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Leadership in education

The professionalization of school leadership in Latin America: A review of eight educational systems

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ABSTRACT

School leadership has emerged as a crucial variable for the provision of educational quality. Education policy in Latin America has sought to follow the international trends for the professionalization of school leadership. Following a theoretical model defining the key dimensions for the professionalization of school leadership, the paper examines eight educational systems in the region that have made significant progress in this area. Five educational systems will be explored using TALIS 2018 principal data, while three others are the subject of in-depth case studies. Our findings show that despite significant advances in the definition of functions and recruitment and selection process, several challenges remain particular regarding the professional development of principals and their working conditions. The paper concludes with policy recommendations on how the region can move forward.

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1. Introduction

School leadership has emerged as a key policy concern in the global agenda for educational reform (European Union, 2009; Pont et al., 2008; OECD, 2016; Schleicher, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). However, the implementation of such policies can vary significantly across regions due to unique policy contexts, developmental stages, existing capacity, and local needs (Akiba, 2017). This variability is particularly evident in Latin America where policies supporting the professionalization of school leaders remain inconsistent and scattered across the region (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). Recent reviews have shown that there is lack of internal coherence and a systematic approach of the different initiatives in the region seeking to professionalize school leadership (Flessa et al., 2023; Weinstein et al., 2014; Weinstein & Simielli, 2022).

As a developing region, it is paramount to understand with greater detail the level of progress, persisting challenges, and opportunities of growth for professionalizing school leadership in Latin America. Our study aimed to fill this gap by studying school leadership policies across eight educational systems in a comparative fashion.

We posed the following research question: *What is the current state of policies supporting the professionalization of school leaders in eight educational systems in Latin America?* To answer this question, we go through the following objectives:

1. Describe and analyze the institutional and social context of eight educational systems in relation to development of professionalization policies for school leaders.
2. Describe and analyze the dimensions of professionalization policies for school leaders in each of the eight educational systems.
3. Analyze the level of internal policy coherence between the four policy dimensions in each of the eight educational systems.
4. Based on a comparative analysis across these eight systems, draw regional conclusions and policy recommendations.

We selected Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico as the five systems for our analysis due to their diverse history with school leadership policies and data availability¹. Although data access was restricted, we conducted case studies in three additional countries to have a wider regional scope: Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Honduras.

We conducted a comparative secondary data analysis with evidence drawn on two sources. First, we used data on leadership policies in Latin America retrieved from research conducted by this paper authors in different research projects for over a decade. Second, we complemented the previous data source with the voice of school leaders

¹ In the case of Argentina, the analysis will focus only on the City of Buenos Aires when using TALIS data as no information is available for the rest of the country. In the case of Brazil, although TALIS data is available for the whole country, some of the policy analysis will focus on the state of Ceará as large amount of policy research has been conducted in this region

themselves represented in a series of quantitative indicators captured in the Teaching and Learning International Survey of 2018.

The TALIS sampling procedure aimed to build a representative sample of lower secondary teachers (ISCED 2). It followed a two-stage sampling process where a first-stage random sample of 200 schools in each participating country was followed by a second-stage random sample of 20 teachers from the selected schools. A school principal was surveyed through a questionnaire in each of the selected schools. For each selected school, two replacement schools of similar characteristics were also selected in case the original school was not able or willing to participate. The questionnaire covered topics such as professional background, leadership style, professional development, school practices, school climate and job satisfaction. Please see Annex A.1 for the number of school leaders surveyed in each of the participating countries. For more information on the TALIS sampling procedures refer to Chapter 5 in OECD (2019a)

Thirty-one OECD countries took part in the survey but due to technical and validity considerations we only considered data for 30 countries. An OECD average-30 is the arithmetic average based on principal data across 30 OECD countries and economies with adjudicated data. This value will be used as a benchmark to compare the indicators of the five educational systems of Latin America and the Caribbean with available data: Brazil, Chile, Ciudad Autonoma de Buenos Aires (hereafter, CABA), Colombia and Mexico.

In the case of the three case-study countries (Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Honduras), it won't be possible to have the same data coverage due to the lack of available TALIS information. Nevertheless, it is still our plan to map the policy context of these countries under the dimensions of our framework with the limited information available. These analyses will lack comparability with other countries, but still may provide valuable information on the regional landscape.

2. A theoretical model on school leadership: Conceptualizing the conditions to foster school leadership professionalization.

A consensus in international literature on school leadership is the need to transition from leadership as an occupation to leadership as a profession (Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022). Although leadership on itself is not a profession, when applied to the work of principal we mean the need to build a stronger managerial force or principalship. Fostering school leadership as a profession -or professionalization- involves the creation of the institutional conditions to build a workforce of experienced, competent, skilled educational actors who engage in ethically driven practice. These conditions, rather than constituting independent dimensions, contribute to the institutionalization of school leadership as a profession. That is, a structure of norms and meanings that give shape to the way in which leaders see themselves, reflect and learn about their practice, interact with their peers and the people they serve, and are recognized as such by the rest of society. Fostering school leadership professionalization

is essential to build educational environments where students and all school members can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Although the concept of school leadership is broader, when we talk about school leadership and the need of professionalizing this activity, we specifically refer to the role of principals who oversee managing and leading school organizations. To operationalize the conditions to foster school leadership professionalization, we rely on an intensive line of research in several Latin American educational system that seeks to establish the parameters for school leadership professionalization (Pont, 2008; Weinstein & Simielli, 2022; Weinstein & Hernández, 2016; Weinstein, et al., 2014). We adapted a model originally developed by Weinstein & Simielli (2022) consisting of four interrelated conditions embedded into the social and institutional context: functions and attributions; requirements, selection, and career; working conditions; and training and skills (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Dimension of professionalization policies for school leadership

Source: Adapted from Weinstein and Simielli, 2022

Social and institutional context. It represents the broader framework within all social activity occurs. It encompasses socially constructed structures such as norms and values but also the political and economic frameworks that shape people’s lives. Within this framework the educational system stakeholders discuss and decide broader agendas to serve students within the educational system. Although often overlooked by policymakers, this dimension is essential to understand the conditions to foster educational leadership professionalization. The creation and stability of the four conditions will rely on strong and reliable social and political consensus about how school leaders can help to satisfy schools challenges, needs, and goals.

Functions and attributions. This first condition refers to the concrete tasks that are expected to be conducted by school leaders (Weinstein & Simielli, 2022). Having a social and political consensus around school leadership contribution may support the definition of a technical framework to derive these tasks, such as national standards for informing school leaders practice and decision-making. The academic consensus suggests the need for school leaders to move passed administrative functions to embrace leadership tasks such as covering pedagogical

functions, manage teacher motivation, and support educators' professional development (Bowers, 2020; Weinstein et al., 2014). Given the complexity and challenges of current educational systems, it is also necessary to distribute leadership roles across schools (Pont et al., 2008). Defining functions and attributions is a strategic move for educational systems because this condition feeds the other three helping to build a more coherent system.

Requirements, selection, and career. This second condition refers to the systems that define and manage the requirements, selection processes, and career progress of candidates who aspire to become school leaders (Pont et al., 2008). In order to recruit good candidates, these systems should include coherent and transparent recruitment mechanisms that focus on job-specific skills to exert the expected *functions and attributions* that the educational system designed. This expected skillset should be derived from a formal national standard (see first condition) and the recruitment processes should involve a wide range of instruments and procedures that are consistent with the required competencies (Weinstein et al., 2014). When it comes to the career, the systems should offer a clear path that allows candidates to progress through professional stages that recognize -at least- experience and competence overtime. In a coherent system, this last aspect closely interacts with the working conditions of school leaders.

Working conditions. This third condition refers to the restraints, resources, and material conditions that allow school leaders to carry out their work. On one hand, this condition includes the specific challenges associated to contextual characteristics of the workplace (e.g. students SES) and the resources to respond to those challenges (e.g. quality of school faculty). On the other hand, this condition also includes having adequate working conditions such as a competitive salary, labor standards, job design, working schedule, incentives and so. Working conditions are pivotal for attracting and retain good candidates into the profession as well as are highly correlated with job satisfaction and prestige. In this sense, international literature shows that policies aimed at improving school leadership must pay increasing attention to making leadership school an attractive profession (OECD, 2019).

Training and skills. This fourth condition refers to the supply of training and developmental opportunities offered to school leaders to improve their skillset throughout their trajectories. School leaders increasingly require specific training to respond to the functions and responsibilities assigned to them and the complexity of their roles (Weinstein et al., 2014). They also need a supply of updated training and developmental opportunities to respond to changes in the social and institutional context that may challenge school leaders' work (e.g. Covid-19 or immigration). *Training and skills* should receive insights from the other three conditions, so the supply is coherent with the needs of the system as a whole.

Taking together, fostering these four conditions within the social and institutional context leads to school leaders to progressively transition from leadership as an occupation to leadership as a profession in terms of principalship (see figure 1).

3. Institutional and social context of school leadership policies

3.1. Global and local policy agenda

School leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring quality education. Academic literature has identified that, following teaching practices, school leadership is the school factor that has the larger impact on student learning (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Day et al., 2011, Leithwood, et. al, 2019). School leadership can transform education by impacting the ways principals foster collective views and goals for the organization, by supporting and guiding teachers to improve their teaching, and generating good working climates for all school members (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). The literature on school effectiveness and improvement has also shown that the impact of school leadership is even greater in schools with difficult conditions (e.g., low resources, located in remote areas, serving challenging students) (Grützmacher et al., 2023; Louis et al., 2010). School leadership can be a fundamental asset for impacting student learning, scaling successful practices, and making education achievement sustainable (Branch et al., 2012).

School leadership has also made its way to international education agendas seeking to identify good policies and practices to improve learning (Schleicher, 2015). For example, the importance of school leadership is strengthened in the UNESCO report “Leading better learning: School leadership and quality in the Education 2030 agenda” (UNESCO, 2016). The report highlights the importance of professionalizing school leadership and developing coherent policies on school leadership to build to reach the goals of the 2030 agenda.

School leadership is also implicitly considered in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, which establish a series of indicators covering student access, trajectory, completion, and proficiency levels to be achieved by 2030. More concretely, SG4 states that by 2030, it is necessary to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO, 2015).

The SDG 4 defines a series of means of implementation to reach this goal. Among them, we can identify SDG 4.c, which stresses the relevance of teachers: “By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States”. It is under this target, that UNESCO highlights the relevance of school leadership for the 2030 Agenda. As an indicative strategy, it is stated that is necessary to strengthen school leadership to improve teaching and learning. The support of school leaders is crucial for teachers to make a major contribution to the improvement of student learning.

Notwithstanding the fact that school leadership has become part of a global *narrative* for improving education, we must not lose sight that theories and evidence emerge from specific contexts, social realities, and cultural assumptions. Research concerning the definition and impact of school leadership has been mostly shaped and developed by the idiosyncrasies of countries with high levels of development such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). The research has identified school leadership with strong managerial attributes (Bush, 2008; Diamond & Spillane, 2016). For example, Day et al. (2010) has identified the following eight managerial attributes as successful dimensions of school leadership: defining vision and values, improving conditions for teaching and learning, redesigning, and enriching the curriculum, restructuring the organization, enhancing teacher quality, building relationships outside the school community, enhancing teaching and learning, and building relationships inside the school community.

Furthermore, strong school leadership is a prerequisite for pertinent decision-making, greater responsibility for school leaders and teachers for student outcomes, greater autonomy and accountability and an impulse for decentralized policies (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016).

In the last two decades there has been a concerned and systematic effort for comparative education to explore how key dimensions on school leadership translate into different societal contexts, particularly in developing countries (Weinstein & Hernandez, 2016). Research in Latin America has shown significant movement towards the adoption of policies directly addressing school leadership and policies (Adelman & Lemos, 2021; Cuenca & Pont, 2016; Flessa, et. al, 2023; OEI, 2017; Weinstein & Hernández, 2016; Weinstein, et al., 2014; Weinstein & Simielli, 2022). Table 1 presents a summary of the main characteristics of the research on school leadership in the five systems with available data.²

Table 1: School leadership research in Latin America

Education system	Description
Argentina	In Argentina, the research, which is limited, has been focused on the construction of the profile of principals, on policy towards school principals, on the practices of principals and their management in different contexts.
Brazil	The extensive existing research has focused primarily on topics such as training, management practices, selection, and managerial leadership, and it is mainly developed by universities within the framework of their doctoral programs. In the case of Ceará, there has not been a concrete line of investigation on the topic.
Chile	In Chile, research on school principals has made a significant leap because of the work carried out by universities and educational study centers, with different representative studies regarding their characteristics and profile, their leadership practices, and training.
Colombia	In Colombia, the limited research on this topic has been addressed through local and low-scope studies, focusing on the training needs of principals, their profile, professional skills and training, and their role in contexts of change.
Mexico	In Mexico, research has been mainly focused on basic education and has focused on the description of the profile of principals, the policy towards principals through the work carried out by the OECD, and the practices of principals and their training needs, through studies located in specific contexts and without national representation.

Source : Weinstein et al., 2014, pp. 16

The relevance of school leadership has gained momentum in the face of low achievement level and stagnant results in educational achievement. UNESCO'Ss Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study), an international standardized testing a dozen countries in the region, shows that around half of the students in the third grade reached the required minimum levels of proficiency in math and reading tests while in sixth grade less than a third reach the minimum required level (UNESCO, UNICEF & CEPAL, 2022). School leadership has been identified as an important school factor to make a difference on student achievement in the region, particularly in school serving high-poverty student populations (Murillo, 2011; Raczynski & Guzmán, 2005).

