

<https://doi.org/10.23913/ride.v12i24.1117>

Artículos científicos

Desafíos y experiencias de administradores escolares novatos en el sureste de México

***Challenges and Experiences of Novel School Administrators from Southeast
México***

***Desafios e experiências de administradores de escolas iniciantes no sudeste
do México***

Edith J. Cisneros-Cohernour

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, México

ecohernour@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2319-1519>

Resumen

El propósito de este estudio fue identificar los desafíos que enfrentan directores de educación primaria en los primeros años de su gestión y en qué medida consideran que su preparación previa los ayudó para enfrentarlos. El estudio fue descriptivo. Incluyó una encuesta que se aplicó a 127 directores de los estados de Yucatán, Campeche y Quintana Roo. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó el cuestionario desarrollado por Webber (2008). Los resultados indican que existen diferencias significativas entre los retos de los directores de los tres estados, aunque no existieron diferencias en relación con los siguientes desafíos: iniciar y dar continuidad a proyectos de mejora escolar, lidiar con personal académico y administrativo con bajo desempeño, mejorar las capacidades profesionales de los profesores, manejar conflictos, lograr un equilibrio entre su vida personal y familiar, aplicar la normatividad, lidiar con papeleo administrativo y tener acceso a las autoridades del sistema escolar. Asimismo, se encontró que la gran mayoría de los directores en los tres estados son hombres. Los directores perciben que su formación docente previa es valiosa para el ejercicio de su papel como directores, pero indicaron requerir formación en gestión escolar, normatividad, pedagogía, psicología, orientación, así como en tecnologías de información y comunicación.



Palabras clave: administración de la educación, enseñanza primaria, liderazgo, México.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges faced by elementary school principals during the first years of their administration and the extent to which they consider that their previous preparation helped them to face them. The study was descriptive, a survey carried out with one hundred and twenty-seven principals from the states of Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, Mexico. During data collection, the questionnaire developed by Webber (2008) was used. Findings indicate that there were significant differences between the challenges that the principals face in the three states, although there were no differences about to with concerning the following challenges: initiating and continuing school improvement projects, dealing with underperforming academic and administrative staff, improving the professional capacities of teachers, handling conflicts, achieving a balance between personal and family life, enforcing regulations, dealing with administrative paperwork and having access to the authorities of the school system. Likewise, most principals in the three states are men. The participants perceive that their previous teaching training is valuable for exercising their role as principals, but they indicated to require training in school management, regulations, pedagogy, psychology, guidance, as well as in information and communication technologies.

Keywords: educational administration, primary education, leadership, Mexico.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi identificar os desafios enfrentados pelos dirigentes do ensino fundamental nos primeiros anos de sua gestão e em que medida consideram que a sua preparação anterior os ajudou a enfrentá-los. O estudo foi descritivo. Incluiu uma pesquisa aplicada a 127 diretores dos estados de Yucatán, Campeche e Quintana Roo. Para a coleta de dados, foi utilizado o questionário desenvolvido por Webber (2008). Os resultados indicam que existem diferenças significativas entre os desafios dos dirigentes dos três estados, embora não tenham ocorrido diferenças em relação aos seguintes desafios: iniciar e dar continuidade a projetos de melhoria escolar, lidar com pessoal acadêmico e administrativo de baixo desempenho, melhorar as capacidades profissionais de professores, lidar com conflitos, alcançar um equilíbrio entre a vida pessoal e familiar, fazer cumprir os regulamentos, lidar

com a papelada administrativa e ter acesso às autoridades do sistema escolar. Da mesma forma, constatou-se que a grande maioria dos conselheiros nos três estados são homens. Os diretores percebem que sua formação docente anterior é valiosa para o exercício de sua função de diretores, mas indicaram que requerem formação em gestão escolar, regulamentação, pedagogia, psicologia, orientação, bem como em tecnologias de informação e comunicação.

Palavras-chave: administração educacional, educação primária, liderança, México.

Fecha Recepción: Julio 2021

Fecha Aceptación: Enero 2022

Introduction

Research on the experiences and problems of those who exercise school leadership in their first years of management is relatively recent and still requires much more attention, especially due to the important role of principal leadership in learning outcomes and in the effectiveness of management. organization.

Among the studies that have found that the exercise of the director's leadership influences the learning outcomes of students, is the work of Hallinger and Heck (1998), who determined that the director's management has an indirect effect on intervening variables that affect learning. Likewise, the studies by Day, Leithwood, and Sammons (2008), Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Leithwood, and Kington (2008), Leithwood and Day (2008), Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), and Gu, Sammons, and Mehta (2008) have confirmed the effect of the director's leadership on teaching.

According to Leithwood et al. (2008), leadership is only surpassed by the influence of teaching on student learning. When both direct and indirect variables are included, leadership can explain 25% of student achievement. Leaders exert this influence indirectly through teachers' motivation, commitment, and working conditions. It is important to note that the authors also found that the type of leadership that has the greatest influence is the one that is widely distributed, that is, when the leadership of the other actors in the school community is favored. (Harris, 2003; Webber y Okoko, 2021).

Rice (2010), who reviewed the literature on this topic, concluded:

The quality of a principal affects a variety of school outcomes, including teachers' satisfaction and their decision about where to work, parents' perceptions of schools (...) and, ultimately, student academic achievement. (p. 1) (own translation).

The director is a key person in the integration between the effectiveness and improvement of the center, as well as the capacity of the organization to implement school improvement projects and thereby achieve greater efficiency. Among the authors who support these results are Murillo, Barrio and Pérez (1999), who combined the theoretical orientation of the school effectiveness movement with the practical orientation of school improvement. The union of these two currents is called improvement of school effectiveness (Muñoz et al., 2000).

Most of the studies on school leadership have been carried out in Western countries (Cowie and Crawford, 2008; Nelson, De La Colina and Boone, 2008; Karstanje and Webber, 2008; Onguko, Abdalla and Webber, 2008; Scott and Webber, 2008). , 2008; Sherman, 2008; Slater, Garcia, and Gorosave, 2008; Webber, 2008; Wildy and Clarke, 2008). Therefore, more studies are required in Latin American countries, for example, Mexico, where research on the subject is incipient. In particular, studies are needed in the southeast of the country, given the characteristics of this region, which has a high cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as low economic growth and a high level of economic inequality and educational backwardness. As indicated by the Educational Social Mobility Report 2020. A look at regional differences from the Espinoza-Iglesias Study Center (de la Torre, 2020), the lag in southern Mexico is persistently higher than in other regions of the country (p 6).

