Educational Leadership in a Changing World

Edited by

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Challenges, Practices, Contexts and Insights

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Preface

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In an era marked by global disruption, growing inequality, and rapid transformation in education systems, the role of school leaders – and educational leadership more broadly – has become increasingly complex, multifaceted, and urgent. This edited volume, *Educational Leadership in a Changing World: Challenges, Practices, and Innovations,* brings together international perspectives and original research that illuminate various dimensions of educational leadership, with a particular focus on school leadership.

Although school leadership has been extensively theorized and empirically studied in recent years, foundational concepts remain the subject of ongoing debate, as leadership is inherently shaped by its context. From a policy standpoint, globalization and internationalization have fostered a certain degree of 'sameness,' reflected in both terminology and theoretical approaches.

The international authorship represented in this volume underscores a shared commitment to improving schools and advancing school leadership. The chapters offer a timely and critical exploration of educational leadership in a rapidly changing world. They address pressing issues related to policy, practice, and equity, while providing grounded examples of innovation, resilience, and reflective practice across diverse contexts.

This book fills the void by providing knowledge on the complex, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded nature of educational leadership in diverse global settings. At a time when educational leaders are expected to address challenges, there is a pressing need for schol-

arship that bridges theory, practice, and context through a variety of perspectives and evidence-based policies.

More specifically, this book provides:

- Empirical insights into a variety of topics, including challenges, contextual elements, quality issues, professional well-being, and the leadership aspects of management and principalship.
- Theoretical and conceptual frameworks that highlight diverse topics, including challenges, contextual elements, quality issues, professional well-being, and the leadership aspects of management and principalship.
- Actionable implications for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners on promoting the support of challenges, contextual elements, quality issues, professional well-being, and the leadership aspects of management and principalship.

Chapter 1 is authored by Juan Luis Fuentes and Laura Camas Garrido. They set the stage by exploring the emotional, inclusive, and ethical foundations of educational leadership. Drawing on care ethics and moral exemplarity, the authors argue for a human-centred approach to school leadership – one that embraces empathy, cultural responsiveness, and ethical guidance as essential components of effective practice. Their chapter provides both a conceptual grounding and a critical lens through which the subsequent contributions can be understood.

In Chapter 2, Rasa Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė and Antonios Kafa investigate the influence of socioeconomic status on the relationship between leadership practices and student science achievement in the context of the OECD PISA study. Through a robust quantitative analysis, the authors reveal how economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) mediates and moderates the effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy. Their findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive leadership and the risks of one-size-fits-all approaches to school improvement.

In Chapter 3, Carolina Marlen Luna Perez and Jennifer Ana Domínguez Rodríguez offer a comparative analysis of global leadership models, examining how different nations conceptualise and implement educational leadership in pursuit of quality and equity. Their work highlights both convergences and divergences across systems and encourages readers to reflect critically on the applicability and transferability of leadership frameworks across borders.

Chapter 4, authored by Monika Šimkutė-Bukantė and Vilma Žy-džiūnaitė, presents a systematic literature review on the link between leadership styles and teacher professional well-being. Synthesising a wide range of studies, they demonstrate how leadership practices significantly affect teacher motivation, stress, job satisfaction, and emotional resilience. Their chapter makes a compelling case for leadership that prioritises the well-being of educators as a strategic investment in school effectiveness.

Chapter 5, authored by Martina Kovačič and Anita Trnavčević, explores the nuanced interplay between principalship, leadership, and management. Drawing from empirical evidence and theoretical reflection, the authors challenge the tendency to treat these roles interchangeably. Instead, they advocate for a more differentiated understanding of leadership that acknowledges the multiple identities and expectations school leaders must navigate daily.

This book is concluded with Chapter 6, where the editors, Anita Trnavčević and Antonios Kafa, provide a look forward and a reflective synthesis of the insights and pathways that emerge across the chapters. They argue for a leadership paradigm that is not focused only on strategic questions and accountability but is also deeply ethical, relational, and inclusive. Their concluding discussion invites readers to reimagine educational leadership as a collaborative and transformative practice anchored in care, justice, and context-sensitive responsiveness.

Authors come from different contexts and provide insights into leadership challenges, contextual elements, quality issues, professional well-being, and the leadership aspects of management and principalship.

This book can be of great interest to: (1) scholars worldwide who are interested in the topic of educational leadership; (2) educational policymakers, Ministries of Education, and professional development contributors; and (3) to students and graduates who immerse themselves to rethinking leadership for a more just and sustainable educational future. We acknowledge the work of scholars and practitioners working in the field of educational leadership. We hope this book will also trigger their attention and open the space for further discussions.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors for their outstanding collaboration and the richness of their chapters, which have greatly enhanced the depth and diversity of this volume. Their insights and dedication have been instrumental in shaping a

meaningful and timely exploration of educational leadership. We are also deeply grateful to the University of Primorska Press for their unwavering support and commitment throughout the publication process. Their support has been invaluable in bringing this book to light.

1 Current Challenges of Educational Leadership: Research Results and Analysis of Good Practices

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Introduction

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping learning experience, ensuring equitable access to quality education, and fostering environments that support students and educators. In an ever-evolving educational landscape, leaders must navigate complex challenges, including emotional well-being, cultural responsiveness, and ethical commitment. The role of the educational leader is not simply to manage institutions but to act as a catalyst for positive change, fostering an environment where students and teachers alike can thrive. This chapter explores the complexities of educational leadership, offering a detailed analysis of contemporary challenges, research findings, and exemplary practices that contribute to effective leadership in educational settings. Education, as framed through a Deweyan perspective, is an inherently relational and life-embedded process that extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition, involving the socio-emotional and ethical

dimensions of both teaching and learning. As such, the chapter emphasizes three key elements: (1) the essential role of the emotional dimension in the educational relationship, (2) the necessity of inclusive and culturally responsive leadership, and (3) fundamental qualities that any leader should have today for fostering meaningful and transformative learning environments.

The first part examines the role of emotionality in education. To what extent does the emotional dimension of educational leadership influence student engagement and academic success? The ability to care is not merely an additional trait of educators but a core responsibility that directly impacts students' academic achievement and overall well-being. In this part, we delve into how care pedagogies serve as a foundation for creating supportive learning environments that foster trust, motivation, and resilience. Adopting Noddings' perspective, care is a multidimensional concept that encompasses physical, emotional, and psychological support. Particularly, care ethics, as an approach to educational leadership, emphasize relational interdependence and moral responsibility, advocating for pedagogical strategies that prioritize student engagement, inclusivity, and the emotional well-being of both students and teachers. Implementing care-centred approaches within schools has been shown to not only improve academic outcomes but also to contribute to the emotional and psychological sustainability of educational institutions. This necessitates systemic changes that include teacher support structures, professional development opportunities, and leadership models that mitigate burnout and promote long-term professional fulfilment. By fostering organizational environments that value emotional engagement, educators can create learning spaces that are both intellectually stimulating and emotionally nurturing.

Beyond emotional engagement, educational leadership must also address the challenges of diversity, inclusion, and social justice, characteristic of our times. In contemporary educational settings, ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities requires a transformation in leadership practices. Drawing upon research on culturally responsive pedagogy, the second part emphasizes the ways in which educational leaders can implement strategies that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity. Specifically, the notion of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is explored in-depth, emphasizing the need for leaders to cultivate critical self-awareness, develop inclusive curricula, and foster school environments that actively support minoritized students.

How does culturally responsive leadership contribute to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments? Effective leadership in this context involves not only structural and curricular adaptations but also a fundamental shift in the philosophical approach to education, moving away from neoliberal frameworks that prioritize economic utility over humanistic and inclusive educational values. By engaging with communities, resisting deficit narratives, and advocating for policies that ensure true educational equity, leaders can create institutions that genuinely reflect and embody principles of social justice and inclusion.

At the heart of high-quality educational leadership lies a strong ethical and moral foundation. But what role do ethical and moral principles play in shaping good educational leadership? The final component of this chapter explores the moral responsibilities of educational leaders, emphasizing the role of teachers and administrators as exemplars who inspire and guide students toward learning, autonomy and self-improvement. Drawing from philosophical perspectives, including those of David Carr, Linda Zagzebski, and José Manuel Esteve, the discussion examines the concept of moral leadership as an essential characteristic of good educators. The ability to lead by example, fostering a sense of admiration and reflective imitation among students, is presented as a critical factor in ethical education. Rather than enforcing compliance through authority, true educational leadership is framed as a liberating force that encourages students to engage in critical self-reflection and personal development. The role of dialogue, prudential advice, and reciprocal trust between teachers and students is explored as a means of reinforcing ethical learning environments that respect individual autonomy while guiding learners toward moral and intellectual growth.

This exploration of ethical leadership also engages with contemporary critiques that question the potential limitations of moral exemplarity in education. Concerns regarding autonomy and critical thinking are addressed by emphasizing that the admiration and imitation fostered by exemplary leadership must be reflective rather than passive. This distinction ensures that students actively engage with ethical principles rather than merely conforming to external expectations. By framing ethical leadership as a dynamic and reciprocal process, it underscores the importance of adaptability, context-awareness, and genuine commitment to student empowerment. Recognizing that educational leadership does not exist in a vacuum, but rather within complex

social and institutional frameworks, the discussion acknowledges the challenges leaders face in balancing ethical integrity with the practical demands of policy implementation and institutional accountability.

As the chapter concludes, it reinforces the interconnectedness of emotional, inclusive, and ethical dimensions in educational leadership. To cultivate caring and sustainable educational environments, leaders must integrate care ethics into their pedagogical approaches. They should promote culturally responsive school practices that address structural inequities, and embody moral principles that inspire and empower learners. By embedding these principles into both daily practice and institutional frameworks, educational systems can become more equitable, resilient, and attuned to the holistic needs of learners. In an era of rapid social and technological change, the transformative power of education lies in its ability to bridge intellectual rigour with emotional depth, cultural inclusivity, and ethical leadership, ultimately shaping future generations with the values of empathy, justice, and lifelong learning.

The Emotional Dimension of Educational Leadership: The Ability to Care

Examining the multifaceted nature of education presents a critical challenge requiring a nuanced perspective on human development and the transmission of knowledge. To face this reality, framing education through a Deweyan lens helps to broaden the understanding of pedagogical practice as an inherently life-embedded process fundamentally shaped by relational dynamics (Dewey, 1930). Therefore, the holistic role of education highlights the socio-emotional context in which it is created, emphasizing its interpersonal nature (Habimana, 2024).

Thus, to institutionalize emotionality as a fundamental aspect of pedagogical accountability, it is essential to recognize and strengthen the role of 'care' in educational practice. This can be achieved by implementing care pedagogies and strategies that cultivate supportive organizational environments, mitigate burnout, and prioritize teachers' emotional well-being (Duffy, 2018; Hawkes & Dedrick, 1983; Webb et al., 2009).

Care is a fundamental, cross-cutting factor that influences both students' academic performance within the educational system and their overall well-being. It is often positioned in the persistent educational dichotomy between the holistic nurturing of student development, pri-

marily associated with early education, and the formal transmission of knowledge, which is more prominently emphasized in higher educational stages (Noddings, 2013). Nevertheless, inequality or resistance in the distribution of care practices in education constitutes a lack of socio-emotional institutionalization. Therefore, the framework of care ethics as a moral responsible approach that states relationality and interdependence among individuals is appropriate to address this issue, especially due to its resilient nature, which fosters adaptation to unforeseen circumstances by prioritizing well-being and engagement, thereby preserving the integrity of education (Kolarić & Taczyńska, 2022).

Specifically, embedded in this context, care can be defined as 'a multidimensional concept that involves both the provision of physical, emotional, and psychological support, and the active maintenance of the well-being of others, often within intimate relationships or professional roles' (Tronto, 1993, p. 103). Nevertheless, the recognition of 'care' within educational practice can be acknowledged in care pedagogies. These pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies are often characterized as care-informed practices that foster reciprocal and transpersonal relationships within safe, inclusive and responsive learning environments (Duffy, 2018).

The materialization of this approach can range from the acknowledgement of the individuality of the learner, to the adoption of didactic models and policies that place care at the centre of the agenda. For instance, when teachers develop a deep understanding of students' backgrounds, cultural identities and linguistic knowledge, while intentionally avoiding deficit-based perspectives, they create an affirming learning environment that validates students' identities and fosters their overall development (Soto, 2005). Similarly, implementing pedagogical approaches that emphasize students' interest-driven, real-world problem-solving, such as service-learning projects, cultivates reciprocal caring relationships. This fosters a sense of social responsibility by actively engaging students in meaningful, community-centred projects (Park et al., 2023).

The multiple benefits of care pedagogies entail the development of a positive self-concept enhancing motivation and learning engagement. Additionally, they cultivate positive self-esteem and emotional well-being, encouraging active participation, intellectual risk-taking, and perseverance in the face of challenges. Furthermore, they cultivate trust and confidence, strengthening self-efficacy and fostering key values

such as intrinsic motivation, perseverance, and resilience (Noddings, 2013). On another note, care pedagogy could be interpreted as an equitable approach towards learning, especially during times of crisis, since it emphasizes mutual respect, fostering resilience through significant dialogue and adaptability (Mehrotra, 2021). Finally, caring relationships in the academic environment promote a sense of community. However, when implemented through cooperative learning activities, they enhance social and emotional learning components in the curriculum, developing prosocial behaviours and supportive classroom environments (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016).

While caring pedagogies emphasize the importance of establishing relationships based on reciprocity, as well as sensitive learning environments, it is of great importance to recognize the need to support and care for teaching staff in order to develop their functions effectively, since the ability to care is closely linked to personal and professional well-being, highlighting the need to implement care strategies that prioritize caregivers (Travers & Cooper, 1997).

The concept of 'caring for the caregiver' is framed by the idea that the well-being of teachers influences both their individual performance and their relationship with their students; experiencing high levels of stress, lack of recognition, or burnout affects their ability to optimally engage in caring pedagogical practices (Hawkes & Dedrick, 1983).

One of the major challenges facing teachers is burnout syndrome, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Factors such as excessive workload, lack of support, and high expectations can lead to burnout, as well as reduce the ability to meet the needs of students (Herman et al., 2018).

To mitigate the impact, it is essential that educational institutions adopt strategies that prioritize the well-being of teachers. Among these measures is school leadership that promotes environments of trust, support and collaboration among teachers, thus strengthening their comfort and job stability. Likewise, the implementation of collaborative work can contribute to reducing professional isolation, fostering motivation and increasing job satisfaction. This shows that the combination of effective professional development and a trust-based environment has a positive impact on teacher motivation and commitment. When teachers have access to continuous learning opportunities and the autonomy to apply their knowledge without excessive supervision, their

involvement in the educational process is strengthened. In this sense, achieving a balance between performance evaluation and promoting a work environment that values teacher professionalism would not only reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, but would also foster innovative pedagogical practices focused on learning (Webb et al., 2009).

Another key in teacher care is the promotion of personal autonomy, as well as the recognition of work done, since these are fundamental in order to promote deeper learning and greater persistence in their tasks, favouring development and performance as opposed to burnout (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This should not be exclusive among teachers, but should involve the different actors in the educational community, from managers and teachers to students, since supportive relationships between teachers and students, social cohesion and a sense of belonging in the school contribute to the participation and emotional commitment of students in their learning (Ulmanen et al., 2016).

In summary, while care pedagogies prioritize the creation of safe and responsive learning environments, equal attention must be given to the well-being of teachers and the broader educational community to foster an education that fully acknowledges the emotional dimension of development (Soto, 2005; Webb et al., 2009). Education should not be seen solely as an intellectual pursuit but as a deeply human experience shaped by care, trust, and relational interdependence (Noddings, 2013). Therefore, by embedding care into both pedagogical practices and institutional frameworks, educational systems can become more equitable and sustainable, ultimately reinforcing the transformative power of education in society (Mehrotra, 2021; Ulmanen et al., 2016).

Inclusion for All? Lessons from Culturally Responsive School Leadership

The Eurydice report (European Commission, 2023), titled *Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Schools in Europe,* states that all European education systems have established comprehensive policy frameworks – legislation, strategies, and action plans – aimed at eliminating educational barriers and fostering equality and inclusion at a systemic level. However, in countries like Spain, 63% of Roma students do not finish compulsory education, compared to 4% of non-Roma students (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013). This issue has been similarly observed in other European countries, as evidenced by Rutigliano (2020). Regarding immigrant students, after analysing the evolution in the achieve-

ment gap between native students and students with an immigrant background in 2009–2018 PISA results, Porcu et al. (2023) show how differences are narrowing but still present in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain.

Echoing the Salamanca Statement and Framework (UNESCO, 1994), the 2017 UNESCO Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education, defines inclusion as 'a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners' (p. 7) and inclusive education as 'the process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to *all* learners' (p. 7, emphasis added). However, once these goals are established, responding to them as educational leaders can take multiple forms, as Thrupp (2003) identifies in his tripartite division of writers' reactions to education policy:

- 'Problem-solvers' are apolitical: it is difficult to tell whether they know that schooling occurs in a context of neoliberal reforms and structural inequality as they barely refer to either in their reform processes. This type of leader would, for example, implement after-school tutoring programmes for low-performing students without analysing the structural barriers behind their difficulties. [1]
- 'Overt apologists' are supportive of contemporary policy without critically examining its implications. An example of a reform they may promote could be adapting teaching to prioritize success for all in skills demanded by the labour market without questioning whether these demands benefit or harm certain groups of students.
- 'Subtle apologists' do acknowledge problems around social justice and might critique the reform, but still fail to deeply interrogate the causes of these problems. An example of this might be criticizing the process to access tertiary education and starting initiatives that help some disadvantaged students enter university without understanding or advocating to transform the structures that make access difficult in the first place.

If the dominant neoliberal perspective views education primarily as a means to develop human capital that will sustain economic growth (Choo, 2020; Qvortrup, 2009), the necessary shift toward inclusion

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[1] Although, in this sense, we could call this view 'apolitical,' we believe that not engaging with politics or the social context is, in itself, a deeply political stance.

and equity is not merely a technical or organizational adjustment but rather a transformation rooted in a distinct philosophical perspective (Fulcher, 1989, cited in UNESCO, 2017), that also involves moral and political reasoning.

To expand on this vision of an educational leadership that fosters inclusive education through a critical lens that is justice and equity-oriented, we will engage with research on culturally responsive pedagogy, and its contributions to the inclusion paradigm.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies emerged at the end of the twentieth century (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and aim to reform all elements of the educational system to respond to the specific educational needs of minoritized students, especially those who are marginalized in most school settings (Gay, 2010).

In the synthesis of the existing literature made by Khalifa et al. (2016), 4 major strands of behaviour of CRSL emerged:

1. Critical self-awareness or critical consciousness: leaders must know who they are as people, understand the context in which they lead and closely explore their own assumptions and biases related to race, class, ethnicity, gender and culture, and how these affect the school environment, actively challenging hegemonic, white- and western-centred leadership practices.

2. Culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation: provide resources and curricula that reflect cultural responsiveness, mentor and model culturally responsive teaching, and offer professional development opportunities. This would also include encouraging courageous conversations where educators speak up against or critically examine their assumptions about marginalized groups and counselling out teachers who acknowledge that this work is not for them.

3. Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments: create a culturally affirming school climate by, for example, using student's voices or challenging policies and behaviours that do not meet an equity and social justice stance, which might sometimes look like 'creative noncompliance'[2] (Meier & Gasoi, 2017).

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[2] Creative noncompliance is defined by Meier and Gasoi (2017) as avoiding adherence

4. Engaging students and parents in community contexts: designing environments that are both supportive, caring communities, and learning organizations by, for example, validating and including different cultures and knowledge in the school, resisting deficit images of students and families by maintaining high expectations in all areas, advocating for community-based causes, or sharing resources with families.

As we can see, culturally relevant leadership is considered an ethical stance that educational leaders need to adopt, rather than a fixed collection of strategies designed for minoritized students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Developing true critical awareness and creating opportunities to dialogue about gender, race, or class, together with shifting the perception of families and students from passive recipients of school services to active participants in the educational process, appear to be strong antidotes to overlooking the structural causes of inequality and reproducing neoliberal patterns of oppression.

Some limitations of these practices, gathered by Schmeichel (2012) would include teachers' difficulty in applying CRSL due to large class sizes, insufficient support, and a focus on standardized testing and completing the curriculum (Morrison et al., 2008), which could lead to well-intentioned educators with a lack of time and an excess of paperwork to reduce culturally relevant pedagogy to recognizing ethnic holidays, incorporating popular culture into lessons, or using informal language (Irvine, 2010), ultimately using students' culture as a performative and superficial hook or as a tool of assimilation (Evans et al., 2020).

Additionally, developing awareness of their cultural biases and blind spots is a gradual process that takes time and effort for teachers and leaders – it does not happen overnight. Effective (and not structural) change, and an idea of continuous improvement is not the same as a process of genuine and profound transformation (Ward et al., 2015), which takes time and could be equated to a marathon more than a race.

Ward et al. (2015), facing the fact that leaders normally have a rather limited scope of action, proposed three options: exit, voice and loy-

to external mandates when they hinder our ability to address the genuine needs and interests of the children in our care. The Civil Rights Movement activist John Lewis refers to similar actions when he speaks of causing 'good and necessary trouble' by speaking up, speaking out, and getting in the way.

alty (Hirschman, 1970). When exit is not an ethical choice and loyalty has consequences on students' lives, voice is all that remains: school leaders retain the power to inform themselves and others, to speak up about the needs of all their students, without exception, and, slowly but surely, to make inclusion a reality in their schools. Fundamentally, since the educational system has historically marginalized minoritized students – deliberately or unintentionally – CRSL serves as a source of inspiration and guidance to ensure that inclusion is both truly inclusive and just.