3.2.School leadership policy implementation in Latin America

² Note that the review referenced in Table 1 was conducted almost over a decade ago. Thus, the development of research in Latin America might have changed considerable for some of these contexts. Although in several countries, such as Argentina and Colombia, the development of research remains scarce as Romero & Krichesky (2019) and Ortega et al. (2022) have indicated.

Although school leadership has been identified as a central factor to improve educational outcomes, the development of school policies have been highly uneven across the region leading to an unequal development across LATAM countries in leadership capacity (Weinstein & Simielli, 2022). For example, while policies in the region have sought to build thorough merit-based selection processes and build frameworks to define good practices of effective leaders, the professional training of school principals is still missing and working conditions do not provide enough discretion make autonomous decisions. As such, school leadership policies tend to lack an internal coherence between them.

A major obstacle is that school leadership policies tend to be highly centralized, either at a national or sub-national level, which translates into major obstacles to foster school leaders' autonomy. Broadly speaking, there seems to be a tension between broader definition of schoolwork, which relies heavily on job security and less on professional accountability. Thus, school leadership does not reach the levels of necessary self-constitution for effective deployment.

Indeed, a glaring characteristic of school leadership policy in Latin American is that it tends to be heavily centralized in the Ministries of Education (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). The locus of decisions affecting school tends to be far away from local authorities and unions and conditioned by governmental disputes between political parties. Even in federal systems, which are heavily decentralized, the decisions are still allocated to the local or provincial government and far from the actual schools. As such, the reason why school policies have faced developmental challenges in the region it's not merely technical but also societal and political. Simply put, in Latin America there is an institutional context based on a highly bureaucratized organization, which translates into an intensely centralized decision-making process on critical matter of school administration and limited school autonomy consequently. Both characteristics conflict with the Anglo-Saxon orientated policies based on management, autonomy, and decentralization.

The concept of professionalization of the school leader workforce has been employed as mechanisms to address the limitation both at the individual, local, and national level (OECD, 2019). Although the concept of professionalization has been applied to the teaching workforce (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018), there have been attempts to circle the professionalization of the school leadership around developing school improvement plans, encouraging teachers' collaboration and participation in effective professional development, counselling students and parents about student progress and student orientation, and connecting the school to a larger network of schools and the local community (OECD, 2020). Likewise in Latin America, countries have developed standards and framework that have dealt with the professionalization of school leaders with a heavily management-based orientation (Uribe, 2010).

3.3.School leader characterization

Obtaining socio-demographic information on school principals has been a challenge in the Latin America, mostly due to an extensive lack of statistics and precise data across countries. When this information exists, it is generally proxy data, unreliable, outdated, or available for only one level of teaching or educational sector (Weinstein et al., 2014). For this paper, we will rely on the data obtained from lower secondary schools from the TALIS 2018 study.

The average age of principals is slightly over fifty years old (Table 2). This age is relatively similar between the different school systems studied except for Brazil, which has a younger body of principals (with an average of 46.5 years). The average age of the OECD countries is 52.2 years, close to the four Latin American systems examined. As it can be seen in Table 2, there is no homogeneous pattern among the five school systems in terms of the gender: while in Brazil and CABA, there is a majority of women in the position (76.5% and 60.7% respectively), in Mexico and Colombia female principals constitute a minority (35.4% and 37.1% respectively), and in Chile there is a similar representation of men and women (49.6%). The Chilean case is the closest to the situation of the average of OECD countries (47.3%).

Table 2: Principal Socio-Demographics

Results based on responses of lower secondary principals

	Percentage of Female Principals			Principals Age	Percentage of female teachers
	% Female Total	% Female Rural areas (up to 3000 people)	% Female Urban areas (up to 100000 people)	Mean average	-
Brazil	76.5	53.3	79.6	46.5	69
CABA (Argentina)	60.7	0	60.7	52.0	68.5
Chile	49.6	32.7	54.0	52.8	64.6
Colombia	37.1	27.2	59.1	53.3	55.4
Mexico	35.4	37.5	43.3	50.7	56.6
OECD Average-30	47.3	50.5	51.8	52.2	68.3

Source: OECD (2018), Table I.3.5 and I.3.21

The explanation for these differences might be due to the proportion of female teachers in each context. Most of principals are former teachers, thus if a system has a higher proportion of female teachers, it can be expected that there is also a higher presence of female principals. Overall, in average across OECD countries, we see that only 47.3% of principals are women in contrast to the 68% of female teachers. The fact that the proportion of female principals is lower than female teachers in lower secondary might be suggesting an obstacle for career advancement of women. The causes behind the barriers for female progression between teachers and principals might can be endogenous (lesser propensity of women to apply to leadership positions) or exogenous (lesser propensity for women to be selected when applying for leadership positions) (OECD, 2019b).

A more detailed look into Table 2, shows us that there is a particular big gap between the percentage of female teachers and female principals in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. In the case of Colombia and Mexico, we see that there is almost gender parity across lower secondary teacher but only a third of principals in lower secondary are female. We see a notable exception in Brazil, where the proportion of female principals (76.5%) is higher than the proportion of female teachers (69%). Across all the participants in TALIS study, this situation only repeats in Sweden (OECD, 2019b).

Another characteristic of gender distribution occurs within the school systems themselves, with various situations existing depending on the type of population grouping in which the school is located. As an illustration, in Chile the proportion of female principals in rural areas is 32.7%, while it rises to 54% in the cities. This territorially variable distribution differs from the more homogeneous pattern existing among OECD countries.

3.4.School socio-demographic characteristics

Examining the school socio-demographic characteristics highly relevant as research has highlighted the fundamental impact that the social composition has for school processes, principal and teacher motivation, and student achievement (OECD, 2019; OECD 2020). In addition, understanding the school composition on the environments where teacher works remain relevant to provide adequate support and training to school and teachers.

Table 3: School composition

Percentage of teachers teaching in schools with the following composition based on the report of lower secondary principals

	More than 10% of students are non-native speakers	More than 10% of students have special needs	More than 30% of students come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes	More than 10% of students are immigrants or with migrant background	At least 1% of students are refugees
Brazil	0.7	9.8	41.5	1.5	2.0
CABA (Argentina)	7.9	4.5	14.2	33.7	8.3
Chile	2.7	54.4	57.0	8.0	4.8
Colombia	3.6	8.6	76.2	3.5	24.5
Mexico	2.9	6.6	40.6	4.9	2.8
OECD Average-30	20.6	30.9	19.9	17.4	29.6

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.3.25

As seen in Table 3, in all cases analyzed except CABA, teachers who teach in schools composed of more than 30% of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households at least double the OECD average (19.9%). The most notable cases are Chile and Colombia where 57% and 76.2% of teachers teach in schools with more than 30% of poor students. The proportion of teachers working in schools with at least 10% of students with special educational needs is much lower than the OCED average (30.9%). This does not apply to Chile, where 54.4% of teachers work in schools with a proportion of 10% or more students with special needs, which almost doubles the OECD average.

The composition of immigrant students shows an interesting contrast in the cases analyzed (Table 3). Except by CABA, all the cases studied show that the proportion of teachers teaching in schools with more than 10% immigrant students or with a migrant background is very low compared to OECD averages (17.4%). In CABA, on the other hand, 33.7% of teachers teach in schools with at least 10% of students with a migrant background. In all the cases studied, the average number of teachers working in schools with more than 10% of non-native speaking students (3.5%) is notably lower than the OECD average (20.6%). Regarding refugee students, in Colombia 24.5% of teachers work in schools with at least 1% refugee students, a figure close to the OECD average (29.6%). The rest of the cases appear well below the Colombian case, where only CABA stands out with 8.3%.

3.5.Levels of school violence

An important part on the studies on school leadership and climate has been devoted to the management of school violence (Roman & Murillo, 2011). Recent phenomenon such as the migratory influx and the unprecedented spread

of drug trafficking are affecting school communities and presenting new challenges to school management (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2019).

Levels of school violence in schools show contrasting realities across the cases under study. CABA and Chilean principals' responses show low occurrence of weekly incidents in comparison with Brazil, Colombia, and in some incidents with Mexico (Table 4). CABA and Chilean's principals report low occurrence of incidents of vandalism and theft (2.4% and 2.3%), bullying among students (4.6% and 3.7%), injuries caused by violence among students (0.8% and 1.9), intimidation of teachers and staff (1.6% and 0.3%), and drugs possession or use (1.6 and 0.3). These reports are like OECD average with the exception of bullying among students where OECD countries show a much higher average (14.3%). On the flip side, Brazilian and Colombian principals report higher occurrences across all indicators mentioned in comparison with CABA and Chile and with the OECD average. Mexican principals report a higher occurrence of incidents vandalism and theft, bullying among students, and injuries caused by violence among students. Incidents of bullying among students seem particularly high in Brazil (28.3%) in comparison with the other cases under study and with the OECD average (14.3%).

Table 4: School Safety

Percentage of lower secondary principals reporting that the following incidents occurred at least weekly in their school

	Vandalism and theft	Intimidation or bullying among students	Physical injury caused by violence among students	Intimidation or verbal abuse of teachers or staff	Use/possession of drugs and/or alcohol	A student or parent/guardian reports postings of hurtful information on the Internet about students	A student or parent/guardian reports unwanted electronic contact among students
Brazil	10.7	28.3	8.8	11.5	8.3	2.4	4.0
CABA (Argentina)	2.4	4.6	0.8	1.6	1.6	3.1	1.6
Chile	2.3	3.7	1.9	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.0
Colombia	7.2	15.2	4.3	5.9	6.2	1.8	1.6
Mexico	8.1	16.9	5.9	0.7	2.2	2.5	1.7
OECD Average-30	2.7	14.3	2.0	3.1	1.0	2.5	3.4

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.3.42

4. School leadership dimensions

4.1. Functions and attributions

Across the international literature on school leadership there is a consensus about the necessity to have clear definitions and a framework for principals' functions and attributions (CEPPE, 2013). There is a push for principals to take lead role on pedagogical orientation and actions that stimulates the actions and capacity of teachers, over the traditional administrative tasks (Bowers, 2020: Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Also, literature shows that as the demands

towards the school system increases, it is necessary to distribute leadership within the school (Pont et al, 2008). Thus, the type and the number of tasks becomes a core component of school leadership (Weinstein et al., 2014).

4.1.1. Principal's agency: Roles, attributions, and use of time

From a comparative international perspective, it can be assessed that principals are called to serve multiple functions. In Latin America, the principal role has been traditionally conceived as an administrator focused on norms compliance and obeying instructions from centralized authorities (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). However as new trends emerge, such as instructional leadership, it is worthwhile exploring how current principals make use of their time and actions.

Roles and attributions

Policy reviews have identified that in all educational systems, ministries of education have formalized, in one way or another, the principal functions in their schools. In general terms, principals are defined as the maximum authority of the school establishment and as the responsible for their direction and functioning (Weinstein et al., 2014). However, educational systems present important difference in the emphasis given to certain tasks. As such, some systems tend to have an emphasis on pedagogical aspects (Chile), others tend to enforce an administrative perspective (Mexico), while others show a mixture and combination of multiple functions (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia).

International policy guidance has stressed the importance of developing standards that can function as a framework for action and accountability that puts further emphasis of instructional leadership over administrative (Pont et al, 2008). This type of instrument already exists in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. In the case of Chile and Colombia, the standards were developed by the Ministry of Education. In Chile, the standards have been used to specify the functions of the principals and guide their professional development, although they have not been used yet for their professional evaluation. In the case of Colombia, the standards were developed with the explicit function to be used for the performance evaluation. As it is the case of the standards developed in other places in the world (Australia, England, Korea, or the United States) these standards are generic and do not differentiate between the different contexts of the schools (i.e. urban or rural) or education level (i.e. primary or secondary). However, the development of these standards tends to not be aligned with the functions established in the legal norms (i.e. except for Chilean case). In the case of Mexico, a general educational reform implemented in 2015 has established standards for principals with the specific aim to evaluate their performance and differentiates their functions by educational level. However, the success of this reform is still under evaluation and new changes (Díaz & García, 2019; INEE, 2017).

The level of decision-making principal possess are key to understand the real capacity that they have to meet the objectives and goals that have been assigned to them. From previous reviews of school leadership in Latin America, several management areas were identified revealing instructional leadership as the weakest one (i.e. tasks related to support pedagogical actions). In this sense, even though in most countries the principal has the function of directing, organizing, and controlling the teaching work or the implementation of the academic program, classroom supervision functions, advice to teachers and evaluation of their performance only appear in a smaller number of countries (Weinstein et al., 2014). Although decentralization reforms were introduced in several Latin American, Ministries of Education retain substantive authority over school functioning (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). Table 5 shows an overview of the number and main attributions principals are asked to cover in their systems.