Likewise, studies on school administrators have focused mainly on the preparation of principals, the socialization process and challenges they face, and their role in school improvement (Kılınç and Gümüş, 2021). Along these lines, Slater, Garcia and Mentz (2018) identified some of the most frequent challenges faced by directors in their first years of service, such as a feeling of loneliness and isolation, the expectations created by the performance of the previous director, the time management, the prioritization of multiple tasks, the school budget, an ineffective work team, the implementation of new educational policies and the management of school infrastructure.

The challenges posed by the administrative aspects of the position are certainly an important issue. For example, it has been found that novice directors often face the challenge of accountability, so director preparation programs should consider this aspect in their

development (Shirrell, 2016). Another related challenge is the difficulty in being able to deal with the demands of actors external to the educational institution, especially when unpopular actions are required. (Prado y Spillane, 2019).

Other barriers that prevent a smooth transition into the director position include a poor work team, strained relationships with staff, and difficulty convincing the team of the director's vision (Arar, 2018; Marshall, 2018), as well as discrimination that it can be reflected in the selection process, where women and other minority groups are often underrepresented in the selection process for new directors (Lee and Mao, 2020).

The management position, in addition, can lead to a lack of professional and emotional support for new directors (Arar, 2018). Recently, some studies have examined the loneliness and isolation generated by this position (Arar, 2018; Bauer and Silver, 2018; Tahir, Thakib, Hamzah, Said, and Musah, 2017). Although these are relatively infrequent and temporary emotions and are usually associated with a lack of willingness to share their knowledge with the rest of the teachers or poor communication with them (Tahir et al., 2017), the analyzes indicate that they are associated with negatively with self-efficacy, job satisfaction and positively with professional burnout and strongly with the intention to quit (Bauer & Silver, 2018; DeMatthews, Reyes, Carrola, Edwards & James, 2021). This last pair highlights the need for the beginning director to develop adequate coping strategies that allow him to cope with the challenges of the position (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

On the other hand, some elements have also been identified that can facilitate the transition to the new managerial position. For example, some facilitators in the transition to the management position include mentoring with previous directors (Arar, 2018; Marshall, 2018; Oplatka and Lapidot, 2018), previous experience in leadership positions, and a cooperative work team (Marshall, 2018). . Motivation is another important facilitator. In this regard, it is usual for beginning directors to handle a vocation speech to channel their motivations in the position, particularly in challenging contexts, since they describe it as their destiny to work in education, the duty to serve students and the fulfillment at work (Swen, 2020).

Likewise, the development of relationships with all the actors involved in the educational process is a recurring theme (Viloria, Volpe, Guajardo and Kyle, 2021), as well as the interaction between directors, actors and the organizational system.

It has been found, for example, that the path to becoming a principal usually includes some important work experiences such as having previously been a teacher leader, or deputy

principal, to finally reach the position of principal (Murphy, 2020). In fact, it is an element that is usually taken into account during the selection process of new directors (Lee and Mao, 2020). Initially, novice directors tend to focus their actions on teachers and content to progressively focus on the interaction between students and content, which contributes to the development of pedagogical leadership (Leiva et al., 2016).

In addition to the above, the preparation of new directors is one of the most studied topics in the area of research on new directors. Many of these studies emphasize that preparation should be a requirement to access the position of director, that the identity as a director must be formed during this period of training and that it is a continuous process that should not end with formal training (Kılınç and Gümüş, 2021).

Some studies, on the contrary, indicate that director selection and preparation programs are not usually related to the reality that exists in educational institutions and their context (Sandoval, Pineda, Bernal and Quiroga, 2019). The same experiences of directors indicate that the place where they received their training is not important, but rather the effort invested in the role of director (Viloria et al., 2021).

These programs have been very heterogeneous, and although they have been significantly associated with the performance of directors, the truth is that they have been associated with various performance variables, so there is no consistent result in the effect of these programs (Grissom, Mitani, and Woo, 2019). Likewise, although director preparation programs provide knowledge that sensitizes novice directors to orient their work to the cultural context (Barakat, Reames and Kensler, 2019; Viloria et al., 2021), this has not necessarily been significantly related with the development of cultural skills (Barakat *et al.*, 2019).

The foregoing, plus the challenges identified in the previously mentioned research, have led to proposing some elements to improve the training process of new directors. It is not surprising that some proposals for preparing directors systematize the process in four large areas, whose name may vary according to the author: contextualization of the place/system, the development of relationships with the work team, the administrative system and the self-care and well-being of principals (Slater et al., 2018).

In particular, mentoring has been shown to play an important role in the training of beginning directors. Mentors provide new directors with feedback on their performance and advice on managing administrative activities rather than leadership, as well as emotional support (Oplatka and Lapidot, 2018; Viloria et al., 2021). Mentoring programs for directors

also offer a "safe" space that generates a greater feeling of empowerment in new directors (Simon, Dole and Farragher, 2019). It should be noted that, although they have been recommended to improve gender disparity in director positions, they continue to be rare for women (Lee and Mao, 2020).

For its part, the role of the beginning principal in school improvement is the third most addressed topic, with special emphasis on aspects of instructional leadership or the evaluation of their teaching staff (Kılınç and Gümüş, 2021).

Leadership development in beginning directors is an interaction exercise between the preparation received and the socialization of the position that allows them to understand the organizational aspects of the position (Murphy, 2020).

The achievement of the objectives proposed by the new directors and their success is associated with their commitment, effort, learning and with the support of the service (Meyer, Sinnema and Patuawa, 2019). As has been seen, it is another important facilitator, especially when the new directors visualize their position in terms of vocation. (Swen, 2020).

Research carried out in Mexico

In Mexico, a primary education director is assigned to a school through the escalafon, a point system based on years of experience, courses, and teaching evaluation. The main actors in the school are not consulted on who should be appointed to the position. The director or director does not meet with parents, teachers and students until the first day of work, since in most cases they are assigned to other schools. Also, most primary schools in Mexico are assigned to a double shift. There is a morning shift and an afternoon shift in the same school building.