Core Qualities of the Educational Leader: Foundations for Ethical and Moral Guidance

The early years of the twenty-first century are facing a profound moral crisis, marked by individualism, violence, radicalization and political polarization, which urgently calls for the search for effective methods for the moral and ethical development of society. Since moral learning is largely dependent on the influence of others (Carr, 2023), the teacher's role as a formative agent takes on a central role due to their continuous contact with students. Therefore, this last section explores the core qualities an educational leader must possess to contribute to the holistic development and human flourishing of scholars.

Throughout history, several authors in the field of philosophy of education and from different cultural and geographical contexts have reflected on the effects of exemplars in societies. For instance, Plato was worried about the influence of the gods of Greek mythology on the education of young people, because it could constitute a grave danger as they embodied ways of life contrary to good and human flourishing. Similarly, in last decades, some prominent voices from the international sphere, such as David Carr from the United Kingdom, José Manuel Esteve from Spain, Linda Zagzebski the from United States, or Kristján Kristjánsson from Iceland, have made significant contributions that facilitate an understanding of the role of educators as a guide in the ethical education of students, with relevant consequences for educational leadership.

First, Zagzebski (2017) argues that in every community there are individuals who are admired because they show excellence in a specific area, which inspires others to improve, which she calls 'role models' or 'exemplars' (p. 153). Therefore, the very first trait of an educational leader could be to possess an excellent quality that elicits that need for

improvement in the learner. Carr (2002) goes even further, claiming that the educational leader must be 'an example of the best values and virtues found in a particular way of life' (p. 117). For him, this is so because no one can teach well what one does not know deeply, and a theoretical knowledge is not enough to fully comprehend some educational contents, specifically, those related to ethics, which are essentially practical. Therefore, an educator cannot teach something that they do not live. In other words, the leader must be a moral exemplar to which the students aspire, which necessarily requires the cultivation of virtuous character in the teaching profession.

Given that the teacher embodies an excellence that the student still lacks, Esteve (1977) maintains that there is a distance between them, derived from the superiority that the educational leader holds over the student. However, according to the author, this excellence must be recognized by the student for the leader to be considered an authority. In this sense, Zagzebski (2017) adds that the recognition of a superior quality in the other causes admiration, which drives the desire to imitate the other to achieve that better self. Henderson (2024) reinforces this idea by explaining that such admiration arises precisely from the lack of that excellence, as it is perceived as a moral ideal worthy of attainment.

By recognizing this ideal, the learner freely and consciously accepts the teacher's influence to imitate them. Nonetheless, the leader's superiority is not exercised for personal benefit – which would distinguish it from models such as authoritarianism – but rather directed towards guiding the learner in achieving their best self (Esteve, 1977), thus reducing the distance between them, which ultimately tends to disappear. For this reason, Esteve (1977) defines this relationship as a 'liberating authority' (p. 187). Therefore, another quality of educational leaders lies in the ability to inspire and guide students, not only through their example as a role model, but also by placing their excellence at the service of the moral development of the students, driving them towards the best version of themselves.

Esteve (1977) notes that another fundamental trait of the educational leader is the use of open dialogue and prudential advice as an essential means of communication with learners. In this leadership model, there is no room for the imposition of commands, as teacher and student progress together towards a shared goal. Rather than imposing a set of beliefs, the educational leader respects students' freedom by fos-

tering an environment where they can independently discover and explore their own convictions. As this author asserts, true leaders must encourage learners' initiative, given that actively exercising freedom is the only way for its full development.

The last key attribute of the educational leader that will be discussed here is the ability to embody consistent exemplarity while responding to the needs of the group they serve. According to Zagzebski (2017), admiration for a fleeting quality lacks true excellence; thus, 'reflective admiration is the test of exemplarity' (p. 63). In this regard, Esteve (1977) maintains that a leader's authority endures only if they effectively address the needs and interests of their community; otherwise, admiration fades. Carr (2002) reinforces this idea, emphasizing the importance of teachers understanding and addressing the specific demands of their group.

This conception of the educational leader as a moral role model has been subject to criticism, especially around the concern of whether imitation of others might limit autonomy, an aspect of particular relevance in education. For example, Kant (1997) argues that true autonomy is based on acting according to one's own principles, not relying on external models. Similarly, Taylor (1992) stresses that moral models are only valuable if critically reflected upon and internalized by the individual. To address this concern, Zagzebski (2017) offers a fundamental contribution, stating that when admiration arises from critical reflection, the individual consciously recognizes that imitation benefits their own development. In this sense, the decision to imitate an exemplary figure is not an external imposition, but the result of autonomous judgement. The disciple, then, freely trusts that the orientations of the educational leader are a suitable path for their improvement (Esteve, 1977). Therefore, the person who makes this decision is autonomous, as it is the result of the exercise of their own freedom.

Moreover, as previously noted, the genuine educational leader not only respects the learner's freedom, but also facilitates it. Hence, the leader does not seek to generate submission or dependence, but to accompany the student to achieve a common goal: the autonomy and freedom inherent to the rational being (Esteve, 1977). Thus, far from restricting the autonomy of the student, the educational leader actively contributes to its achievement. This demonstrates, once again, the close interconnection between the terms 'educational leader,' 'freedom' and 'autonomy.'

Lastly, as Kristjánsson (2006) notes, young people's attention has been diverted to social network sites, which reflect a society in moral decay. Thus, a major challenge facing this leadership model is to shift students' attention away from these questionable models and redirect it towards the figure of the educational leader, in order to meet today's ethical and moral challenges, respecting human dignity and contributing to human improvement.

An exemplary figure of educational leadership that is being studied again today is Janusz Korczak (Liebel & Markowska-Manista, 2019; Tsabar, 2021), a Polish pedagogue, doctor and writer who devoted his life to the care of orphans in Warsaw. His pedagogy was grounded in respect for the dignity of the child, the promotion of autonomy, and moral education through personal example (Fuentes & García Bermejo, 2024). Korczak's leadership was not based on the imposition of rules, but rather on the ethical conduct he modelled, which inspired children to imitate him in a thoughtful and autonomous manner. In fact, his orphanage became a democratic community, where children practiced self-government through their own parliament, court and newspaper (Efron, 2005). This model enabled them to cultivate a sense of justice, responsibility and self-discipline, thereby illustrating that effective leadership does not restrict autonomy, but rather strengthens it by fostering a reflective admiration that motivates students to reach their fullest potential.

Korczak also embodies Carr's (2002) idea regarding the need for educational leaders to cultivate virtuous character. Korczak himself emphasized that the educator's responsibility is to continuously improve to become a force for change and a leader capable of transforming children's lives (Efron, 2005). Undoubtedly, his life proves that the true educational leader does not dominate, but accompanies; does not impose, but inspires; and does not restrict, but liberates.

Some Final Thoughts

In this chapter, we have attempted to answer the research question regarding the current challenges of educational leadership through a panoramic review of recent research on three key themes: the emotional dimension of leadership, especially related to the capacity for caring; the responsibility to promote culturally inclusive contexts through the effective recognition of the value of diversity; and attention to the ever-complex nature of the leader, as the primary cause and foundation

of positive influence on others. Thus, a critical synthesis is provided of some of the most significant contributions of recent years on the three themes addressed, in dialogue with established voices in educational research.

The first conclusion to be drawn from the review conducted, indicates that educational leadership entails great responsibilities that largely co-incide with some of the most important social and cultural challenges of our time, which places it at the forefront of society. This is good news insofar as education, in general, and the school, in particular, is not iso-lated from the society in which it operates, but is directly linked to it, as Dewey (1899) pointed out, and can respond to the social challenges it poses. At the end of the nineteenth century, the American pedagogue argued that the radical change taking place in education at that time required a radical change in education itself, such that schools would become the natural social unit they should aspire to be. More specifi-cally, he warned that 'Travel has been rendered easy; freedom of move-ment, with its accompanying exchange of ideas, indefinitely facilitated. The result has been an intellectual revolution. Learning has been put into circulation' (p. 40). These words seem to accurately define some of the most characteristic features of recent decades, where learning as a capacity for adaptation has become an essential activity where the in-tellectual has adopted a renewed vision in the complex interpretation of reality in continuous relationship with the emotional.

However, this intellectual revolution cannot be supported solely by schools; rather, it must, in a certain sense, be led by education. In other words, between the social isolation of schools and complete subordi-nation to social trends, there is a place where it is possible to balance educational autonomy with an eye toward the emerging demands of so-ciety. Indeed, educational leadership cannot uncritically subject schools to passing trends and dominant fads (Esteban & Fuentes, 2020). Unlike other occupations, the task of education entails a high level of auton-omy in decision-making and personal initiative (Carr, 2002), which goes beyond the mere application of a series of teaching techniques, or the reproduction of procedures designed by agents outside the school en-vironment. This has direct consequences for the training of future ed-ucators and gives meaning to their development in higher education institutions, where intellectual demands and autonomy are prominent signs of identity.

A recent example of this can be found in the processes of integrat-

ing technology into schools, which have captured the attention, efforts, and resources of many educators, researchers, administrators, and politicians in recent years, relegating other fundamental issues of education to the background. However, there seems to be a decline, or at least a slowdown, in the placement of technology at the centre of learning. It does not seem reasonable to follow the pendulum's logic and make an anti-technology shift, but rather to warn of the need for a thoughtful reflection on the role of education in society. Perhaps the third challenge examined here allows for the introduction of this element of balance into the debate on educational leadership, by raising a controversial and even uncomfortable issue due to its complexity, but one that raises profound questions as necessary as those posed by the previous two.

Secondly, we have studied the emotional aspect of educational leadership as an essential task for generating a sense of belonging to a community among group members, as it promotes a deeper and more stable interpersonal commitment to the common good than strictly instrumental and utilitarian reasons. Considering this, two reflections can be raised. On the one hand, there is a risk of placing emotions at the centre of education as a priority reference in decision-making. There is no doubt that an emotionally safe and comfortable environment provides well-being and fosters the mental health of individuals, as well as the development of numerous capacities linked to creative thinking (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Furthermore, attention to emotions allows for the complementing of other essentially intellectual capacities such as critical thinking, generating what has been called an extended reason, as an essential resource against current forms of indoctrination (Ibáñez-Martín, 2021). However, we have once again swung towards a context where emotions seem to be against academic rigour as two antagonistic poles, whose confrontation can lead to a clearly anti-pedagogical position, especially serious in childhood. Authors such as Kristjánsson (2015) warn of the consequences of what has been called The Vulnerable Child Paradigm, as an effect of an excessive psychologization and subjectivation of well-being and education. In his own words: 'The core rationale here turned on the need for schools to mend children's fragile emotional selves and boost their self-esteem – under the banners of efficiency and adaptability – thereby furnishing them with the requisite motivation and self-efficacy to behave pro-socially' (Kristjánsson 2015, p. 10). This shift has also been accompanied at the social level by a sen-

timentalist culture (Barrio Maestre, 2022) that has led to an emotivism where emotions serve as the perfect tool for political and social manipulation (Menéndez Álvarez-Hevia, 2018), as tragically reflected in the series of dystopian novels written by American author Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games, where spectacle is elevated to the category of political weapon in the purest style of the man considered the founder of modern political theory, Niccolò Machiavelli. Namely, in his key work The Prince, where he collects his first-hand experiences as a diplomat and military commander in the Florentine Republic, he asserts that effective leaders must consider questions such as 'whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both' (2021, p. 77). His explanation consists of affirming that both are useful for governing and, as is his custom, he understands them to be necessary means justified by the end. Furthermore, he asserts that if he has to choose, it is better to be feared than loved, because (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 78):

> [M]en have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation, which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment, which never fails. Nevertheless, a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred because he can endure very well being feared while he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women.

It is worth noting in the language used by Machiavelli the primacy of emotions in the exercise of leadership, as well as the risk involved in considering them as tools for an end, which, however lofty, is not necessarily legitimized to fully justify the means.

On the other hand, human emotions cannot be described as mere factors or processes to be controlled by leaders, regardless of the educational, social, or political context. They are a constitutive part of human beings, defining us as people and differentiating us from other beings and even from machines with artificial intelligence. Without emotions, it would not be possible to explain fundamental human experiences such as gratitude or forgiveness, which lie beyond mere reason (Caro & Fuentes, 2021), nor would it be possible to live virtues such as optimism or experience the deep and renewing satisfaction of hope (González

Martín & Fuentes, 2012). This is why expressions widely used in the discourse of emotional intelligence, such as emotional management or emotional control, can lead us to become true emotional manipulators when they are not subject to some higher and less instrumental criterion than that of effectiveness. Nor can the criterion of subjective emotional well-being be sufficient insofar as it limits us to individuality that forgets the essential ties with others, not only to survive, but as Aristotle (1836) points out, to achieve plenitude, and that allow us to understand ourselves from a broader and shared perspective, far from self-absorption and selfishness.

In this sense, the Self-Determination Theory developed by Ryan and Deci in recent decades (2017), has made it possible to delve deeper into this idea in different cultural and interpersonal contexts such as business, sports, family, and education, at least in two different senses. It has allowed us to identify three basic anthropological needs shared by all human beings and which refer to autonomy, interrelation, and competence. In this way, such theory has overcome other subjectivist approaches and unites the contributions of two disciplines traditionally distant due to disagreement over what can be considered objective: psychology and philosophy. Thus, at the same time, the reality of the objective implies a limit beyond oneself, a goal to be oriented toward that implies ethical elements. Ethics is none other than the dam that allows us to establish a limit and a direction for emotions and their management.

Along with the emotional dimension of educational leadership, in this chapter we have analysed the challenge of cultural diversity. Many issues arise in this regard that cannot be fully addressed here, so we will highlight two. Beyond the necessary respect that citizens of a democratic society must have for everyone's right to choose their own culture, concern for the treatment of diversity in schools implies promoting the idea that educational institutions have the responsibility to generate opportunities for their students to advance their social standing. In other words, to open new and higher horizons in which individuals, regardless of their cultural background, have opportunities not only to access greater levels of well-being and higher economic income than their families of origin, but also to access life prospects in which they could develop their full capabilities and providing meaningful purpose to their existence. This implies perceiving society as an open space for participation, in which the individual possesses the autonomy to inter-

vene, overcoming basic limitations and granting a more genuine meaning to freedom of choice. Furthermore, the development of this capacity also implies an ethical development on the path to human fulfillment or flourishing, in that one not only attends to one's own affairs, but is also capable of assuming shared responsibilities of a political nature, based on the central axis of the common good (Aristotle, 1894).

The second idea we wish to emphasize relates to the fact that the educational treatment of cultural diversity does not necessarily imply a relativization of the pillars of any culturally grounded approach to life, but rather their recognition and consideration as contributions to the discovery of a more fulfilling way of life in common, that is receptive to different sensibilities (Fuentes, 2014). Indeed, it would be a contradiction if, when we speak of educational inclusion, we meant the explicit or implicit exclusion of the principles and values of members of the educational community, which includes not only students but also their families and local communities of reference. This does not, however, mean renouncing the school's potential to contribute to this idea of good. In other words, the school and its members are not excluded from intercultural dialogue about the cultural elements that enable the best forms of human cultivation. A cultivation that is precisely part of the word culture, which comes from the Latin *cultus* and derives from the verb *colere,* meaning 'to cultivate.' And like all crops, it can be diverse, but not infinite, since not all fruits or products of the field are beneficial to humans.

Finally, we have identified the ethical character of the educator as a challenge for educational leadership. There is no doubt that from Socrates to Korczak, our history is shaped by figures of extraordinary worth who, for various reasons, have guided and continue to guide our existence. Their ways of living, and even dying, have shaped our cultures and have served as a reference for our decision-making, both in matters of everyday life and in more profound ones that help us answer the big questions. We not only remember their ideas or their words, but we also remember the people who said them. Thus, idealism is not only a system of thought or philosophical theory; it is also Plato, Kant, and Hegel, whose names and texts remain alive after centuries or millennia. The educational relevance of these exemplars remains alive today, among other reasons because they embody ideas that are brought to a level of understanding accessible by their similarity to other human beings.

Dewey pointed out that 'The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons' (1930, p. 9), among which, in our view, could be the leadership of people. More specifically, exemplarism is linked to educational leadership, in that leaders are likely to provoke admiration and desires for emulation in others, due to their excellent characteristics in different domains. However, at the same time, there are a series of associated risks derived from the capacity for imitation of negative exemplars. In other words, exemplarism can become a process that reproduces evil in that it exposes profiles with at least one of its pernicious characteristics to groups of individuals, provoking desires for imitation in some of them and, therefore, causing the continuation of evil. This is especially worrying in the educational field, where teachers are role models who act in a setting that, in most cases, involves children, adolescents, and young people. Therefore, their capacity to influence others in their training process is very high (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017). It is worth asking what motivates individuals to admire figures whose lives are far from being completely exemplary. To this end, Carr (2024) and Croce and Vacarezza (2017) respond that the complexity of the figures, the combination of factors, or mixed traits are aspects that attract others, to the extent that the exemplary figures are perceived as closer to their own reality. However, their explanation and normalization do not exempt them from the obvious educational risks and draws attention once again to the educational leader of reference, to the ethical character of the educator, as they constitute the closest reference figure.

It is obvious that planting a seed is not enough to grow a plant. With it, a plant sprouts, sometimes with significant initial strength, but the task of cultivation continues afterward. In this sense, the classic metaphor of education as cultivation and school as a garden, which is still preserved in the names of educational institutions in some languages, takes on renewed meaning regarding educational leadership, which requires a permanent responsibility over time. Such stability can be rooted in its ethical foundation, which, as we have seen in this chapter, is present in some of the most important challenges facing educational leadership today. This leads us to understand that leading people and communities in our field of knowledge is more than a technical matter, reduced to the acquisition of practical skills. While these are obviously relevant, the humanity inherent in educational action and its purposes deeply permeates the nature of leadership today.

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2 Unearthing Context: How Socioeconomic Status Shapes the Leadership-Science Achievement Nexus

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Introduction

The relationship between school leadership and student achievement has been a subject of extensive research, particularly in the context of large-scale educational assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Successful school leaders have a critical role in promoting school effectiveness and adapting their leadership practices to their school environment (Gurr et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020).

In fact, when we are referring to school leadership and student academic outcomes, instructional leadership could act as an important leadership practice. Yet, this leadership perspective is presented through indirect pathways in which school leaders influence teaching and learning and supporting students, through curriculum management, teacher support, and fostering a learning-focused school culture (Hallinger, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008).

Additionally, the level of school autonomy is an important factor to take into consideration, influencing student academic outcomes. School autonomy refers to the extent to which school leaders have decision-making power over key aspects of school management, including curriculum design, resource allocation, and personnel decisions. In fact, granting more school autonomy could allow school leaders to adopt more context-specific leadership practices (Hanushek et al., 2013).

Therefore, the relationship between school leadership and student academic outcomes highlights the indirect influence that school leaders

have on their students (Day et al., 2020). This indirect effect on student outcomes may be observed through school leaders' practices and styles that could include support for teachers' professional development, engagement with external stakeholders, supporting the overall teaching and learning process, fostering a participative leadership among the internal stakeholders, etc. (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011).

Nevertheless, the impact of school leadership practices on student achievement can be influenced by a range of contextual factors, including the economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) of students (Hallinger, 2016). Therefore, exploring how these particular factors interact with school leadership practices are important for developing policies that support students and school effectiveness in general.

Having said that, this chapter seeks to examine the role of ESCS in the relationships between instructional leadership, school autonomy, and students' science achievement in OECD's latest PISA cycle. Specifically, the research seeks to determine (1) whether ESCS moderates the effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy on student performance and (2) whether ESCS mediates these relationships. By highlighting the mediating and moderating roles of ESCS, this study offers valuable insights for policymakers and educators striving to enhance student learning outcomes through contextually informed leadership practices.

Theoretical Background

The Role of Contextual Factors and School Leadership

In general, it is highly important to recognize the complexities of the context in which school leaders operate, as these factors can significantly shape their perception and implementation of their leadership practice. Hallinger (2016) identified various contextual areas that affect school organizations and play a significant role in shaping and influencing school leaders' practices, including the institutional and community contexts. The institutional context, in particular, is defined by factors such as school size and the degree of centralization within the education system (Hallinger, 2016). For instance, centralization affects the vision and reforms that effective school leaders aim to implement, together with the school-level autonomy in school organizations. Also, the community context pertains to the actions of school leaders in the various communities where they lead their school organizations (Hallinger, 2016). Based on the above, school leaders' practices are affected on these

contextual factors. School leaders' leadership dimension and practices may depend on factors such as the socioeconomic status of students and the school's location.

In fact, the role of ESCS as both a mediator and moderator in these relationships adds further complexity. Specifically, these kind of factors could shape the relationship between instructional leadership and school autonomy and affect school leaders' practices. ESCS has long been recognized as a critical determinant of student achievement. ESCS, as measured in PISA, encompasses family wealth, parental education, and access to cultural resources, all of which contribute to students' educational opportunities (OECD, 2019). A study by Borgonovi and Pál (2016), suggested that ESCS mediates the effects of school leadership on student outcomes by influencing the availability of learning resources, parental support, and students' aspirations. Therefore, contextual elements play an important role when leading school organizations.

Additionally, ESCS may alternate the effectiveness of instructional leadership and school autonomy in school organizations. For instance, schools in high-ESCS contexts may benefit more from autonomy due to greater parental involvement and resource availability (Schleicher, 2018). Conversely, in low-ESCS settings, school autonomy may have limited positive effects if leaders lack the necessary capacity to navigate resource constraints effectively (Leithwood et al., 2020; Pashiardis et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Schwarz and Brauckmann (2015) emphasize the importance of context, noting that school leaders' practices are strongly influenced by their perceptions of their environment. Specifically, they referred to the concept of the 'area close to the school' (ACTS) and how it influences school leaders' leadership and performance (Schwarz & Brauckmann, 2015). Similarly, Hallinger (2016) highlights the significance of the community context in shaping school leaders' practices. According to studies conducted in Europe, factors such as the school's geographical location, parental engagement, financial constraints, and student behaviour affect school leaders' instructional practices (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pashiardis, 2014). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that contextual factors, including ESCS, directly impact school leadership effectiveness, making it impossible to separate leadership success from its surrounding environment (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2022).

Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement

Instructional leadership is considered one of the most prominent leadership models in education and has been widely examined due to its potential to impact student learning outcomes, as part of the indirect role of school leaders in influencing student learning outcomes. Hallinger (2016) emphasized that instructional leadership impacts student achievement primarily through the development of teacher capacity, curriculum management, and the establishment of a school culture that prioritizes learning. However, the strength of this effect has been debated, with some studies indicating that while instructional leadership contributes to student achievement, the effect size remains modest (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Empirical evidence suggests that instructional leadership is more effective when mediated through factors such as teacher collaboration, professional development, and a structured learning environment (Robinson et al., 2008). Despite this, some studies have reported contradictory findings, suggesting that the direct impact of instructional leadership on student achievement is limited and may depend on contextual factors such as students' socioeconomic background (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

For instance, Hallinger et al. (1996) found that instructional leadership had no direct effect on student achievement but influenced school effectiveness through shaping the instructional climate. Similarly, Heaven and Bourne (2016) found a weak correlation between instructional leadership and student performance in Jamaican schools, suggesting that other factors, such as teacher involvement and school environment, play a role in academic achievement.

Also, in another study, Hou et al. (2019) observed that instructional leadership had a significant moderating influence on the relationship between students' high school entrance scores and college entrance scores. Therefore, while instructional leadership is recognized as a key factor in shaping student achievement, its impact is largely indirect and influenced by mediating variables such as teacher collaboration, instructional strategies, and school climate. In addition to this, students' economic, social, and cultural Status (ESCS) adds further complexity.

School Autonomy and Student Academic Outcomes

Additionally, school autonomy has emerged as a key factor in shaping school leaders' practices and its impact on student achievement. Yet, we need to consider that contextual factors, as mentioned above, could in

fact affect school effectiveness and student academic outcomes. Specifically, a literature review provides some information on school leaders' level of autonomy and its effect on student academic outcomes. Some research suggests that granting schools greater autonomy can lead to improved student outcomes, as it allows for more context-specific decision-making and resource allocation (Hanushek et al., 2013).

Jackson (2023) examined a policy in Chicago that increased school-level control and found that school leaders' indirect support improved maths and English passing rates. Kemethofer et al. (2023) used PISA 2015 data to examine the associations between school leadership, autonomy, and student achievement. Their findings indicated no direct link between school autonomy and leadership behaviour, but accountability and leadership were correlated. Additionally, their study found that parental involvement played a significant role in linking leadership to student outcomes.

However, Cheng et al. (2016) support previous studies that show research on school autonomy often overlooks cultural and structural dimensions, leading to inconsistent findings. Therefore, they suggest that school autonomy should be analysed in terms of functional, structural, and cultural components to better understand its impact on student learning.

Additionally, the literature suggests that the benefits of school autonomy depend on the capacity of school leaders to make effective decisions and on the level of accountability mechanisms in place (OECD, 2019). In fact, an important debate in the literature concerns whether school autonomy leads to better academic performance across different socioeconomic contexts. Some studies indicate that autonomy is beneficial in high-performing education systems where school leaders have the skills and resources to support their independence effectively (Dronkers & Robert, 2007). However, in less resourced contexts, increased autonomy without adequate support may exacerbate existing inequalities and lead to divergent outcomes (Woessmann, 2016). Yet, we need to take into consideration that school autonomy allows school organizations to be innovative in teaching and learning and to respond more directly to the needs of the communities they serve (Kemethofer et al., 2023).

Concluding Remarks and the Logic of This Study

In general, the literature suggests that instructional leadership and school autonomy can influence student achievement, with the role of

school leaders being particularly important. However, contextual factors such as the level of autonomy in school organizations, whether centralized or decentralized, along with the economic, social, and cultural status of students, can shape the role of school leaders. Instructional leadership enhances student learning primarily through teacher development and curriculum management rather than directly affecting student performance. Similarly, the impact of school autonomy on student achievement varies depending on school leadership capacity, accountability structures, and socioeconomic conditions. The economic, social, and cultural status of students plays a crucial role in moderating and mediating these relationships, underscoring the need for context-sensitive leadership approaches.

Therefore, based on the literature review, in Figure 2.1 we present the conceptual model of this study. The model illustrates the direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy on students' science achievement, with ESCS serving as both a mediator and a moderator. The mediation pathway suggests that ESCS may partially explain the relationship between instructional leadership, school autonomy and student outcomes, while the moderation pathway posits that the strength of these relationships depends on varying levels of ESCS.

The following hypotheses are formulated on the basis of this model:

H1 *Instructional leadership and school autonomy are significantly associated with students' science achievement.*

H2 *Instructional leadership and school autonomy are significantly associated with ESCS.*
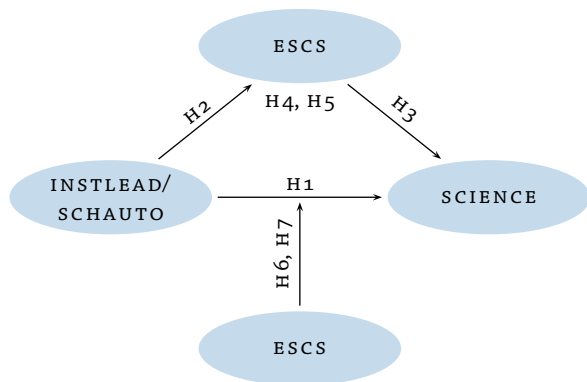
Figure 2.1
A Conceptual Model
of the Study

H3 *ESCS is positively associated with students' science achievement.*

H4 *ESCS mediates the relationship between instructional leadership and science achievement.*

H5 *ESCS mediates the relationship between school autonomy and science achievement.*

H6 *ESCS moderates the relationship between instructional leadership and science achievement.*

H7 *ESCS moderates the relationship between school autonomy and science achievement.*

The following section of the article describes the methodology used to test these relationships.

Methodology

Data Source and Variables

This study examines the relationship between ESCS, school leaders' instructional leadership, school autonomy, and students' science achievement. The study uses secondary data analysis of the latest OECD PISA 2022 results. Based on available data, a total of 60 countries and regions were included in the final analysis. These are countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) or OECD partner countries.

Independent Variables

In this study, we chose as independent variables two scales from the OECD PISA 2022 cycle: Instructional Leadership (INSTLEAD), and School Autonomy (SCHAUTO). Both scales are from the school leaders survey. For instructional leadership (INSTLEAD), school leaders were asked to rate (5-point scale) how often they or other members of their school management team engaged in activities or behaviours related to teaching or instructional leadership during the last 12 months (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2024).

Higher scale score values indicate higher frequencies of engagement by the school leader and school management team in instructional leadership activities, and vice versa. Meanwhile, the school autonomy (SCHAUTO) scale comprises 12 items (e.g. 'Appointing or hiring teachers,' 'Determining teachers' salary increases') and principals are asked about who had the main responsibility for various decisions or activities

at their school (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2024). Higher scale score values indicate that the school leader, teachers or members of the school management team, and the school governing board had a greater level of autonomy in decision-making activities at their school. Lower scale score values indicate that these groups had less autonomy.

Dependent Variable

As a dependent variable in this study, students science scores in the latest OECD PISA results were selected. Scientific performance, for PISA, measures the scientific literacy of a 15-year-old in the use of scientific knowledge to identify questions, acquire new knowledge, explain scientific phenomena, and draw evidence-based conclusions about science-related issues (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2023a). In the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the average science score among OECD countries was 485 points (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2023b).

Mediator/Moderator

Economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) was chosen as mediator and moderator between school autonomy, principal instructional leadership and science achievement. ESCS is the OECD PISA 2022 index of economic, social and cultural status. ESCS is a composite score derived, as in previous assessments, from three indicators related to family background: parents' highest education, in years (PAREDINT), parents' highest occupational status (HISEI) and home possessions (HOMEPOS) (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2023a). It must be mentioned that this index is constructed from students' survey results. The higher the value of ESCS, the higher the socioeconomic status. The ESCS scale has a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 across OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2023b).

Data Analyses

To examine the relationships between instructional leadership, school autonomy, Economic, Social, and Cultural Status (ESCS), and students' science achievement, the analysis of mediation and moderation was

used. For this purpose, the Hayes' PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.0 (Hayes, 2022) was chosen. This approach provides a robust framework for testing indirect and interaction effects through bootstrapped confidence intervals, improving upon traditional stepwise regression methods (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were computed before the main analysis to assess variable relationships and potential multicollinearity. Statistical significicance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 to determine whether ESCS mediates the relationships between instructional leadership, school autonomy, and students' science achievement. This model estimates:

- Path a: The direct effect of instructional leadership and school autonomy on ESCS.
- Path b: The direct effect of ESCS on science achievement, controlling for instructional leadership and school autonomy.
- Path c': The direct effect of instructional leadership and school autonomy on science achievement after controlling for ESCS.
- Path c: The total effect of instructional leadership and school autonomy on science achievement. The total effect is the sum of the direct and the indirect effect ($c = c' + a \times b$).
- Indirect Effect ($a \times b$): Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to estimate bias-corrected confidence intervals (95% CI) for the indirect effect. Mediation was considered statistically significant if the BootLLCI and BootULCI did not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The mediation model follows the equations:

$$M = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon,$$
$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_2 X + \beta_3 M + \varepsilon,$$

where M represents ESCS, X represents instructional leadership or school autonomy, and Y represents students' science achievement. The indirect effect (IE) was calculated as $\beta_1 \times \beta_3$. The overall mediation model of this study is presented in Figure 2.2.

To assess whether ESCS moderates the relationships between instructional leadership, school autonomy, and science achievement, we employed PROCESS Model 1. This model tests:

Figure 2.2
Conceptual Model
of Mediation

The moderation model follows the equation:
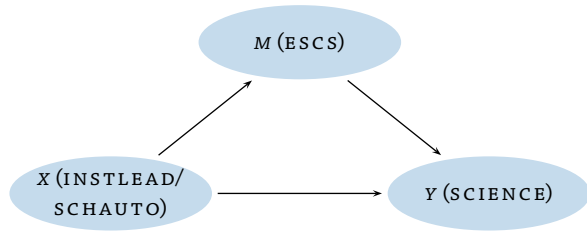
- The main effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy on science achievement.
- The moderating role of ESCS, assessed using an interaction term $(X \times W)$.
- Simple slopes analysis, examining the conditional effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy on science achievement at different levels of ESCS.

The moderation model follows the equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 W + \beta_3(X \times W) + \varepsilon,$$

where W represents the moderator (ESCS), and $X \times W$ represents the interaction term. Moderation was considered statistically significant if the coefficient β_3 was significant ($p < 0.05$). The conceptual model of moderation is presented in Figure 2.3.

In the results section, we present the results of the analysis that examines the role of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) as a mediator and moderator in the relationships between school autonomy (SCHAUTO), instructional leadership (INSTLEAD), and students' science scores in PISA 2022.

Results

Prior to conducting the mediation and moderation analyses, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relation-

Figure 2.3
Conceptual Model
of Moderation
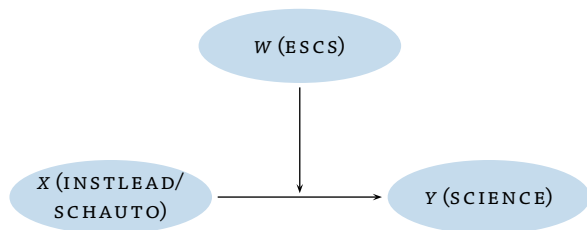
Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	IN-STLEAD	SCHAUTO	ESCS
INSTLEAD	0.28	0.44			
SCHAUTO	−0.34	0.78	−0.154		
ESCS	−0.44	0.61	−0.300*	0.322*	
SCIENCE	440.00	55.00	−0.443**	0.416**	0.703**

NOTES $N = 60$. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

ships between instructional leadership (INSTLEAD), school autonomy (SCHAUTO), economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS), and science achievement (see Table 2.1).

The results revealed that school principals instructional leadership was significantly negatively correlated with ESCS ($r = -0.300$, $p < 0.05$) and science achievement ($r = -0.443$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher instructional leadership was associated with lower ESCS levels and lower student performance in science. Meanwhile, school autonomy was positively correlated with ESCS ($r = 0.322$, $p < 0.05$) and science achievement ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater school autonomy was associated with higher ESCS and better science performance. In this regard, both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are confirmed.

As expected, ESCS showed the strongest correlation with science achievement ($r = 0.703$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform better in science. So, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed. These findings establish the foundational relationships among key variables, providing justification for conducting mediation and moderation analyses to further explore the role of ESCS in explaining and moderating these effects.

Testing for the Moderation Effects

The first moderation analysis aimed to examine whether ESCS moderates the relationship between school principals' instructional leadership and science achievement. As can be seen in Table 2.2, the model explained 56% of the variance in science achievement ($R^2 = 0.56$), which indicates a strong explanatory power. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3,56) = 23.34$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting that the included predictors (INSTLEAD, ESCS, and their interaction) contribute significantly to explaining science scores.

Table 2.2 Moderating Effect of ESCS on the Relation between Instructional Leadership and Students' Science Scores in PISA 2022

Predictors	β (SE)	t	(1)	(2)
INSTLEAD	−33.26 (12.08)	−2.75**	[−57.46, −9.06]	[−58.72, −15.10]
ESCS	56.32 (8.43)	6.68**	[39.44, 73.21]	[38.96, 69.84]
Interaction	9.96 (19.46)	0.50	[−29.30, 48.68]	[−18.24, 52.83]

NOTES   95% confidence interval: (1) low limit, upper limit, (2) boot low limit, boot upper limit. R^2 = 0.56, F = 23.34**, N = 60. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Instructional leadership had a significant negative effect on science scores (β = −33.26, p = 0.01). Meanwhile, ESCS had a significant positive effect on science scores (β = 56.32, p < 0.001), suggesting that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds perform better in science. The interaction effect between instructional leadership and ESCS was not statistically significant (β = 9.96, p = 0.62), indicating that ESCS does not moderate the relationship between instructional leadership and science scores (see Figure 2.4).

The Bootstrap confidence intervals for instructional leadership ([−58.72, −15.10]) confirm that its negative impact on science achievement is robust, as the CI does not include zero. The interaction effect's confidence interval ([−18.24, 52.83]) contains zero, reinforcing the conclusion that moderation is not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 – ESCS moderates the relationship between instructional leadership and science achievement – is not supported.

The moderating role of ESCS in the relationship between School Autonomy (SCHAUTO) and science achievement was also examined (see Table 2.3).

The model explains 56% of the variance in science achievement (R^2 = 0.56), indicating strong explanatory power. The overall model is statistically significant F (3,56) = 23.67, p < 0.001, meaning the predictors (SCHAUTO, ESCS, and their interaction) contribute significantly to ex-

Figure 2.4

Moderating Effect of ESCS between Instructional Leadership and Science Scores
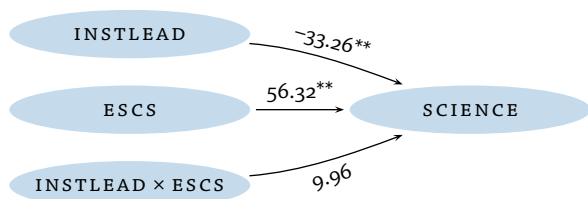
Table 2.3 Moderating Effect of ESCS on the Relation between School Autonomy and Students' Science Scores in PISA 2022

Predictors	β (SE)	t	(1)	(2)
SCHAUTO	14.88 (6.60)	2.26*	[1.67, 28.09]	[0.37, 28.19]
ESCS	59.36 (8.53)	6.96**	[42.26, 76.45]	[46.60, 74.83]
Interaction	23.87 (13.55)	1.76	[−3.28, 51.01]	[−3.01, 48.92]
Conditional Effects of School Autonomy at Different ESCS Levels				
Low (−0.61)	0.34 (10.56)	0.03	[−20.81, 21.49]	
Average (0.00)	14.88 (6.60)	2.26*	[1.67, 28.09]	
High (0.610)	29.43 (10.58)	2.78**	[8.23, 50.62]	

NOTES   95% confidence interval: (1) low limit, upper limit, (2) boot low limit, boot upper limit. R^2 = 0.56**, F = 23.67, N = 60. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

plaining science scores. Results show that school autonomy had a significant positive main effect on science scores (β = 14.88, p = 0.03). Similarly, ESCS had a significant positive effect on science scores (β = 59.36, p < 0.001), while the interaction effect between school autonomy and ESCS was not statistically significant (β = 23.87, p = 0.08). This result indicates that ESCS does not significantly moderate the relationship between school autonomy and science achievement (see Figure 2.5). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is not supported.

However, the conditional effects analysis suggests that the impact of school autonomy varies across different ESCS levels:

- At low ESCS (−0.61), the effect of school autonomy on science scores was negligible and not significant (p = 0.97).
- At average ESCS (0.000), school autonomy had a significant positive effect on science scores (p = 0.03).
- At high ESCS (0.610), the effect of school autonomy on science scores was stronger and statistically significant (p = 0.01).

The Bootstrap confidence intervals for school autonomy ([0.37, 28.19]) confirm that the positive effect is robust. The interaction effect's confi-
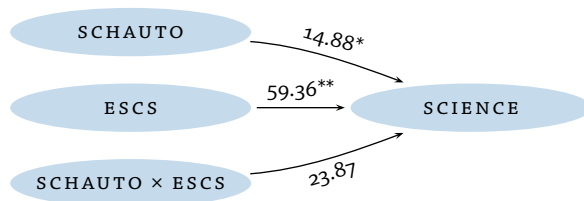
Figure 2.5
Moderating Effect of ESCS between School Autonomy and Science Scores

SCHAUTO — 14.88* → SCIENCE
ESCS — 59.36** → SCIENCE
SCHAUTO × ESCS — 23.87 → SCIENCE

dence interval ([−3.01, 48.92]) includes zero, reinforcing that the moderation effect is not significant.

Testing for the Mediation Effects

The mediating role of ESCS in the relationship between instructional leadership and science scores was investigated. The overall model explains 55% of the variance in science achievement ($R^2 = 0.55$), with a significant overall model fit ($F (2,57) = 35.36$, $p < 0.001$). As can be seen in Table 2.4, the total effect of instructional leadership on science scores was negative and significant ($\beta = -54.78$, $p < 0.001$).

The first regression equation examined the effect of instructional leadership on ESCS. The results indicated a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.41$, $p = 0.02$). The second regression equation examined the effect of ESCS on science achievement while controlling for instructional leadership. The results indicated a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 56.51$, $p < 0.001$), meaning students with higher ESCS scores performed better in science. When controlling for ESCS, instructional leadership remained a significant predictor of science achievement, though its effect was reduced ($\beta = -31.49$, $p < 0.001$). The aforementioned statistics are visually presented in Figure 2.6.

A bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) was used to test the significance of the indirect effect. The indirect effect of instructional leadership on science scores through ESCS was significant and negative ($\beta = -23.28$, BootSE = 8.97, 95% CI [−40.08,−3.56]). This result indicates that ESCS mediated the relationship between instructional leadership and science achievement. The mediation is partial, meaning instructional

Table 2.4 Mediating Effect of ESCS on the Relation between Instructional Leadership and Students' Science Scores in PISA 2022

| Predictors	β (SE)	t	(1)	(2)
INSTLEAD–ESCS	−0.41 (0.17)	−2.40*	[−0.75, −0.07]	
ESCS–Science	56.51 (8.36)	6.76**	[39.76, 73.26]	
INSTLEAD–Science	−31.49 (11.47)	−2.75**	[−54.47, −8.52]	
Total effect	−54.78 (14.56)	−3.76**	[−83.92, −25.64]	
Ind. effect INSTLEAD–ESCS–Science	−23.28 (8.97)			[−40.08, −3.56]

NOTES 95% confidence interval: (1) low limit, upper limit, (2) boot low limit, boot upper limit. $R^2 = 0.55$**, $F = 35.36$, $N = 60$. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2.6

Mediating Effect
of ESCS between
Instructional
Leadership and
Science Scores
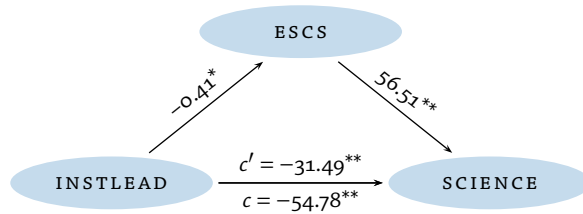
Table 2.5   Mediating Effect of ESCS on the Relation between School Autonomy and Students' Science Scores in PISA 2022

Predictors	β (SE)	t	(1)	(2)
SCHAUTO–ESCS	0.25 (0.10)	2.59**	[0.06, 0.45]	
ESCS–Science	57.27 (8.60)	6.66**	[40.04, 74.50]	
SCHAUTO–Science	14.86 (6.72)	6.72*	[1.41, 28.30]	
Total effect	29.26 (8.40)	3.48**	[12.44, 46.08]	
Ind. effect SCHAUTO–ESCS–Science	14.40 (5.90)			[5.01, 28.08]

NOTES   95% confidence interval: (1) low limit, upper limit, (2) boot low limit, boot upper limit. $R^2 = 0.55$**, $F = 35.36$, $N = 60$. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

leadership affects science both directly and indirectly through ESCS. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is partially confirmed.

The mediating role of ESCS in the relationship between school autonomy and science scores was also assessed (see Table 2.5). The overall model explained 53% of the variance in science achievement ($R^2 = 0.53$), with a significant overall model fit (F (2,57) = 32.74, $p < 0.001$). The total effect of school autonomy on science achievement was significant ($\beta = 29.26$, $p < 0.001$) suggesting that higher levels of school autonomy were associated with improved science scores.

The first regression equation examined the effect of school autonomy on ESCS. The results indicated a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.01$). The second regression equation examined the effect of ESCS on science achievement while controlling for school autonomy. The results indicated a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 57.27$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that students with higher ESCS performed better in science. When controlling for ESCS, school autonomy remained a significant predictor of science achievement, though its effect was reduced ($\beta = 14.86$, $p = 0.03$).

