation ability of schools as change mechanisms is linked to cultures of collaboration among the school members. It also relates to other factors such as the staff's willingness both to improve and to develop a strong community feeling and membership, as well as their motivation.

"Last year, a classmate attended a special training on neuroscience applied to education. We had several meetings with some teachers who were interested in implementing whatever he was telling us. This year we are carrying it out in our classes and, with their guidance, we are achieving positive results." (HD2)

3.1.4. Ability for Leadership

Leadership implies the exercise of influence by one or more people over others. The interview scripts were developed to answer questions such as the management's ability to engage in change processes within the school organization, how middle leaders are emerging to ensure the sustainability and long-term stability of these processes, as well as the influence of these leaders to build a strong shared school improvement project.

"Our department head has a positive influence on us as she is able to unite us around a common goal. I think she has an innate ability to get people to follow her." (HD1)

3.1.5. Cooperation in the Management Team

The description of cooperation in the management team includes the management's trend to interact more or less with their colleagues, who are also management team members. From this point of view, it includes communication, dialogue, consensus and negotiation among all agents involved, not only in decision making, but also in the approach they take to ensure the effective development of the school organization. Here, it is also relevant to consider the collegiality, commitment and trust shown by the management team members in order to achieve this goal. It also includes the interactive practices and relationship between formal leaders and other staff.

"Sometimes during the cloisters, we take a short break to share a relaxed coffee. We talk about how we can improve our teaching work by establishing common guidelines." (Principal)

3.1.6. Teaching Staff Commitment

Teaching staff commitment refers to the professional's willingness to get involved in their work. This involvement is combined with the teachers' motivation to keep learning, their responsibility for their professional performance, their ethical behavior, the school they work in, as well as their professional identity.

"We often attend different courses and congresses that interest us professionally. Once we have finished them, we put them in common so other colleagues can get ideas to put them into practice." (HD2)

3.1.7. Shared Educational Project

The shared project category concerns the establishment of common goals at school, as well as clearly defined paths of action to achieve them. Theoretically, this project is the result of negotiation processes by mutual agreement, in which all educational agents' voices are heard to establish the educational solution. A key element in this arrangement is the willingness of all staff to move along this educational direction, which provides consistency for the teaching quality offered at the secondary school.

"It is clear if we want to improve our teaching and help our students, we must have a common aim. In the departmental meetings we establish common objectives for the area." (HD3)

3.2. Frequencies

Subsequently, the frequencies found for each category analyzed in the studied secondary school are presented, in order to draw closer to the realities of the participants involved in the study (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of the interview categories.

Categories	Frequency
Support and Supervision	26
Students' Learning	7
Shared Professional Learning	37
Ability for Leadership	23
Cooperation in the Management Team	11
Teaching Staff Commitment	50
Shared Educational Project	32

The participants identify the term "departments" as a category of Support and Supervision. Also, other issues that stand out are words such as "improvement", "principal", "meeting", "work" and "ourselves". All of these are consistent with the assumptions underlying this study. They highlight the importance of other middle leaders in promoting improvement processes in the school organization. Often, principals are bogged down attending bureaucratic matters; hence they need to empower other staff to answer merely bureaucratic matters. These people ensure that teaching and learning processes are implemented and work properly, while also acting as revitalizers for improving the social and professional networks of schools.

Related to Students' Learning, we found that the frequency analysis used for this category highlights some problems that teachers must face if they want to perform their teaching commitments. Likewise, the main principles on which the educational processes are based in the school are shown.

Thus, they highlight subjects such as language, a subject-based curriculum on which all the school's projects are outlined, methodologies focused on the student, which attempt to exceed the predominance of knowledge transmission itself. Other striking points are the use of innovative tools to achieve student motivation and the global assessment of the intelligence construct, beyond just the contemplation of the intellectual coefficient and memory. As it happens in other categories, students are also called on to be individuals with their circumstances, thereby promoting the inclusion of other methodologies and tools in the classroom.

Uniform responses emerged when participants were asked about the Shared Professional Learning construct. Most of them think that the department is the suitable place to learn professionally. In their opinion, the interviewees think that departments provide spaces for exchange, dialogue and decision-making oriented towards professional learning. Despite the existence of other interdisciplinary spaces, such as the Technical Teams for Pedagogical Coordination, teachers feel that departments offer them all the opportunities they need to improve professionally.

