

Determining the Competences and Professional Development Needs of Educational Administrators in the Southeast of Mexico

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the competences and professional development needs of school principals in Mexico. Data collection a survey addressed to elementary, junior high and high school principals. Findings of the study indicated that principals require improving in all the area of competence: (a) management, (b) communication and human relations, (c) academic development, (d) school improvement, (e) education for global competition, (f) legislation, (g) leadership, (h) personnel motivation, and (1) ethical, social and moral responsibility.

Key words: school principals, principal leadership competences, international studies

1. Introduction

Research on educational administration clearly states the important correlation between the quality of the principal leadership and the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in the schools. As Murphy (1990; 1999) stated, different studies on the role of the principals on school improvement provide strong evidence that certain practices of the principal, such as (a) developing a mission and goals for the organization and being capable to put them into the practice; (b) leading school productivity, (c) promoting an educational environment that benefits the learning process in the school, which have a high impact in the quality of learning. Leithwood, Day, Sammons et al. (2008) and Bush (2000), also support the conclusion that leadership makes a difference in student achievement and has a key role in creating and sustaining an effective school environment (Sergiovani, 2009). Consequently, the education of the principal is crucial because he is not only the person in charge of the management, direction of the organization, and of the supervision and evaluation of school personnel, he should also provide the opportunities for strengthening the instructional leadership of the teachers by promoting their professional development (Checkley, 2000). In addition, the principal is responsible for providing a “vision” about how the different parts of the organization can be integrated and create a synergy of effects that allow the people, the processes and technology to work in harmony with the school objectives (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1988).

Since most educational administration and management studies have been conducted in the United States,

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Canada and Europe, it is necessary to conduct research in this area in Latin America, in order to determine the appropriateness in the Mexican context of research findings from abroad. This descriptive study aimed to determine the competences and needs for professional development of school administrators in the elementary, junior high and high schools, from the principals' perspective, in a state of Southeast of México

1.1 Research Questions

(1) What are the ideal competences of school administrators in our context and culture?

(2) For which of these competences is professional development necessary?

(3) Are there any significant differences among personal characteristics of the administrators (i.e., principal, middle management administrators, gender, years of teaching or administrative experience, etc.), as well as the characteristics of the schools (i.e., system differences, types of school), and administrators' needs and interests in professional development?

2. Educational Significance

This study is consistent with the educational priorities established in the Mexican National Program of Development (PNE 2013-2018), for improving the quality of educational processes, since this also involves improving the capacity and competences of those in charge of the schools, because they need to lead them so that these could respond to the challenges of preparing students to satisfy societal needs and priorities.

The findings of the study were used for the creation of a program for preparing school administrators in South-eastern Mexico. The creation of this new program is helping to strengthen the coordination and management of schools, and to promote the education of qualified administrators and management experts in education. These priorities are consistent with the National Plan for Development (2013-2018) that stresses the needs for improving the quality of education for all Mexican children, and those from the Sectorial Program of Education (2013-2018), that stress the importance of school administrators' preparation and professional development for an effective school management, school integration and accomplishment of higher results by students, as well as change and innovation in the schools. This is important because as Cuellar (1989), Cisneros-Cohernour y Merchant (1999), and Cisneros-Cohernour (2001), found that most of the principals and middle managers working in schools in México do not have formal training or education in school administration when selected for their positions. Similar findings were found by Slater, García Garduño, & Lopez Gorosave, (2008).

In addition, a study of this nature contributes to verify to what degree the competences identified in the research conducted in other countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand can be applied in Latin America.

3. Methodology

In order to determine the competences and professional needs of educational administrators in the southeast of Mexico, the researchers conducted a survey of principals and middle management directors and coordinators of different schools in the State of Yucatan. The questionnaire included 112 items organized into nine categories of competences: (a) management, (b) communication and human relations, (c) academic development, (d) school improvement, (e) education for global competition, (f) legislation, (g) leadership, (h) personnel motivation, and (1) ethical, social and moral responsibility. In the process of validating the instrument both serving school

administrators and a group of experts with experience in research and training of educational administrators in Mexico and the US were involved. The use of the Delphi technique allowed for the experts to validate the competences included in the instrument, prior to its administration to a sample of educational administrators as part of the pilot study for the project.