Table 5: Main responsibilities of school principals*Based on policy reviews of each educational system*

Main responsibilities and emphasis	
Ceará/Brazil	Not identified
Argentina	High number of tasks; dimensions: instructional, administrative and social; well-defined instructional responsibilities
Chile	Focused definition; emphasis on instruction and goal setting
Colombia	Variety of dimensions: goal setting, generation of organizational conditions, administration, and instruction
Mexico	High number; emphasis on administration and low presence of instruction

Source: Weinstein & Hernández, 2016

In TALIS 2018, a distinction is made between the attributions related to the management of human and financial resources, student policy, and curricular and pedagogical management. Systems in Latin America tend to have no decision-making capacity in the management of human resources, and particularly in the hiring and firing of teachers, as well as setting their salaries (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). This tendency is also shown in the data as a conclusive result of the data analysis is that only a low percentage of principals of lower secondary from the five systems with available data tend to have a responsibility on the management of human and financial resources, especially when compared to the average of OECD countries. With few exceptions, the percentage gap of principals regarding this responsibility is significant. Table 6 illustrates this situation:

Table 6: School Leaders Attributions- Staff management*Percentage of lower secondary principals who report having significant responsibility for the following tasks*

	Hire teachers	Fire or suspend teachers	Establish starting teacher salaries	Determining salary increases	Decide to use budget in the school
Brazil	32.8	31.6	13.9	13.2	44.7
CABA (Argentina)	76.7	50.2	2.6	19.6	22.5
Chile	58.6	49.4	18.5	19.2	31.8
Colombia	15.5	18.1	14.6	13.1	28.3
Mexico	36.6	32.8	9.3	13.2	30.7
OECD Average-30	73.2	64.7	32.1	33	67.9

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.5

Regarding student policies, we also see that for the most part the percentage of principals making decisions in these areas are below the OECD average (Table 7):

Table 7: School Leaders Attributions- Student policies*Percentage of lower secondary principals who report having significant responsibility for the following tasks*

	Approve admission of students to the school	Establish student evaluation policies	Establish policies and procedures on student discipline
Brazil	48.2	39.8	68
CABA (Argentina)	M	M	80.9
Chile	70.8	62	68.8
Colombia	69.4	44.2	51.4
Mexico	66.1	42.1	63.5
OECD Average-30	77.6	59.9	76

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.5

Note: The letter “M” stands for no data was available for that category

However, the attributions referring to curricular and pedagogical management present a different situation from staff management and student policies. In this dimension, there are Latin American systems, such as CABA and Chile, in which the percentage of principal having a responsibility in these areas is higher than the OECD average, while in others, such as Brazil, Mexico and Colombia, the percentage is lower (Table 8). The exceptionalism of CABA and Chile are consistent with policy reviews that have noted that in these countries there seem to be a higher emphasis on instructional leadership (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Table 8: School Leaders Attributions- School policies
Percentage of lower secondary principals who report having significant responsibility for the following tasks

	Choose instructional resources	Determinate course content	Decide courses that will be taught
Brazil	51.4	28.9	31.2
CABA (Argentina)	65	57.4	78
Chile	52.5	48.4	61.9
Colombia	41.7	31.9	48
Mexico	46.9	21.9	32.9
OECD Average-30	47.8	40.3	66.1

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.5

Overall, despite some exceptions if CABA and in Chile, principals lack of autonomy over strategic areas of school management and leadership. This could be a considerable obstacle to undertake their expected role within leadership standards or frameworks, and it poses, thus, a difficulty for the recent policies in implementation (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016).

Use of time

Principals dedicate their work time to different activities, which is indicative of their work routines. In this sense, TALIS distinguishes six categories, three of them being marked by the type of activity and the other three by the actors with which they interact.

In previous sections we saw that a larger proportion of principals focused on administrative tasks over instructional leadership. However, contrary to what might be assumed based on the results from the prior section, in four (out of five) school systems, principals report spending less time in their day than the average in OECD countries in administrative-focused tasks and meetings (Table 9). Only Colombia (33.3% of the time) exceeds the OECD average (29.5%), while CABA (19.9%), Brazil (20.9%), Chile (22.6%) and Mexico (26.9%) allocate shorter times. Equally counterintuitive is the result referring to the time allocated to tasks and meetings related to curriculum and teaching, in which, again, only Colombia (16.2%) is like the OECD average (16.3%), while the principals of the four other systems allocate more time (Brazil, 17%; Mexico, 17.8%; CABA 19%; and Chile 19.9%) to this dimension. In terms of tasks and

meetings related to leadership, the differences are less pronounced, with Chile (21.7%) along with the OECD average (21.3%), and both slightly higher than CABA (19.7%), Mexico (18.1%), Colombia (17.7%) and Brazil (17.6%).

Table 9: Principals working time.

Average proportion of time lower secondary principals report spending in the following tasks

	Administrative tasks and meetings	Leadership tasks and meetings	Curriculum and teaching-related tasks and meetings	Student interactions	Parent or guardian interactions	Interactions with local and regional community, business and industry	Other
Brazil	20.9	17.6	17.0	19.4	13.6	7.8	3.8
CABA (Argentina)	19.9	19.7	19.0	19.6	14.7	5.1	2.1
Chile	22.6	21.7	19.9	16.5	11.9	5.1	2.6
Colombia	33.3	17.7	16.2	12.4	10.4	7.5	2.5
Mexico	26.9	18.1	17.8	17.2	12.8	5.4	1.8
OECD Average-30	29.5	21.3	16.3	13.2	10.3	5.8	3.6

Source: OECD (2018), Table I.2.31

When the focus is placed on interactions with actors, it is striking that in Latin American systems principal tend to have greater interaction with students and their families, personified in “responsible adults,” as well as with the local community (Table 9). Thus, regarding students, the time allocated by OECD average (13.2%) somewhat exceeds Colombia (12.4%), but it is lower than Chile (16.5%), Mexico (17.2%), Brazil (19.4%) and CABA (19.6%). Regarding representatives, the OECD average and Colombia are equivalent (10.4% and 10.3% respectively), both being lower than Chile (11.9%), Mexico (12.8%), Brazil (13.6%) and CABA (14.7%). This greater interaction with students and parents’ correlates, as we will see later, with the greater presence of these actors in school management councils (or committees).

4.1.2.School Leadership team

In Latin America, the school principal is usually accompanied by a school leadership team whose functions are normed by school legislation (Weinstein et al., 2014). In some cases, the pedagogical leadership is carried by a specialized member of the team, like the vice-principal in CABA or the chief of technical pedagogical unit in Chile.

TALIS 2018 consults on the existence of school management councils. In four school systems the percentage of principals who declare having a school management team instance exceeds 90%, and in the case of Colombia it is 83.4% (Table 10). In this sense, the systems studied are similar to or exceed the OECD average (87.3%).

Table 10: Existence and composition of the school management team

Percentage of lower secondary principals reporting the following issues

	Percentage of principals who report that their school has a school management team	Percentage of principals who report the following to be represented on the school management team							
		Principal	Vice/deputy principal or assistant principal	Financial Manager	Department heads	Teachers	School governing board	Parents or guardians	Students
Brazil	93.6	100.0	63.7	24.6	16.6	82.3	75.3	68.3	65.4

CABA (Argentina)	98.7	100.0	77.5	70.1	81.5	70.8	34.2	42.3	45.7
Chile	94.2	99.3	28.2	39.5	35.1	70.5	35.1	51.6	49.9
Colombia	83.4	99.5	21.1	27.1	69.8	97.4	99.3	96.4	97.0
Mexico	92.3	96.5	77.0	50.8	24.2	85.3	53.3	80.1	61.1
OECD Average-30	87.3	99.1	82.2	39.8	51.6	56.4	40.8	29.2	25.3

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.10

Another aspect considered refers to the participation of different management positions in the school management team. The situation of Latin American systems presents variations in this regard (Table 10). For example, the figure of the deputy principal, which is widely expanded in OECD countries (82.2%), has a strong presence in Mexico (77%), CABA (77.5%) and Brazil (63.7%), but it has little relevance in Chile (28.2%) and Colombia (21.1%). Although the figure of the head of administration and finance is relevant in CABA (70.1%), Mexico (50.8%) and Chile (39.5%), it has little impact in Colombia (27.1%) or Brazil (24.6%).

A characteristic that seems to be typical of Latin American systems is the inclusion of different actors from the educational community within the school councils (Table 10). Thus, in the five cases studied there is greater participation of teachers, parents, and students in the school councils than in the average of OECD countries. In the case of teachers, the OECD average is 56.4%, which compares unfavourably with Colombia (97.4%), Mexico (85.3%), Brazil (82.3%), CABA (70.8%) and Chile (70.5%). The same situation occurs with respect to representatives: the OECD average (29.2%) is widely surpassed by Colombia (96.4%), Mexico (80.1%), Brazil (68.3%), Chile (51.6%) and CABA (42.3%). The circle closes with a marked greater participation of students in these instances, with an average situation in OECD (25.3%), which is clearly surpassed by Colombia (97%), Brazil (65.4%), Mexico (61.1%), and Chile (49.9%). The principals then have to carry out the task of organizing and channelling these management teams and these broader instances of participation in the schools.

4.1.3. Leadership styles

School principals carry out their work with types of leadership that emphasize different dimensions of school life, such as the improvement of academic processes and results, broad participation in decision-making, the consolidation of culture and collective identity, or the promotion of the link between the school center and the environment, including networks with other school establishments (Bowers, 2020). TALIS 2018 provides background information on different managerial leadership styles.

A relevant finding is that, as the following table shows, the principals of the systems considered tend to declare more than their peers in OECD countries that they frequently or very frequently develop practices linked to pedagogical or instructional leadership (Table 11). The results echo the time allocation emphasis on instructional leadership that principals reported on Table 9.

Table 11: Principal's leadership activities

Percentage of lower secondary principals who have "often" or "very often" engaged in the following activities in their school in the 12 months prior to the survey

Observe classroom teaching	Provide feedback based on observation	Take actions to support teaching cooperation for	Take actions for teachers to improve their	Take actions to hold teachers	Inform parents about student
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	new teaching practices	teaching competence.	responsible for academic results	academic performance
Brazil	54.8	62.3	79.2	85
CABA (Argentina)	34.7	48.7	66.7	83.7
Chile	62.6	68.1	79.3	78.2
Colombia	47.6	65.1	84.2	85.3
Mexico	56.3	56	70.7	89
OECD Average-30	40.9	50.1	59.3	55.3

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.12

Additionally, principals report that they frequently collaborate with their teachers in solving disciplinary problems in classrooms, exceeding the OECD average in all the systems studied (OECD, 2020). Paradoxically, this does not mean that there are less practices of administrative management. As Table 11 also shows, the OECD average is ostensibly lower than the five Latin American systems studied when it comes to principals who must frequently (or very frequently) review the school's administrative procedures and reports or must solve problems with class schedules.

The results regarding distributed leadership and the promotion of school community participation by principals are less evident. In these dimensions, there is usually no regular pattern that differentiates the situation of the five systems with respect to the average of OECD countries. On the other hand, there is a differentiation between Latin American systems themselves, in which Colombia and Brazil have modalities of leadership and management of their principals that more strongly include parents and students themselves.

Thus, in relation to whether parents are involved in school activities, Brazil (59.8%) and Colombia (59.7%) exceed not only the OECD average (47.9%) but also Chile (44%), CABA (26%) and Mexico (23.5%), a result that is repeated in terms of whether the school provides parents with opportunities to participate in school decisions (Colombia 96.7% and Brazil 91.6% v/s OECD 83.1%, Chile 80% and CABA 42.9%). In relation to students, TALIS reports that principals in Colombia (96.3%) and Brazil (88%) more frequently provide opportunities for students to participate in school decision-making than the OECD average (80.8%). Chile (78.9%), Mexico (76.8%) and CABA (52.7%). This “participatory advantage” of Brazil and Colombia is also repeated when it comes to collaborating with the local community.

Table 12: Principals' views on distributed leadership

Percentage of lower secondary principals who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the following statements

	This school provides staff with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions	This school provides parents or guardians with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions	Parents or guardians are involved in school activities	This school provides students with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions	The school co-operates with the local community
Brazil	95.4	91.6	59.8	88.0	91.6
CABA (Argentina)	87.4	42.9	26.0	52.7	39.0
Chile	93.1	80.0	44.0	78.9	62.5
Colombia	98.9	96.7	59.7	96.3	93.6
Mexico	93.8	81.7	23.5	76.8	46.6
OECD Average-30	98.0	83.1	47.9	80.8	71.6

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.5.9 and Table II.5.20

Policy reviews in Latin America support these findings as it has been found that schools support the participation of teachers, parents, and students in school administration, in aspects such as the definition of school plans, school regulation, school budget, and problem resolution. School principals then also have important tasks in the organization and channelling of wide participation instances (Weinstein et al, 2014).

4.2. Requirements, promotion, and selection

One of the main areas of development for high performance developed countries is the professionalization of the selection process for school leaders (Pont et al, 2009). Selection mechanism need to be transparent and clear, centered on specific skills defined by standards, and that it incorporates a myriad of evaluation instruments consistent with the required skills. Likewise, the evidence shows that some countries have put emphasis on the evaluation of principal performance, which could have important benefits for principal practices and behaviors.

4.2.1. Recruitment policies:

The selection process for school principals is one of the areas of educational policy, which has undergone through major modifications in the last decade. In general, the changes introduced in the regulations of the countries have tended to professionalize access to management positions, through the inclusion of specific measurement of the skills and competencies of the candidates, and through the incorporation of elements that have sought to promote transparency and objectivity of the process and decision-making, such as the establishment of representative selection commissions or committees.