The indirect effect of school autonomy on science scores through

Figure 2.7

Mediating Effect of ESCS between School Autonomy and Science Scores
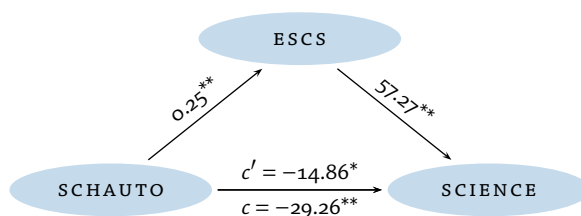
ESCS was significant and positive (β = 14.40, BootSE = 5.90, 95% CI [5.01, 28.08]). These findings indicate that ESCS partially mediated the relationship between school autonomy and science achievement. The mediation is partial, meaning school autonomy affects science both directly and indirectly through ESCS. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is partially supported. Overall, our study shows that ESCS has a mediating, instead of moderating, effect between school leaders' instructional leadership, school autonomy and students' science achievement.

Discussion and Implications

This study aimed to analyse the complex relationships between instructional leadership, school autonomy, economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) and student science achievements. While there is considerable scientific evidence on the links between ESCS and student achievement, there is little research on *how* ESCS works and *for which groups*. Our study shows that ESCS plays a mediating rather than a moderating role in the relationship between instructional leadership, school autonomy and student science achievement. Our findings suggest that ESCS partially mediates the effects of both instructional leadership and school autonomy on student achievement. The confirmation of partial mediation suggests that while instructional leadership and school autonomy have a direct effect on science achievement, a significant part of their effect is channelled through the mediating mechanism of socioeconomic status. This means that the effectiveness of instructional leadership and the benefits of school autonomy depend on the socioeconomic context in which they are implemented (Chen et al., 2018). The impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement has been the subject of extensive debate (Carlisle & Murray, 2015; Chen et al., 2018). Socioeconomic status, which reflects the socioeconomic status of family members, is often considered a key factor influencing children's academic and cognitive development (Chen et al., 2018). Instructional lead-

ership and school autonomy can be enhanced or diminished depending on the socioeconomic status of students and schools (Carlisle & Murray, 2015).

However, the research findings are mixed when it comes to ESCS as a moderator. The rejection of the hypotheses that socioeconomic status is a moderator of the relationships between instructional leadership/school autonomy and science achievement suggests that the strength or direction of these relationships does not change significantly with different socioeconomic statuses. However, this does not mean that social-economic status (SES) has no effect – on the contrary, its effect is indirect, i.e. it acts as a mediator rather than as a condition that modifies the strength (Munir et al., 2023). At the same time, this implies that the effects of instructional leadership and school autonomy on science achievement remain fairly constant across socioeconomic backgrounds. This finding reinforces a recurring idea in the literature that leadership has a greater effect across schools but does not necessarily reduce SES differences within schools (Tan et al., 2020; Perry & Mcconney., 2010). Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic success is multidimensional and depends on a variety of factors, with exceptions and differences within and between countries (Munir et al., 2023). The absence of moderating effects does not negate the importance of socioeconomic status but rather suggests that its influence operates primarily through mediating pathways. This nuanced understanding highlights the need to consider socioeconomic status as an integral part of the educational ecosystem, shaping the indirect effects of leadership and autonomy rather than directly modifying their effects.

Another important finding of our study – the negative relationship between instructional leadership and science achievement – also deserves separate attention in this discussion. This finding contradicts the classical notion that instructional leadership is related with increased students' achievement (Karadag, 2020). This seemingly illogical finding may be related to the specific measures used to assess instructional leadership in this study, or it may reflect a complex interplay of factors that are not fully reflected in this model. As suggested by Eryilmaz and Sandoval-Hernandez (2021), it is the limitations of the indicators used in international studies that may lead to such seemingly illogical results. Simply put, this may mean that the meaning and application of in-

structional leadership varies across contexts. In systems where instructional leadership is implemented through formal or top-down mechanisms (e.g. frequent lesson observations, performance monitoring), it may create unintended pressures or fail to address the true learning needs of students. For example, research has shown that in countries with strong bureaucratic traditions, principals' instructional leadership may still reflect administrative control rather than pedagogical support (Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė & Jurgilė, 2023).

In contrast, school autonomy was positively related to achievement and had both direct and indirect effects through ESCS. This is consistent with previous research (Hanushek et al., 2013) that greater autonomy allows schools to adapt to the needs of their communities, especially where resources and parental involvement are high. However, this advantage may be less available in contexts with low ESCS, where schools lack the capacity to fully exercise decision-making freedom. Moreover, in the absence of compensatory policies, it may even widen the gap between schools with different levels of social capital (Schleicher, 2018).

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of school leadership and educational equity in the context of international student achievement assessments, such as PISA and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). These assessments aim not only to measure student achievement internationally, but also to identify key contextual factors – such as leadership practices, school autonomy and socioeconomic status – that determine educational outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2020; Mullis et al., 2020). The partial mediation effects of ESCS identified in this study are consistent with PISA data, which consistently show that socioeconomically advantaged students tend to perform better, regardless of the policies of the school itself (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2023a). Meanwhile, the fact that the moderation effect was not statistically significant suggests that the impact of leadership practices on achievement remains stable across SES strata. This adds new nuances to the debate on educational equity and highlights the need to analyse the indirect pathways through which social context influences learning (Schleicher, 2018). Furthermore, the negative association between instructional leadership and science achievement calls into question the universality of international indices of leadership. Such indices used in the TALIS

(Teaching and Learning International Survey) and PISA surveys may not account for cultural and systemic differences in the implementation of leadership across countries (Eryilmaz & Sandoval-Hernandez, 2021).

Therefore, these findings reinforce calls for a more context-sensitive interpretation of international assessments and a more cautious approach to generalized global educational recommendations. Particularly, some implications for policy and practice could be associated with context-sensitive school leadership development. Educational policy should consider tailored training that informs school leaders about the presence of diverse school environments and socioeconomic contexts in school organizations. Also, given the mediating role of ESCS, educational reforms should incorporate broader socioeconomic interventions, such as parental engagement programmes, resource allocation adjustments, and community-based support initiatives, to mitigate the disparities in student achievement. Finally, future research should examine variations in leadership practices across different governance structures and cultural settings to refine school leadership models across the multiple contexts.

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3 | School Leadership and Educational Quality: A Review of Selected Global Models

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Introduction

Amongst the current global challenges is the need to ensure inclusive, equitable, equal, and quality education, guaranteeing both universal access and the fair distribution of opportunities for all. This goal aligns with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to improve education systems worldwide and reduce gaps in access and learning (United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.). To advance toward this objective, it is essential to consider a range of internal and external factors that impact educational development, including each country's context and the commitment of political leaders (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2024).

At the institutional level, one of the key elements in improving educational quality is school leadership, which has a direct impact on student learning outcomes and school management (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008). Various studies have demonstrated that school principals significantly influence the organizational culture of educational institutions, teacher motivation, and the implementation of effective pedagogical practices (Day et al., 2009).

In response to this evidence, numerous countries have developed educational leadership regulatory frameworks that establish standards and guidelines to strengthen school leadership teams and their impact on education. These frameworks aim not only to professionalize school management but also to ensure that leadership contributes to equity

and the improvement of learning outcomes in diverse educational contexts (Pont et al., 2008).

This chapter reviews the educational leadership regulatory frameworks implemented in Chile, Canada, Singapore, and Australia, countries that have developed specific models to guide school leaders in managing their institutions. These frameworks define clear criteria in key areas such as pedagogical leadership, resource management, teacher professional development, and engagement with the educational community. Through this analysis, common elements among these regulatory frameworks can be identified, offering a comprehensive perspective on how different countries structure educational leadership to enhance school management and learning outcomes.

Chile, for example, has developed the Framework for Good School Leadership and Management, which aims to professionalize school administration and promote the development of effective leadership teams (Ministerio de Educación República de Chile, 2015). In Canada, the province of Ontario has implemented the Ontario Leadership Framework, which has been key in reducing educational gaps and promoting equity (Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership, 2013). Similarly, Singapore has established the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP), a comprehensive programme that strengthens the training of school leaders to improve student performance (Ng, 2013). Finally, Australia has introduced the Australian Professional Standard for Principals, which sets clear guidelines for leadership development and evaluation in schools (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2020).

Despite contextual differences among these countries, they have all adopted a regulatory approach to educational leadership as a key strategy for the continuous improvement of their education systems. This study aims to examine how these frameworks are structured and which leadership dimensions are prioritized in each model.

Thus, this research will help to understand the regulatory framework on public education, providing evidence on the importance of having clear guidelines for school management and their relationship with learning improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Education is a fundamental pillar for the development of societies, and its quality largely depends on the management and leadership of the

school leadership teams. In this regard, educational leadership has been widely studied as a key factor in improving learning, equity, and the efficiency of school systems (Leithwood & Day, 2008). Since school leadership influences multiple dimensions of the educational system, it is necessary to approach its study from a comprehensive perspective. This theoretical framework analyses the fundamental concepts that underpin educational management and leadership in schools, in order to understand the impact of regulatory frameworks in the selected countries: Chile, Canada, Singapore, and Australia. To this end, five key thematic areas are presented: Educational Management, Educational Leadership, Dimensions of School Leadership, Public Administration in Education, and Regulatory Frameworks for Educational Leadership, which we will explain below.

Educational Management

Educational management refers to the processes, strategies, and policies implemented to effectively administer school systems and ensure learning quality. It encompasses the planning, organization, leadership, and evaluation of resources and stakeholders involved in education (Bush, 2020). The quality of education is directly linked to efficient management, which must guarantee access, equity, and excellence in learning outcomes (Fullan, 2020). Strong leadership within educational management translates into better school administration and a positive impact on student achievement (Schleicher, 2021). In this regard, management models vary across countries, depending on factors such as the degree of decentralization and the regulatory framework governing public education.

Educational Leadership

Leadership is understood as the process of motivating and influencing others to define and achieve common goals (Leithwood et al., 2006). This concept recognizes that leadership is not limited to the principal's role but is distributed among different members of the educational community. Furthermore, leadership is closely related to management. Although these two concepts have different meanings and scopes, they complement each other to enhance institutional development.

Different leadership approaches have been identified, including:

- *Transformational Leadership*. This approach motivates and empowers the educational community to achieve institutional goals. It is

Table 3.1   Synthesis of Key Dimensions of Leadership Practices

Synthesis of Key Dimensions of Leadership Practices, according to authors Leithwood et al. (2006)	Synthesis of Key Dimensions of Leadership Practices, according to authors Robinson and Gray (2019)
Setting a direction	Set goals and expectations
Developing staff	Promote and participate in teacher learning and professional development
Redesigning the organization	Obtain and maintain resources strategically
Managing instruction	Plan, coordinate, and evaluate curriculum instruction

NOTES   Adapted from *Framework for Good School Leadership and Management* (p. 12), by the Ministerio de Educación República de Chile (2015).

based on a shared vision, the professional development of staff, and the creation of a school environment that fosters academic success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

- *Distributed Leadership.* In this model, influence and decision-making emerge from the interactions among members of the organization rather than relying solely on individual leadership (Harris, 2008).

- *Instructional Leadership.* This approach focuses on improving teaching and learning. Educational leaders (such as principals and instructional coordinators) ensure that teachers receive the necessary support, resources, and guidance to implement effective classroom strategies and enhance student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008).

In many countries, educational leadership has been formalized through regulatory frameworks that establish standards and expected competencies for school administrators.

Dimensions of School Leadership

School leadership consists of multiple interrelated dimensions that impact institutional management and student learning outcomes. According to Leithwood et al. (2019), there are five fundamental dimensions of effective school leadership:

1. *Setting Goals and Expectations.* This involves defining clear and achievable objectives that guide the work of the school community and align teaching practices with the institutional vision.

2. *Strategic Allocation of Resources.* This refers to efficiently distributing human, material, and financial resources to optimize teaching and learning processes.

3. *Ensuring Teaching Quality.* This dimension focuses on three key school leadership practices: developing a coherent instructional framework, monitoring the impact of teaching on student outcomes, and evaluating teachers.

   - *Coherent Instructional Framework.* An aligned curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessments ensure consistent instruction and access to relevant content, leading to improved student outcomes.

   - *Monitoring and Use of Evidence.* School leaders should track performance data and foster a culture that promotes trust in evidence-based practices to enhance teaching effectiveness.

   - *Teacher Evaluation.* Teacher assessment should be based on clear evidence of student impact, emphasizing professional development. The most effective evaluations focus on constructive feedback, teacher involvement in the process, and building trusting relationships.

4. *Leading Teacher Learning and Development.* This focuses on providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers and fostering educational innovation.

5. *Ensuring an Orderly and Safe Environment.* This dimension aims to establish a positive school climate, reduce conflicts, and ensure optimal learning conditions. These dimensions have been identified in multiple studies as key factors in improving educational quality and equity in school systems (Robinson & Gray, 2019).

Public Administration in Education

Public administration in education refers to the management and governance of educational policies within the public sector. It involves the planning, organisation, and supervision of resources and activities necessary to ensure the efficient functioning of educational systems and the effective implementation of policies that promote educational quality. This concept encompasses both administrative management and pedagogical leadership and is essential to ensuring that public policies translate into better educational outcomes for students (Ball, 2008).

According to Gairín Sallán (2024), educational administration within the public framework has evolved toward a distributed leadership model. This approach not only enhances resource management efficiency but also encourages the active participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, in the decision-making process. This model of leadership is essential to ensuring that policies remain adaptable and responsive to the specific needs of each educational community. Furthermore, transformational and collaborative leadership plays a crucial role in fostering continuous improvement, innovation, and sustainable development within educational systems.

In summary, public administration in education involves the governance of educational policies through leadership that integrates both administrative and pedagogical aspects, focusing on equity, inclusion, and continuous improvement. School leaders must be able to adapt policies and educational practices to local needs, manage resources efficiently, and promote the active participation of all members of the school community.

Regulatory Frameworks for Educational Leadership

Regulatory frameworks for educational leadership are official documents or guidelines established by national and international organizations that define the standards, competencies, and responsibilities of school leaders. Their purpose is to guide school management to improve teaching and learning, ensuring quality education based on equity, inclusion, and continuous improvement (Pont et al., 2008). These frameworks not only establish criteria for the training and evaluation of school principals but also provide guidance on how they should manage their institutions to achieve effective and transformative leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Key Characteristics of Regulatory Frameworks for Educational Leadership

According to specialized literature, regulatory frameworks for educational leadership typically include the following key elements:

- *Definition of standards and competencies.* They establish clear criteria regarding what is expected of educational leaders in terms of school management and pedagogical development (Pont et al., 2008).
- *Focus on pedagogical leadership.* They prioritize teaching and learning as the fundamental pillars of school management, promoting evidence-based practices (Leithwood et al., 2017).

- *Professional development and continuous training.* They provide strategies to enhance the training of school leaders, ensuring that educational leadership evolves in response to educational demands.
- *Accountability and evaluation.* They incorporate mechanisms to measure the performance of school leaders and their impact on the educational community (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).
- *Adaptability to context.* They are designed to respond to the specific needs of each educational system, allowing their implementation in diverse school settings (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in guiding school principals, establishing practices that strengthen educational quality and foster the continuous improvement of school management processes.

Evaluation of School Leadership in Regulatory Frameworks

The evaluation of school leadership is a fundamental component within regulatory frameworks, as it allows for the monitoring and improvement of school management over time. According to Hallinger and Heck (2011), leadership evaluation should align with school improvement goals, ensuring that educational leaders generate a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Leithwood et al. (2017) argue that regulatory frameworks should evaluate leadership based on its impact on student learning and teacher development, establishing clear performance indicators. On the other hand, Bush (2020) highlights that accountability mechanisms within these frameworks enhance the quality of school leadership and its alignment with educational policies. From a broader perspective, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) emphasize that leadership evaluation should not be purely punitive but also formative. That is, regulatory frameworks should not only measure outcomes but also support leadership development through feedback processes and continuous support.

In this sense, the evaluation of school leadership in regulatory frameworks contributes to:

- Enhancing the effectiveness of school principals, ensuring they possess the necessary competencies to lead their institutions.
- Strengthening evidence-based decision-making, allowing educational systems to adjust their policies based on real data.
- Ensuring educational equity and quality, guaranteeing that all schools benefit from efficient and learning-oriented leadership.

Therefore, regulatory frameworks that incorporate rigorous leadership evaluation processes directly contribute to improving educational systems and fostering the professional development of school leaders.

School Leadership Evaluation Policies

School leadership evaluation policies establish the criteria, procedures, and tools used to measure the effectiveness and impact of school principals in their institutions. These policies aim to ensure that leadership in schools contributes to the continuous improvement of educational quality, the professional development of leaders, and compliance with established regulatory frameworks (Pont et al., 2008).

The evaluation of school leadership can focus on different aspects, such as:

- *Student learning outcomes*. Analysing the relationship between leadership practices and academic performance.
- *School climate and culture*. Evaluating how leadership influences collaboration, community engagement, and the well-being of students and teachers.
- *Management and leadership practices*. Examining the implementation of pedagogical and organizational leadership strategies.
- *Professional development of school leaders*. Considering ongoing training and the growth of leadership competencies.

According to Murphy et al. (2017), leadership evaluation should be based on professional standards and use multiple sources of information to ensure improvements in both school management and student learning.

At the international level, organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development have signed agreements and memoranda to strengthen cooperation in the field of education. One example is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed on July 10, 2024, between the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development and the IIPE-UNESCO, aimed at enhancing institutional capacities in countries to monitor and improve the quality of education in the school sector (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2024). These agreements contribute to capacity-building programmes, benefiting a larger number of countries and promoting accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

In this context, school leadership evaluation policies not only seek to measure the effectiveness of school principals but also promote the enhancement of their competencies and their impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Comparison of Regulatory Frameworks in Chile, Canada (Ontario), Singapore, and Australia Based on the Analysed Dimensions

This section will analyse the educational leadership regulatory frameworks of Chile, Canada (Ontario), Singapore, and Australia. The comparison will be based on the key dimensions of educational leadership, highlighting how each country has integrated specific school leadership practices and how these have influenced educational outcomes.

Chile: Framework for Good School Leadership and Management (MBDLE)

In Chile, the 'Framework for Good School Leadership and Management' (MBDLE, by its Spanish acronym) has been implemented as a key tool to professionalize school leadership.

This framework establishes that principals must be both pedagogical and strategic leaders, capable of making decisions that impact the improvement of educational outcomes. It promotes leadership as a key factor in educational quality while emphasizing team management and community engagement.

School leaders guide their work based on ethical principles and universal values, as expressed in the Institutional Educational Project. These principles, such as trust and ethical conduct, shape their leadership and management within the school community (Ministerio de Educación República de Chile, 2015).

Objective

The MBDLE aims to provide a conceptual framework that guides the work of school leaders in Chile, promoting effective leadership practices and fostering the continuous improvement of educational institutions.

Structure and Content

The Framework for Good Leadership and School Management (MBDLE) is organized around three fundamental components:

- *Skills.* Practical competencies essential for school leadership.

Figure 3.1

MBDLE Dimensions Diagram

NOTES Adapted from Ministerio de Educación República de Chile (2015, p. 19).
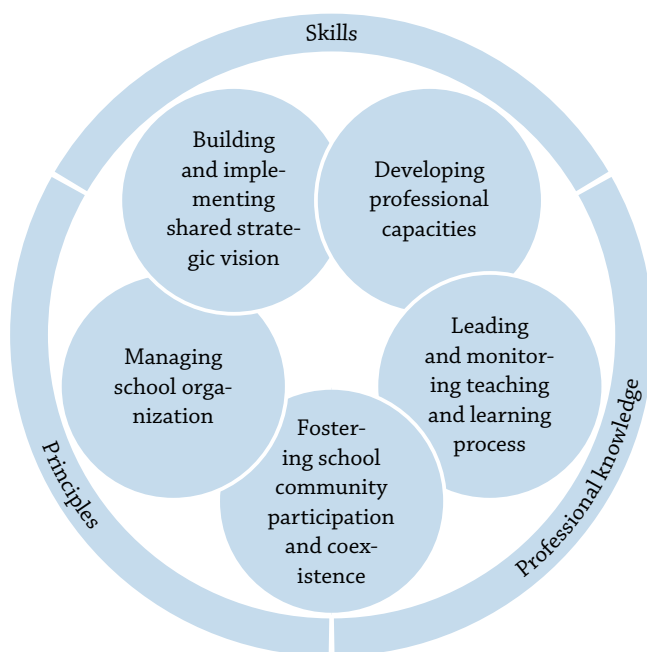
- *Principles*. Ethical values and foundations that guide decision-making.
- *Professional Knowledge*. Theoretical and technical foundation in leadership and school management.

Based on these components, the MBDLE defines five key dimensions for effective school leadership:

- *Shared Strategic Vision*. Focused on building a common direction that unifies the efforts of the educational community.
- *Professional Capacity Development*. Centred on promoting professional learning and strengthening pedagogical leadership.
- *Leadership in Teaching and Learning*. Related to teacher support and the continuous improvement of pedagogical processes.
- *Management of School Climate and Participation*. Aimed at promoting a positive, inclusive, and participatory school environment.
- *Institutional Management and Organization*. Concerning the efficient administration of resources and institutional development.

These elements help guide the training, selection, and evaluation of leadership teams by establishing clear criteria.

Associated Programmes

- *Training and Professional Development.* The MBDLE guides initial training and ongoing professional development for school leaders, defining key competencies and promoting effective leadership skills.
- *Selection and Evaluation of School Leaders.* This serves as a reference for selection and evaluation processes, ensuring that the criteria align with the leadership practices defined in the framework.