The following figure illustrates the different stages of the study:

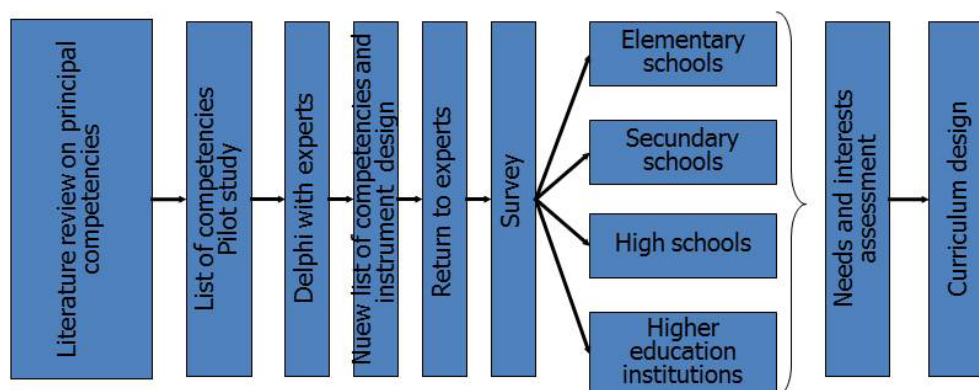


Figure 1 Study Metodology

3.1 Subjects

A representative sample of school administrators from elementary (234) and junior high schools (83), as well as all the high school (300) and higher education administrators (454) at the State level were included in the study. Sixty seven percent of all participants responded to the survey (Table 1).

Table 1 Response Rate B by Educational Level

Educational level	Number of participants included in the study	Response rate n/%
Elementary	234	128 (55%)
Junior High	83	69 (83%)
High school	300	182 (61%)
Higher education	454	217 (69%)

High school and higher education administrators had the least teaching and administrative experience (10.5 years and 8.5 years respectively). In contrast, elementary and junior high school administrators were more experienced in both teaching and administration. The average teaching experience of these administrators was of 26.5 and 15.5 years respectively (Table 2). The high school and higher education administrators were also younger (mean 37 years) than their peers in elementary and junior high schools (mean 52 years). The highest level of education of most administrators of all levels of education was the bachelor degree.

Table 2 Numbers, Gender and Experience of Participants

School level	Characteristics					
	Gender		Age average	Level of education	Teaching experience	Administrator experience
	males	females				
Elementary	61	67	52	Bachelor (50%)	28	17
Junior High	13	56	53	Bachelor (51%)	25	14
High school	21	28	39	Bachelor (78%)	12	10
Higher education	120	130	35	Bachelor (64%)	9	7

4. Results

The competences identified by the experts were considered to reflect the existing situation of the school administrators. However, some differences were found about their perception of the competences required for the job, which depends on the level of education of the schools. The competences that were the most required, according to the majority of the administrators, were those related to personnel motivation (73.12%), even though elementary school administrators stated that in their case, the most required competences are those related to school improvement (74%). In contrast, the competences less required, were those related to preparing for international competition and globalization (37.36%), as well as those related to academic development (53%) as it can be appreciated in Table 3.

Table 3 Percentage of Required Competences

Competences	Educational level				
	Elementary	Junior high school	High school	Higher education	Mean% total
Management	69.4	66.4	61.6	54.9	63.1
Communication and human relations	70.3	65.7	62.1	54.2	63.1
Academic development	54.7	51.9	47.2	40.3	48.5
School improvement	74.0	63.9	68.4	55.3	65.4
Education for global competition	47.8	38.0	34.2	29.4	37.4
Legislation and regulations	56.4	56.0	50.0	39.6	50.5
Leadership	71.7	70.3	70.8	60.4	68.3
Personnel motivation	72.7	77.0	76.3	66.5	73.1
Ethical, social and professional responsibility	67.9	64.8	65.2	56.4	63.6

After asking the administrators to indicate what competences were required for their job, they were asked to indicate in which of those competences they would be interested to receive training. The majority of the administrators were interested in developing competences related to education for global competition (63.9) and academic development (59.01%). The competences in which the administrators indicated less interest for receiving training were those related to motivating their personnel (46.5%), and those regarding school management (47.6%).

Some differences, however, were found among the administrators depending on the type of school in which they worked (Table 4). Junior high school administrators indicated that the competences for which they needed less training were related to school law and regulations (43.2). High school administrators indicated that the competences in which they would like to acquire training were related to human relations (45.07%). Higher education administrators indicated that the competences in which that they would like less training were related to personnel motivation (51.27%).

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Table 4 Interest for Receiving Training in the Competences

Competences	Educational level				Media % total
	Elementary	Junior High school	High school	Higher education	
Management	43.9	47.6	43.9	54.9	47.6
Communication and human relations	44.7	49.8	45	57.2	49.2
Academic development	55.8	54.1	63.6	62.5	59
School improvement	47.7	49.8	55.3	56	52.2
Education for global competition	59.9	63.9	66.7	65.3	64
Legislation and regulations	52.8	43.2	50.7	52.6	49.8
Leadership	45.1	44.3	51.8	51.8	48.3
Personnel Motivation	41.7	43.3	49.7	51.3	46.5
Ethical, social and professional responsibility	50	48.8	54.7	53.8	51.8

Then, the administrators were asked to indicate what the most important competences for professional development were by using a scale of 1-3; where 1 was the least and three the most important. According to the subjects, the most important competences for professional development were those that obtained an average 1.5 points (Table 5). The findings indicate that all competences were considered important, since the lowest score given by the administrators was above 2.