In Argentina and Brazil, the selection process is organized by institutions dependent on political criteria such as jurisdictions and municipalities. Ideally, the responsible institutions have greater independence to ensure transparency, as happens in Chile and Colombia where the civil service is responsible for the recruitment process (Aravena, 2020). Historically, Brazil has had permanent problems regulating selection based on political interests. In 2011, for example, 10% of principals were selected following political considerations with significant variations between cities. For example, in Santa Catarina the proportion was 83%, followed by Sergipe with 77% and Tocantins with 47%; however, in Acre, Ceará or Sao Paulo it was 0% (Pereda et al., 2021). Today this pattern is less common thanks, among others, to Law 13005 of 2014 that regulates the technical and meritocratic selection of principals (Lima, 2021).

The same phenomenon in Brazil is described for Mexico, but the 2013 educational reform that articulated the Professional Teaching Service Law would have ended the bipartite commissions between the state education secretaries and the unions for the granting of management positions. The process would have been consolidated with the Educational Model of Compulsory Education of 2017, which promoted the hiring of suitable profiles, establishing educational leadership as its axis. Unfortunately, there was a recent change in the law and there is no evidence of how it would be working now (Díaz & García, 2019).

Colombia has the peculiarity of functioning under two teaching statutes (which also regulate principals given the absence of a managerial career): Decree 2277 of 1979 and Decree 1278 of 2022. Only the second follows selection

processes based on the competition, the merit and professionalization of the career and applies to pedagogy graduates who began graduating in 2002, if they do not enter teaching through a temporary competition. An estimate from the Ministry of Education indicated that, already in 2002, it would take 25 years for Decree 1278 to cover the entire teaching and management staff. The expectation remains 10 years later due to the resistance of the oldest officials to change voluntarily (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2016).

Chile has a Framework for Good Leadership and School Leadership, but there is no clarity regarding how it should be used in the selection process (Aravena, 2020). Despite this system, it is not common for principals to be highly qualified, that is, to have specialized training in leadership and professional experience in intermediate leadership positions. However, the system has increased the average previous professional experience of candidates to become principals (Rivero et al., 2018).

4.2.2. Recruitment criteria

The school systems studied tend to have two basic criteria regarding eligibility for the managerial position: possessing a degree in teacher and having some experience as a classroom teacher. The aim is to have professionals who know the inside of classrooms and schools (Weinstein et al., 2014; Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). In addition, in recent years, education systems across Latin America have tried to renew their recruitment process to ensure certain technical skills across principals recruited. Table 13 shows an overview of the recruitment process in the examining countries.

Table 13: Principals' recruitment process
Based on information collected from each school system

	Eligibility criteria for school principals				Recruitment process for principals		
	Teaching experience	Teaching degree	Specialization or course in management	Others	Merit	Exams	Actors involved
Argentina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Positive teaching evaluation; Prior experience as Vice-Principal; Moral qualities	Yes	Yes	Jury: it may include supervisors, teacher union and school community
Ceará (Brazil)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moral qualities	Yes	Yes	School actors
Chile	Yes	No	No		Yes	Yes	Committee: local authority, civil service and local teacher good evaluated
Colombia	No	No	No	Professional degree and 4-5 years of experience	Yes	Yes	National committee of the civil service
Mexico	Yes	Yes	No	Positive teaching evaluation	Yes	Only for Upper secondary	

Source: Aravena (2020), Pereda et al. (2019), Rivero et al. (2018), Romero & Krichesky (2019) and Weinstein & Hernández (2016). Note: in Argentina, recruitment processes vary according to provinces. In Chile, recruitment criteria are defined with autonomy by each local authority.

Table 13 also shows that in most systems have been built based on merit and exams, which means that besides the professional background of principal they also need to demonstrate their skills by undergoing standardized tests. As proof of merits, principals are usually requested to show evidence of their professional background, including professional experience, professional title, academic productivity, and professional development. Skills evidence, for its part, generally includes standardized written tests and an oral interview, whose focus varies according to the countries from tests of knowledge of directive competencies, motivation and interest tests, and reading and logical reasoning (Weinstein et al., 2014).

In most school systems, except for Colombia, the evaluation of candidates at one or all stages of the process rests on a jury or qualification committee. In the case of Mexico, in the past, the selection of school principal for elementary education went through a mixed commission made up of two government representatives, two union representatives, plus a fifth member appointed by common agreement by both parties operating as arbitrator. The current reform seeks that the selection be based on a new institutionality based solely on technical criteria. In Chile the committee is made up of a municipal administrator (the local school administration unit), a member of the Council of Senior Public Management of the Civil Service, and a highly rated teacher from the municipality payroll. In Argentina, the situation varies across provinces, and it might consist of local officers, union leaders and members of the school community. In most of the provinces of Brazil, the responsibility relies on school communities' representatives. In Colombia, the decision relies on an office of the Civil Service, without participation of the school community whatsoever (Weinstein et al., 2014).

4.2.3. Principal experience

Looking at TALIS 2018 data, we see that Brazil is the school system in which principals have had the most limited work experience as teachers, of 15.9 years (Table 14). The other countries have a dissimilar situation, with Colombia sharing this range of (relative) low experience, with 16.1 years, while CABA stands out on the contrary, reaching 26.6 total years as teachers. The situation in Chile and Mexico is, however, similar to the OECD average, which is 19.9 years.

Table 14: Principals' work experience

Lower secondary principal's years of work experience

	As a principal at the current school	As a principal, in total	In other school management roles	As a teacher, in total	Others
Brazil	5.9	8.1	6.3	15.9	4.8
CABA (Argentina)	5.9	7.8	7.8	26.6	8.1
Chile	7.5	10.1	5.1	22.1	3.4
Colombia	7.8	13.1	6.2	16.1	8.0
Mexico	5.3	9.7	3.7	21.4	m
OECD Average-30	6.9	9.7	5.3	19.9	3.5

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.3.13

Additionally, there is a variety of situations regarding experience in the management position itself. The system that has principals with the most experience is Colombia with 13.1 years, followed by Chile with 10.1 years and Mexico with 9.7 years (Table 14). On the other hand, Brazil has an average of 8.1 years and CABA only 7.8 years, being below the OECD average (9.7 years). Regarding experience as a principal in the same school, again Colombia and Chile are the systems that have the longest permanence (7.8 and 7.5 years on average), exceeding the OECD average (6.9 years). On the other hand, Brazil, CABA and Mexico have shorter stays, with 5.9 years for the first two and 5.3 years for the last. These data allow us to infer, then, that there are systems, such as Mexico, with greater rotation in the management position, just as there are others, such as CABA, in which the period prior to assuming as principal is longer. Still, much more studies in the region are needed to have a better grasp of the trajectories with a particular focus on different areas (i.e. urban and rural) and schools (i.e. academic and vocational tracking).

4.2.4. Performance appraisal

The performance evaluation of school principals, even when it has not been established as a systematic process in most of the countries, it has shown recent advances in Chile and Mexico, in the creation of a specialized institutional framework and autonomous for this function, and in the formulation of standards that would guide the process (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Table 15 shows a summary on how these policies are spread in the five selected countries.

Table 15: Performance appraisal of school principals

Based on information collected from each school system

	Existence of systematic assessments	Frequency	Dimensions	Consequences
Argentina	Yes	Annually		Vertical promotion
Ceará/Brazil	No			
Chile	Yes	Annually	Working plan for the year and period	Possibility of early dismissal
Colombia	Yes	Annually	Functional and behavioral policies	Return to teaching for teachers and exclusion of teacher career for other professionals
Mexico	Yes			

Source: Weinstein & Hernández (2016)

As it can be observed, regular performance appraisal processes of school principals only exist for Argentina, Chile and Colombia (Weinstein et al, 2014). But even when an evaluation system exists, its consequences are not clearly favorable for the continuous development of principals. For example, while in Argentina, positive results might contribute to the promotion of principals, in Chile, a negative performance may imply an early dismiss, with no explicit opportunities for their professional growth (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016).

4.2.5. Career progression

As discussed in the section on recruitment, the principal position is usually drawn from the teaching ranks and as such it represents the terminal stage in the professional career of teachers (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2019; Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). Indeed, the transition of teachers to school principals is considered as the default mechanism for

vertical career promotion in Latin America, where career structures largely follow a vertical progression-based seniority leaving little room for meritocratic recognition (Cuenca, 2015). These types of progressions can be described as “flat”, offering few opportunities for professional development. If teachers would like to take more responsibilities and improve their working conditions it often means leaving the school to take administrative roles, thus potentially increasing the shortage of teachers.

An important wage gap exists between classroom teachers and principals across countries in Latin America (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016). Additional amounts also vary within the same school system. In the case of Colombia there are systems that strongly reward principals which work in an urban area, in Mexico principals in upper secondary schools are rewarded and in Chile in schools which have more students from socio-economically disadvantaged families. In any case, principal’s compensation is also affected according to the actual dedication they have to the position (see section on function and attribution for more details)

4.3. Working conditions

The working conditions of school principals is an area of high relevance within policies aimed at school leadership, since they allow for the possibility of having outstanding professionals in this strategic position. In this sense, international literature shows that policies aimed at improving school leadership must pay increasing attention to make leadership an attractive profession (Pont et al., 2009).

4.3.1. School resources

Colombian, Brazilian and Mexican’s school leaders fall short in key supplies for serving students in comparison with OECD countries. Colombian and Brazilian principals’ responses reveal that the shortage at least doubles the average of OECD countries in qualified teachers (52.6% and 40.4%) and competent educators to serve students with special needs (68% and 59.6%) and, coming from socioeconomically disadvantage homes (52.2% and 49.9%). This shortage also extends to key resources for digital infrastructure, physical infrastructure, and time for instructional leadership and time with students.

Table 16: School resources

Percentage of lower secondary principals reporting that the following shortages of resources hinder the school's capacity to provide quality instruction "quite a bit" or "a lot"

	Shortage of qualified teachers	Shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students with special needs	Shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials	Shortage or inadequacy of digital technology for instruction	Shortage or inadequacy of physical infrastructure	Shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes	Shortage or inadequacy of time for instructional leadership
Brazil	40.4	59.6	38.1	59.0	53.3	49.9	49.0
CABA (Argentina)	12.7	18.3	21.5	38.7	30.8	7.7	27.0
Chile	17.8	26.6	7.6	13.3	21.8	16.8	22.9
Colombia	52.6	68.0	64.2	63.9	70.0	52.2	63.1
Mexico	18.5	34.2	15.5	44.4	33.7	15.8	9.2
OECD Average-30	21.0	32.1	12.9	24.6	25.5	17.2	31.9

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.3.63

4.3.2. Dedication and duration of the principal function

In Colombia, Chile and Ceará/Brazil, the principal function is exclusive to one school. However, this depends on the school's enrollment size. For example, in Chile, in very small schools, there is the figure of the teacher in charge, which corresponds to a teacher who assumes additionally managerial functions. In Ceará/Brazil, for its part, exceptionally the principal of rural areas can take charge of attached establishments, that is to say, they do not have official school status. In Colombia, for its part, the law does not establish that the principal must assume teaching functions but leave the decision open. In the cases of Mexico and Argentina, the principal function is not exclusive and is combined (or can be combined) with classroom functions. In Mexico, the principal of primary and secondary schools combines his position with classroom functions or with other managerial tasks in different shifts. Only in the case of upper secondary education, the role of principal is an exclusive function. In Argentina, the regulations do not define the exclusivity of the position and they only have one charge 5-hour schedule for management, while the remaining time is dedicated to the classroom (Weinstein et al, 2014)

The duration of the principal role varies between school systems, but most systems have principals under an indefinite-term contract in Latin America. Only in Ceará/Brazil, Chile and Mexico in the case of the upper secondary, the principals have a fixed term in office at the school for which they were appointed. In these cases, the possibility of re-election for a period is included. In Ceará/Brazil, the term is 4 years, while in Chile it reaches 5 years, with re-election for a similar period. This situation is also evident in the case of Mexico, only for the upper secondary, where the duration of the position lasts up to 4 years. In the cases of Mexico – for primary education – and Colombia, the principals sign one-year contracts, after which they become indefinite term condition.

4.3.3. Sources of stress.

The sources of stress are multiple across the cases under study. "Having extra duties due to absent school staff" is a stress source reported by a high proportion of principals from Colombia (71.9%), Brazil (64.7%), and CABA (46%), which are much higher than the other two cases and the OECD average (37.1%) (Table 17). "Being responsible for student performance" is another source of stress reported by a high proportion of principals in Colombian (67.1%), Brazilian (67%), and Chile (53%), which are also higher than the other cases of the region and the OECD average (46.4%). Colombia stands out as the country that shows more sources of stress with proportions over the other cases or in comparison with the OECD averages. For instance, 59.3% of Colombian principals report that "having too much teacher appraisal and feedback work to do" is a source of stress, while the OECD average is just 28.7%. In the case of "maintaining school discipline", 58.3% of Colombian principals report this as another source of stress in contrast with 41.7% of OECD countries. "Being intimidated or verbally abused by students" is reported by 27.8% of principals versus 6.4% of OECD school principals. These contrasts also apply to "keeping up with changing requirements from" (64.9%) and "accommodating students with special needs" (47.2%), which surpass in at least 9% the OECD averages. Brazilian principals also report having several sources of stress that surpass the OECD average proportions reported.