In relation to research, some studies have been carried out, mainly as a result of the implementation of the School Project (Ministry of Public Education [SEP], 1999) and the Quality Schools Program (PEC). Ruiz (1999) found that the role of principals was relatively strongly correlated with student achievement. Loera, Hernández and García (2006) studied school leadership as part of the PEC evaluation and showed that the principal made a difference in improving student achievement. Camarillo (2006) analyzed factors of success and failure in Proyecto Escolar, and concluded that the director is essential for its success.

Also, case studies were conducted in several Mexican states as part of the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP), an investigation of the challenges of

novice school administrators in 10 countries (Onguko et al., 2008, 2012; Webber, 2008). The project focused on the usefulness of the preparation received for the position from the perspective of directors in their first three years in office. Among the results of these case studies are the following: in Mexico City, Slater, Esparza et al. (2005) reported two important challenges for school principals. The first was the lack of resources; the other was how to motivate those with whom they worked: teachers, staff, and supervisors. Principals expressed their frustration with teachers who did not share their dedication.

In their analysis, Slater, Boone et al. (2005) found that school directors approached their administrative positions with one of three predispositions, either seeking to improve the conditions of education (change agent), promote themselves (ambition) or acquire personal skills (personal improvement). Many of these school directors came from teaching in the classroom. They saw themselves as ambitious change agents who had the best interests of their school and the nation, but this may not be the teachers' view of them.

In Baja California, Slater, Esparza et al. (2005) studied 15 school principals in rural areas. They expressed similar concerns about the attitude of teachers and their frequent absences. The directors were eager to talk about their struggles in communities dealing with poverty, drug addiction, and fleeing families.

In the case studies mentioned above, it was found that some principals complained about teachers' lack of dedication, which was often expressed in terms of punctuality. They wanted teachers to be on time, work collaboratively, and communicate with parents. Some said the union protected teachers who didn't want to work hard.

Directors had an enormous amount of paperwork, but little training in the laws, rules, regulations, and policies they were supposed to implement and report on (Slater, Garcia, and Gorosave, 2007). They were concerned that parents would not vigorously support the school's mission, would not want to attend the school, or volunteer to help. Some parents preferred that their children stay home to help with household chores.

Finally, in the state of Sonora, Slater, Boone et al. (2007) found that principals faced additional challenges in their first year related to the appointment system and the structure of the school day.

Purpose of the study

Given the need to examine whether the results of these studies are consistent with the training needs of school directors in other regions of Mexico, this research aimed to identify the challenges faced by primary education directors in the first years of their management and the extent to which they consider that their previous baggage prepared them to face them.

Method

This study was quantitative, of a descriptive type, since, as Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) indicate, it focuses on describing the phenomena and their characteristics, rather than examining why they occur. The descriptive study was carried out through a survey of the directors of three states of the Mexican southeast.

Participants

In collaboration with the Secretary of Education of the Government of the states of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo, the 130 directors were identified, of whom a participation of 127 was obtained. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Tabla 1. Datos y características sociodemográficos de los participantes

Variable	Yucatán (N = 46)	Campeche (N = 46)	Quintana Roo (N = 35)
Sexo			
Masculino	59.0 %	80.0 %	63.0 %
Femenino	41.0 %	18.0 %	37.0 %
Edad			
Menos de 25 años	0.0 %	1.1 %	0.0 %
25 a 34 años	3.0 %	20.2 %	11.4 %
35 a 44 años	10.0 %	41.5 %	31.4 %
45 a 54 años	30.0 %	28.7 %	57.1 %
55 o más años	3.0 %	7.4 %	0.0 %
Grado académico			
Normal básica	4.0 %	19.1 %	34.3 %
Licenciatura	29.0 %	68.1 %	54.3 %
Estudios de maestría	2.0 %	8.5 %	5.7 %
Grado de maestría	8.0 %	3.2 %	2.9 %
Estudios de doctorado	3.0 %	1.1 %	0.0 %
Grado de doctorado	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Fuente: Elaboración propia

As noted in the table above, most of the directors are men, especially in the case of the state of Campeche. In terms of age, most are between 45 and 50 years old, with the exception of the state of Campeche, where most are between 35 and 44 years old. In relation to the highest degree of studies, most of them have a bachelor's degree.

The characteristics of the principals in relation to their teaching and professional experience are presented in Table 2.

Tabla 2. Características de su experiencia en el puesto directivo de los participantes

Variable	Yucatán (N = 46)	Campeche (N = 46)	Quintana Roo (N = 35)
Años completos en el puesto de director(a)			
Un año	16.0 %	29.8 %	60.0 %
Dos años	16.0 %	18.1 %	14.3 %
Tres años	12.0 %	37.2 %	14.3 %
Cuatro años	0.0 %	2.1 %	0.0 %
Años de experiencia profesional en un puesto formal administrativo o de liderazgo antes de su puesto actual como director de primaria			
Menos de cinco años	19.0 %	37.1 %	37.1 %
Cinco a nueve años	6.0 %	8.6 %	8.6 %
10 a 19 años	2.0 %	5.7 %	5.7 %
20 años y más	6.0 %	2.9 %	2.9 %
Número total de años de experiencia profesional en educación, antes de ocupar el puesto actual			
Menos de cinco años	2.0 %	40.4 %	0.0 %
Cinco a nueve años	6.0 %	17.0 %	5.7 %
10 a 19 años	7.0 %	7.4 %	34.3 %
20 años y más	31.0 %	6.4 %	60.0 %

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Most of the participants were in their first year as directors, some had experience in administrative positions, but for a short time. In relation to their experience in education, the directors from Yucatán and Quintana Roo reported having more years of professional experience compared to their colleagues from Campeche.

The schools in which principals work have different characteristics. In the case of the state of Campeche, 43.6% of the schools have less than 100 students, and 25% have between 200 and 300 students. For their part, only 45% of the directors of Yucatan responded to this

question, among these 34% have schools between 100-299 students. In the case of Quintana Roo, there is variety in the number of students, which fluctuates mainly between 200-600 students.