According to the respondents, the most important competences for professional development were related to ethical, social and professional responsibilities (2.7 points), as well as leadership (2.6 points) as well as personnel motivation (2.7 points). In contrast, the competences identified as less important for professional development were those related to education for global competition (2.4 points) and school management (2.4 points).

Table 5 Degree of Importance of the Different Competences

Competences	Educational level				Media total
	Elementary	Junior high school	High school	Higher education	
Management	2.6	2.6	2.1	2.5	2.45
Communication and human relations	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.53
Academic development	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.53
School improvement	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.63
Education for global competition	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.43
Legislation and regulations	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.48
Leadership	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.65
Personnel motivation	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.65
Ethical, social and professional responsibility	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.7

Some differences were found among the administrators' perception regarding the importance of certain types of competences. For example, junior high administrators gave the lowest score to the competences related to academic development (2.5 points), while high school administrators gave the lowest priority to the competences related to school management. Higher education administrators considered the less important competences for professional development to those related to legislation and regulations (2.3 points).

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The analysis of differences between certain personal characteristics of the administrators, such as (kind of position—main administrator versus middle level administrator, gender, years of experience), and the administrators’ needs and interests in professional development were not statistically significant. However, it was found that in junior high schools, the number of female principals was almost nonexistent.

In addition, the respondents were asked to indicate their possible interest for participating in a professional development program. In case they were interested in participating, they were asked to indicate if they would receive some support from the school system, their preferences regarding the duration of the program, as well as the schedule and type of program in which they would be more interested in participating.

Seventy one percent of the respondents indicated interest for participation in professional development. They also indicated that they preferred to participate in a formal program at the Master of Science level. High school and higher education administrators indicated a higher interest for participating in the program (Table 6).

Table 6 Interest for Participating in A Professional Development at the Master Level

Administrators by school level	Percentage
Elementary	52
Junior high	41
High school	80
Higher education	71

When asked about the kind of support that they could receive from their educational system for participating in the Master program, the respondents indicated that they would receive total or partial support to cover the costs (89%). Six percent of the administrators would receive a time reduction in their work schedule in order to participate in the program, one percent of the respondents indicated that they would receive support also for buying course materials, and only four percent of all respondents indicated that they would not receive any support from their institutions (Table 7)

Table 7 Kinds of Support that the Respondents Would Receive for Participation in A Program

Type of support	Percentage
Full fellowship	59
Partial fellowship	30
Work time reduction	6
Other (support for course materials, etc)	1
None	4

Regarding their preference for the duration of the program, 86% of the respondents indicated that they would prefer a program with a duration of two years, 11% of the respondents preferred a three year program, and only 3% of the respondents would like to participate in a four-year program at the Master level. The majority of the respondents stated that it was very important for them that the program maintain a balance between the theoretical and the practical aspects of the training (92%).

The respondents also indicated that they would prefer the Master program to take place during Friday and Saturday given their busy working schedules (63%) (Table 8).

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Table 8 Preferred Days for Attending Classes during the Master Program

Days	Percentage
Monday and Tuesday	21
Wednesday and Thursday	23
Friday and Saturday	63
Sunday	13

The majority of the respondents indicated that they would like to participate in a part-time program (93%). Only 6% would like to participate in a full time program. Seventy eight percent of the respondents would like the program to include both class and distant learning activities as part of the Master program while 22% would prefer the program to be fully distance learning.

5. Conclusions

Findings of the study were consistent with prior studies regarding the lack of experience and certification requirements for principals prior or even after their appointment (Cuellar, 1999; Cisneros-Cohernour & Merchant, 2005; Slater et al., 2008).

Even though, principals rated themselves high in all competencies, there is a need for training administrators in all nine areas of competence: a) management, b) communication and human relations, c) academic development, d) school improvement, e) education for global competition, f) legislation and regulations, g) leadership, h) personnel motivation and i) ethical social and professional responsibilities. These areas were grouped into four general competences: management, instruction and leadership, organizational leadership and organizational development. These and four other areas related to ethics, use of technology and information, and internationalization, as well as the relationship between theory and practice should be included in the design of a Master on Arts on Educational Administration.

The professional development program should give priority to those principals who are already in service and secondly to people who have an interest educational administration. In addition, future research is needed in order to identify the kinds of experiences that principals have prior to their appointments and how they contribute to ensure their competence and efficacy in their pivotal role in schools. In addition, more research is required in rural settings to understand the daily challenges faced by administrators and for identifying other competences when addressing the needs of diverse populations.

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