Table 17: Sources of Principal stress*Percentage of lower secondary principals for whom the following are sources of stress "quite a bit" or "a lot"*

	Having too much teacher appraisal and feedback work to do	Having too much administrative work to do	Having extra duties due to absent school staff	Being held responsible for students' achievement	Maintaining school discipline	Being intimidated or verbally abused by students	Keeping up with changing requirements from local, municipal/regional, state or national/federal authorities	Addressing parent or guardian concerns	Accommodating students with special needs
Brazil	47.9	59.4	64.7	67.0	64.9	24.6	55.6	59.1	29.9
CABA (Argentina)	25.6	48.2	46.0	31.7	42.4	3.4	44.0	45.8	10.9
Chile	27.7	56.8	37.1	55.3	46.3	6.3	49.2	38.4	15.5
Colombia	59.3	67.8	71.9	67.1	58.3	27.8	64.9	46.7	47.2
Mexico	8.1	48.4	36.3	29.4	25.6	4.8	27.5	22.8	15.8
OECD Average -30	28.7	68.8	37.1	46.4	41.7	6.4	55.5	46.5	30.7

Source: OECD (2020), Table II.2.47

4.3.4. Principal turnover

Principal turnover data is lacking across the examined educational systems. Despite the absence of data for other countries, there are some variables to consider that likely affect the results:

- The desertion rate is higher when it comes to politically elected principals, not only due to changes in government, but also because they do not usually have the training characteristics or leadership qualities that the position needs (Pereda et al., 2021).
- The dropout rate increases in rural schools, with low socioeconomic status and low academic performance (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2023).
- The principal role is usually the final stage of the teaching career. In fact, they reach management positions at an older age, especially among public establishments, and retirement is the main reason for desertion (Rivero et al., 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2023).
- Additionally, there is a key public policy issue. In Brazil, the selection period lasts 3 years and in Chile, they are elected by Senior Public Management for 5 years. So, the succession system is inevitable and a phenomenon that encourages, at least in theory, rotation of position or school. The policy in Argentina and Colombia is substantially different, since the position of a principal is reached permanently, as long as they wish to remain in the position and there is no serious misconduct. Both elements have their pros and cons for educational improvement (Aravena, 2020).

4.4. Training and skills

The continuous training of school principals is crucial for effective leadership in educational systems. Leaders need specific training to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Successful systems adopt sequential professional development strategies throughout leaders' careers, including initial training, induction, and ongoing training. There is a trend towards innovative methods and practical on-site training, as well as the creation of specialized institutions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, in the countries studied there is no clear training policy, and an overview of the various development bodies and the responsible institutions is provided.

4.4.1. Training frameworks:

The training of school leaders in Latin America lacks a comprehensive policy that covers the different stages of the managerial career. The existing initiatives are weakly articulated and tend to be specific training programs. The training offered comes from both the public and private sectors, with differences in regulation and quality. Some systems depend heavily on private supply, while others have established public-private alliances.

The training of school principals in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico focuses mainly on continuing (in-service) training, with less emphasis on initial and induction training. Regarding initial training (pre-service), only Argentina and Ceará/Brazil have it as mandatory. In induction training, only Colombia offers programs that are mandatory. Regarding continuing training, all the countries mentioned offer voluntary and mostly self-financed programs, with a variety of public and private offers. In Chile, there are self-financed and voluntary programs, while in Colombia there is a public-private alliance. In Argentina, continuing training is voluntary and comes from various institutions, both public and private. In Brazil, there is a federal and distance offer, in addition to permanent programs from local universities in Ceará. Finally, in Mexico, there is a coexistence of public and private supply, being financed by the federal government in some cases.

In Colombia, training has not been the subject of significant reforms and no national standards are defined to estimate the knowledge and capabilities of managers. There are also problems of regulation and quality assurance of the offer (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2016). In Colombia, many principals report a need for training in the management of public resources. There are financial guides for budget management, including salaries and benefits, for holding events with public resources. However, training is complex and produces hesitation, since violation of these regulations creates personal and pecuniary responsibility. Furthermore, specific training in educational direction, management or administration is not common. If we add to this that the previous experience is in teaching, the training profile and experience is in pedagogy but not in administration (Sandoval et al., 2020).

In Argentina, there are no regulations or national curricular guidelines that organize the initial or continuous training of principals or national or provincial databases that contain the entire offer to know its scope or impact (Romero & Krichesky, 2019). In Mexico, training has focused on the business field and little on disciplines related to education failing to respond to the specific needs of different educational contexts (Díaz & García, 2019).

4.4.2. Educational attainment and instruction content

Table 18 shows the percentages of principals at different levels of educational achievement according to their ISCED level³. It can be noticed that at the OECD average, 2 out of 3 lower secondary principals have a master or a doctoral degree. The reality of Latin America is sharply different, with most secondary principal having just a bachelor’s degree. The exceptions are Chile and Colombia where more than half of lower secondary principals have at least a master or a doctoral degree.

Table 18: Principals’ highest educational attainment
Percentage of lower secondary principals, by highest level of formal education completed

	Below ISCED level 5	ISCED level 5	ISCED level 6	ISCED level 7	ISCED level 8
Brazil	0.0	2.7	93.8	3.5	0.0
CABA (Argentina)	0.0	11.6	53.6	34.8	0.0
Chile	0.0	2.1	41.5	54.6	1.8
Colombia	0.0	0.0	11.7	87.1	1.2
Mexico	0.0	0.8	50.3	37.1	11.7
OECD Average -30	0.4	2.5	30.8	62.8	3.5

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.4.24

The TALIS 2018 Survey links three different moments in principals’ career (“before assuming the position”, “after assuming the position”, and “before and after assuming the position”) with three key topics in management training: “School management”, “Topics of teacher development” and “Pedagogical Leadership”. Table 19 shows that in all systems it is stated that there is training during the management career on the topics indicated. The results show great dispersion and will depend on the topic and trajectory, the analysis, and level of comparability of these. To illustrate the above, the principals declare that before taking office, training in school management in Brazil, Chile and CABA stands out, all significantly above the OECD average, 30.7%. Once in office, on the same issue, systems such as Chile and CABA are well below the OECD average 33% and Mexico, on the contrary, rises with 50.4%. Once in office, in terms of instructional leadership, Mexico, Colombia and Chile stand out above the OECD average percentage of 33%. On the contrary, in CABA a notable 34% declares that they have never had training in this area.

Table 19: Principals’ formal training
Percentage of lower secondary principals for whom the following elements were included in their formal education or training

³ Education categories are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-2011). ISCED level 5 are short, practical, skills-oriented post-secondary programmes, ISCED level 6 refers to bachelor programmes, ISCED level 7 are masters programmes and ISCED level 8 are doctoral programmes.

	School administration or principal training programme or course				Instructional leadership training or course			
	Before taking up position as principal	After taking up position as principal	Before and after taking up position as principal	Never	Before taking up position as principal	After taking up position as principal	Before and after taking up position as principal	Never
Brazil	36.5	31.3	19.1	13.2	29.5	29.4	24.2	16.9
CABA (Argentina)	36.6	26.8	16.1	20.5	21.7	18.0	26.2	34.1
Chile	41.4	16.4	28.2	14.0	30.6	23.9	33.7	11.8
Colombia	20.1	39.6	24.9	15.5	19.2	26.6	42.1	12.2
Mexico	14.0	50.4	22.4	13.2	15.9	45.6	28.1	10.4
OECD average-30	30.7	33.0	23.2	13.0	28.9	28.8	24.8	17.5

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.4.28

4.4.3. Professional development

This section displays the percentage of principals who participated in various training or professional development activities in the twelve months prior to the TALIS survey.

Continuing education activities, courses, seminars, and activities are considered in different modalities (in-person or online) with a wide range of topics, from specific management subjects to teaching methods and pedagogical topics.

Table 20: Types of professional development undertaken by principals

Percentage of lower secondary principals who participated in the following professional development activities in the 12 months prior to the survey

	Courses/seminars about subject matter, teaching methods or pedagogical topics	Courses/seminars about leadership	Courses/seminars attended in person	Online courses/seminars	Educational conferences	Formal qualification programme	Peer and/or self-observation and coaching as part of a formal arrangement	Participation in a network of principals ⁴	Reading professional literature
Brazil	79.3	58.2	65.7	44.9	55.2	32.1	21.3	32.7	66.0
CABA (Argentina)	73.7	39.9	67.1	31.9	73.9	12.9	54.2	34.4	87.3
Chile	76.0	75.1	72.6	25.1	68.5	37.7	40.9	51.5	77.6
Colombia	81.6	74.5	64.9	44.3	70.8	25.5	47.8	55.0	82.0
Mexico	73.1	73.4	68.1	55.2	65.5	38.2	65.9	45.3	85.7
OECD average-30	72.0	72.7	77.4	35.9	74.6	15.7	47.2	61.0	86.8

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.5.10

Participation in online courses/seminars varies; Mexico (55.2%), Brazil (44.9%) and Colombia (44.3%) exceed the OECD average (35.9%), while Chile (25.1%) lags behind (Table 19). Regarding the courses on “leadership” topics, the OECD percentage is 72.7%, being in line with the majority of the systems studied, however Brazil 58.2% and especially CABA 39.9% are significantly below the percentage.

Regarding the participation in activities such as peer observation, no clear pattern is observed in the systems of the region (Table 20). Mexico and CABA stand out as regional leaders with rates of 65.9% and 54.2%, exceeding the OECD average (47.2%). In contrast, Chile (40.9%) and Brazil (21.3%) present considerably lower percentages, indicating the need to improve their standards in this type of activity. In terms of participation in management networks, the region's systems are all below the OECD average 61%, with Brazil 32.7% and CABA 34.4% standing out negatively. This is an area of very little development and with a high potential for systemic leadership.

Table 21 reveals various barriers that hinder the participation of principals in professional training. The systems studied show a set of barriers that include costs, lack of employer support, scheduling difficulties, and lack of incentives. Colombia (68.2%) and Chile (59.5%) face significant financial challenges, exceeding the OECD average (34.6%).

Table 21: Barriers to principals' participation in professional development

Percentage of lower secondary principals reporting the following barriers to their participation in professional development activities

	Do not have the prerequisites	Professional development is too expensive	There is a lack of employer support	Professional development conflicts with the principal's work schedule	Do not have time because of family responsibilities	There is no relevant professional development offered	There are no incentives for participating in professional development
Brazil	7.0	44.9	38.9	35.8	17.3	25.4	34.9
CABA (Argentina)	8.3	50.2	29.7	69.7	51.2	36.5	51.5
Chile	5.1	59.5	29.3	50.0	23.5	38.1	49.5
Colombia	11.5	68.2	52.7	43.8	18.0	42.2	59.4
Mexico	18.2	39.0	45.2	35.9	16.2	44.4	50.6
OECD average-30	6.5	34.6	20.7	47.9	17.7	27.2	34.5

Source: OECD (2019), Table I.5.40

Lack of employer support is common in the region, exceeding the OECD average (20.7%), with Colombia leading this need (52.7%) and Chile showing 29.3%. The lack of incentives to participate in professional development is a trend in the systems, exceeding the OECD average (34.5%). Colombia stands out as the country with the greatest need in this aspect (59.4%). These findings offer valuable signals to improve the professional development of school leaders and, therefore, educational quality in the region.

5. Analysis of the internal policy coherence in each of the five educational systems

Previous policy reviews in Latin America have remarked on the progress made in the region regarding the development of school leadership initiatives. As described in the previous section of this paper, the five examined educational systems show signs of addressing the school leadership in the four dimensions covered in our theoretical model (Figure 1). However, the development of these dimensions within each system might be uneven as education systems may have prioritized some policies over others. The literature has identified this as a problem of internal coherence (Weinstein & Hernández, 2016) that it lends itself as the major obstacle for the complete professionalization of the school leadership profession.

Table 22 presents a comparative diagram between each dimension by each educational system. The first row presents an ideal type of professionalization for each dimension. The following rows presents a summary on how each educational system have addressed the dimension based on the evidence presented so far. We labeled “low, medium, high” to signal the level of professionalization achieve by each system.