In relation to the location of the schools where the directors work, it was found that most of the participants from Quintana Roo work in schools in urban areas (57%), while most of the directors who participated from Campeche do so. in schools in rural areas (53.2%) and 9.6% in remote rural areas. In the case of Yucatan, half of the participants indicated that they work for a school in the capital and the other half in a rural area.

Instrument

A questionnaire was used that was designed based on the case studies of the first stage of the International Study of Principal Preparation (Webber, 2013; Webber and Scott, 2013), which has served as the basis for studies in other countries (Webber, Mentz, Scott, Okoko, and Scott, 2014).

The instrument was administered to novice school directors during their first three years of service with the intention of determining the challenges they encounter in their work and the extent to which they consider that they were prepared to face them in their position.

Regarding the procedures, the questionnaires were sent to the schools where the principals work. They were given a month to answer the survey. Once they completed it, they returned it in a sealed envelope to the Secretary of Education of their state, where each one of them was collected for analysis.

Participants were asked to rate the questionnaire items using a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or don't know. They rated first by answering whether the item represented a problem in their work and then indicated whether they were adequately prepared to solve it.

Items were organized into six categories: Community, Personal, Parents, School, System, and Self. One item crossed the categories: Conflict management. Table 3 shows the aspects of the questionnaire.

Tabla 3. Categorías del Cuestionario para directores

Categoría	Problemas
Comunidad	Entender la cultura de la comunidad en la cual se encuentra mi escuela Desarrollar relaciones dentro de la comunidad en la cual se encuentra mi escuela
Personal	Lidiar con personal con bajo desempeño Construir relaciones positivas con el personal Mejorar la capacidad del personal
Padres	Lidiar con padres demandantes Iniciar el mejoramiento escolar
Escuela	Sostener iniciativas de mejora escolar Adquirir los recursos apropiados Aplicar las normas del sistema
Sistema	Lidiar con el papeleo administrativo Obtener acceso al personal del sistema Equilibrar los imperativos del sistema con las necesidades locales
Aspectos personales	Tener credibilidad en la comunidad en la que se encuentra mi escuela Organizar mi tiempo Enfrentar la soledad del puesto Sentir confianza en mí mismo como director de escuela Hacer frente a la visibilidad en mi trabajo diario Lograr un balance entre el trabajo y mi vida personal
A lo largo de las categorías	Manejo de conflictos

Fuente: Elaboración propia

In addition, the questionnaire included three open questions:

- 1) Please comment on any aspect of your job as director that you would have liked to have been better prepared for before taking the position.
- 2) Please comment on the usefulness of his preparation before taking the position, considering his experiences during his first years as a school principal.

- 3) Add any comments, observations or suggestions that you consider pertinent regarding the preparation of school directors.

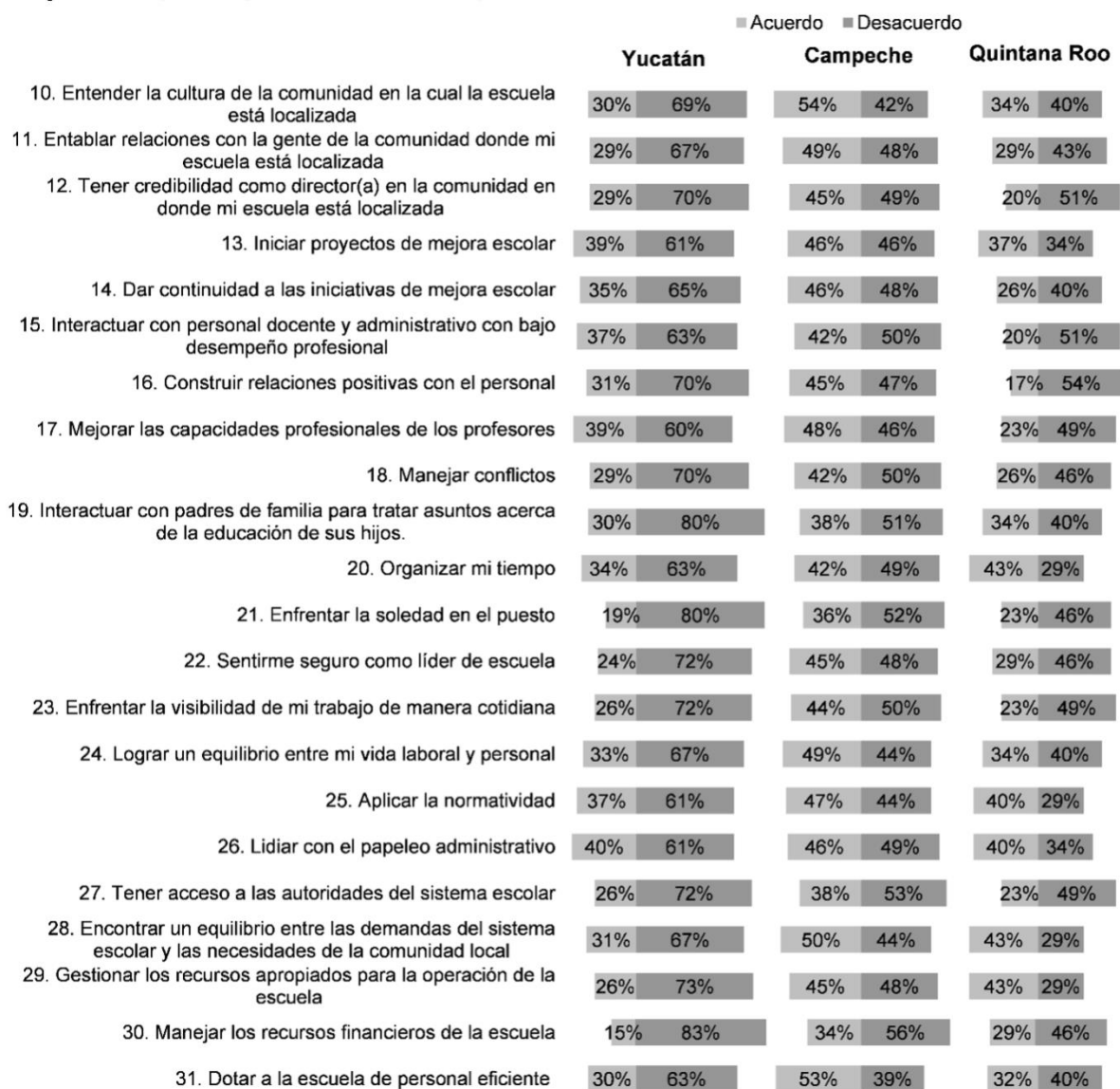
Process

The results were recorded and subjected to different analyzes considering the type of data. For quantitative data, the SPSS statistical program was used; for the comments, a qualitative analysis was used, where patterns, common themes or categories were identified, as well as a contrast with the theory.