Thus, the perception of the staff as a team who works together towards improvement, through pedagogical training and coordination, stands out. It highlights the dynamism and the importance of departments in promoting initiatives.

In addition, two strongly identified leadership modalities are identified. With a trend towards imposition, the principal advocates his leadership ability, determined by their position at the top of the educational hierarchy, particularly in issues related to the functioning, management, evaluation and conflict resolution. From the other, the departments are established as potential spaces of power and influence, and therefore, of leadership, where decisions are taken in groups. In this regard, the emotional component emerges as an inherent ability of effective leaders, who show an open attitude to dialogue and a global vision of teaching and learning processes, which positively affects the educational performance of the secondary school.

There are also issues such as management, the management team's organization, and goal- and result-oriented work. In turn, the normative standards are the referent on which all actions stated by the management team are based; especially those involved in the management and administration of the school, as well as the pedagogical dimension. Most of the changes that are being promoted in

this school are promoted from "above", prevailing the epistemological understanding of the school's management over the vision of how the secondary school should become.

Furthermore, the principal has a key role in consolidating the school project. Beyond being the project's designers, there is a strong concern among the management team to ensure its fulfillment, giving an entity to the institution. Likewise, it is found that this project not only affects the social fabric, but also affects their structure, the departments and the didactic areas. In turn, other leaders such as the heads of departments play a key role in establishing the shared project to achieve sustainability.

3.3. Discourse Analysis

The discourse analysis by the participants is influenced by both the context of the school in which they work as well as the type of relationships that arise within this context (Figure 1). This secondary school stands out for being more horizontally oriented, as recommended by the research areas about shared leadership and middle leaders.
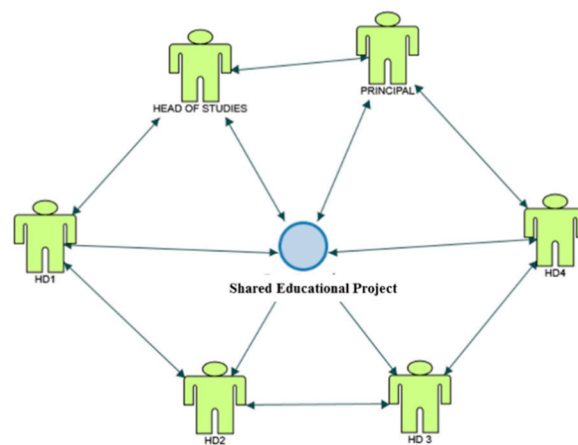

Figure 1. Conceptual map for secondary school relationships.

As a result from the conceptual map, it can be seen that the principals work together in order to ensure that other members assume responsibilities in the teaching and learning processes and are involved in achieving the educational goals established by the school. Also, cluster analysis was carried out, which grouped the previously established categories into four macrocategories: Student Learning, Organizational Structure, Micropolicy and Epistemological and Ideological Placing (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cluster analysis.

The Student Learning category showed how the participants' discourses in this secondary school are focused on the significance of instruction. Studies such as those by Leithwood and Riehl [21] have pointed out that one of the main points of pedagogical leadership is its emphasis on instruction in order to improve student learning. In addition, the discourses are mediated by context, as has already been found in studies conducted by Llorent-Bedmar et al. [43]. As a result, the cultural, social and

economic features of a secondary school will influence how teaching and learning processes develop, the resources available, as well as the teacher profiles employed in secondary schools.

> *"I don't want students leaving the fourth grade of Obligatory Secondary Education who can't read or write. They must have some quality in teaching (…) you can't make them stay here for 3 or 4 years, even if they don't have certificates and don't carry them in their bag… something."* (Principal)

> *"We will continue to study with our eyes closed. I see the fourth year students in the school library and I see them studying with their eyes closed like that, and then I explain to them in class, I give them some tips on how to study and yes, sometimes you get things."* (HD2)

> *"Student learning has become a high priority for my department. We meet frequently in order to adjust teaching to students' needs and provide an efficient response. I attempt to support and mentor all the teachers in my department, and they are grateful for that."* (HD3)

The macrocategory Organizational Structure includes school leaders' discourses based on the relationships of trust in secondary schools promoted by management and their willingness to encourage involvement and participation among school staff, which were already considered in the study by Spillane, Hopkins and Sweet [17]. In turn, discrepancies are observed between democracy and autocracy, in order to develop distributed leadership modalities [44]:

> *"There is one pyramid because the principal's project reflects just such insight. The management team then receives, logically, the instructions from the administration. Later, they involve the TTPC, where everything is discussed and decisions are made there. Afterwards there's the extended TTPC, where all the heads of department are present and where they are involved in the most important decisions, more decisive, the faculty is involved, where they discuss, they make proposals. After that, the proposals are taken to the departments…"* (HD1)

> *"The meetings I hold are mainly about bureaucracy. Regarding this group of pupils, how to work with them and how to organize teachers for working with them. I inform teachers about the guidelines from the inspection. We meet with the inspector and then I meet with TTPC and report on the most important issues that have been raised."* (Principal)

> *"Teachers are taken into account. There are multiple structures for teachers to coordinate and improve their practices. Horizontally there are cycle teams and vertically the TTPC and the departments are excellent places to design comprehensive teaching and learning processes."* (HD4)

Moreover, the discourses from the Micropolicy macrocategory refer to the existence or not of affinity between the management team and the other staff. When their vision about the school is more similar and their relationships between them more fluid, it is likely a trend towards collaboration and interdisciplinary activities to achieve school improvement. Harris and Jones [24] affirm that high schools where conditions of confidence and collaboration exist, promoted by the school administration, favor the establishment of stronger relationships in the school.

> *"Yes, sometimes I feel alone… and less alone because the principal of this school helps me a lot. She has a high level of training; she knows the issue, she has a project that involves the teaching staff… then the math department collaborates with me more than my colleagues from my department. In fact, the math department is an example for all the teachers who are involved with school improvement."* (HD3)

> *"It is difficult to carry out my teaching work as there are more and more inspections and administrative requirements. I feel that the figure of the director is becoming a manager rather than a teacher. Because there is a commitment among the collaborating teachers themselves, the position of director is more manageable."* (H1)

"The management team has changed and there are very committed people now, people with great motivation and from my point of view they are doing well. Principal and head of studies are concerned about teacher professional development, they encourage teachers to be more innovative, they offer support to those who need it and I can feel the difference." (HD4).

Finally, Epistemological and Ideological Placing impacts on teaching practices and configuration of school staff relationships, particularly when staff share the same view as principals. Where this is happening, it is more likely that there will be innovation and pedagogical renewal processes oriented to achieve sustainability and improving teaching and learning processes.

"There is no problem because we tend to achieve agreement, what happens is that people already have a working dynamic and it's very difficult that they change it. We are committed to dialogue and we attempt to talk about everything in order to build up consensus for the benefit of all." (HD4)

"When you discover there is something working, you try to encourage your colleagues to use it. You tell them, "Why don't you use this kind of game that asks you about everything?" In this school there are exchanges of practices and this helps us to learn." (HD2)

"Most teachers share ideas about how to teach and try to be innovative in their practices. However, there are also senior teachers who are more reticent to innovate, and this is evident in our meetings." (HD2)

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The figure of the Spanish school principal has been affected by suggestions made from European entities. Historically, Spanish education legislation has given priority to the principal as the staff administrator in schools. Therefore, principals were managers dedicated to bureaucracy, taking away their time to address pedagogical issues. However, current educational laws, consistent with the recommendations made by European organizations [3,4], point out that principals must become pedagogical leaders. However, current school principals find it difficult to balance bureaucratic and pedagogical responsibilities. If they want that, they have to trust and empower other educational agents in order to assume pedagogical commitments.

As a result, it can be seen how the Spanish educational regulations have positioned different roles for school principals. In turn, the existence of educational agents with "power" and "influence" at a legislative level has fostered the emergence of new leaders in schools. This impact is also observed in the implementation of the presented case study. Between a model of inherited school principals (bureaucratic, dependent on colleagues and context) and new orientations (professionalism, pedagogical leadership), school principals in Spain are moving. The contextual analysis and review of the literature on the subject, and its exemplification in a case study, presents a vision of the situation and development paths of school leadership in Spain. We conclude that, if properly placed, educational leadership can be a device to dynamize public educational institutions [45].

In the secondary school located in the city of Granada, under a well-established project, the participants assume that support and supervision exercised by the management team, as well as by other middle management positions, justifies their school's academic success [9]. In this regard, they demonstrate that they have overcome the confrontation between democracy and autocracy, often drawn when attempting to include distributed leadership modalities [43].