Table 22: Comparative analysis of internal coherence of school leadership policies

	Function and attributions	Requeriment, selection and careers	Working conditions	Training and skills
Ideal type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear framework outlining roles and responsibilities . - Established distributed leadership based on strong management team. - Time allocated to instructional leadership. - Manageable and concise number of attributions for the principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and delineated pathway for principals’ career - Selection based on merit, previous experience and skills evaluation. - Comprehensive and impartial panel of judges to select principal. - Strong accountability systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exclusiveness of the principal function - Attractive salaries - Manageable stressful situations - Clear contractual situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pertinent and abundant offer for professional development - Training in instructional leadership - Reduced barriers for participation .
Argentina/CABA (Bueno Aires)	<p>Medium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of guiding framework or clear standards on the role of teachers. - Numerous and multiple functions are defined in communal or 	<p>Middle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Merit based promotion. - Systematic use of evaluation - Union intervention in the selection of principals - Low incentives to move up the 	<p>Low:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No exclusivity of the principal role - Low principal salaries - High proportion of teacher stress due to absent staff 	<p>Medium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior training is required to become a principal. - Low participation in instructional leadership programmes

	province legislature. - Consolidate school team and functions. - Emphasis on instructional leadership	professional ladder. 1.		
Brazil/Ceara	Medium: - Lack of guiding framework or clear standards on the role of teachers. - Consolidate school team and functions. - In Ceara there is great emphasis on the participation of the community in school decisions	Medium: - Merit based promotion. - Political criteria for the selection of principal - Teacher experience and course work required. - No systematic evaluation is applied	Medium: - Exclusivity of the principal role - Attractive principal salaries - High proportion of principal being stress for being accountable for student achievement and maintaining discipline.	Medium: - Prior training is required to become a principal. - Low participation in instructional leadership programmes.
Chile	High: - Clear framework establishing roles and responsibilities. - Emphasis on instructional leadership	Medium - Merit based promotion. - Systematic use of evaluation - Low articulation between leadership framework and career path	Medium - Exclusivity of the principal role - Attractive principal salaries - High proportion of principal being stress for administrative work	High - Wide offer of in-service training programs - Considerable proportion of principals' participation in instructional leadership program - Costs are in important barrier for participation in professional development
Colombia	High: - Clear framework establishing roles and responsibilities. - Emphasis on instructional leadership	Low - Lack of a systematic review of prerequisites. - No clear status on the development track of principals - Gradual insertion of merit-based criteria	Medium - No clear definition on the exclusivity of the role - Proliferation of indefinite term contract - High proportion of principal experience stress due to absent staff	Medium - Establishment of professional development institutions for principals - High proportion of principal reporting barriers to access - High proportion of principals reporting

				participation in instructional leadership
Mexico	<p>Medium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear framework establishing roles and responsibilities. - Numerous and multiple functions are defined in communal or province legislature. - Emphasis on administrative tasks 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unclear definition of the current legislature for principal prerequisites and promotion - Strong emphasis on experience but not enough instrument measuring skills and competencies - Despite efforts position are heavily influence by political forces 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attractive salaries for becoming a principal. - Low proportion of principal experiencing stress - Fixed-term contract with clear renewal structure 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High proportion of principals reporting participation in administrative leadership

Next we present a brief description of each educational system justifying the label of professionalization awarded to each dimension

5.1.1.CABA (Buenos Aires)/Argentina

The starting point of the coherence analysis is to analyze whether there is a formal definition of the functions and powers of the management function. Given the federalist character of Argentina, school leadership policies, unlike most countries in the region, are not defined at the central level but at the level of provinces and communes. Furthermore, the Argentine system lacks a guiding framework or clear standards around the role of the teacher. The functions are specified in legislation at the provincial level and tend to be quite numerous. In the case of Buenos Aires, this can amount to more than 60 functions, which correspond to the instructional-pedagogical, administrative, and socio-educational areas. However, these multiple tasks are responded to with regulations that define a management team with specific tasks. Thus, the vice-principal is responsible for instructional and pedagogical tasks while the teacher-secretary is responsible for administrative tasks. A different feature of the Argentine principal is that he is responsible for socio-educational tasks such as the health, well-being, and nutrition of the students (Weinstein et al, 2014).

The multiple management roles are in dialogue with the selection and promotion processes. In Argentina, the principal is a kind of primus inter pares among teachers, where his role is defined as the teacher with the highest hierarchy in the institution. Depending on the province, the principal is required to have previous experience as a vice-principal. The selection process takes into consideration these elements based on experience and merit, but also on individual competencies measured through tests or dissertations depending on the province. A distinctive element of the career of principals in Argentina is that the position of principal is not the last level in the career since they can later be promoted to school supervisor (Weinstein et al, 2014).

However, the career structure of managers can have negative implications for working conditions. Being considered a *primus inter pares*, the principal does not have absolute exclusivity in his functions and is frequently required to teach classes. In the case of Buenos Aires, these class hours can be up to 5 hours per week. Furthermore, the salary differences between a teacher and a principal who work the same number of hours per week are usually minimal. The result of this is that Argentina has a serious problem of attraction towards the profession of principals (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Despite the strong instructional component that the functions of the principals have, they do not find a correlation with the participation of the principals in courses of this nature. According to TALIS data, more than 30% of principals in Buenos Aires say they have never participated in a course on instructional leadership (Table 19).

In short, in Argentina we find a highly heterogeneous system that, although it has tried to incorporate the multiple dimensions of leadership in its legislation and in the diversification of the management team, this has not translated equally into its principal training processes. nor in the managerial career. The figure of *primus inter pares* opposes that of a complete managerial and emotional professionalization to the attractiveness of the career of principals.

5.1.2.Ceara/Brazil

In the case of Brazil we can observe the reality of other federal entities where there is intense decentralism and it is not possible to find a formal and explicit description of the definition of principals. However, this description is absent even at the provincial level. For example, in the case of Ceará/Brazil, it is not possible to identify a regulation that covers a specification of the functions of principals. Now, although these positions are not formally defined in school regulations, it is possible to find a distinction of positions such as principal, coordinator (responsible for technical-pedagogical functions), secretary and financial advisor. In other words, although there is a lack of regulations on the roles of principals, schools still identify leadership roles from which they respond to different administrative responsibilities (Weinstein et al., 2014).

The TALIS 2018 data also indicates that there is a significant proportion of lower secondary school principals who dedicate efforts to community participation (parents, students, teachers) in the school (Table 10). A possible explanation for these actions may respond to the high concentration of students from the most vulnerable socioeconomic sectors, which would cause the need for greater cohesion and collaboration of social networks to support the school's socio-educational processes (Table XXX).

Following Brazil's decentralized logic, the requirements to be a principal are defined at the provincial level. In the case of Ceará, it is considered an essential requirement to have a teaching degree, along with specific courses in management, and some moral qualities. In fact, on average among lower secondary school principals in Brazil, the percentage of principals who have taken administrative management courses prior to taking their position is higher than the OECD average of the countries participating in TALIS (Table 19).

The selection process for principals in Ceará/Brazil includes different stages, framed within a merit and competitive competition. In the first stage, a multiple-response test is carried out, in which the reading and interpretation of texts,

logical reasoning and knowledge about educational policies for school management in the country and the state are measured. In the second stage, the verification and evaluation of the merits is carried out, which includes the title and experience, among others. The third stage finally corresponds to an exit test for a mandatory course in school management and leadership conducted by the State. Likewise, there has been a tendency to establish juries (or qualification committees) at the local level, so that the decision is not made exclusively by the respective single-person authority but rather corresponds to a more collective deliberation process in which different local actors participate, corresponding to the school itself (Weinstein et al., 2014)

In Ceará the attractiveness for the position of principal is high, which is commonly reflected in the significant number of applicants for the position, which exceed the vacancies established in the different competitions or calls. In general, this can be linked to salary benefits, but also to the fact that, with the political reforms introduced, the position has acquired increasing importance within school management and educational policies at a broader level. However, in Brazil more than a third of principals declare they have another job and there is no exclusive dedication to the work of the principal in a school (Weinstein et. al, 2014).

In short, in Brazil, and more specifically in Ceará, we can make progress in the professionalization of principals that is mainly observed in the distribution of tasks in the school apparatus, the exhaustive selection processes that include the completion of specific courses in school management, and the establishment of a school committee for the selection of principals. The importance given to participation with the community is also striking. However, the system lacks clear definitions of the director's role either by norms or standards, nor are there quality control mechanisms for the training of directors or the continuous evaluation of the director.

5.1.3.Chile

In Chile, management functions have been established for a long time (Decree with Force of Law No. 1 of 1996, updated in 2023). It establishes that an educational establishment has a management team made up of a principal (directs and leads the educational center), a deputy director (collaborates with the director in management and coordination), a General Inspector (supervises compliance with educational regulations, development of pedagogical activities and school climate) and a Technical Head (coordinates technical-pedagogical tasks). Although all these positions are contemplated in the regulations, the Subdirectorate has little relevance in the Chilean system (28.2%).n summary, the work of the management team is to support the director in the areas of school organization, the climate for good coexistence and the promotion of professional collaboration for student learning.

Along with this regulation, the General Education Law (2009) establishes the functions and powers of the management team, stating that it has the duty to lead the establishments under its charge, promote the professional development of teachers, and comply with the standards of the establishment that they lead. It is complemented by the Law on Quality and Equity in Education, Law 20,501, which states that management teams must carry out pedagogical

supervision in the classroom. and defines the competitive process for the position of director, including the participation of an autonomous public body to technically advise the process (Public Service).

The educational system contemplates a framework of action for managers in which specific areas of action are defined called the Framework for Good Management and School Leadership (2015). This framework defines four key dimensions for the exercise of the managerial function: Leadership, Curriculum Management, Resource Management and Climate and Coexistence Management. Its objective is to guide the practice of school leaders and converge expectations regarding the management function. Additionally, the management work is also guided by the Indicative Performance Standards (EID) for Educational Establishments and their Supporters and other associated regulations that directly involve the management team, a relevant example is. The law that creates the Public Education System (2017), in addition to defining the specific function of directors, creates an instance in local governance only for directors, highlighting their importance in the system (Conference of Principals).

The work of principals in Chile, according to TALIS information, indicates that contrary to general belief, a large proportion of principals allocated time to pedagogical issues (19.9%) than to administrative issues. On administrative issues, a lower percentage of principals' report spending time in this area (22.6%) than the OECD average (29.5%) (Table 7). However, in terms of decision making, the proportion of principals in Chile that have a say on issues like hiring or budgetary decision is much lower than the OECD average (Table 4) .

Regarding the hiring and working conditions of principals of public establishments, they are regulated by a set of laws and decrees that establish the conditions, requirements and procedures for the selection, hiring and performance in educational establishments. The principal of a public school (Municipality or Local Education Service) is chosen through a competitive process that includes the participation of an autonomous public body that technically advises the process (Civil Service).

According to national regulations, principals have different forms of evaluation and accountability, such as annual Performance Agreements with their employer with objectives, goals and results to be achieved, with the use of indicators and means of verification. They are committed to fulfilling Teacher Training and Professional Development plans through concrete actions and collaborative work. In some cases, they may include external evaluations.

Regarding managerial professional development, this has been addressed with different types of strategies from the educational system. There is an offer for training courses provided by the State through the Center for Pedagogical Improvement and Research of the Ministry of Education. This offer is for pre-service, induction into the position for new directors and continuing education.

Additionally, the same Ministry of Education has promoted agreements for the creation of Leadership Centers (interuniversity alliances) specialized in research and development of professional capabilities at the different levels of leadership of the school system (leadership for nursery, school and systems education institutions. Intermediate level). The university's offer of postgraduate programs in educational leadership is regulated in its quality by the National Council of Education. As a results, The system stands out above the OECD average, the training in school

management issues before taking office and in general its indicators of training needs in pedagogical leadership or data use issues are below average (Table 19 and 20).

In summary, the Chilean educational system has developed a system that includes definitions of public policy that define management functions, establish its regulations and areas of action, raise results on its performance and has created training programs according to trajectory.

5.1.4.Colombia

In Colombia, the managerial role in the educational field is defined in the General Education Law (1994). This law establishes the functions and responsibilities of principals, who are considered guiding leaders of institutional processes in educational establishments. In addition, Law 715 of 2001, which regulates the distribution of powers and resources in the educational sector, also addresses aspects related to the powers and functions of principals. In 2002, the Ministry of Education published the Glossary of Functional and Behavioral Competencies for teachers and teaching managers. More recently, Decree 1278 (2022) was issued, which addressed management training policies. All the above shows us a progressive advance in the Colombian educational system in defining the role, practices and powers of managers in the field of management and leadership, giving much emphasis to their transformative role and a distributed leadership style.

Managers are made up of principals, rural principals, coordinators, supervisors and core directors and have the responsibility of leading institutional processes in educational establishments. Coordinators are usually assigned responsibilities related to pedagogical leadership and the management of school coexistence, under the supervision of the principal.

Although the Colombian State declares itself unitary, its political organization is in Departments with a markedly decentralized seal. This means that national regulations are generally modified or applied according to the departmental context. This is the case of the selection of principals. Using the specific requirements established by the regulations as a reference, the selection modality can be by merit contest, direct appointment, or modality where the community participates through voting.

Regarding the field of resource management and impact on personnel hiring issues, they are very limited in contrast to the OECD averages. In the case of contracting teachers, its level of incidence is 15.5% in relation to 73.2% in the OECD, the same in budgetary issues, 28.3% of involvement in decisions, well below 67.9% of the OECD average. Although it has few powers, the time dedicated to administrative issues is above (33.3%) the OECD average (29.5%) (Table 4).

In the way the establishments are managed, there is coherence between what is declared in the regulations of incorporating the community in management and the management perception that over 95% declares a relevant participation of teachers, parents and students in daily management, very above the OECD average and the compared systems of the study (Table 7).

The professionalization of the principal function through training processes has been addressed through the National Development Plan (PND) (2018-2022), which gave impetus to a strategy aimed at strengthening the role of principals by promoting their personal and professional development through the creation of a Leadership School (2020) that, together with declaring its strategic objectives in the educational system, defines the main areas of practice of leaders and training modalities. The creation of a School of this type is relevant from several perspectives. The first is the issue of access to training programs, 68.2% of principals declare that there are barriers to their improvement due to issues of financing, schedules, and employer facilities, well above the OECD average (34.6%). Other relevant areas in which the existence of the Leadership School could be a potential contribution is the preparation of future principals (pre-service training), only 20.1% of principals have training in school management before taking over the roles (30.7% OECD) (Table 20)

The Colombian system has maintained a policy and institutional structure in constant improvement in terms of defining and developing capabilities in the field of school leadership.

5.1.5. Mexico

Although Mexico is a federal country, the government maintains important regulatory powers regarding the financing, evaluation and administration of personnel, as it is responsible for determining study plans and programs, the school calendar, the assignment of school books, and the regulation of the national system of teacher training and evaluation (Weinstein et al, 2014).