Results

Next, figure 1 presents the answers of the directors of the three states in relation to the problems they face in their jobs.

Figura 1. Aspectos problemáticos de los primeros años como director

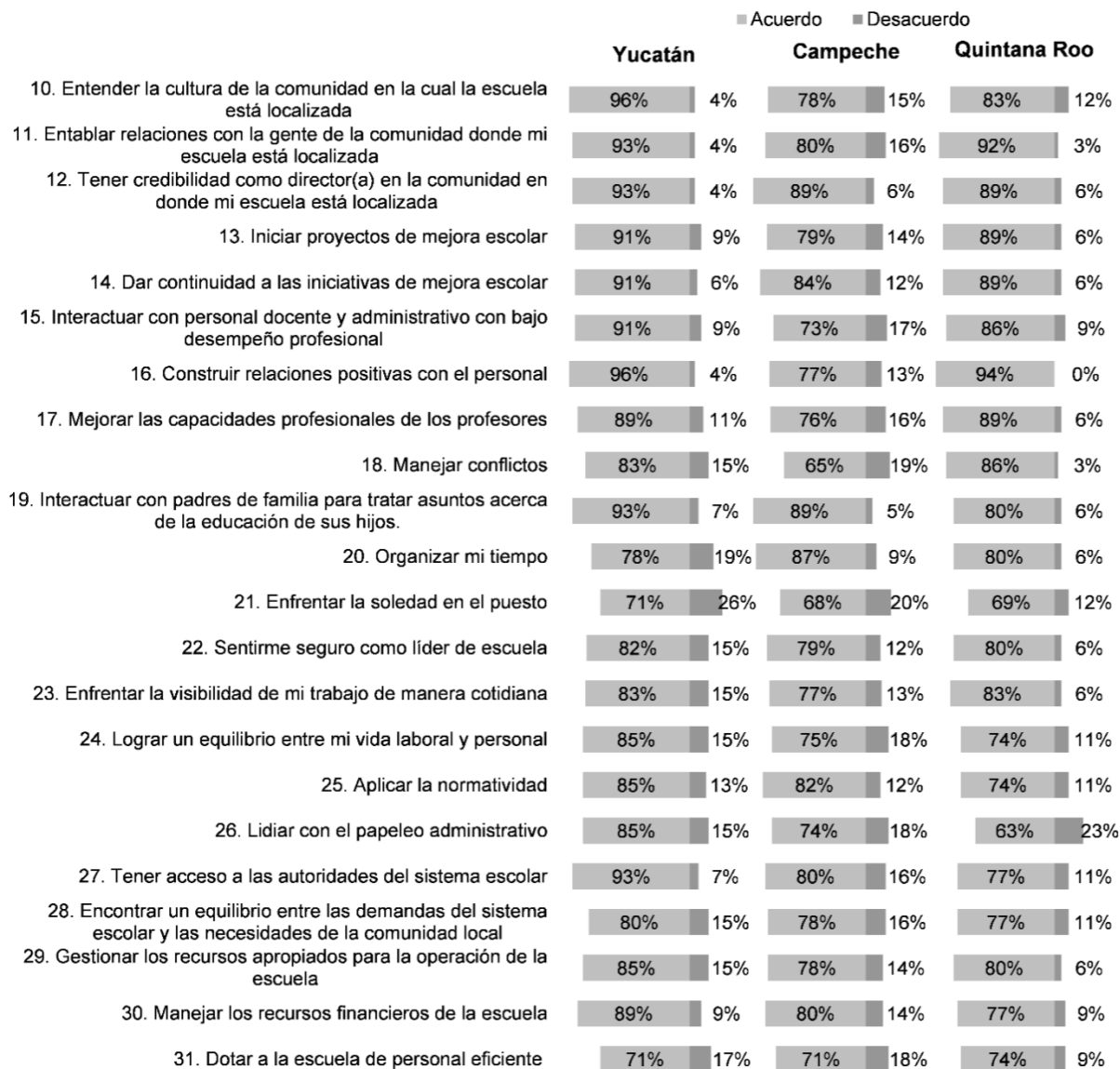


Fuente: Elaboración propia

As can be seen in figure 1, Campeche is the state where the directors pointed out the most problematic aspects. Particularly noteworthy is understanding the culture of the community in which the school is located, and staffing the school with effective staff. In Yucatan there was a lower frequency of challenges. The highest were dealing with administrative paperwork, initiating school improvement projects, and improving the professional skills of teachers. Finally, in Quintana Roo the challenges presented a more heterogeneous behavior, with some with frequent discharges and others less identified. In particular, it highlights being able to organize your time, find a balance between the demands

of the school system and the needs of the local community, and manage the appropriate resources for the operation of the school.