There is a similar concern about how students learn. The socio-economic and cultural conditions of this secondary school help them to focus more on instructional processes [2], albeit under a collaborative framework [17].

From the point of view of literature, shared professional learning is equivalent to the coexistence of practice exchange and mutual enhancement [44]. Spaces for educational reflection and willingness to collaborate are key factors in the development of a shared professional learning at any educational establishment [20].

Based on a case study contextualized in a secondary school, it is observed how other educational agents (especially the head of studies and department heads) are postulated and profiled as leaders in a distributed and shared leadership. Thus, leadership capacity is understood from a growth approach. The extensive training and experience of the management team members, along with other TTPC members, is linked to how they focus the tasks undertaken by the high schools. They are well aware that school success cannot be achieved by a single person, but rather through a team of staff for the benefit of the students [23]. Although there is no agreement regarding the intention to assume responsibilities based on leadership by all teaching staff, there have been processes of transformation and change by a significant group of staff, being able to speak of shared leadership modalities [8]. However, we must recognize that leadership is not considered as distributed puristically, in terms of distributed leadership from other contexts [45]. Among other reasons, this is because of the strong school cultures inherited in the Spanish context. The conception of leadership found is oriented towards assumptions of "collaboration as a way to foster support, information and the exchange of resources among teachers" [46] (p 367).

With regard to the category Cooperation in the Management Team, we found a similar degree of incidence. The principal and the head of studies both agree in highlighting the importance of sharing and collaborating in establishing actions and projects at the secondary school, albeit with the staff of people who are close to them. Along similar studies conducted by authors such as Paranosic and Riveros [18], focusing on management and heads of departments, school objectives and perspectives among strategic positions within the educational establishment are reflected in the proper functioning of the school, as well as in instructional processes.

Closely related to the previous one, there are significant differences in the category of Teaching Staff Commitment. While most staff consider that they are strongly involved in the school's projects, attending training courses and meetings outside of their working time regularly, only a small number of staff admit not doing so because of insufficient funding. This is not an event that takes place exclusively in this educational context. Instead, it has been pointed out by several studies such as the ones carried out by Hargreaves and Fullan [5] or Hopkins and Spillane [44]. Furthermore, it has also been included in the guidelines drawn up by organizations such as the OECD [3,4], which have identified it as a situation to be faced in order to achieve school improvement.

In relation to the category Shared Educational Project, the discourses are oriented towards difficulties in facing their reality from a consistent position. Those teachers who have been working for a long time are aware of a challenging context and know what issues are relevant to combating the difficulties they face in their day-to-day working life. However, the new staff feels confused when rectifying such situations, expressing disagreement with the policies acquired in their schools.

In relation to specialized investigations, these findings are consistent with the school's establishment of "purpose, autonomy, and patterns of discourse. Purpose and autonomy, manifest as organizational conditions, largely shape patterns of discourse that characterize the interaction of the team members." [47] (p. 67). From this approach, the staff's ability to be organized around a shared goal or to achieve consensus in solving a problem affects their ability to initiate internal renewal processes [48,49] and deploy leadership [24].

In summary, the three objectives of the research have been answered. In relation to the first one (understanding the profile of the leadership role of Spanish principals), it has been possible to identify a tendency of Spanish principals to share their leadership with other agents who share their concerns. In general, principals tend to address bureaucratic aspects, thus stopping them from carrying out their teaching duties with normality, having to distribute their teaching among other teachers.

Regarding the second research objective, identifying potential leaders in secondary schools, it has been found that the heads of studies and department heads are well placed to assume leadership roles, agreeing with studies such as the one conducted by Paranosic and Riveros [18]. In addition, when principals and these agents share the school's perspective about the future, the principal is likely to build enabling conditions for assuming leadership.

Regarding the third aim, to examine how school leaders promote the professional development of teachers through educational sustainability to achieve better schools, we found several findings. Teachers' professional development depends on working conditions. In addition, teacher involvement is a key factor in ensuring that professional development takes place. Participants believe in the head of studies and heads of departments, expressing that they tend to be more accessible than principals when it comes to addressing their concerns. Finally, the establishment of a common purpose oriented to improvement and sustainability, initiated by the management team, involves more teachers to work in a more innovative way.

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