Canada (Ontario): Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)

Ontario has been recognized as a global leader in educational reforms, known for its focus on capacity building and the implementation of strategies aimed at improving teaching. These reforms have been designed and driven with the active participation of professionals within the education system, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness (Moriconi & Bélanger, 2015). School principals are responsible for leading teams, engaging the school community, and developing a shared vision. This approach highlights the importance of pedagogical leadership that is inclusive and fosters learning improvement through the participation of all educational stakeholders.

Objective: To provide a comprehensive guide for school and system leaders in Ontario, establishing effective leadership practices and the personal resources necessary to promote student success and school improvement.
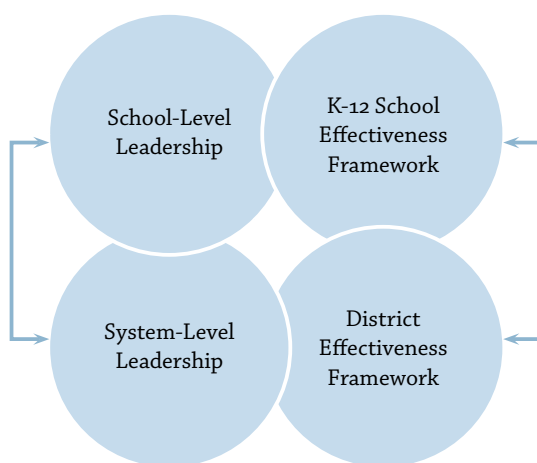
Figure 3.2

OLF Leadership Levels Diagram

NOTES Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, p. 7).

School-Level Leadership

K-12 School Effectiveness Framework

System-Level Leadership

District Effectiveness Framework

Structure and Content

The OLF outlines effective leadership practices and sets clear expectations for educational leaders in the province. It identifies four levels of leadership:

- School-Level Leadership
- System-Level Leadership
- District Effectiveness Framework
- K-12 School Effectiveness Framework

It is worth mentioning that Level No. 1, 'School-Level Leadership,' establishes five fundamental dimensions that describe effective school leadership practices:

1. *Setting Directions.* Develop and communicate a shared vision that promotes high expectations and clear goals for student success.
2. *Building Relationships and Developing People.* Foster positive relationships and support the continuous professional growth of educational staff.
3. *Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices.* Create a school culture and organizational structures that support effective teaching and learning.
4. *Improving the Instructional Programme.* Continuously monitor and enhance teaching practices to improve student performance.
5. *Securing Accountability.* Take responsibility for student success and ensure that staff do the same by using data and assessments to inform decisions.

These dimensions are designed to guide school leaders in the continuous improvement of education and learning within their institutions.

Associated Programmes

- *Continuous Professional Development* (OLF) serves as the foundation for training and professional development programmes for educational leaders in Ontario, emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement and evidence-based learning.
- *Evaluation and Reflection* provides tools for self-assessment and professional reflection, helping leaders identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Singapore: Leaders in Education Programme (LEP)

Singapore, through the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP), has a highly specialized educational management strategy focused on the continuous training of school leaders. The model is based on a high level of specialization and adaptability among school administrators, who must efficiently manage resources and promote academic excellence within their school communities. The LEP ensures that principals have a direct impact on improving teaching and learning, which is a key factor in the success of Singapore's education system. The Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) is a 6-month full-time programme designed to prepare highly capable vice principals and ministry officers in Singapore for principalship (Jayapragas, 2016). The programme places a strong emphasis on pedagogical leadership, viewing principals not only as resource managers but also as facilitators of high-quality learning. School leaders are expected to serve as role models of excellence, implementing pedagogical best practices and also driving change and innovation within the education system.

The LEP is built upon educational policies that prioritize continuous improvement in education quality. The structured leadership development policies align with the regulatory and political frameworks described by Ball (2008), which address the impact of public policies on education.

Learning to Conduct Futuring
- Handling real-life complexities in school leadership
- Encouraging anticipation of trends and challenges
- Balancing imagination with pragmatism

Learning to Contextualize
- Adapting best practices to local school contexts
- Gaining insights from global education strategies
- Contextualizing leadership theories and behaviours

Learning to Collaborate in a Self-Organizing Paradigm
- Relying on shared decision-making
- Enhancing instructional effectiveness through teacher participation
- Networking and cross-border collaboration

Learning to be Adaptable and Flexible
- Emphasizing change management
- Balancing instructional and stakeholder needs
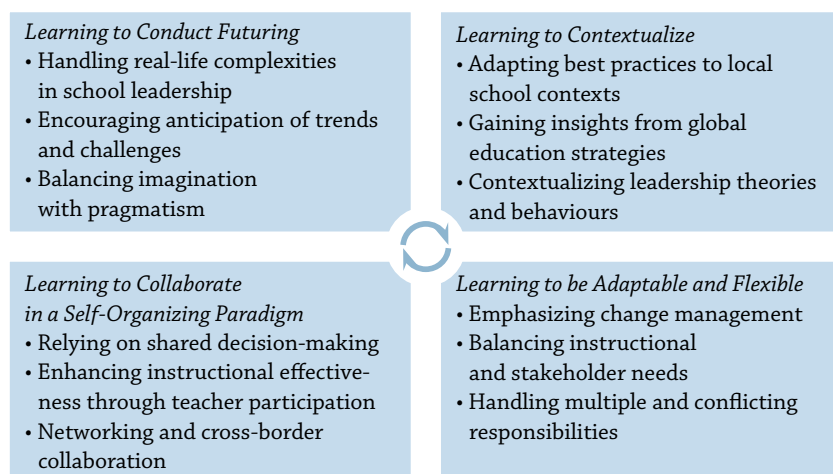- Handling multiple and conflicting responsibilities

Figure 3.3   Leaders in Education Programme Diagram
NOTES   Based on Jayapragas (2016).

Objective

To develop highly skilled school leaders capable of managing change and improving educational quality through strategic and effective leadership.

Structure and Content

The educational leadership model in Singapore is based on the continuous training of school administrators and the development of key competencies in:

- Learning to conduct futuring
- Learning to contextualize
- Learning to be adaptable and flexible
- Learning to collaborate in a self-organizing paradigm

Associated Programmes

- *Leaders in Education Programme International (LEPI).* Building on the success of the LEP, the Leaders in Education Programme International (LEPI) was introduced in 2005 to extend its impact globally. This programme offers school principals and education officers worldwide the opportunity to explore contemporary approaches to educational leadership and gain first-hand experience in Singaporean schools, observing successful practices and innovative strategies in action (National Institute of Education, 2015).
- *Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS).* Training for current school leaders, with an emphasis on management and instructional leadership.

Australia: Australian Professional Standard for Principals

In Australia, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals provides a framework for the continuous improvement of school leadership, focusing on pedagogical management, the professional development of principals, and fostering a culture of ongoing enhancement. This framework emphasizes the autonomy of principals in managing their schools while adhering to clear professional standards aimed at improving student learning outcomes (AITSL, 2020).

Research has shown that effective school leadership directly impacts teaching quality and student performance (Leithwood et al., 2008). In this regard, Fullan (2020) argues that educational leaders must act as

- Vision and values
- Knowledge and understanding
- Personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills

Leadership Requirements lens

Leadership Emphasis lens

- Operational
- Relational
- Strategic
- Systemic

Professional Practices lens
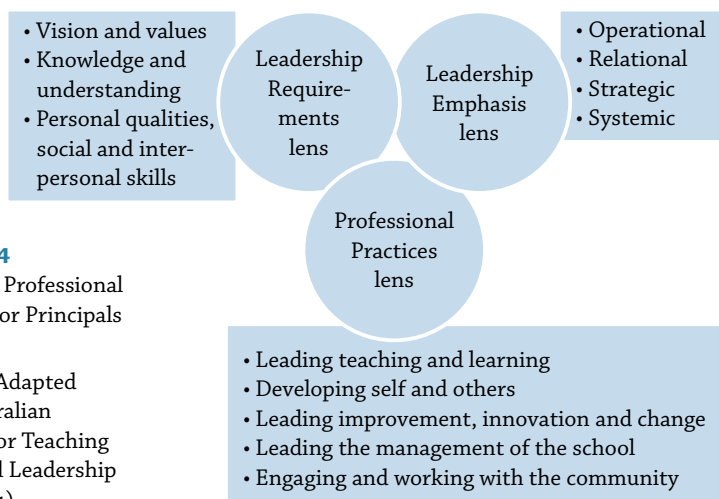
Figure 3.4
Australian Professional Standard for Principals Diagram

NOTES Adapted from Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2020, p. 11).

- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing self and others
- Leading improvement, innovation and change
- Leading the management of the school
- Engaging and working with the community

agents of change, promoting innovation and continuous improvement within schools.

Objective

To define the essential competencies and practices for educational leadership in the country, ensuring effective and equitable school management.

Structure and Content

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals programme establishes three key areas of leadership:

- *Educational Leadership.* Improvement of teaching and learning within the school.
- *Organizational Leadership.* Management of resources and administrative processes.
- *Community Leadership.* Connection with families and the school community.

Associated Programmes

- *Training and Professional Development for Principals.* Based on the national standard, aimed at the enhancement of school leaders.
- *Self-assessment and Professional Reflection.* A framework used by principals to evaluate their strengths and areas for improvement.

Summary of School Leadership Approaches and Dimensions

Table 3.2 and table 3.3 provide a comparative view of the educational leadership frameworks in the analysed countries. The first table summarizes the general approaches adopted by each country in relation to the five key pillars of school leadership, such as educational management, pedagogical leadership, and public administration. The second table, meanwhile, provides a detailed breakdown of the specific dimensions addressed by each school leadership programme, such as staff professional development, resource management, and engagement with the educational community. Together, they serve as a visual synthesis of the approaches and dimensions discussed earlier, allowing for a more direct comparison between the regulatory frameworks of the different countries.

These tables offer a clear and concise representation of educational

Table 3.2 Summary of Regulatory Frameworks by Country

Axis	Chile	Canada	Singapore	Australia
Educational Management	Focus on strategic management for continuous improvement. Use of data and self-evaluation to adjust pedagogical practices.	Promotes resource management to support student performance improvement through collaboration.	Management oriented towards resource efficiency, with an emphasis on continuous educational improvement.	Encourages principals' autonomy in school management under clear national standards.
Educational Leadership	The MBDLE guides principals as pedagogical and strategic leaders.	The OLF establishes collaborative and pedagogical leadership, focusing on learning improvement.	The LEP fosters integral leadership, emphasizing teaching and learning improvement.	The APS promotes pedagogical leadership centred on learning and continuous improvement.
Dimensions of School Leadership	Pedagogical leadership, management of teaching teams, and relationships with the educational community.	Leadership in school direction, staff development, and performance improvement.	Promotion of pedagogical leadership, strengthening of the school community, and organizational management.	Leadership in teaching, organizational management, and development of relationships with the school community.

Continued on the next page

Table 3.2 *Continued from the previous page*

Axis	Chile	Canada	Singapore	Australia
Public Administration in Education	Alignment with national public policies for educational improvement. Promotion of equity in access to education.	Linked to provincial and federal policies, focusing on inclusion and educational equity.	Direct insertion of educational policies aimed at continuous improvement and educational quality.	Clear standards aligned with national education quality policies and principals' responsibility.
Regulatory Frameworks for Educational Leadership	The MBDLE establishes standards and criteria for evaluating and training school leaders.	The OLF guides the development of leadership practices effectively.	The LEP provides guidelines for the training and development of educational leaders.	The APS defines key competencies and practices for school leaders.

Table 3.3 Dimensions of School Leadership in the Programmes of Each Country

Dimensions	Chile	Canada	Singapore	Australia
Pedagogical Leadership	Emphasizes effective pedagogical management, ensuring that leadership is focused on the quality of teaching.	Promotes a collaborative approach to pedagogical leadership to improve learning.	Highlights the importance of pedagogical leadership in improving educational outcomes.	Focuses on the capacity of principals to improve pedagogical processes and school performance.
Resource Management	Focuses on the efficient allocation of resources to support teaching and learning.	Highlights the management of human and material resources to optimize school performance.	Emphasizes efficient resource management in schools, ensuring students have access to what they need.	Establishes clear guidelines for managing resources, ensuring they contribute to ongoing improvement.

leadership approaches and practices in Chile, Canada (Ontario), Singapore, and Australia, to facilitate a visual comparison.

Conclusions

This study has focused on a comparative review of the regulatory frameworks for educational leadership in Chile, Ontario (Canada), Singapore,

Table 3.3 *Continued from the previous page*

Dimensions	Chile	Canada	Singapore	Australia
Professional Development	Emphasizes ongoing training and professional development of teaching staff.	Stresses the importance of staff training and professional development, including principals and teachers.	Highlights comprehensive leader training, with an emphasis on continuous professional development.	Promotes the continuous professional development of school leaders as a key driver for educational improvement.
Change Management	Addresses the need to manage organizational and pedagogical change by adapting to student needs.	Emphasizes leading change through collaboration and adapting to evolving demands.	Highlights managing educational change in response to societal shifts and changes in the educational environment.	Establishes that leaders should be agents of change, promoting innovation and continuous improvement within schools.
School Community Development	Emphasizes active participation from the educational community, including parents and the broader community.	Promotes strong connections with the school community and parents.	Stresses the importance of collaboration with the school community to foster a supportive learning environment.	Encourages collaborative work with the educational community, parents, and other stakeholders to improve the school climate.
Evaluation and Reflection on Performance	Incorporates internal evaluation and reflection practices to improve leadership.	Promotes self-assessment and evaluation of school leaders' performance.	Emphasizes ongoing evaluation of leadership and the impact of school leaders.	Includes continuous reflection on leadership practices to ensure consistent school performance improvement.

NOTES   Author's own elaboration.

and Australia, aiming to understand how these countries have structured school leadership to contribute to the improvement of educational quality. As stated in the introduction, educational leadership has a significant impact on student learning outcomes and school management (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008). In this regard, the regulatory frameworks implemented in each country seek not only to strengthen school management but also to professionalize leader-

ship roles and promote equity and continuous improvement in education systems (Pont et al., 2008).

The five key areas that guided this analysis – Educational Management, Educational Leadership, Dimensions of School Leadership, Public Administration in Education, and Regulatory Frameworks for Educational Leadership – allowed for a structured comparison and a better understanding of how each country addresses these essential aspects of school leadership. Throughout this analysis, it has been observed that, although the frameworks vary in their approach and context, they all agree on the need for strong pedagogical leadership, effective resource management, continuous professional development for teaching staff, the ability to manage change, and alignment with public education policies.

Pedagogical leadership has been a constant element across all the analysed frameworks. As argued by Leithwood et al. (2008), educational leaders play a key role in improving student learning outcomes. This is clearly reflected in Singapore's approach, where the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) emphasizes the importance of comprehensive pedagogical leadership in enhancing student performance (Tan, 2023), as well as in Canada's Ontario Leadership Framework, which promotes collaborative and pedagogical leadership to achieve better results (Moriconi & Bélanger, 2015).

Educational management and resource management also stand out as essential components for the success of education systems. As Fullan (2020) notes, efficient resource management is crucial for achieving substantial improvements in schools. In all the studied countries, the regulatory frameworks emphasize the need for the efficient allocation of both material and human resources to ensure equitable access to quality education.

Professional development for school staff is identified as another fundamental pillar, particularly in countries like Canada and Australia, where the continuous training of principals and teachers is considered crucial for educational improvement (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020; Moriconi & Bélanger, 2015). In this regard, school leadership frameworks provide clear guidelines for fostering a culture of lifelong learning among education professionals.

Additionally, change management is a recurring aspect across all the frameworks analysed, as school leaders must be capable of effectively leading both organizational and pedagogical changes. This skill involves

not only adapting to new structures but also fostering innovation and addressing resistance to change within educational institutions. This is evident in the frameworks of Singapore and Australia, which emphasize adaptability and innovation within educational institutions (Jayapragas, 2016; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). However, Singapore's programme also underscores that the diverse values shaping school leadership are not always aligned, highlighting the need for further research into the sources of tension within school leadership (Tan, 2023).

Finally, public educational administration and leadership regulatory frameworks highlight the crucial role of public policies in the success of education systems. As Ball (2008) and Pont et al. (2008) conclude, aligning leadership frameworks with national and local policies is essential for educational improvement. This link is evident in the cases of Chile and Canada, where regulatory frameworks are aligned with national public policies, ensuring that school leadership responds to social and educational expectations.

In summary, the comparison of educational leadership frameworks in these four countries demonstrates that, despite contextual differences, all agree on the importance of strong pedagogical leadership, efficient resource management, continuous professional development, effective change management, and alignment with public policies. This study, in alignment with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.), offers a comprehensive perspective on how leadership regulatory frameworks enhance educational quality and help reduce access and learning gaps. It reinforces that effective leadership is essential for the transformation and enhancement of global education systems.

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4 | Linking School Principals' Leadership Styles and Teacher Professional Well-Being: Systematic Literature Review

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Introduction

International research suggests that teacher well-being is directly related to the leadership of school principals (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Cann et al., 2021). Qualitative research conducted in Canada found that leaders influence teacher well-being by demonstrating respect for professional competence, representing teachers' interests, listening, and communicating the school's vision (Lambersky, 2016). Quantitative research conducted in Italy found that schools with high levels of leadership also have higher teacher job satisfaction, higher teacher productivity, and a more supportive school climate (Paletta et al., 2017). A quantitative study conducted in India found that the higher the psychological empowerment, the greater the expression of empowering leadership, and empowered teachers are more committed to the school and less disengaged (Dash & Vohra, 2019).

The results of a quantitative study conducted in America showed that the actions of school leaders and their expression of leadership have an impact on teachers' professional practice, job satisfaction, psycho-emotional state, motivation and, ultimately, teacher well-being (Ford et al., 2019). The results of the study also revealed that working both individually with the needs of teachers and with the whole team achieves a greater level of influence in raising teacher well-being. Thus, research reveals the links between principal leadership and teachers' professional well-being or its elements, but the links are fragmented, and principal leadership is referred to as a general concept of leadership (Lam-

bersky, 2016; Paletta et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2019) without distinguishing specific leadership styles. If school principal leadership styles are found in the studies conducted, they usually include only one (Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021; Collie, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024; Liu et al., 2023) or a few (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020) principal leadership styles. Therefore, a lack of systematic links between principal leadership styles and teachers' professional well-being is observed in the scientific literature. It also remains unclear what impact different leadership styles of principals have on teachers' professional well-being.

In order to contribute to reducing the identified information gap, the aim is to answer the research questions raised: What kind of research is found and lacking in analysing the links between the leadership style of school leaders and teachers' professional well-being? Which leadership styles of school leaders in relation to teachers' professional well-being are analysed in publications? What influence do different leadership styles of school leaders have on teachers' professional well-being? The aim of this review is to investigate the links between the leadership styles of school leaders (principals and their deputies) and teachers' professional well-being by purposefully distinguishing the leadership styles of school leaders applied in schools.

Material and Methods

Search Methods

The systematic literature review includes an analysis of a specific and purposefully selected volume of scientific literature (Jesson et al., 2011) in order to study the links between school principals' leadership styles and teachers' professional well-being. Applying the method of systematic literature review collects targeted information about the research questions raised based on scientific works and publications of other authors; therefore, applying this method does not require a separate empirical study. Six steps are distinguished, on the basis of which a systematic review of scientific sources is carried out (Jesson et al., 2011):

1. *Preparation of review* – reviewing what information is available, how valuable it is and what is not known, creating a review plan, formulating a question and identifying keywords, determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, and finally, generating a data selection report;

2. *Comprehensive literature search* – search for literature using keywords in the selected database;

3. *Quality assessment* – selected publications are read to decide which ones will be used for the review and which ones will be discarded due to inappropriateness;

4. *Data extraction* – relevant information found in publications is noted;

5. *Synthesis* – combining the collected data according to the established criteria;

6. *Description* – describing the results of the systematic review.

Database Searches

During the review phase, a research plan was prepared, including research question, keywords, and inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 4.1). When applying the systematic literature review, the Scopus scientific literature database was selected, which is considered reliable due to the number of peer-reviewed publications, constant updating, and a search system that provides wide possibilities. Due to the novelty of the topic, the publication period of scientific literature was not limited. The search was performed using the keyword 'leadership,' which was combined using the Boolean logic operator AND with the second keyword 'teacher well-being.' It was noted that some publications use both the word form 'well-being' and 'wellbeing,' therefore it was chosen to perform an analysis of the two results obtained by keywords. The search phrase was chosen to exclude words such as school leaders, administration, director, and professional welfare, due to broader search possibilities when relevant literature uses synonyms in the title and abstract.