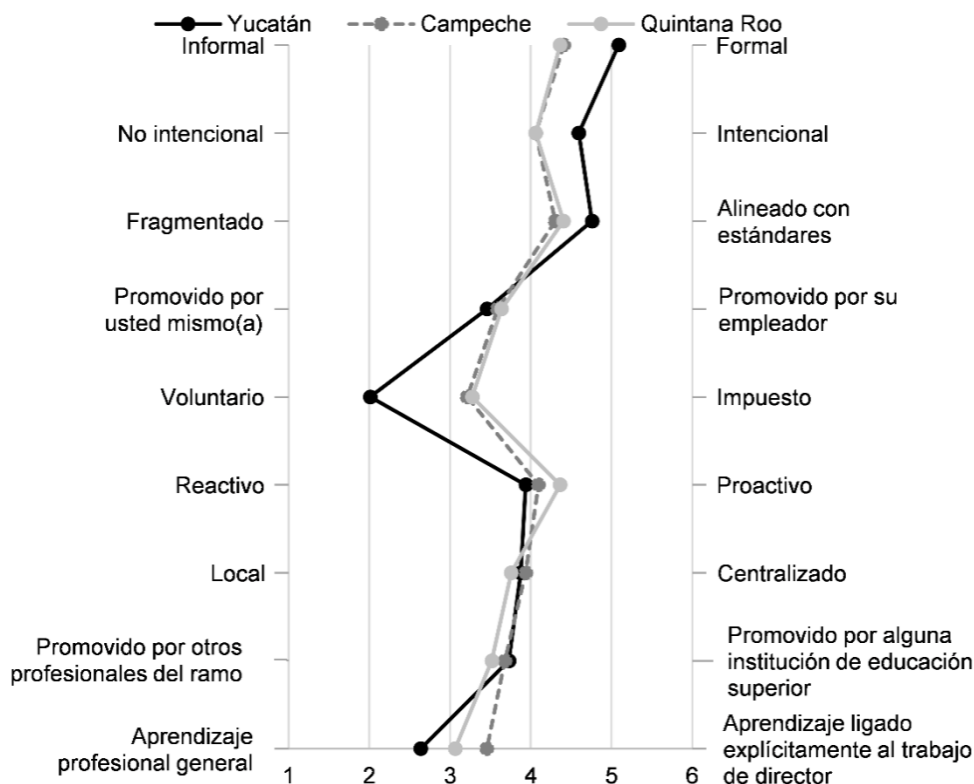
Figura 2. Aspectos en los que estaba preparado antes de ocupar el puesto de director



Fuente: Elaboración propia

In general, figure 2 shows that directors usually feel prepared in most aspects and functions of their position as director. Here it stands out that both in Yucatan and Campeche, facing the loneliness of the position presented a greater problem in their preparation; while in Quintana Roo they found themselves dealing with administrative paperwork.

Figura 3. Evaluación de sus experiencias de aprendizaje antes de tomar el cargo de director



Fuente: Elaboración propia

In general, quite homogeneity was found in the three states in their evaluations of their learning experiences before taking the position of director, however, as can be seen in figure 3, Yucatán seems to have an orientation more towards the formal, intentional, standards-aligned, and voluntary than the other two states.

The analysis of the data indicated that, overall, the directors of the three states identified some challenges or challenges in a similar way: applying regulations and dealing with administrative paperwork (42%); achieve a balance between your work or personal life (39%); improve the skills of teachers (38%); give continuity to school improvement initiatives (36%); interact with teaching and administrative staff with low professional performance (34%); handle conflicts (32%), and have access to school system authorities (30%).

In all other problems or challenges, significant differences were found between the responses of directors from Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo.

In relation to the answers to the open questions, in the first question the directors indicated the topics in which they would like to be better prepared for their position: 24% mentioned training in school management, 20.3% indicated the need for more training on

rules, policies and procedures, 13% on pedagogy, psychology and orientation and 12.7% on information and communication technologies.

In response to the second question, most of the directors said they were adequately prepared in all areas, as can be seen in the following comment:

I don't feel like I have a major problem in this position because my experience as a teacher has supported me and things were accomplished as presented. I think the most important disposition is to do things and not be afraid. My experience has made me feel safe and I am happy with my work

The directors spoke positively about their preparation and experience in teaching. One manager said:

(My preparation was) very useful because before I got a permanent position as director, I had been an interim director, and this helped me a lot, and I prepared myself as a teacher through 26 years of service, which I consider enough experience and preparation.

In their final comments, 13 of the directors suggested that additional courses would help them develop professionally.

Three of them commented:

I suggest that future directors be better advised and trained so that they arrive at their positions with a broader vision of meeting objectives.

I believe that all directors would benefit from participating in formal leadership preparation courses, workshops or programs; this would complement our development and contribute to improving the quality of education

The academic preparation is important because it allows a deep knowledge of the contents and other necessary knowledge in the elaboration of the work, but the experience is essential because it provides all the necessary elements to be a good leader and the work of director is to be a good leader. to create a positive work environment.

Beyond these direct conclusions, there may be other issues involved. To better understand this, it is important to note three unique comments that went beyond the responses of most directors. What do the voices of these people tell us about the challenges of school directors?

The first comment was from a director who raised questions about the system and expressed criticism. He complained about the lack of commitment from supervisors:

We must learn to accept the decision of the bosses, although they lack a legitimate basis to support us, they are personal and selfish decisions that prevent us from complying with the regulations and fulfilling our responsibilities as directors.

A second principal spoke more positively, but hinted that such democratic leadership and a positive climate may be lacking in many schools.

The director must always exercise democratic leadership and promote collegiality to allow the creation of a positive and satisfying work environment that translates into productivity and effective work as a product of a teaching leadership team, but this is not always the case.

A third principal emphasized the critical issues of poverty and the need to connect school and community.

As director I have a broader field of action, and it is a challenge because I not only provide educational services, but also the community in general, and therefore I feel the needs and desires that are not addressed by other agencies. As a consequence, I focus on the poorest sections of the community. The authorities do not pay attention to these needs.

These three opinions shape the problems identified by the principals in the responses to the questionnaire and may lead to future studies about the context and school leadership.

Discussion

From all of the above, we can conclude that the majority of the people who exercise school leadership in elementary schools in the three states are men. Although these are a minority in the number of education graduates, they are the majority in management positions. Among the three states, Yucatán was the state with the highest number of female directors (41%), followed by Quintana Roo (31%), Campeche was the state with the lowest number of female directors (20%). These results are consistent with Lee and Mao (2020), who found in their research that women and people belonging to minority groups are underrepresented in leadership positions, which could be evidence of discrimination in selection processes for school leadership.

In relation to the challenges faced by principals, significant differences were found between the three states. For this reason, future studies should examine in greater depth the context in which principals exercise their functions and the influence of this on their work and their school community.