A particular element of Mexico is that the responsibility of the policy for school principals and, more broadly, for teachers, has historically been generated based on agreements signed between the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) and the National union of Education workers (SNTE).

The responsibilities for principals are clearly defined for the primary and secondary education level, although without nuances of differences between these two levels. One aspect that draws attention is the diverse number of functions attributed to the principal: 26 in the case of primary education, and 21 in the case of secondary education. However, the emphasis in these roles is placed mainly on administrative elements than on pedagogical ones.

In terms of the division of labor within the school, only in secondary schools is the role of the vice principal formalized, who, following the regulations, has the task of supervising the work of the teachers, relegating administrative tasks to the principals (Weinstein et al., 2014).

In terms of the requirements to be a principal, it is considered essential to be a teacher. Access to the position has historically been in a ranking system, determined by factors dictated under agreement between the SEP and the SNTE, and which correspond to knowledge, skills, seniority, discipline and punctuality. Selection, in this sense, does not include a competitive examination but rather implies an evaluation of merits that includes, in more specific terms, elements such as length of service, academic training, participation in educational projects, participation in community support projects, publications made, the design of teaching materials, teacher training and updating activities and recognition for performance in teaching work (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Data from TALIS 2018 shows that there is a very high percentage of lower secondary principals who participate in administration courses once they take office. However, the percentage of principals participating in instructional leadership courses is considerably lower than the OECD average.

In short, in Mexico, clear roles have been defined for managers as well as scaled selection processes, given the dialogues between the government and unions. However, the training of directors continues to have a purely administrative focus, leaving aside aspects related to pedagogical instruction.

6. Case studies

The following sections present specific case studies on three educational systems where access to the data has been more limited. In broad terms, the three systems examined (Bolivia, Costa Rica and Honduras) follows the same dimensions explored in the previous sections.

6.1.1. Bolivia

Social and institutional context

In 2022, Bolivia had an enrolment of 2,945,072 students, of which 90% attended public schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). Of the more than 15 thousand schools, 79% are in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In 2010, the country advanced in its latest educational reform with Law No. 70 Avelino Siñani – Elizardo Pérez (AS-EP Law), which emphasizes the plurinational, intercultural, decentralized nature of education and advances teacher professionalization. However, its focus has been more ideological as a critique of neoliberal, centralist and ethnicist education than a technical-pedagogical change based on the needs of the country (Cajías, 2013; Jemio, 2014). This has translated into persistent low academic results that are explained not only by problems in teacher training or educational equipment, but also by the absence of a curriculum with clear and explicit objectives and content. Other challenges are related to access to information, coverage in secondary education, bureaucracy and the distance between law and practice (Bozo, 2014; Flores, 2022; OPCE, 2021; Rivera & Laserna, 2014; Villafuerte & Mardesich, 2018).

Opportunities and challenges for school leadership policy

According to the OEI (2017), in Bolivia there are just over six thousand principals, of which 66% are men and 95% work in public schools. The country does not have a managerial career, but it does have a teaching policy: the Regulation of the national scale of the education service that dates back to 1957 and has not been significantly modified by Law No. 70, its predecessor or the Political Constitution of the 2009. This marks different strengths and challenges regarding school leadership.

The recruitment process is defined in the aforementioned Regulations, establishing an examination of merits and competencies for horizontal and vertical promotion. This exam considers a score for academic degree, personal and professional conditions (including, for example, punctuality or participation in pedagogical and union meetings),

merits (such as awards and publications) and sanctions (for behavior or performance). The designation is organized through an annual, voluntary qualification sheet in which district and national commissions participate. Among principals, a degree in pedagogy is required at the educational level to which they are applying, capacity for the managerial function, no less than 5 years of teaching experience and, at least, 100 merit points (Supreme Decree No. 04688). Regarding decentralization, the Ministry of Education (2017) organizes and makes the process transparent by establishing a Process Manual for the administrative teaching registry and career ladder procedures. However, neither the regulations nor the laws, decrees and regulations explain the concept of “capacity” for the position and the regulations have only been updated, in ministerial resolution 0071/2022, only for classroom teachers and administrative staff. Added to this, Martínez (2011) explains, is that the principals are selected for only three years.

Initial teacher training is mandatory. A training that, since the AS-EP Law, is offered in fiscal, free institutions dependent on the Ministry of Education (Law No. 070 of 2010). Unfortunately, the law establishes a single curriculum that does not prepare for educational administration and management. Thus, management training has tended to be self-taught (Quiroz and Vázquez, 2009).

This situation seems to be reversed with continuous professional development, also regulated by Law No. 070. Thus, in addition to courses and seminars, since 2016, a diploma and master's degree in educational management has been offered (OEI, 2017). Both are scored positively in the call for promotion (Martínez, 2011) and the review of its content, following what was indicated by the Ministry of Education (2018), allows identifying elements of administrative and curricular management including the relationship with the community through the dialogue, listening and generating agreements, the balance between bureaucratic logic and the empowerment of education and teacher support. However, given the explicit rejection of competency-based training as a neoliberal imposition (Martínez, 2011), training is very abstract and ideological. In fact, the diploma does not contain academic references, does not clearly identify competencies or leadership functions and it is not exclusive to school principals and can be applied to municipal and departmental directors.

The definition of functions is described in Law No. 70, but only for municipal, departmental or central education directors, unlike the Bolivarian Education Code of 1966, already repealed. Despite this, school principals would have responsibilities in administrative, institutional, community and pedagogical management, such as the planning of the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) and the Annual Operational Plan (POA) that must be established with the school boards (Martínez, 2011 ; OEI, 2017). However, in addition to bureaucratic pressure and imprecise and ideological training, the participation of parents is a challenge for management functions. Since the educational reform of 1994, school boards can control the performance of principals and teachers by evaluating annual management, approving reports and balance sheets, and channeling municipal resources (Veliz, 2011). Unfortunately, Law No. 70 did not establish its limits, increased the administrative pressure and community participation and eliminated the figure of technical-pedagogical advisors as support for management functions (Flores, 2022; Martínez, 2011; Quiroz and Vázquez, 2009).

Management teams are also a challenge, since their reference is non-existent in laws, decrees or regulations. They are only mentioned in the diploma of the Ministry of Education (2018) as a figure also composed of parents. But this

makes leadership difficult due to the responsibilities conferred and their poor preparation to perform the role (Martínez, 2011).

Unlike the above, labor conditions could be a strength. The salary is regulated by the Regulation of the national scale of the education service (Supreme Decree No. 04688) and detailed in the Manual of processes of the administrative teaching registry and of scale procedures (Ministry of Education, 2005) establishing a basic salary per location, title and position, as well as border, zone, permanence, merged, economic and seniority bonuses. Thanks to this, for example, a normalista principal will earn 66% more than a normalista teacher in a rural area (Ministry of Education, 2019). Likewise, principals can be promoted to municipal positions and, as teachers, their status is immutable, and they are entitled to their salary if they are dismissed without fault until their position is reinstated in a maximum of 90 days.

Now, this immobility hinders the evaluation of performance, today non-existent. This implies that the teaching career is ultimately rigid due to the absence of a salary-educational achievement link and that means that teachers are underpaid compared to comparable professional groups (Copana, 2018).

6.1.2. Costa Rica

Social and institutional context

As of 2020, Costa Rica had 1,183,283 students, of which 90% attended public centers, according to the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) (MEP, 2020; 2021).

Governance is centralized and highly bureaucratic, so the educational system faces challenges to become more agile, efficient and modern (Román & Murillo, 2022). One of them is to improve the information system for students and teachers. Indeed, only as of 2019 did the MPE promote the SABER Platform (Basic Administration System for Education and its Resources) and its implementation would still be ongoing, according to the Nation State Program (PEN, 2021a).

Other problems are low academic results; gaps in digital access; little monitoring of educational trajectories; low universalization of the national curriculum; weaknesses in teacher training, hiring and evaluation; reduction in public social investment as a consequence of growing fiscal problems; and regulations on the functions of principals that have not changed at the pace of educational policy (PEN, 2021a; 2021b).

Opportunities and challenges for school leadership policy

In 2020, there were 3,177 school principals in the educational system, especially in primary education (74.0%) and scientific-humanistic secondary education (13.4%). By gender, more than half were women (60.5%) and, in relation to age, just over a third were between 51-60 years old (38.2%) and another third between 41-50 years old (37.1%) (Román & Murillo, 2022). Thus, by 2024, 55% could meet the retirement requirements, which could mean a generational change. In fact, 28% of managers were appointed for the first time in 2020 (PEN, 2021b).

Although the country does not have a managerial career or a framework for good performance that clearly defines the responsibilities of managers (Beirute, 2021; PEN, 2023), they do have certain basic regulations for the exercise of school management that entail several advancements but also many challenges.

In terms of selection, the country has achieved greater transparency and independence from political interference (El Diálogo, 2018). The requirements are described in the Civil Service Statute that regulates the entry into the public service of all educational personnel in public centers. In addition to generic requirements such as having the moral and physical aptitude of the position or passing the trial period, the Statute published in 1970 delegates greater specifications to the Descriptive Manual of Civil Service Jobs (Law 1581, 1970, Article 20), updated in 2021. Said Manual establishes three central guidelines: a bachelor's or master's degree in educational administration, three years of teaching or technical-teaching experience and incorporation into the respective Professional College (Servicio Civil, 2021). The process ends with a shortlist of the three best candidates chosen by the Civil Service and the MEP. However, the process does not consider qualitative criteria such as pedagogical leadership competencies and does not discriminate between initial training programs, despite the fact that there is an oversupply of professionals (El Diálogo, 2018). As Beirute (2021) explains, the selection does not discriminate between degrees from accredited and non-accredited courses.

Aware of the importance of adding other requirements, in 2020 a law was approved that proposed a suitability test, but the change of government in 2022-2023 stopped the work of the technical teams of the Civil Service and the MPE (PEN, 2023).

Initial training is another matter. Since 2018, progress has been made in the professionalization of leaders under the requirement of a bachelor's or master's degree in educational administration, one that today has 74% of the endowment (OEI, 2017; PEN, 2021b), but of 30 programs only one has accreditation (Beirute, 2021). In other words, of 16,361 graduates between 2000-2019, 86.4% did so from non-accredited private universities. Furthermore, only two programs offer specialization in management of initial or technical-vocational education centers and only one offers leadership training. Other challenges include little practical content, masculinized training, low follow-up of graduates, outdated content, and little connection with the MPE. Thus, it is not surprising that there is a gap between the profile formed by universities and the policy requirements (Vargas & González, 2021).

Induction for those entering managers for the first time is non-existent (PEN, 2021b) and continuous training is irregular and seems to occur only for groups of centers that participate in specific programs (OEI, 2017). Only in recent years has the Directorate of Curriculum Development recognized the role of managers in educational transformation, but their training has not yet become the norm and progress was interrupted by the pandemic (Beirute, 2021).

The Descriptive Manual of Civil Service Jobs also establishes fifteen tasks for managers in direction, coordination and supervision of administrative and curricular activities (Civil Service, 2021). General information that is complemented by the National Qualifications Framework for Education Careers of Costa Rica (2023). Thus, currently the functions are much more precise, filling a gap that was absent from the official documentation (Beirute, 2021). For example, in terms of pedagogical management, theoretical, methodological, and technical mastery in leadership could now be

required with learning results that point, among others, to curricular support, the application of innovative experiences and the integration of digital technology. Unfortunately, both documents are very recent, and their implementation requires the long-term commitment and participation of the MEP authorities, universities, professional associations and the principals themselves (Fallas et al., 2023).

The promise of impact of these advances on selection, training and evaluation is high, but until then the challenges remain, especially in the wake of COVID-19. The main criticism of management functions points to the poor curricular management that exists due to administrative pressure and the lack of training received. This is followed by the limited possibilities to influence the selection, training or retention of teachers; no financial autonomy, materials or curriculum; community participation that is reduced to paper; and the absence of incentives to break the top-down dynamic by promoting democratic or distributed leadership. Another issue is the poor supervision and support of the Regional Directorates of Education, due to the scarcity and poor preparation of personnel and the high administrative demands of the higher levels of governance (Beirute, 2021; Bolaños et al., 2021; El Diálogo , 2018; OEI, 2017; PEN, 2021b).

The existence of a management team, by regulation, depends on the size of the enrollment and the educational level. Thus, 77% end up concentrating on secondary education (PEN, 2021b). Unfortunately, their profile and tasks are still focused on administrative work (Beirute, 2021).

The working conditions of the managers show gaps in the support of their supervisors and reiterate the high demand imposed by the administrative overload. Furthermore, despite self-evaluating their jobs very positively, turnover is high. Between 2016-2020, only 35% remained in the same educational center versus 57% of the teachers and management team (Bolaños et al., 2021; PEN, 2021b). Despite this, after passing the trial period, they obtain contractual stability, the salary increases with annual evaluations and they have the possibility of moving up as advisors, department heads or principals of the Regional Directorates (OEI, 2017).

Finally, there is the performance evaluation regulated by the Civil Service Statute, where an annual evaluation is established by the immediate boss considering personality and work – including human relations, initiative, organization and quality of work or discipline, for example – with five possible results facilitating the right to an annuity in the first three: excellent, very good, good, insufficient, and unacceptable (Law 1581, 1970, Article 151-156). However, the tests have not changed since the 1950s, they are highly subjective and have no training value, thus, the evaluation ends up reduced to just another procedure (Arce, 2018). A few years ago, there would have been a bill to modify the situation, but it failed to advance in Congress.