The search phrase was used to search for keywords in the title, excerpt and among keywords of publications. During the initial selection, 165 articles were found using the phrase 'leadership AND teacher AND well-being,' and 91 articles were found using the phrase 'leadership AND teacher AND wellbeing.' A total of 256 articles were identified that met the search criteria for scientific literature. The titles and excerpts of these publications were reviewed to search for the named keywords in order to ensure that they were relevant to the context of the problem question raised and that they were relevant to the context (leadership and teacher well-being). After applying the initial inclusion and exclu-
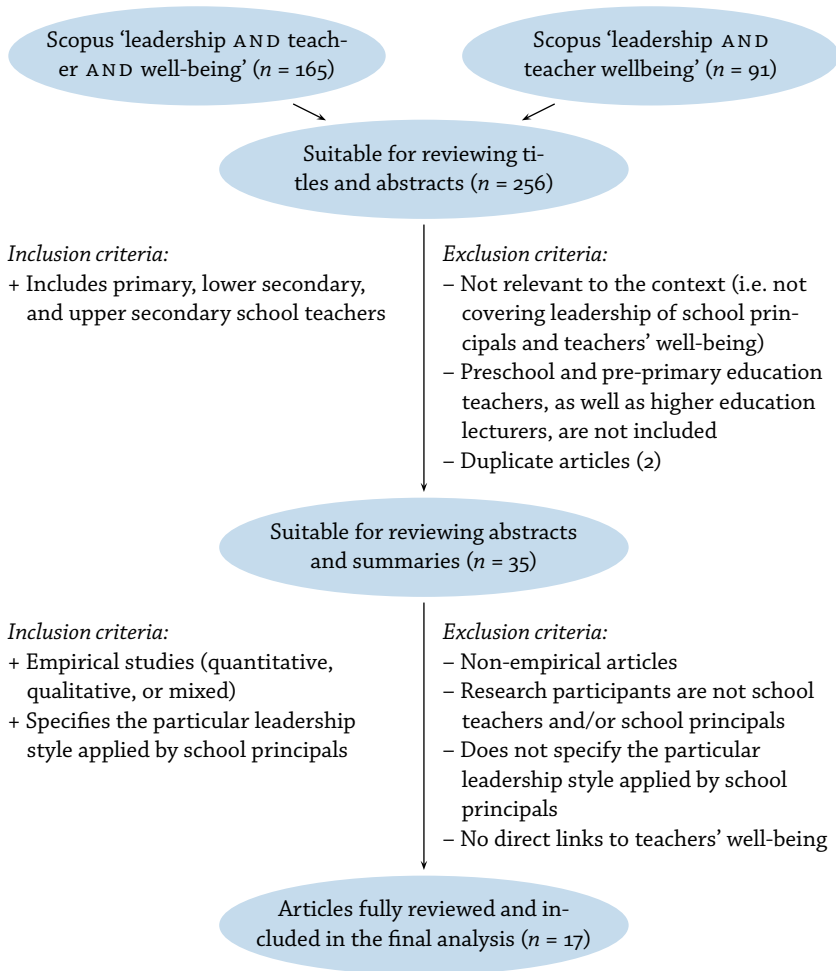
Scopus 'leadership AND teacher AND well-being' ($n = 165$)

Scopus 'leadership AND teacher wellbeing' ($n = 91$)

Suitable for reviewing titles and abstracts ($n = 256$)

Inclusion criteria:

+ Includes primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school teachers

Exclusion criteria:

– Not relevant to the context (i.e. not covering leadership of school principals and teachers' well-being)
– Preschool and pre-primary education teachers, as well as higher education lecturers, are not included
– Duplicate articles (2)

Suitable for reviewing abstracts and summaries ($n = 35$)

Inclusion criteria:

+ Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed)
+ Specifies the particular leadership style applied by school principals

Exclusion criteria:

– Non-empirical articles
– Research participants are not school teachers and/or school principals
– Does not specify the particular leadership style applied by school principals
– No direct links to teachers' well-being

Articles fully reviewed and included in the final analysis ($n = 17$)

Figure 4.1   Selection of Scientific Publications Based on the Stages of a Systematic Literature Review

sion criteria, 37 articles were selected, of which two were duplicates, therefore the final number of publications is 35. In the next stage, not only the titles and excerpts of the 35 articles are read, but also the summaries/conclusions of the articles and the application of secondary criteria is introduced.

After this review, the number of publications was reduced to 17, which were included in the final analysis. After selecting suitable publications that met the established criteria, a deeper analysis of these was performed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

During the initial stage, only those articles that covered primary, secondary and upper secondary school teachers were included in the review of titles and excerpts, while pre-school and pre-primary education teachers and higher education lecturers were excluded. Articles that did not fit the context, i.e. did not cover the leadership of principals and teacher well-being in their content, were excluded. During the second stage, additional criteria were introduced such as the results of the articles must be based on empirical (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed) research conducted by the authors, excluding other types of articles, the articles must name the specific leadership style used by school principals. Attention is once again drawn to the research participants and their compliance with the participant inclusion criteria (school teachers and/or school leaders), and relevance to the context (leadership of principals and teacher well-being).

Retrieval of References and Handling

The following subsection presents the retrieval of references and handling: only full and final publications; selected document type: scientific journal articles; language selection: English only; subject area: social sciences and psychology. When searching for scientific literature, it was observed that including teachers' professional well-being increases the likelihood of finding relevant publications in the field of psychology.

Results

Overview of Selected Literature

In order to answer the research question, 'What research is found and lacking in analysing the links between the leadership style of school principals and teachers' professional well-being?,' an analysis of all publications that meet the established criteria was performed. After analysing the year of publication (Table 4.1), an obvious novelty of the articles and the popularity of the topic are noticeable, since 94% of the literature was published in the period 2020–2024 (6% in 2020 (n = 16), 18% in 2021 (n = 3), 6% in 2022 (n = 1), 41% in 2023 (n = 7), 24% in 2024 (n = 4)), and the remaining 6% (n = 1) of the publications were published in 2011.

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of articles by continent and country. The analysis revealed that 9 out of 16 articles (56%), excluding one that

Table 4.1 Overview of Selected Publications by Year of Publication

Year	Author(s)	Year	Author(s)
2024	Mendoza and Dizon	2022	Shie and Chang
	Li et al.	2021	Buskila and Chen-Levi
	Butler		Abdulaziz Alfayez et al.
	Bellibaş et al.		Cann et al.
2023	Collie	2020	Van der Vyver et al.
	Attar et al.	2011	Eyal and Roth
	Xu and Yang		
	Liu et al.		
	Limon et al.		
	Quinteros-Durand et al.		
	Lee and Swaner		

Table 4.2 Overview of Selected Publications by Continent and Country

Continent	Country	Author(s)
Africa	South African Republic	Van der Vyver et al. (2020)
Australia	Australia	Collie (2023)
Asia	Philippines	Mendoza and Dizon (2024)
	Israel	Eyal and Roth (2011)
		Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021)
	United Arab Emirates	Attar et al. (2023)
	China	Li et al. (2024)
		Xu and Yang (2023)
		Shie and Chang (2022)
		Liu et al. (2023)
	Saudi Arabia	Abdulaziz Alfayez et al. (2021)
Asia/Europe	Turkey	Limon et al. (2023)
Europe	Ireland	Butler (2024)
Oceania	New Zealand	Cann et al. (2021)
South America	Peru	Quinteros-Durand et al. (2023)
North America	United States of America	Lee and Swaner (2023)
		Bellibaş et al. (2024)

NOTES   In total 47 countries.

examines data from different countries, were conducted by authors in
Asia, dominated by Israel and China, while all other continents have
at least one article published, covering countries such as South Africa,
Australia, Turkey, Ireland, New Zealand, Peru, and the United States.

Table 4.3 Overview of Research Designs Used in Selected Publications

Res. design	Data collection tool	Sample	Author(s)
Quantitative	Questionnaire	101	Attar et al. (2023)
		122	Eyal and Roth (2011)
		266	Xu and Yang (2023)
		400	Van der Vyver et al. (2020)
		410	Limon et al. (2023)
		426	Collie (2023)
		620	Quinteros-Durand et al. (2023)
		768	Li et al. (2024)
		783	Shie and Chang (2022)
		1,124	Abdulaziz Alfayez et al. (2021)
		1,150	Mendoza and Dizon (2024)
		3,600	Lee and Swaner (2023)
	TALIS 2018 data	3,799	Liu et al. (2023)
		153,866	Bellibaş et al. (2024)
Qualitative	Self-reflection report based on a prepared questionnaire	53	Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021)
Mixed	Closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview questionnaire	48 quant., 12 qual.	Butler (2024)
		65 quant., 6 qual.	Cann et al. (2021)

When reviewing the research designs used in the selected publications (Table 4.3), it was observed that quantitative research (82%, $n = 14$) dominates, with mixed (12%, $n = 2$) and qualitative (6%, $n = 1$) research methods being used extremely rarely. The most commonly used instrument in quantitative research is a questionnaire, but two authors chose to use secondary data collected in TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) 2018. The qualitative ($n = 1$) study used a self-reflection report based on a prepared questionnaire, while the mixed ($n = 2$) research design includes a questionnaire in the quantitative part of the study and a semi-structured interview in the qualitative part of the study. The sample size of the conducted studies ranges from 101 to 3,600 teachers in quantitative studies using a questionnaire ($n = 12$), and from 3,799 to 153,866 in secondary TALIS 2018 data analysis ($n = 2$). An overview of the qualitative studies ($n = 1$) shows a sample size of 53 teachers using a self-reflection questionnaire. In the mixed research

design ($n = 2$), from 48 to 65 research participants were interviewed during the quantitative research phase using questionnaires, while during the qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews, from 6 to 12 research participants were interviewed.

Based on the review conducted by year of publication, country, applied methods, instruments and sample studied, and in order to answer the research question 'What research is found and lacking in analysing the links between school principals' leadership style and teachers' professional well-being?,' it was revealed that the empirical research method most often used by the authors is quantitative research, with a significant lack of qualitative research. It was also noted that many authors used questionnaires, several utilized secondary TALIS 2018 data, but no longitudinal empirical research related to the research question was found. The analysis also showed a lack of qualitative research, with the interview method not being used in any of the qualitative studies, and a self-reflection report with pre-prepared questions was used once. Finally, the mixed research method is also not common, although a couple of authors combined questionnaires with a semi-structured interview. Thus, based on the review of the methods used in empirical research in the selected publications, a lack of mixed, and especially qualitative, research is observed.

After selection of all articles meeting the criteria, Table 4.4 was created detailing the results:

- *The leadership styles of school principals in relation to teachers' professional well-being.* In the publications that met the criteria, the most common leadership styles used by school leaders studied by the authors are authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership. Also analysed were such styles as autonomy-supporting, coaching, empowering, liberal, learning-oriented, positive, servant, supportive, transactional, and participative leadership. It was noted that classical leadership styles and styles with managerial aspects, such as transactional leadership and transformational leadership, are still the most commonly studied.

- *The influence of school principals' leadership styles on teachers' professional well-being.* Positive and significant associations with teacher professional well-being are found in leadership styles such as distributed, empowering and transformational leadership, while

Table 4.4 The Influence of School Leaders' Leadership Styles on Teachers' Well-Being

Styles	Links to teacher well-being	Author(s)
Authentic leadership	Authentic leadership based on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management creates teacher well-being.	Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021)
	The organizational trust and commitment to the organization maintained by the school principal has a positive and significant impact on teacher well-being.	Shie and Chang (2022)
	Authentic leadership of the principal is positively related to the individual psychological state of teachers, when this is positively related to teacher well-being (satisfaction with work and life and negatively related to emotional exhaustion). Authentic leadership of the school principal is indirectly positively related to teacher well-being.	Xu and Yang (2023)
Autonomy-supportive leadership	Autonomy-supportive leadership by a principal reduces the negative relationship between teacher stress and perceived well-being. The more a principal supports teacher autonomy, the higher the teacher's well-being and the lower the experience of stress. Autonomy-supportive leadership by a principal is positively correlated with teacher emotional, social, and psychological well-being. A principal who supports teacher autonomy indirectly contributes to increasing teacher resilience.	Mendoza and Dizon (2024)
	Leadership that supports principal autonomy is positively related to teacher energy and engaging behaviour, and hence to the maintenance of teacher well-being. Leadership that undermines principal autonomy is related to higher teacher turnover intentions.	Collie (2023)
Coaching leadership	Coaching leadership applied by the principal as a reflective practice develops leadership skills and leads to increased well-being for both the supervisor and the teacher. Coaching leadership applied by the principal increases teacher self-efficacy and, consequently, teacher well-being.	Butler (2024)

positive but undisclosed or significant associations are found in autonomy-supportive and coaching leadership. An indirect but positive association is found in authentic, learning-oriented, positive and servant leadership styles. The application of support-

Table 4.4 *Continued from the previous page*

Styles	Links to teacher well-being	Author(s)
Distributed leadership	Distributed leadership is positively and significantly associated with teacher well-being and commitment, while it is negatively associated with administrative workload. The more leadership is delegated and responsibilities are shared, the more teachers are committed to the school, feel less stressed by workload, and therefore experience greater well-being. Distributed leadership is directly and significantly associated with teacher well-being in 45 out of 47 countries.	Bellibaş et al. (2024)
	Distributed leadership indirectly and positively affects teacher well-being through teacher self-efficacy.	Liu et al. (2023)
Empowering leadership	When a principal empowers a teacher, teacher engagement and teaching self-efficacy increase. Empowering leadership by a principal is significantly associated with increased teacher well-being, when this is related to school resilience. Empowering leadership by a principal increases school organizational resilience. Empowering leadership by a principal has a negative impact on teacher stress and a positive impact on teacher professional well-being and perceptions of support received.	Limon et al. (2023)
Liberal/ Laissez-faire leadership	Liberal/laissez-faire leadership has a negative impact on teachers' professional well-being. Liberal/laissez-faire leadership positively correlates with stress, anxiety, and depression, while negatively correlating with comfort and enthusiasm.	Van der Vyver et al. (2020)
Learning-centred leadership	Learning-oriented leadership helps to meet teachers' psychological needs, when these satisfied teachers feel autonomous, positive and have a better understanding of their well-being. Learning-oriented leadership predicts higher teacher well-being. Teachers who experience well-being feel better, experience less stress and are therefore more effective.	Abdulaziz Alfayez et al. (2021)

ive leadership and participative leadership correlates positively and significantly with teacher professional well-being, while an extremely weak correlation is found with liberal and directive leadership styles. One author reveals the opposite, proving negative associations between teacher professional well-being and lib-

Table 4.4 *Continued from the previous page*

Styles	Links to teacher well-being	Author(s)
Positive leadership	Positive leadership from principals demonstrates appreciation for teachers, provides opportunities for teachers' professional development, and gives teachers sufficient freedom in making decisions that lead to the experience of teacher well-being.	Cann et al. (2021)
Servant leadership	Servant leadership has an indirect impact on teacher well-being through its positive impact on teachers' life satisfaction, support for personal growth, learning, and the provision of work tools.	Quinteros-Durand et al. (2023)
Supportive leadership	Supportive leadership from principals is positively correlated with teacher well-being.	Lee and Swaner (2023)
Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership of the principal positively and significantly influences the impact of teachers' emotional intelligence on psychological well-being, and subsequently on organizational commitment. Transformational leadership of the principal indirectly affects teacher psychological well-being.	Li et al. (2024)
	Transformational leadership by a principal is negatively related to teacher burnout, which was partly due to the autonomy granted to teachers.	Eyal and Roth (2011)
	Transformational leadership positively contributes to teachers' professional well-being, which leads to lower teacher turnover intentions. Transformational leadership of the principal is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression, and positively with perceived comfort and enthusiasm. Transformational leadership of the principal has a stronger impact than transactional leadership in all parameters.	Van der Vyver et al. (2020)

eral leadership style. Finally, some authors highlighted a positive, while others a negative, association of transactional leadership with teacher professional well-being.

Different leadership styles of principals have different influences on the elements that make up teachers' professional well-being: teacher autonomy (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Cann et al., 2021; Limon et al., 2023; Collie, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), self-efficacy (Limon et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Butler, 2024), job satisfaction (Attar et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023),

Table 4.4 *Continued from the previous page*

Styles	Links to teacher well-being	Author(s)
Transactional leadership	Transactional leadership is positively correlated with teacher burnout, which was partly driven by principals' control over teachers.	Eyal and Roth (2011)
	Transactional leadership positively contributes to teachers' professional well-being, which leads to lower teacher turnover intentions. Transactional leadership of the principal is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression, and positively with perceived comfort and enthusiasm. When in all parameters, transactional leadership of the principal has a weaker effect than transformational leadership of the principal.	Van der Vyver et al. (2020)
Participative, directive, supportive and laissez-faire leadership	Teacher well-being is positively and significantly correlated with participatory, directive, supportive, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Participatory leadership style correlates most strongly with teacher well-being, is somewhat weaker with supportive leadership and even weaker with laissez-faire, with the lowest correlation with directive leadership.	Attar et al. (2023)

teacher resilience (Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), commitment to the institution (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Shie & Chang, 2022; Bellibaş et al., 2024), change intentions (Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Collie, 2023), and stress experienced (Limon et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Bellibaş et al., 2024; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024):

- *Teacher autonomy.* When a teacher feels autonomy support (Collie, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024) and empowerment (Limon et al., 2023) from their supervisor, they increase their self-esteem, empowerment, engagement, energy, and positive emotional state (Collie, 2023; Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), and by feeling positive, they gain more freedom to make decisions and confidence to deal with situations (Cann et al., 2021). The same is observed in the context of transformational leadership, where teachers not only feel more motivated due to the granting of autonomy, but also become psychologically stronger because they experience less stress and long-term anxiety (Eyal & Roth, 2011). On the other hand, when the leader does not support autonomy, teachers experience more stress, are more likely to withdraw from tasks and, when meeting only minimal requirements, become de-

tached from school activities, eventually considering changing jobs (Collie, 2023). However, when teachers experience complete freedom of action and are unrestricted by liberal leaders, they experience greater anxiety due to uncertainty (Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

- *Self-efficacy.* The clear allocation of specific tasks and responsibilities among teachers based on the principles of distributed leadership provides teachers with opportunities for self-efficacy, leading to increased self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2023). In the effect of coaching leadership, teachers feel that they experience the trust of the leader (Butler, 2024) and, as in the effect of empowering leadership, this empowers and strengthens self-confidence (Limon et al., 2023), leading to higher self-efficacy (Limon et al., 2023; Butler, 2024).

- *Job satisfaction.* Authentic leadership style is positively related to job satisfaction when it gives teachers more space for their creativity, self-expression, and acceptance of their individuality (Xu & Yang, 2023), while servant leadership also has a positive impact on teacher satisfaction by strengthening this through support, encouragement to grow and develop, and providing the necessary tools to work (Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023). In contrast, teachers whose leaders are supporters of directive leadership rarely experience a sense of security and are usually not given freedom of choice, which reduces job satisfaction (Attar et al., 2023).

- *Teacher resilience.* Empowering leadership, by giving teachers more confidence in themselves and their existing competencies, increases teachers' resilience in stressful situations, when the overall resilience of teachers strengthens the resilience of the institution (Limon et al., 2023). Similarly, autonomy-supporting leadership, although indirectly contributing to increasing teacher resilience, contributes to teachers' professional well-being by supporting teachers' freedom and choice (Mendoza & Dizon, 2024).

- *Commitment to the institution and intentions to change.* A principal applying a transformational leadership style has a positive impact on teachers' emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, which leads to higher commitment to the institution (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Also, the trust created by authentic leadership (Shie & Chang, 2022) and the empowerment of teachers by distribut-

ing the workload and thus equalizing the volume of work in distributed leadership leads to decreasing stress and greater commitment to the school (Bellibaş et al., 2024). Both transformational leadership and transactional leadership contribute to higher teachers' professional well-being (Van der Vyver et al., 2020), while leadership that does not support teacher autonomy (Collie, 2023) is associated with higher change intentions (Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Collie, 2023).

- *Experienced stress.* Teachers feel psychologically safer in an environment with an authentic (Xu & Yang, 2023), autonomy-supportive (Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), and empowering leader (Limon et al., 2023), as they rarely experience stress. When principals apply distributed leadership, teachers feel less tension and experience less stress due to clear communication and distributed areas of activity for which they assume pre-agreed responsibility (Bellibaş et al., 2024). Continuous professional development is part of teachers' professional growth. Therefore, learning-oriented leadership satisfies teachers' need to learn, they feel more independent and able to realize themselves, which gives teachers psychological peace and reduces the level of stress due to the cultivation of new knowledge (Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021). However, permissive leadership styles contribute to stress and anxiety among teachers (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Finally, transformational leadership, due to its motivating autonomy, reduces the potential for teacher burnout (Eyal & Roth, 2011), while transactional leadership, due to its control over teachers, promotes burnout (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Ultimately, all leadership styles of school leaders that increase empowerment, confidence, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, motivation, engagement, emotional satisfaction, and autonomy contribute to the growth of teachers' professional well-being, while styles applied by leaders that increase anxiety, stress, depression, alienation, and the desire to change jobs negatively affect teachers' professional well-being.

Limitations

This systematic literature review has several limitations. First, the selection according to the method of systematic literature review was carried out in the first half of 2024, therefore, not all articles published in 2024 that met the criteria were possibly included in the analysis. Second, the

concept of leadership of managers includes both school principals and deputy principals, but when searching for one or another phrase, often not all results are included due to the mismatch of keywords used in published articles; therefore, only the concept of leadership was used in order to increase the chances of finding suitable publications. Third, the search was carried out including the field of education science and, having noticed that including the field of psychology on the origins of well-being results in more relevant publications, this was also selected. However, other areas of social science were not selected for review, in which articles that met the criteria could potentially be found. Fourth, empirical studies were selected only during the second stage of applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria while it could have been reviewed in the first stage. However, this did not affect the final result of the study.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first systematic literature review studying the links between leadership styles applied by school principals and teachers' professional well-being. Therefore, the study included all scientific sources in the Scopus database and articles selected according to the criteria to confirm the relevance of the topic, with 94% of these published in 2020–2024. Also, based on the number of studies conducted, the greatest relevance of the topic is observed in Asian countries (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021; Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021; Attar et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024; Li et al., 2024), so the lower number of publications in Western countries indicates the lack of research on the topic and the need for further research. It has been revealed that many authors conduct quantitative research (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021; Shie & Chang, 2022; Collie, 2023; Attar et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Limon et al., 2023; Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023; Lee & Swaner, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Bellibaş et al., 2024), while very rarely conducting qualitative (Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021) and mixed studies (Cann et al., 2021; Butler, 2024). The analysis showed a lack of qualitative and mixed studies investigating the links between principals' leadership styles and teachers' professional well-being. Qualitative studies would reveal the links and their causality in more depth. The analysed articles revealed connections, but did not provide extensive information about their causality and ongoing consequences.