Results from both the problems or challenges section and the open-ended questions indicated that some principals experienced common problems developing or maintaining school improvement projects, working with underperforming staff, improving teacher capacity, managing conflict, achieving a balance between personal and work life, apply regulations, manage paperwork and have access to the authorities of the system. Almost all directors expressed an interest in receiving continuing education, particularly in the form of courses or workshops.

These results indicate a higher level of satisfaction on the part of the directors than that reported by the directors who participated in the previous case studies. However, the challenge areas are similar to those mentioned above. Working with teachers has been a frequent theme in the international literature, and the problem of paperwork has been examined in Mexico (Slater, Boone et al., 2005). The development or maintenance of school improvement projects has also been recognized in other studies, especially because the projects involve cumbersome paperwork (Hobson et al., 2003).

Principals indicated that they are satisfied with their experiences in their first years in their positions in Yucatán and feel well prepared from their previous experiences in schools, although this experience is primarily as teachers and not related to school management.

The literature has suggested that leadership should be widely distributed (Harris, 2003; Webber and Okoko, 2021), but leadership in Mexican schools may need to move from an autocratic approach to a democratic approach, to distributed leadership. Future studies may further examine the factors that facilitate or inhibit this type of leadership in the context of the school community.

Conclusions

From this study we were able to conclude several elements. First, that school management continues to be a position largely dominated by the male gender.

Second, it is remarkable how the characterization of the findings reveals different results for each state, so it is important to consider the elements of the context for any type of study oriented to educational administration.

Third, it was found that there are common challenges for principals in their early years, such as developing or maintaining school improvement projects, working with underperforming staff, improving the capacity of teachers, managing conflicts, achieving a balance between personal life and labor, apply regulations, manage paperwork and have access to system authorities. These challenges can be considered not only for in-depth study, but also for the development of education and training programs for future directors.

Finally, as a fourth point, it is considered that, despite the challenges, the previous training seems to be perceived favorably by the participating directors, since, they consider, it was useful for their first years of service, for which it is recommended that the training programs professionalization for managerial positions continue officially, and seek to guide new training opportunities in those common challenges presented by the participants.

Future lines of research

Future research can use mixed methods to obtain a deeper understanding of the work of directors in the context of the Mexican southeast and especially of the type of leadership both from the authorities outside the school and within the school building and the way in which these leaderships they contribute to democracy and the participation of the different actors.

Finally, given the large participation of male participants in management positions, it is recommended that studies be considered specifically focused on those women who hold the position of director in educational institutions; It is important to establish studies that investigate the motivations of women directors, their careers and training.

References

- Arar, K. (2018). How Novice Principals Face the Challenges of Principalship in the Arab Education System in Israel. *Journal of Career Development*, 45(6), 580-596. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845317726392>.
- Barakat, M., Reames, E. and Kensler, L. A. W. (2019). Leadership Preparation Programs: Preparing Culturally Competent Educational Leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 14(3), 212-235. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775118759070>.
- Bauer, S. C. and Silver, L. (2018). The impact of job isolation on new principals' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and persistence. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(3), 315-331. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2017-0078>.
- Camarillo, J. P. (2006). Factores de éxito y/o fracaso en la implementación del proyecto "La gestión en la escuela primaria". *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 4(3), 84-107.
- Cowie, M. and Crawford, M. (2008). "Being" a new principal in Scotland. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 676-689. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908271>.
- Day, C., Leithwood, K. and Sammons, P. (2008). What we have learned, what we need to know more about. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 83-96. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800102>.
- Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D. Leithwood, K. and Kington, A. (2008). Research into the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: policy and research contexts. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 5-25. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800045>.
- de la Torre, R. (2020). *Reporte de movilidad social educativa 2020. Una mirada a las diferencias regionales*. Centro de Estudios Espinoza Yglesias.
- DeMatthews, D. E., Reyes, P., Carrola, P., Edwards, W. and James, L. (2021). Novice Principal Burnout: Exploring Secondary Trauma, Working Conditions, and Coping Strategies in an Urban District. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1-17. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.1917624>.

- Gall, M., Gall, J. and Borg, R. (2007). *Educational research: An Introduction* (8th ed.). New York, United States: Pearson Education.
- Grissom, J. A., Mitani, H. and Woo, D. S. (2019). Principal Preparation Programs and Principal Outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 73-115. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18785865>.
- Gu, Q., Sammons, P. and Mehta, P. (2008). Leadership characteristics and practices in schools with different effectiveness and improvement profiles. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 43-63. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800078>.
- Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (1998). Exploring the Principal's Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(2), 157-191. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/0924345980090203>.
- Harris, A. (2003). Teacher Leadership as Distributed Leadership: Heresy, Fantasy or Possibility? *School Leadership and Management*, 23(3), 313-324. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/1363243032000112801>.
- Hobson, A., Brown, E., Ashby, P., Keys, W., Sharp, C. and Benefield, P. (2003). *Issues for Early Headship. Problems and Support Strategies*. United Kingdom: National College for School Leadership.
- Karstanje, P. and Webber, C. F. (2008) Programs for school principal preparation in East Europe. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 739-751. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908325>.
- Kılınç, A. Ç. and Gümüş, S. (2021). What do we know about novice school principals? A systematic review of existing international literature. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(1), 54-75. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219898483>.
- Lee, S. W. and Mao, X. (2020). Recruitment and selection of principals: A systematic review. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220969694>.
- Leithwood, K. and Day, C. (2008). The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 1-4. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701799718>.