6.1.3.Honduras

Social and institutional context

In 2020, Honduras had 1,921,454 students, of which 84% attended public schools (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEDUC, 2020). The educational system is decentralized and, since 2014, its modernization has been promoted considering results-based management, the vindication of historically excluded sectors and the favoring of democratic governance (Republic of Honduras, 2019).

An important characteristic is its high rural enrolment (49%) and, in primary education, the high presence of single and two-teacher schools (60%) (SEDUC, 2020), so it is common for principals to also fulfill classroom functions (Cuenca & Pont, 2016).

Challenges include low enrolment, especially in secondary education (SEDUC, 2020); carry out the decentralization of human and financial resources; address low academic results; reformulate, disseminate, promulgate and apply new laws (Republic of Honduras, 2019); address the decline in public spending on education; respond to the stagnation of several teaching indicators; and position principals on the agenda (Association for a More Just Society, ASJ, 2022; Inter-American Dialogue, 2022b). Although principles of transparency and accountability have been promoted (Inter-American Dialogue, 2017), this situation would be explained, in part, by the vertical leadership and caudillismo of political parties, as they slow down processes in the face of change, encourage corruption and making public services poor (PNUD, 2022).

This scenario has led the country to rely on international organizations to configure the educational agenda. Thus, a Round Table of Education Cooperators (MERECE) has been created and it is common for these organizations to have representation in government structures (Edwards et al., 2019). An example is the Strategic Plan for the education sector (PESE) 2018-2030 (SEDUC, 2017).

Opportunities and challenges for school leadership policy

The PESE confirms that, based on national research, success in learning is related, among others, to the management of the educational center, especially pedagogical management (Republic of Honduras, 2019). However, it does not detail a strategic area of action regarding the issue. This dynamic characterizes the different documents that define the functioning of the educational system, establishing strengths and weaknesses.

The first document that marks this trend is the Honduran Teacher Statute (Law No. 0760-SE-99, 1999, article 22, 69 and 77), which, since 1999, similarly organizes the teachers, principals and technicians' careers in public schools. Regarding the selection, it establishes a competition, run by the Departmental Selection Board, with an aptitude and knowledge test, the qualification of merits and a psychometric test with a minimum approval of 75% in each one. But only in 2019 specifications have been established for principals. The Teaching Position Classification Manual (SEDUC, 2019), along with affiliation to the professional association, requires a degree in pedagogy and experience at the educational level to which you are applying. The manual also indicates pedagogical, administrative, financial, and personal competencies, although it does not indicate their obligation to evaluate. Now, the most complex thing is that this structure is influenced by party politics and/or the magisterial colleges (Inter-American Dialogue, 2015; 2022b).

In terms of training, progress and challenges are also observed. Until the publication of the Teaching Position Classification Manual (SEDUC, 2019), the degree in pedagogy was optional (OEI, 2017). Thus, it does not seem strange that 58% of managers in the Danlí region have a degree in pedagogy, while 15% are technicians and 8% are engineers or lawyers (Fonseca and Hernández, 2023).

Mentoring and supervision are non-existent and continuous training is scarce. Since the regulations are generic and do not emphasize leadership, when training opportunities are given their focus is administrative. The problem also lies on the limited personnel of the regional directorates available for training (Inter-American Dialogue, 2022b), but especially in the poor development of capacities in decentralized organizations (Edwards et al., 2019).

The details of the functions are only specified in the Teaching Position Classification Manual (SEDUC, 2019). The list adds up to 21 characteristics of administrative and curricular management indicating, for example, the official representation of the center, the management of activities with the community, the delivery of pedagogical guidelines, the coordination of the academic improvement plan and the preparation, development, and evaluation of the supervision program. However, the focus is usually administrative as an indirect consequence of selection, training, and other regulations. The Inter-American Dialogue (2015) explains that the influence of the party limits principals from being more than administrators. Likewise, in practice financial, material, or human resources autonomy is very limited and is focused on departmental management; and the principal does not participate in the strategic vision of the school (Diálogo Interamericano, 2017; OEI, 2017).

Educational supervision is another issue that does not drive leadership. Established in the Fundamental Law of Education (LFE), its description, focus and functions come in the Educational Supervision Model (SEDUC, 2018). Unfortunately, supervisors are politically elected so they do not have the ability and legitimacy to technically supervise the schools (Inter-American Dialogue, 2015; Fonseca and Hernández, 2023).

Working conditions entail, as advances in transparency, the establishment of a salary manual and a scale of grades according to the title (Executive Agreement No. 1360-SE-2014, 2014). Likewise, the appointment is for life, few must work double shifts and they usually remain in office for 10 years (Cuenca and Pont, 2016; Fonseca and Hernández, 2023). However, salary improvements do not depend on professional performance, since they are granted by title, area or seniority. It is also not possible for a principal to advance in position without political or union influence (Diálogo Interamericano, 2022b).

Finally, performance evaluation is non-existent, although the LFE establishes one evaluation for staff (Executive Agreement No.1358-SE-2014, 2014. Article 136), and principal positions are for life so there are no incentives for ongoing professional development.

7. Policy recommendations and conclusions

In relation to the dimensions of professionalization of policies aimed at school leaders, the evidence reviewed shows emerging strengths in terms of functions and powers, requirements and selection and training, as well as important weaknesses, especially in working conditions. These strengths and weaknesses are specific to some countries, but many tend to be shared.

The dimension of function and attribution is where the best results are observed, at least among the countries that participated in TALIS 2018. A key trend is the prioritization that pedagogical leadership acquires in the discourse of principals, as well as the participation of parents and the involvement of the educational community in school councils.

In Brazil, CABA and Chile, managers also report investing less time in administrative tasks and meetings than the OECD average. However, little influence is perceived in the management of human resources and financing and policies related to admission, evaluation and discipline of students.

- **Recommendation 1:** Define Action Frameworks or Professional Standards that guide the functions and powers of principals, placing emphasis on the leadership of the educational project of the school, as well as on the management of curricula, human resources and financing, students and politics or social according to the needs of the school systems.
- **Recommendation 2:** Ensure, through systematic participatory processes of consultation with school actors, that the Action Frameworks or Professional Standards are relevant to the educational, social and cultural reality of schools, simultaneously achieving progress in the social legitimation of these instruments of politics and management.
- **Recommendation 3:** Promote that the Action Frameworks or Professional Standards have the basic achievement conditions so that school leaders can materialize them in their institutional and pedagogical management practices, taking special care that they have the powers required for this and that they are consistent with the rest of current educational regulations.

The consolidation of merit- and exam-based systems and the trend toward the inclusion of technical skills in selection are also important strengths among the countries reviewed through TALIS 2018, especially when historically in Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico It was selected at discretion, with a strong political and clientelist component, as Díaz & García (2019), Pereda et al. (2021) and The Dialogue (2015; 2018; 2022b) point out. Although countries are or are trying to advance reforms to alleviate this challenge, the region shares another: the requirement of teaching experience that is not complemented by specialized training in instructional leadership. In fact, only Brazil, CABA and Costa Rica ask for specific training, but in administration.

- **Recommendation 4:** Consolidate selection systems based on merit, which consider the experience and previous training of the applicants, which incorporate proven selection modalities (e.g., competency tests), within a process guided by institutions specialized in Human Resources management. within the public administration.
- **Recommendation 5:** Ensure that the selection systems operate transparently, explaining the necessary requirements and competencies, as well as the evaluation criteria of the applicants, promoting the articulation of this process with the existing definitions in the Frameworks of Action or Competencies Standards defined.

Pedagogical leadership also appears, following the OECD pattern, in training before and during professional practice in Brazil, CABA, Chile and Colombia. The trend towards online training is also interesting here, particularly in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico and before the pandemic. However, the challenges are numerous. As observed in the literature

reviewed and in the case studies, there are no comprehensive policies that cover the managerial career and initiatives tend to be weakly linked, abstract, unregulated, and/or focused solely on administration. In addition, the barriers that managers point out to participate are critical, including support from the supporter, high cost and the absence of relevant topics. For example, only in Brazil and CABA is continuing training mandatory and in Colombia is induction.

- **Recommendation 6:** Create and strengthen a professional development system that, virtually/in-person and inside/outside the school, provides training contextualized to the local needs of school leaders and, at the same time, covers common interests to respond to the nationally defined functions and powers.
- **Recommendation 7:** Strengthen the institutional capacities of training entities, by universities, private foundations or public organizations, in terms of educational leadership and management. Also, complementing their traditional academic activities, with the promotion of self-training and peer training, especially through the constitution of networks of inquiry and exchange between school principals.
- **Recommendation 8:** Ensure timely access of managers to relevant and quality training processes, establishing public support systems (e.g., scholarships, subsidies, etc.) that prevent individual payment capacity from becoming an obstacle to professional development. continuous

The dimension of working conditions is the most critical of the four evaluated. Indeed, only in CABA is there a performance evaluation that also allows vertical promotion. On the other hand, the weaknesses point to the conflict that occurs between decision makers and unions, regarding the use of an objective, formative evaluation carried out by the Public Service. Likewise, management is considered the end of the career in many countries and there are few opportunities for professional development. In other words, projection requires leaving school to take on administrative positions. On the other hand, the sources of stress are multiple, particularly in Brazil and Colombia.

For the most part, the principal function tends to be exclusive except for some educational system like Argentina and Brazil, where restrictions are not specified.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the four dimensions indicated, it is not strange to think that attrition is an important problem, although the references are scarce and seem specific to their contexts: in Chile, for example, attrition or annual rotation is 10% annually (Valenzuela et al., 2023) and in Costa Rica only 35% of principals remain when 57% of their teachers do (PEN, 2021b). Now, the analysis of its causes could put particular pressure on certain schools or educational systems, remembering that turnover increases with age due to retirement and in rural schools, with low socioeconomic status and poor academic performance, as well as before politically elected principals (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Pereda et al., 2021; Rivero et al., 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2023). A list to which public policy is added: in Brazil and Bolivia, principals can only be in office for 3 years and in Chile, 5 years, thus, succession is inevitable and indirectly encourages rotation and/or desertion (Aravena , 2020). However, permanent selection without progression or a performance evaluation cannot occur either.

- **Recommendation 9:** School systems must create basic working conditions so that the professionalization of the principal function can be developed, among which it is key to have exclusive time dedicated to its exercise

by school principals, as well as specialized professional support teams, particularly in school with high socio-cultural complexity or large enrollment.

- **Recommendation 10:** Promote a management career that establishes progressive professional development stages, recognizes and values performance in contexts of high social and cultural complexity, and that has a performance evaluation system to which salary increases and non-salary incentives are associated.

For the professionalization of school leadership to effectively advance in the school systems of the region, it will be relevant to have a determined political will on the part of educational authorities at different levels: national, regional and local. But additionally, it will be relevant to have technical capabilities at the institutional level that effectively design and implement policies and action programs aimed at their promotion. In this sense, there are relevant institutional weaknesses in the organizations in charge of the subject, which sometimes view managerial work as another appendix to teaching work, without highlighting the specificity of their function. The weakness of the existing statistics and official information on this particular topic is decisive and illustrative. Research can play a relevant role in terms of thematizing the importance and specificity of leadership work in the school systems of the region. As is known, the situation in terms of accumulated knowledge is not only scarce, but is concentrated in a few countries (Flessa et al., 2018; Aravena & Hallinger, 2018). Additionally, it is common for the topic to be analyzed from a normative and deficit perspective, which establishes ideal models to comply with regarding managerial work from some highly developed Anglo-Saxon countries (Bush, 2012; Oplatka, 2017). This predominant approach makes a clean slate of the particular Latin American context, without dwelling on the specific demands required to work in this socio-economic, political and cultural reality (Weinstein, 2021). Some data from TALIS 2018, such as the complexity characteristics of school, the high participation of the school community and its actors (teachers, families and students), or the incidence of socio-political actors such as teaching unions or political parties in the selection of principals, reinforce this need for a contextualized approach regarding the professionalization of school leadership.

- **Recommendation 11:** Support the strengthening of institutional capacities within national or regional ministries of education to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies aimed at developing the school leadership.
- **Recommendation 12:** Promote a research agenda that enables in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of school leaders, both from a socio-demographic and educational point of view as well as their leadership practices, educational beliefs, motivations, and professional values. This research must develop a view capable of detecting the specific challenges that the socio-educational context poses to Latin American school leaders. The research agenda must also integrate the evaluation and monitoring of policies aimed at professionalizing the leadership function currently underway in different countries in order to accumulate knowledge and learning on this strategic subject.

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9. Annexes

9.1.1.A.1 ISCED 2 principals' participation and recommended ratings

	Number of participating principals	Principals' participation before replacement (%)	Principals' participation after replacement (%)	Recommended Rating
Brazil	184	88.0	95.4	Good
CABA (Argentina)	121	77.5	86.2	Good
Chile	170	78.9	87.6	Good
Colombia	141	68.8	70.9	Fair
Mexico	193	90.6	97.0	Good

Note: The “recommended rating” refers to the expert rating award to the participation rates of each TALIS participating system following a data adjudication process. “Good” means the system’s data can be used for all reporting and analytical purposes and can be included in international comparisons. “Fair” means national and sub-national estimates can be produced; some teacher characteristics may suffer from a larger standard error (s.e.). For more information for the sampling frame of each participating system please refer to Chapter 5 in OECD (2019).

Source: Table AII.A.5, OECD (2020)