It was revealed that in the publications that met the criteria, the most common leadership styles used by school leaders studied by the authors are authentic (Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021; Shie & Chang, 2022; Xu & Yang, 2023) and transformational (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024) leadership, as well as autonomy-supportive (Collie, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), distributed (Liu et al., 2023; Bellibaş et al., 2024), liberal (Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Attar et al., 2023), supportive (Attar et al., 2023; Lee & Swaner, 2023), and transactional (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020) leadership. However, less frequently studied leadership styles include coaching (Butler, 2024), empowering (Limon et al., 2023), learning-oriented (Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021), positive (Cann et al., 2021), servant (Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023), participative (Attar et al., 2023), and directive (Attar et al., 2023) leadership. Based on the results of a systematic literature review, an analysis of known (such as distributed, transformational, transactional) leadership styles and their connections is visible, but this highlights the need for analysis of other unstudied leadership styles, especially considering the recently developed styles such as instructional and inclusive leadership. The results of quantitative studies in some of the analysed articles revealed significant associations (Shie & Chang, 2022; Limon et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Bellibaş et al., 2024) between specific leadership styles and teachers' professional well-being, while other authors showed associations but did not reveal whether these were significant (Xu & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Among the quantitative studies, some authors also analysed correlations (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021; Attar et al., 2023; Lee & Swaner, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024). Thus, the need for more complex procedures in quantitative studies to reveal correlations is evident.

A systematic literature review showed that, depending on the leadership style, the leadership of school principals has a positive or negative impact on teachers' professional well-being. This is also confirmed by other authors studying the leadership of school principals and teachers' professional well-being (Serpieri & Vatrella, 2017; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2021; Cann et al., 2021). The analysis revealed the links between leadership not only with teachers' professional well-being, but also with some of its constituent elements, such as: teacher autonomy (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Cann et al., 2021; Collie, 2023; Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2023; Limon et al., 2023; Butler, 2024), job satisfac-

tion (Attar et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023), teacher resilience (Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024), commitment to the institution (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Shie & Chang, 2022; Bellibaş et al., 2024), change intentions (Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Collie, 2023), and stress experienced (Limon et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024; Bellibaş et al., 2024). However, none of the articles selected according to the criteria included such elements of professional well-being as teacher engagement (Rusu & Colomeischi, 2020; Pöysä et al., 2022, Vincent et al., 2023), time and workload pressures experienced (Qiao & Hu, 2021; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Cotson & Kim, 2024), and availability of learning opportunities for teachers (Dreer, 2023; Abbaspour et al., 2024). The authors of the articles distinguish teacher autonomy (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Cann et al., 2021; Collie, 2023; Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024) as one of the elements of well-being, which is confirmed by other authors (Yukselir & Ozer, 2022; Pan et al., 2023), and secondly, that the more autonomy is granted, the more self-confidence and job satisfaction teachers have (Jentsch et al., 2023), while its absence leads to greater emotional exhaustion (Ebersold et al., 2019). Self-efficacy as another important element discussed by the authors (Limon et al. 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Butler, 2024) is also found in other authors' articles confirming the support from principals (Jentsch et al., 2023). The study conducted by Ortan et al. (2021) confirms the links between job satisfaction and the provision of appropriate working conditions and necessary tools (Quinteros-Durand et al., 2023), while negative emotions (Xu & Yang, 2023) and increased workload (Cayupe et al., 2023) negatively affect job satisfaction. The authors who studied teacher resilience (Limon et al., 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024) are also seconded by Gibbs and Miller (2014), who highlight that it is precisely the support from school principals and mutual support from the community that strengthens resilience in various situations. Sohail et al. (2023) revealed that teacher's stress is directly related to school principal leadership, which is also confirmed by the articles analysed in this review (Limon et al., 2023; Xu & Yang, 2023; Mendoza & Dizon, 2024; Bellibaş et al., 2024). Finally, teacher stress also increases teachers' turnover intentions (Ryan et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The systematic literature review revealed that there is a lack of deeper, more experience-revealing research that could show a more detailed

causality of the links, and more broadly reveal the ongoing processes and school principles of operation. Analysis showed that most often the researchers choose to study the classic or most popular leadership styles such as transformational and distributed, without including the latest, less researched leadership styles. In addition, this review revealed the positive associations between teachers' professional well-being and leadership styles applied by school principals such as distributed, empowering, transformational, autonomy-supporting, coaching, learning-oriented, positive, supportive, participative and servant leadership, while the directive leadership style has extremely weak, but positive associations. Some researchers highlighted a positive, others a negative association of transactional leadership with teachers' professional well-being, while liberal leadership has a negative association. It was established that empirical research on leadership styles such as instructional leadership, adaptive, agile and patronizing leadership are missing in the scientific literature.

The review highlighted that most researchers choose to study the links between one or two leadership styles and teachers' professional well-being, while there is a lack of studies that examine the relationships between three or more leadership styles applied by school principals within a single study. Finally, it was revealed that different leadership styles of school principals have different influences on the elements that make up teachers' professional well-being, such as teacher autonomy, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, teacher resilience, commitment to the institution, change intentions and experienced stress, but publications do not focus on links with other elements of professional well-being. Therefore, there is a need for broader studies that would simultaneously cover not only all elements of well-being, but also school principals' leadership styles.

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5 | Navigating between Principalship, Leadership and Management

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Introduction

In 2009, we published an article (Trnavčevič & Roncelli Vaupot, 2009) discussing aspiring principals in Slovenia. Among our findings, we discovered that aspiring principals tend to describe their roles as paternalistic and hierarchical, often assigning a management role to the principal. Leadership style and power were closely linked to the principal's position (Trnavčevič & Roncelli Vaupot, 2009, pp. 99–100). Furthermore, participants in the study characterized a principal's role as paternalistic and protective.

In 2024, a principal appeared on the critical TV show *Tarča* (Prazni katedri, 2024) and expressed concern that teachers must be protected from parents who communicate disrespectfully and demand better grades for their children. She claimed that an excessive involvement of 'unprofessional publics' in teachers' professional autonomy occurs in schools. This indicates that after over 16 years, the focus on leadership still emphasizes managerial practice and the power dynamics inherent in the principal's role.

In daily newspaper *Delo,* a principal SB has called for 'practical solutions' without engaging in theoretical discussions (Kuralt, 2025). In his view, principals are often expected to address 'practical' issues rather than engage in educational theory. This perspective directs principals to act more as managers than true leaders. By basic definition, leadership involves influencing and inspiring followers. If we consider teachers to be the followers, then principals must empower them to maintain their autonomy and professionalism in both internal and external contexts.

However, the messages conveyed through the aforementioned TV show *Tarča* and daily newspaper *Delo* are quite similar. They are focused on 'protection' of schools. The president of the Slovenian Principals' Association explicitly stated that schools should be regarded as 'sacred places' which 'only authorised professionals can enter' (Kuralt, 2023).

These assertions regarding a 'protective' stance raise numerous questions and issues about the role of principals and the nature of principalship. We will focus on a single perspective, basing our discussion on the assumption that schools operate within specific contexts and legal frameworks. Principals are influenced by traditions, values, school culture, routines, and expectations. The legal framework defines their position, power, and authority, which in turn shapes their practice. Consequently, we propose a conceptual model that reconstructs the relationship between leadership, management, and principalship, advocating for a theoretical revival of principalship as a vital discourse.

Legal Context: Principals in Slovenia, Italy and Austria

In this section, we provide a comparative analysis of principals' roles and positions in the legal context of three neighbouring countries, Slovenia, Italy and Austria.

Slovenia

In practice, the role of a school principal in the Slovenian educational system reaches far beyond administrative responsibilities. As both a pedagogical leader and an executive manager, the principal plays a key role in shaping the school climate, fostering collaboration among staff, and creating conditions conducive to learning. According to Dolgan (2012), principals in Slovene elementary schools take on a dual role, functioning as educational leaders and institutional managers. They must balance the expectations set by the school's founder, whether municipal or state authorities, and the professional needs of their staff. Their effectiveness is closely linked to their leadership style, which should reflect their traits, the characteristics of their team, and the specific conditions within their school environment. A thorough awareness of these elements is essential for developing leadership training programmes that can strengthen school performance.

While Slovenian legislation outlines the principal's formal duties, it does not explicitly define the leadership competencies required, particularly those commonly referred to as 'soft skills.' Yet, as will be explored

through the analysis of legal provisions, policy documents, and professional development programmes in the following sections, an increasing emphasis on these competencies is emerging. Although not yet systematically defined or embedded in legislation, the need for soft skills is gradually gaining recognition across various regulatory and professional frameworks.

The primary legal basis for defining the role of the principal in Slovenia is the Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja (zofvi) [Act on the Organisation and Financing of Education] (1996). Principals' competences are systematically defined by the zofvi. According to Article 49 of this act, principals are responsible for organizing, leading, and directing the institution's work, preparing development programmes, managing employment relationships, ensuring legal and financial compliance, and guaranteeing the professional and lawful execution of educational activities. These legal provisions indicate that the Slovenian legal framework already encompasses the essential components of principalship as recognized by international sources. In Slovenia, the principal's role legally transcends administrative management and includes both strategic and professional dimensions. It is, therefore, crucial to understand that zofvi as a systemic law does not require changes regarding the roles and tasks of principals; the issue lies not in the legislation itself but rather in its inconsistent implementation in practice. A shift is needed at the level of execution, meaning that principals should be provided with conditions necessary to fulfil their statutory role. Support mechanisms must be strengthened, and a professional culture that respects their autonomy and accountability must be cultivated.

Article 49 of the zofvi hence stipulates that the principal is both the pedagogical leader and executive head of a public educational institution. Further, Article 49 lists the principal's responsibilities, including the organization and planning of school operations, development of annual and long-term plans, ensuring the legality of school activities, and overseeing the functioning of professional bodies within the school system (Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja (zofvi), 1996, as amended). In addition to defining the principal's role, the Act also sets out specific eligibility criteria for appointment in Article 53. The requirements vary depending on the type of institution but generally include a relevant higher education degree (at least at the second cycle level), professional titles such as *mentor, advi-*

sor, senior advisor, or counsellor, a minimum of five years of experience in education, and successful completion of the principal certification exam. For example, principals of public kindergartens, schools, and institutions for children with special needs must meet qualifications appropriate to their institution, including pedagogical or counselling credentials. Principals of higher vocational colleges must hold the title of lecturer and have a minimum of five years of experience. Notably, a candidate who does not yet hold the principal certification may still be appointed, provided they complete the required examination within one year of starting their term. Failure to do so results in automatic termination of their mandate, which otherwise lasts five years.

However, despite this detailed enumeration of tasks and conditions, the law does not provide a specific list of leadership competencies required for the position. It defines the function, not the profile. This gap places the responsibility for interpreting and developing leadership expectations in the hands of educational institutions and training bodies.

Effective educational leadership increasingly relies on a broad range of interpersonal and managerial skills. These include social intelligence, communication abilities, emotional stability, team leadership, and human resource management. Such competencies are essential for implementing distributed and shared leadership, guiding the school community, engaging with parents and the broader public, and fostering a collaborative school culture. As Pellitteri (2021) emphasizes, emotional intelligence, encompassing the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and express emotions, is crucial for effective interpersonal communication and the creation of a positive emotional climate within schools. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate the emotional dynamics of the school environment, thereby strengthening relationships among teachers, students, and parents and promoting a culture of collaboration.

These competencies are somehow recognized and promoted in the official training programmes for principals, coordinated by the Ministry of Education. The training goes beyond regulatory knowledge and covers practical aspects of leadership development, with specific attention to managing teams, developing a school vision, and resolving interpersonal conflicts. One such example is the programme *Mreže ravnateljev za razvoj vodenja* (Networks of principals for leadership development), implemented by the School for Principals (a unit of the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024), which emphasizes lead-

ership through peer networking, mentoring, and self-reflection (Až-man & Zavašnik, 2023).

Despite these educational efforts, leadership competencies – particularly soft skills – are still not formally or legally included in the selection and evaluation criteria for school principals. Current appointment procedures remain primarily focused on formal qualifications, such as academic degrees, years of professional experience, and professional titles. In contrast, personal traits, emotional intelligence, and leadership abilities are typically assessed only informally, if they are considered at all.

The Draft National Programme for Education 2023–2033, published by the Ministry of Education, acknowledges this gap. It proposes the strengthening of school leadership capacities and the establishment of a systemic approach to continued professional development and self-reflection for school leaders, including tools for leadership quality assessment (Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje, 2024).

In summary, while Slovenian law positions school principals as key figures within the educational system, it has yet to fully capture the complexity and multidimensional demands of modern school leadership. Despite growing emphasis on soft skills in training and guidance documents, these competencies are still only marginally embedded in the formal legal and procedural criteria for appointing and evaluating principals. This misalignment underscores a broader issue: the need to reconcile statutory frameworks with the practical realities of educational leadership, where qualities like empathy, effective communication, and intercultural awareness are often just as vital as legal proficiency. Bridging this gap will be essential for any meaningful reform aimed at strengthening the professional identity and support structures for school leaders in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

Italy

Compared to Slovenia, Italy and Austria have developed more structured and legally defined approaches to school leadership. In Italy, entry into the principalship is governed by a national-level competitive examination (*concorso nazionale*), established by Decreto Legislativo 30 marzo 2001, n. 165 [Legislative Decree No. 165/2001] (2001), which assesses candidates' knowledge of educational law, school organization, and leadership skills (Savelli, 2017a, 2017b). Successful candidates

are appointed as *dirigenti scolastici* and are responsible for the strategic management of their schools, a role significantly strengthened by the enactment of Legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107 [Law No. 107/2015] (Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione e delega per il riordino delle disposizioni legislative vigenti, 2015), commonly known as *La Buona Scuola*.

This law redefined the principal's role from that of a primarily pedagogical leader to a strategic manager responsible for overseeing staff recruitment, financial and human resources management, and the overall development of the educational institution. Article 1 of *La Buona Scuola* assigns principals the task of preparing and implementing the Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa (PTOF), overseeing teacher assignment, and aligning school activities with broader national and regional education strategies. These responsibilities function within a framework aimed at enhancing school autonomy and fostering long-term institutional planning.

Following selection, new principals undergo an induction period that includes mandatory training organized by INDIRE (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa). Although the initial training primarily addresses legal and managerial content, contemporary leadership frameworks emphasize that effective school leadership also requires interpersonal competencies, such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills, which are crucial for fostering inclusive and effective school environments (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016).

Altogether, the Italian system increasingly recognizes the importance of soft skills in school leadership. While these competencies are not always explicitly evaluated in formal selection procedures, they are strongly emphasized in post-selection training and professional development. As a result, newly appointed principals are better supported in addressing the multifaceted demands of educational leadership.

Austria

In Austria, the role of school principals is defined by a combination of legal mandates and competency-based models that emphasize both formal qualifications and soft skills. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) has developed a comprehensive leadership profile and training programmes to ensure that school leaders are equipped with the necessary competencies to manage schools effec-

tively (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2020). The legal responsibilities of school principals are outlined in the School Education Act (Wiederverlautbarung des Schulunterrichtsgesetzes (SchUG), 1986) and the Civil Service Act (Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz (BDG), 1979). According to Article 56 of the SchUG, principals are responsible for the pedagogical and administrative leadership of the school, including quality assurance and personnel management (SchUG, 1986). Article 45 of the BDG 1979 further details the duties of civil servants in leadership positions, emphasizing accountability and adherence to legal standards (Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz (BDG), 1979).

International frameworks, such as those outlined in the UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024,* emphasize that school leaders are expected to balance administrative management and instructional leadership to promote quality education (UNESCO, 2024). Although specific national profiles vary, Austria follows this general orientation through its national competency frameworks for principals, which stress both formal qualifications and interpersonal competencies (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2020). Notably, while no formal principal training is mandatory before appointment, Austria provides structured professional development and coaching opportunities for school leaders once they assume their position (https://www.leadershipacademy.at).

Austria offers state-supported coaching and professional development programmes for school principals, with a strong emphasis on soft skills such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and relationship-building. One of the most established programmes is the Leadership Academy Österreich, coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Education and organized in collaboration with external experts. It focuses on fostering reflective, relationship-oriented, and systemically aware leadership. Its curriculum includes modules aimed at developing personal and interpersonal competencies, including emotional awareness, communication strategies, and team leadership (see https://www .leadershipacademy.at).

In addition to nationally organized initiatives, private training providers offer supplementary programmes in Austria, including seminars on emotional intelligence in leadership. Although these are not formally part of national education policy, they reflect a growing acknowledgment of the importance of interpersonal skills in school leadership.

Austria's approach to supporting school principals places significant emphasis on developing emotional and social competencies through professional development opportunities such as the Leadership Academy Österreich. These programmes focus on cultivating empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution, skills increasingly recognized as vital for nurturing collaborative school environments and promoting organizational effectiveness.

Further insights into the evolving role of school principals in Austria are provided by Wiesner and Schratz (2019), who discuss the balance between accountability and improvement. They highlight the challenges faced by principals in navigating a highly centralized system while striving for school-based innovation. The authors also introduce the Field-TransFormation360 model, which emphasizes the development of leadership competencies across four quadrants: rational processes, strategic processes, creative processes, and identity processes. This model underscores the importance of personal mastery and reflective practice in effective school leadership (Wiesner & Schratz, 2019).

While Austria's legal statutes may not explicitly reference soft skills, these competencies are firmly embedded in the national competency frameworks and leadership training strategies, reflecting their central role in effective school governance.

Comparative Insight

This comparative lens reveals key differences presented in Table 5.1. These distinctions highlight the systemic strength of Italy and Austria in formally acknowledging and embedding soft skills as essential components of effective leadership. In contrast, Slovenia emphasizes professional experience and optional training, but the absence of a standardized framework for evaluating leadership preparedness creates a noticeable disconnect between legal mandates and educational practice.

School Management, School Leadership and Principalship

To provide a limited overview of the number of publications on school management, school leadership, and principalship, a basic search was conducted across three different repositories. We intentionally chose the terms school leadership and school management instead of educational leadership and educational management to highlight the roles of principals as leaders and managers. In the Web of Science repository, we found the following results for the publication years 2021 to

Table 5.1 Key Differences in Selected Countries

Criteria	Slovenia	Italy	Austria
Legal basis for leadership	Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja (ZOFVI)	Legge 107/2015 [Law 107/2015] *La Buona Scuola*	Wiederverlautbarung des Schulunterrichtsgesetzes (SchUG) & Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz (BDG), 1979
Soft skills in legislation	Not explicitly included	Integrated into training and leadership assessments	Included in the national competency models for principals
Selection process	Based on formal qualifications (education, exams)	National competitive exam includes leadership evaluation	Appointment based on formal qualifications and competency frameworks
Continuous training	Available but optional	Mandatory professional development via INDIRE	Professional development and coaching offered after appointment (state-supported)
Evaluation of leadership	Informal and limited	Legally mandated periodic evaluation	Part of professional development programmes, includes feedback and personal growth plans

Table 5.2 Number of Articles per Category and Repository from 2021 to 2025

Repository (category)	School management	School leadership	Principalship
WOS (under 'topic')	16,411	7,341	113
Sage Publications (research article)	87,228	138,982	37,074
Emerald	47,705	21,558	123

2025 (https://www.webofscience.com/): under the search term school management, there were 16,411 results; under school leadership, there were 7,341 results; and under principalship, there were 113 results. In the Sage Journals repository, under the search term school management, we found 87,228 results categorized as research articles. Additionally, there were 138,982 results for the search term school leadership, and 37,074 research articles under principalship. In the Emerald repository, we discovered 47,705 results for the term school management. For school leadership, there were 21,558 results, and under principalship, there were 123 research articles. The results are presented in Table 5.2.

The number of publications in each field reflects global research interests and policy priorities. However, there seems to be a low interest in the topic of principalship. Why is that? It may be because discussions about school leaders often focus on principals by using the terms 'school leader' and 'principal' interchangeably.

School Management

The neoliberal agenda has promoted the marketization of public education (Bartlett et al., 2002; Locatelli, 2017; Lubienski & Malin, 2025). In the UK, the field of management in education emerged relatively recently after 1988 (Bush, 2008) but gained significant attention and international reach in the early 1990s. With the rise of New Public Management and the marketization of public education, extensive discussions arose regarding whether education should be viewed as a public or private good, the purpose of public education, and the challenges of policy borrowing (Oplatka, 2004). This led to a heightened focus on school leadership.

In this context, the concept of management was largely imported into educational systems worldwide and impacted them in two main ways: culturally, as the UK system differs from other educational systems, and disciplinarily, as key ideas, concepts, theories, and approaches, along with tools and techniques from general and business management, were adapted for use in education. Management has acquired negative connotations, being seen as overly technical rather than people-oriented, perhaps due to this 'import.' Mertkan (2013) argues that the shift in the focus of educational policy reforms has led to leadership becoming the predominant discourse.

Mintzberg (2004), a respected theorist in the field of business management, provides an intriguing perspective by linking management to the Aristotelian concept of phronesis. He argues that management is not merely a science, profession, or set of skills; it encompasses judgment, vision, insight, and choice. This viewpoint positions management as an art and underscores the significance of wisdom in practice- phronesis. Therefore, management transcends basic process-oriented and transactional elements and deserves greater attention in educational contexts than it currently receives.

If management is rooted in phronesis, it necessarily incorporates ethical dimensions, experience, and knowledge, all aimed at promoting what is considered 'good' for the school. While Aristotle's ideas origi-

nate from the past, they provide valuable insights for comprehending modern concepts like management. If experience, choice, and judgment are central to phronesis, then principals should not be appointed solely based on meeting legal qualifications; they should also possess proven experience in leading people and managing processes. This way, they are better equipped to make informed judgments and choices compared to those who may be well-educated but lack practical experience.

Bush (2007, p. 393) asserts that both management and leadership are equally essential in schools and does not prioritize one over the other. He references Leithwood et al. (1999), who observed that school leaders engage in their daily responsibilities without distinctly separating managing from leading. However, whether referred to as school leaders, managers, or simply principals, there is an implicit value-laden understanding of their roles. Consequently, we will discuss leadership and principalship in the following section.

... and School Leadership and Principalship

Wei (2025, p. 628) considers leadership and principalship to be synonymous. She states that 'principalship reveals a process of influencing by which school principals exert an intentional impact on others; they aim to structure activities and relationships in educational contexts.' Leadership is also defined as the act of influencing others. The question of whether school principalship can be used as a synonym for leadership is not merely rhetorical; by using specific expressions and concepts, we reshape and define the meanings and implications of our practices. By examining the daily lives of principals, we encourage them to define their identities as leaders. Nevertheless, the legal framework, cultural context, and other factors significantly influence the roles and practices of principals.