- Leithwood, K., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 27-42. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800060>.
- Leiva, M. V., Montecinos, C. y Aravena, F. (2016). Liderazgo pedagógico en directores nóveles en Chile: Prácticas de observación de clases y retroalimentación a profesores. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación y Evaluación Educativa*, 22(2). Recuperado de <https://doi.org/10.7203/relieve.22.2.9459>.
- Loera, A., Hernández, R. y García, E. (2006). *Buenas prácticas de gestión escolar y participación social en las escuelas PEC. Resultados de la comparación de muestras polarizadas por niveles de logro y eficacia escolar 2001-2006*. Chihuahua, México: Heurística educativa.
- Marshall, I. (2018). Novice Principals Speak Out: A Qualitative Analysis of the Transition from Teacher to Principal in Barbadian Primary School. *Caribbean Journal of Education*, 40(1&2), 139-169.
- Meyer, F., Sinnema, C and Patuawa, J. (2019). Novice principals setting goals for school improvement in New Zealand. *School Leadership and Management*, 39(2), 198-221. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1473358>.
- Muñoz, M., Murillo, F. J., Barrio, R., Brioso, M. J. Hernández, M. L. y Pérez, M. J. (2000). *La mejora de la eficacia escolar: un estudio de casos*. España: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.
- Murillo, F. J., Barrio, R. y Pérez, M. J. (1999). *La dirección escolar. Análisis e investigación*. Madrid, España: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, Centro de Investigación y Documentación Educativa.
- Murphy, G. (2020). Leadership preparation, career pathways and the policy context: Irish novice principals' perceptions of their experiences. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1-22. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220968169>.
- Nelson, S. W., de la Colina, M. and Boone, M. D. (2008). Lifeworld or systemworld: what guides novice principals? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 690-701. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908280>.
- Onguko, B., Abdalla, M. and Webber, C. F. (2012). Walking in unfamiliar territory: Headteachers' preparation and experiences in their first year in Tanzania. *Educational*

- Administration Quarterly*, 48(1), 86-115. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11423391>.
- Onguko, B., Abdalla, M. and Webber, C. F. (2008). Mapping principal preparation in Kenya and Tanzania. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 715-726. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908307>.
- Oplatka, I. and Lapidot, A. (2018). Novice principals' perceptions of their mentoring process in early career stage: the key role of mentor-protégé relations. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 50(3), 204-222. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2017.1420044>.
- Prado, A. and Spillane, J. P. (2019). Novice School Principals Constructing Their Role Vis-À-Vis External Stakeholders: (Not) Attempting to Be "All Things to All People". *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(5), 812-840. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18822101>.
- Rice, J. K. (2010). *Principal Effectiveness and Leadership in an Era of Accountability: What Research Says*. Washington, United States: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research.
- Ruiz, G. (1999). *Un acercamiento a la calidad de la educación primaria en Aguascalientes desde la perspectiva de la efectividad escolar*. Aguascalientes, México: Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes.
- Sandoval, L. Y., Pineda, C., Bernal, M. y Quiroga, C. (2019). Los retos del director escolar novel: formación inicial y liderazgo. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 31(1), 117-126. Recuperado de <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.61919>.
- Scott, S. and Webber, C. F. (2008). Evidence-Based Leadership Development: The 4L Framework. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 772-776. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ817192>.
- Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP]. (1999). *El proyecto escolar: una estrategia para transformar nuestra escuela*. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública.
- Sherman, A. (2008). Using case studies to visualize success with first year principals. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 752-761. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908334>.
- Shirrell, M. (2016). New principals, accountability, and commitment in low-performing schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(5), 558-574. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2015-0069>.

- Simon, S., Dole, S. and Farragher, Y. (2019). Custom-designed and safe-space coaching: Australian beginning principals supported by experienced peers form pipeline of confident future leaders. *School Leadership and Management*, 39(2), 145-174. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1470502>.
- Slater, C. L., Boone, M., Alvarez, L., Topete, C., Iturbe, E., Muñoz, L., Base, M., Romer-Grimaldo, L., Korth, L., Andrews, J. and Bustamante, A. (2005). School leadership Preparation in Mexico: Metacultural Considerations. *Journal of School Leadership*, 15(2).
- Slater, C. L., Boone, M., Nelson, S., de la Colina, M., Garcia, E., Grimaldo, L., Rico, G., Rodríguez, S., Sirios, C., Womack, D., Garcia, J. M. and Arriaga, R. (2007). *El Escalafón y el Doble Turno: An International Perspective on School Director Preparation*. *Journal for Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 6(2), 60-90.
- Slater, C. L., Esparza, E., Peña, R. M., Topete, C., Álvarez, I., Cerecedo, T. and García, J. M. (2005). Preparación del administrador de la escuela en Baja California. *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 3(1).
- Slater, C. L., Garcia, J. M. and Gorosave, G. L. (2007). The Challenges of a Successful First-Year Principal in Mexico: Structural, Human Resource, Symbolic, and Political Perspectives. Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration Conference. Washington.
- Slater, C. L., Garcia, J. M. and Gorosave, G. L. (2008). Challenges of a successful first-year principal in Mexico. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 702-714. Retrieved from [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3679\(2009\)0000011015](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3679(2009)0000011015).
- Slater, C. L., Garcia, J. M. and Mentz, K. (2018). Frameworks for principal preparation and leadership development: Contributions of the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP). *Management in Education*, 32(3), 126-134. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020617747611>.
- Swen, C. P. (2020). Talk of Calling: Novice School Principals Narrating Destiny, Duty, and Fulfillment in Work. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(2), 177-219. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19840387>.
- Tahir, L., Thakib, M. T. M., Hamzah, M. H., Said, M. N. H. M. and Musah, M. B. (2017). Novice head teachers' isolation and loneliness experiences: A mixed-methods study. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(1), 164-189. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215587302>.

- Viloria, M., Volpe, T., Guajardo, R. A. and Kyle, R. (2021). Novice school principals' advice to educational administration students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 20(2), 136-147. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2019.1568251>.
- Webber, C. F. (2008). Principal preparation: international perspectives. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 673-675. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea.2008.07446faa.001>.
- Webber, C. F. (2013). Template versus awareness. In Slater, C. L. and Nelson, S. (eds.), *Understanding the Principalship: An International Guide to Principal Preparation* (pp. 71-94). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald.
- Webber, C. F. and Okoko, J. M. (2021). Exploring Teacher Leadership Across Cultures: Introduction to Teacher Leadership. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Webber, C. F. and Scott, S. (2013). Principles for principal preparation. In Slater, C. L. and Nelson, S. (eds.), *Understanding the Principalship: An International Guide to Principal Preparation* (pp. 95-122). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald.
- Webber, C. F., Mentz, K., Scott, S., Okoko, J. M. and Scott, D. E. (2014). Principal preparation in Kenya, South Africa, and Canada. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 27(3), 499-519. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-07-2013-0125>.
- Wildy, H. and Clarke, S. (2008). Principals on L-plates: rear view mirror reflections. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 727-738. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908316>.