In the Slovenian context, principals are both leaders and managers, primarily appointed to carry out management tasks in accordance with legislation. The introduction of the concept of leadership appears to elevate principals' roles to that of school leaders. However, various training programmes focus on educational management.

Educational management in Slovenia began to gain prominence in the 1990s. In 1996, the National Schools for Leadership in Education was established, offering a certified programme for school principals. Over time, theoretical foundations for nationally constructed concepts emerged, reflecting international trends in leadership. The programme

consists of six modules: Introduction to Leadership, Theories of Organizations and Leadership, Planning, People in Organizations, Principal as Pedagogical Leader, and Legislation (Šola za ravnatelje, n.d.). These module titles have remained almost the same since 1996. The continuation of the required, licenced programme focuses more on soft skills, such as developing learning networks, supervising teachers, and providing constructive feedback. The rhetoric emphasizes that principals need to inspire, motivate, and, as the president of the principals' association suggests, 'protect' teachers. This discussion reflects a recurring theme: protective principals and disempowered teachers. Despite recent shifts in rhetoric, the legal framework and existing legislation defining principals' roles and obligations have not changed substantially. We now observe new challenges for school principals that necessitate a rethinking of principalship, though empirical research in this area remains limited.

The question of whether 'school principalship' can be used as a synonym for 'leadership' is, hence, not merely rhetorical. Our choice of language and concepts reshapes and defines the meaning of our practices. By understanding the everyday experiences of principals, we encourage them to identify themselves as leaders. However, various factors, including legal frameworks and cultural contexts, influence the roles and practices of principals.

Bush (2007) highlights the diverse epistemologies and disciplines that shape the field of educational leadership and management. His systematic literature and research review draws from both international and South African sources. In 2003, Bush developed a typology of educational management and leadership models. He divided them between management and leadership models and drew a correspondence between them (Bush, 2007, p. 394). For example, for the collegial management model, he found corresponding leadership models, such as transformative, interpersonal and participative; for the subjective management model he identified the post-modern leadership model, and for the cultural management model, moral and instructional leadership models were identified. Such a typology has two implications. Firstly, it shows that models are not unique to management or leadership. They carry similar features. Secondly, redundancy is unavoidable, and so are the barriers between management and/or leadership models.

Typologies and theories of educational leadership have been exten-

sively described and discussed by scholars (Davies & Davies, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Tian & Huber, 2020). Hallinger (1992) identified trends in principalship in the USA from 1960 to 1990, which evolved from programme manager to instructional leader and then to transformational leader. Mango (2018) noted that there are over 60 leadership theories guiding researchers in this field. He conducted a thorough analysis aiming to consolidate these various theories and found considerable redundancy and similarities among them. After scrutinizing 22 theories, he identified five domains.

This consolidation effort is not unique; for instance, Meuser et al. (2016) conducted an extensive analysis of leadership theories and identified one focal theory encompassing six leadership approaches: transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, strategic leadership, leadership and diversity, participative/shared leadership, and trait theory. Educational leadership is shaped by all of these theories, domains, and models. They not only address the need of principals to 'protect' teachers from non-professionals but also reflect the importance of diversity and variety in leadership practices.

Gurr (2015) reported on the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), which has been ongoing since 2001, and he provided an international model of successful school leadership. Initially involving seven participating countries, the project expanded to 20 countries, incorporating rich, diverse methodologies to explore the nature of successful principal leadership. Among many findings, Gurr (2015) highlights the concepts of distributed leadership and heroic leadership that successful principals embody. While heroic leadership may suggest an emphasis on individual leadership, it is essential to recognize that principals do not lead schools alone. Gurr (2015, p. 144) intentionally uses the term 'school leaders' instead of 'principals' to emphasize this point.

The distinction between 'school leader' and 'principal' is closely tied to legal frameworks, the roles and positions of principals, and the organizational structure of schools. Gurr (2015) provides an example regarding changes in pedagogy, stating that heads of curriculum areas can lead improvements in teaching methods. However, the legal framework defines school structures and hierarchies, which in turn dictate the roles and responsibilities of various school leaders. This observation suggests that emphasizing principals as school leaders extends beyond mere leadership; it pertains to specific roles and positions within

a cultural and legal context, as well as the expectations and needs of followers and stakeholders.

Social media has transformed established communication channels and opened schools to various stakeholders and the public. According to the President of the Principals' Association, this shift makes schools and educators vulnerable. This perspective warrants further research in areas such as teacher education, the selection and preparation of principals, and the exploration of theories from other fields, such as marketing and public relations, which offer substantial research on communicating when the audience is unknown. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as participation in television shows, printed publications (e.g. newspapers), and social media.

The role of principals is evolving; they now face issues for which they may not have received adequate training, such as addressing discipline, engaging with different generations of parents, and adapting to the mobile phone generation in schools. Meanwhile, policymakers and decision-makers have been slow to introduce necessary changes.

To effectively address the challenges posed by 'new technologies and media,' which have transformed modern communication, including in schools, it may be beneficial to revitalize research on principalship. The legal context significantly, although not exclusively, shapes a principal's role, duties, and authority while also defining organizational structures. Since any employee can exercise leadership within a school, the legislation stipulates a principal's formal positions and roles. While formal positions and roles do not explicitly emphasize leadership competencies, they implicitly expect them. We propose a conceptual model that reflects the legal frameworks of Slovenia, which could serve as a framework for future studies.

If a principal is put in the centre of a school due to power and authority, and assigned responsibilities, duties, and tasks to be performed, then principalship colours the management processes and leadership as influencing others.

Concluding Discussion

The growing complexity of educational leadership in the twenty-first century demands that school principals possess more than regulatory knowledge and administrative competence. As emphasised by the OECD, effective school leaders must demonstrate strong interpersonal competencies, including communication skills, relationship-building
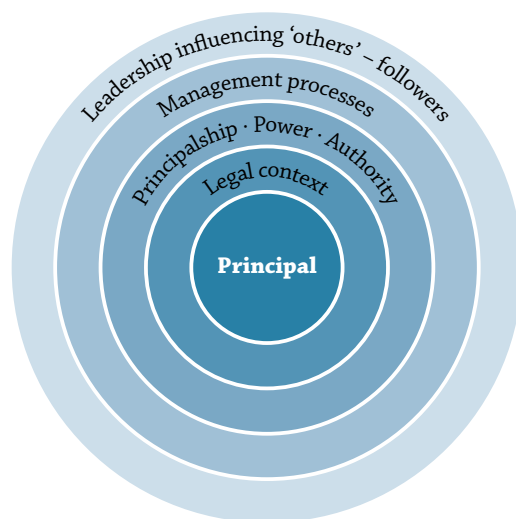
Figure 5.1
Conceptual Model
for Principalship

abilities, and the capacity to manage change constructively. These skills are not peripheral, but central to fostering a positive school climate and enabling sustainable school improvement.

As OECD research suggests, interpersonal and emotional competencies should not be considered optional attributes, but rather integral to the principal's role. Their absence in formal standards risks leaving principals underprepared for the relational and transformational demands of contemporary schooling. In Slovenia, this gap is slowly being addressed through professional development programmes and sublegal guidelines; however, these remain fragmented and largely dependent on individual initiative.

The legal framework explicitly and implicitly reflects a principal's power position, authority, responsibilities, and accountability. With a focus on administrative tasks, neither management nor leadership is sufficiently addressed. The foci of principals' perceived needs, knowledge and skills upgrade, and hence, professional development, move the practice towards management processes while leadership remains 'optional.'

Considering principals as *primus inter pares* and expecting them to be super persons is illusory in this complex world. Schools must be managed well with established processes and fulfilling aims and tasks, in a welcoming, supportive, and developmentally oriented school culture. Principals must understand their role and 'engage others' in leader-

ship. Distributed principalship would give rise to undistributed power and authority, accountability and responsibility while enabling sharing, distributing instructional and other types of leadership. If so, principals could get more adequate training, better navigate between different roles, and be more aware of their power, authority, responsibility and accountability position than they currently are.

Policy Implications for Slovenia

For Slovenia, these findings carry important implications. While the formal responsibilities of school principals are clearly outlined in national legislation, the systemic embedding of interpersonal competencies within leadership frameworks remains limited. The Slovenian educational policy environment still largely emphasizes administrative compliance and legal accountability, often at the expense of recognizing and systematically developing soft skills as a core component of school leadership.

To align with international trends and evidence-based policy recommendations, Slovenia could benefit from integrating soft skills more explicitly into the legal and professional profile of school leaders. The incorporation of competencies in initial principal training, such as ongoing coaching and performance evaluation frameworks, is needed. A shift in discourse is necessary, from a focus on managerialism to leadership rooted in relational ethics, emotional intelligence, and democratic engagement. Additionally, we should move towards empowering principals, enabling them to effectively administer, manage, and lead schools with the strategic goal of transformation. This shift of focus on principalship goes beyond semantic change into meaningful praxis. To effectively carry out the role of principal in Slovenia, it is crucial to consistently apply all statutory competencies outlined by ZOFVI. This includes systematically training principals in strategic, pedagogical, and organizational leadership, as well as promoting an environment that supports professional leadership within schools.

Research implications for Slovenia

Our discussion and conceptual model of principalship raise several questions and opportunities for further research. Beyond testing the model in various national contexts, it can also be compared internationally. The dominant discourse requires fresh perspectives aiming to address the needs of non-English speaking countries, as well as their

cultural traditions and legal frameworks. Research on school management should be informed by new insights from general management, which continues to influence school practices in multiple ways. Additionally, educational leadership theories may benefit from being examined through a constructivist research paradigm, as Wei (2025) suggests. Leadership, management, and principalship are dynamic concepts; new generations of parents, students, and emerging technologies demand innovative teachers guided by forward-thinking principals. As a result, exploring the relationship between the 'new' and the 'old' opens up new avenues for research.

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6 Educational Leadership in Transition: Reflections, Integrations, and Paths Forward

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The Time to Rethink Educational Leadership

Based on the collective chapters of this edited volume, we can conclude that the demands on educational leaders have never been greater. Ansell and Boin (2019) mentioned that modern societies are increasingly faced with 'unknown unknowns.' Yet, they argued on the important role of a leader during the outbreak of a challenging time. In particular, they argued that when challenges emerge in societies, constituents look to their leaders to protect them and deal with the crisis to address any possible consequences (Ansell & Boin, 2019). Crises and emergency situations, including COVID-19, have reshaped school leaders' practices (Harris & Jones, 2022; Kafa, 2021). Specifically, Striepe and Cunningham (2022) stated in a scoping review of empirical research studies on school leadership during times of crisis, that crises impacting school organizations are divided into natural and human disasters. Natural disasters include fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and so on, whereas human disasters include numerous school disasters, shootings, and deaths, among other things (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). In different contexts, not only disasters but also other challenges were amplified during and after the COVID-19 lockdown (Sia et al., 2023). For example, communication with parents has been changing, expectations of schools' stakeholders have been changing, and pressures on schools are increasing.

Therefore, demands on educational leaders have never been greater. Based on the chapters of this edited volume's challenges, contextual elements, quality issues, professional well-being, and the importance of

understanding leadership beyond the aspects of management and principalship and within the context of principalship have emerged as crucial for reimagining leadership in this changing world. Based on the thematic aspects of the chapters, *theoretical frameworks, empirical insights, and lived experiences were presented to build more equitable, inclusive, and humanizing leadership models.* Educational leaders are navigating uncharted waters and an increasingly complex environment, shaped by societal inequality, emotional strain, policy accountability, and a global call for inclusivity. Therefore, the time calls to rethink the educational leadership field and support educational leaders across various educational sectors to lead successfully and effectively.

In such situations, there is often an attempt to find 'the' right model, 'the' right style, 'the' right … This book emphasizes the contextual and legal frameworks within which school leadership, principalship and management are embedded. A methodological diversity has to address nuances and allow for culturally bounded and context-sensitive interpretations of empirical data. New old issues require new approaches in practice, refocused research and changes in education policies. The neoliberal approach did not provide the expected results in improving equity, inclusion, teacher well-being and students' academic results. Marketization-based policies and the 'tyranny of choice' (Salecl, 2011) have not resulted in better education systems, as many authors argue. Therefore, reconsidering the future of education will require a distance from neoliberal politics and a closer movement towards the essence of education. Schools must become student-centred again, and teachers must be empowered and act autonomously. The teachers' call for 'protection' from stakeholders' demands requires more than only techniques and skills. It calls for different education of future teachers and professionalization of principalship.

What Have We Learned from the Chapters of this Edited Volume?

Based on the perspective of rethinking the educational field and on the contributions of this particular edited volume, we need to understand the lessons learned to form specific implications and set the future path for the field. The opening chapter by Fuentes and Camas Garrido presents a compelling argument that educational leadership must be grounded in *emotional intelligence, inclusive values,* and *ethical conduct.* The chapter highlights the *emotional labour* of leadership, where empa-

thy and care become indispensable to building trust, motivating staff, and fostering equitable learning environments. The challenge to dominant neoliberal logics that reduce leadership to metrics and accountability makes this framing particularly important. By centring on relationships, emotional well-being, and cultural responsiveness, Fuentes and Camas Garrido push for a leadership paradigm that is *relational rather than transactional,* and *transformative rather than managerial.*

Following and building on the first chapter, this need for contextually responsive leadership is taken further in Chapter 2 by Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė and Kafa, who explore how *economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS)* moderates and mediates the relationship between leadership practices and student science achievement using OECD PISA data. Their findings show that *instructional leadership alone cannot overcome the structural disadvantages faced by students in low-ESCS settings.* This chapter critically reveals the *limitations of generic leadership prescriptions,* especially in centralized or stratified systems. Rather than treating leadership as a universal toolkit, the authors argue for *adaptive leadership* strategies that account for local inequalities and systemic constraints. Their analysis strengthens the volume's core argument: *leadership must be situated within its specific policy, institutional, and social context.*

In Chapter 3, Luna Pérez and Domínguez Rodríguez offer a comparative lens to understand leadership practices across Chile, Canada, Singapore, and Australia. Their comparative analysis of national leadership frameworks shows how different systems prioritize pedagogical leadership, community engagement, and resource management, often in response to both international standards and local demands. Despite contextual differences, several converging themes emerge. Effective leadership is increasingly linked to professional development, distributed authority, and stakeholder collaboration. These global cases suggest that policy frameworks that support leadership development, particularly those that promote reflection, autonomy, and ethical action, can enhance educational quality and reduce inequality. Therefore, we can argue that educational leadership is shaped by a variety of aspects, including historical moments, political systems, national values, etc.

The discussion in Chapter 4 focuses on a critical and modern aspect of educational leadership, referring to teachers' well-being. Through a systematic literature review, Šimkutė-Bukantė and Žydžiūnaitė demonstrate that leadership styles such as transformational, distributed, au-

thentic, supportive, and empowering are positively associated with teacher professional well-being. Especially in an era where everything is changing, teachers' well-being is important. They are leaders within the classroom who support our students. Their direct contact with students and parents and the role of school leaders calls for sustaining and promoting teachers' well-being. Therefore, from Chapter 4 we draw a conclusion that teachers' well-being is crucial for effective leadership. When teachers experience burnout, stress, or a lack of support, it negatively impacts students' learning. Therefore, school leaders must develop competencies to support their teaching staff in centralized and decentralized education systems. Supporting teachers does not mean removing roles, duties, or requirements from their responsibilities. Instead, teachers should be highly motivated, knowledgeable, and skilled professionals who can thrive in demanding environments, supported by positive relationships with colleagues that enhance their well-being.

Finally, in Chapter 5, Kovačič and Trnavčević explored the often-blurred lines between principalship, management, and leadership, particularly in the context of Slovenia. We have learned that in many educational systems, including Slovenia, the legal and policy frameworks often constrain leadership by framing it through managerial and administrative logics rather than promoting leadership. To discuss school leaders' and principals' transformative potential, it could be useful to research the principalship and principals' roles in the broader context of leadership. Principals are central figures in schools if we look at them from the position of power, authority, and organizational structure. They are accountable and responsible for the school in general. As such, they have to identify their transformative potential and managerial 'smoothness.'

We can summarize the content of the book in seven postulates:

1. Context matters deeply
2. Leadership is a human practice
3. Teacher well-being is a prerequisite for school effectiveness and improvement
4. Understanding and addressing challenges (including crises and emergencies) requires new knowledge, skills and attitudes for new times
5. Quality matters in every aspect of the educational leadership field
6. Management and leadership are intertwined, while principalship

has to be navigated between the policy framework and leadership and management practices

7. There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Model

What are the Implications?

Building on the findings from the collective chapters of this edited volume, the following implications for policymakers and future research are presented.

Policymakers

- *Context matters.* School leaders can respond to and address the needs and challenges in their environment. The era of 'policy borrowing' only seemingly faded away. Education policies round the world have been designed on the implicit or explicit, endogenous or exogenous practices of policy borrowing. We can observe different forms of policy borrowing (Gupta, 2022; Nishimura-Sahi, 2020). Clapham (2023) discusses policy borrowing from contexts associated with high performance in international league tables. Globalization has brought about 'sameness,' similarity, and interconnectedness (Bauman, 1998); notions that are often ascribed positive connotations and that facilitate international comparative research, such as P I S A. However, they also amplify competition and other policy decisions and marketized practices, such as league tables (Clapham, 2023).

- *School leaders' professional development on addressing current societal challenges, crises and emergencies matters.* Potter and Chitpin (2020) discuss professional development in the highly neoliberal context of the English schools in Ontario and emphasize professional critique and data analysis methods that are beyond statistics. Policy makers need and must have data that goes beyond the numbers. In Chapter 4, Šimkutė-Bukantė and Žydžiūnaitė point out the need for mixed methods research design. The dominant, quantitative research has to be accompanied by qualitative and mixed methods research designs to get better and in-depth understanding of current phenomena. This is an implication for further research but also a recommendation to policy makers to incentivize professional development through financial incentives and to encourage principals and school leaders to make use of their reflective

practices. An action research methodology could add to informing policy-makers and indicate more specific needs emerging in specific contexts. A bottom-up approach to identifying professional development needs rather than a top-down approach has been advocated (Lafferty et al., 2024). However, as Miranda et al. (2024) argue, due to the highly complex political environments, school leaders need to build political awareness. Such topics are not frequently included in teachers' and principals' professional development; however, they would help them to better navigate through policy and political complexity.

- *Strengthen school leaders' understanding and awareness of teachers' well-being.* This is a prerequisite for the success of the teaching and learning process. School leaders cannot directly influence working conditions, such as teachers' workload, the quality of physical conditions of schools, and the policies of accountability. However, school leaders have a direct impact on creating a positive, inclusive, and motivating school culture through school policies and norms, and job satisfaction (Dreer, 2021).

- *Promoting the leadership aspect of educational leaders beyond the concepts of managerialism and administration.* A clear distinction must be made between managerialism and management. Managerialism carries a pejorative, critical connotation in education (Santiago & Carvalho, 2012). For example, the journal J C E P S (Journal of Critical Education Studies), regularly publishes academic articles on managerialism, marketization of public education, the impact of New Public Management (N P M) on education and other topics related to and emerging from N P M application to the field of education. Also, 'leaderism' as a concept has emerged in a pejorative connotation. O'Reilly and Reed (2010, p. 960) define leaderism as 'an emerging set of beliefs that frames and justifies certain innovatory changes in contemporary organisational and managerial practice – is a development of managerialism and that it has been applied and utilized within the policy discourse of public service reform in the U K as part of the hybridization and evolution of N P M and new public governance practices in the public services.' So, when discussing management and leadership, we need to embed the discussion in a broader political context. A bottom-up approach to policy development can contribute to a humanistic un-

derstanding of leadership, and place principalship in the service of it. It also highlights leadership and management from a specific perspective.

Future Research

At the end of this book, we also look at future research. Our ideas go beyond the book. We are very much aware of the need to research new practices, concepts and ideas that are somehow introduced into educational management and leadership from other fields or cultures. Well-being is a good example of a new concept in education. Comparative studies in the international arena will unfold new understandings and lead to improvements in practice. *Hence, advanced contextual research* that explores how educational leadership, management and principalship are enacted in varying socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional settings is needed. Further investigation of the intersections between educational leadership and new challenges, such as advanced digitalization and technological development, will enrich the field of education.

Šimkutė-Bukantė and Žydžiūnaitė, in Chapter 4, identified the need for a mixed-methods research design. Their observation leads to re-thinking the methodological issues in educational leadership, management, and principalship. Advanced qualitative approaches have to be applied, and an understanding of their philosophical, epistemological and methodological paradigms considered. One example of a lost paradigm is generic qualitative research. There are many pitfalls of such research (Kahlke, 2014), although it may be beneficial in some other fields, like nursing. We need a critical rethinking of the methodologies used to generate new knowledge and reflexivity rather than reflections.

Beyond all said, we would like to draw the attention of researchers in the field of educational leadership, management and principalship to meta-analysis, to building research on already existing studies, especially qualitative studies from within national contexts. There are so many opportunities to generate knowledge, but they require knowledgeable and open-minded researchers.

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In an era marked by global disruption, growing inequality, and rapid transformation in education systems, the role of school leaders – and educational leadership more broadly – has become increasingly complex, multifaceted, and urgent. This edited volume brings together international perspectives and original research that illuminate various dimensions of educational leadership, with a particular focus on school leadership. Although school leadership has been extensively theorized and empirically studied in recent years, foundational concepts remain the subject of ongoing debate, as leadership is inherently shaped by its context. From a policy standpoint, globalization and internationalization have fostered a certain degree of 'sameness,' reflected in both terminology and theoretical approaches. The international authorship represented in this volume underscores a shared commitment to improving schools and advancing school leadership. The chapters offer a timely and critical exploration of educational leadership in a rapidly changing world. They address pressing issues related to policy, practice, and equity, while providing grounded examples of innovation, resilience, and reflective practice across diverse contexts.