

## **Semi-professional school leadership in Spain: Gender differences**

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### **Abstract**

Constructing the identity of school principals is difficult because being a principal requires carrying out complex functions in challenging contexts. Our research addressed semi-professional school leadership in Catalonia, Spain, with a particular focus on differences in the managerial styles of men and women. In Spain, the school management system is semi-professional which means that principals are teachers who take on leadership roles for limited periods.

In a descriptive study based on an *ad hoc* questionnaire administered to a representative sample, we considered the personal and contextual characteristics of elementary school principals. Focusing on the variable of gender, this article analyses principals' reasons for accepting and continuing in their position and principals' priorities when performing their duties; also, their perceptions of various aspects of the school environment that help them in their role.

We found significant differences related to gender. While the predominance of male principals in elementary education is declining, female principals, more than their male counterparts, must accept and tackle the challenges associated with contextualized, distributed and pedagogical leadership in conditions leading to overexertion. Many of the principals who were women worked in small, rural or disadvantaged schools.

Paradoxically, female principals construct their professional identity in closer alignment with administrative style and with teaching duties than with leadership style. We conclude that these challenges should be taken into account and further investigated to avert the precarious position of women in school leadership.

**KEYWORDS:** Leadership challenges, professional identity, gender differences, leadership roles, principals, professionalization, semi-professional leadership

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In the last decade, it has been accepted internationally that both direct and indirect relationships exist between school leadership performance and educational success (Day & Sammons, 2013; Mulford, 2006; Radinger, 2014). Moreover, school leadership with the capacity to achieve academic success has been defined fundamentally in terms of contextualized, distributed and pedagogical leadership (Dyson, 2008; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins 2006; McKinsey Report, 2010; OECD, 2016b; Spillane, 2006; Waite & Nelson, 2005). Recommended courses of action identified by the OECD (2009) include: redefining responsibilities and leadership functions to improve school performance; distributing leadership; developing skills to achieve effective leadership; and increasing the attractiveness of management as a profession.

Internationally, education policies assume the importance of developing good school leadership at the national level while recognizing the demands of such a complex and relevant function for the educational success of their citizens. Among other aspects, the conception and regulation of school leadership should be investigated, including the level of professionalization, the characteristics of schools and the profiles of the principals who are currently leading them. The socio-cultural and economic processes of feminization and masculinization in the school environment should also be taken into account. The purpose of this article is to understand how school principals are constructing their professional identity in contexts such as Spain, where the position of school principal is semi-professional, teaching is feminized, leadership is masculinized, and the demands on school management are high due to progressive legislative initiatives that seek to increase the responsibility and autonomy of principals.

In this paper, we report on research that analysed how men and women in the position of principal perceived their role as leaders and how they constructed their identities as leaders. Our study focused on Catalonia, Spain, where the position of principals is semi-professional. A context where efforts are underway to professionalize the management of schools by increased school autonomy, accountability and selection of teaching teams.

## **2 PROFESSIONALIZATION AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

### **2.1 A complex process of identity building**

School management and leadership have not always been as clearly linked as they are now. Day & Sammons (2013) note a difference in how school leadership and management have been addressed in the literature. School leadership issues have been comparatively more oriented towards organisational development and school improvement. School management issues, in turn, have been linked to implementation and control. Currently, it is assumed that school leadership and school management are concepts that must be integrated into the development of the role of principals (OECD, 2009, 2016b).

In discussions of leadership, it is also important to know the historical, social and professional contexts concerned (Adams, 2016; Raelin, 2016). School leadership approaches are heterogeneous in terms of access, training, professional status, performance and evaluation (OECD 2016a; Schleicher, 2012). English speaking countries, with more decentralized education systems, employ professional leadership models. In contrast, southern European and Latin American countries employ semi-professional leadership models (Bush, 2009; OECD, 2016a) whereby schools are managed by teachers who shoulder the added responsibility of leadership and management, for limited periods of time.

Professionalization is associated with the construction of professional identity, which is a complex process (Carroll & Levy, 2010). The prevalence of semi-professional school leadership challenges principal-teachers. Reconciling the pressures and contradictions inherent to the role of leader and teacher require a diffuse identity (Bush, 2009; Darmody & Smith, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). In countries with semi-professional school leadership models, constructing the identity of a school leader involves unique characteristics and conditions that must be analysed.

In any case, school leadership is linked with high demands. It is internationally accepted that collaborative school cultures aimed at school improvement are needed to respond to the socio-educational complexity of education systems. Concretely, studies on distributed leadership (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016; Gronn, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Spillane, 2006) seek to determine under which conditions distributed leadership is exercised democratically (Bush, 2015; OECD, 2016b). Teachers working as principals need to work with other organizations, in addition to their work in individual classrooms. Notably, when leadership seeks to promote both student learning and teacher learning (Díez Gutiérrez, Terrón Bañuelos & Anguita Martínez, 2006; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014).

Lofty demands and the difficult conditions in which managerial duties are performed are conducive to recruitment shortages and high rates of abandonment, stress and burnout (Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Jones, 2017; Timms, Graham & Caltabiano 2006). In addition, the training provided for the development of leadership competence is insufficient (FEDADI, 2017; OECD, 2014; Schleicher, 2012). Critical aspects such as emotional intelligence, particularly empathy and social skills, are neglected (Fisher, 2018; Goleman, 2000; Gómez-Delgado, 2018). These factors are emphasised in the case of semi-professional principals with a diffuse professional identity.

## **2.2 Gender and leadership**

We define the aforementioned conditions as the development of school leadership in conditions of fatigue and high professional complexity. Considering differences related to gender in school leadership contributes to the above complexity (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Since the 1980s, research in this area (Ball & Reay, 2000; Hallinger, Dongyu & Wang, 2016) has evolved from positions claiming “fundamental” and universal differences in leadership styles (Burke & Collins, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Kaufmann, 1997) to positions affirming that contextual factors have greater influence on leadership styles (Adams, 2016; Ball & Reay, 2000).

In the context of universal differences related to gender, it is asserted that markedly feminine or masculine styles exist and differ by what Gilligan (1982) defined as “the ethics of care” that is more typical of but not exclusive to women. A style that entails actions that are more oriented towards processes than achievements (Kaufman, 1997) and that prioritize understanding the characteristics and needs of individual students (Collard, 2001). Feminine style involves approaches based on guidance and

communication (Burke & Collins, 2001; Cisler & Bruce, 2013), and promote more horizontal relationships (Shaked, Gross, & Glanz, 2017). According to the above assertion, women are more likely than men to develop pedagogical and distributed leadership (Hallinger et al., 2016; OECD, 2016a).

On the other hand, those who defend the contextual factors, rather than essential gender differences, contend that it is impossible, from a monolithic and predetermined perspective, to define a leadership style associated with gender. They base their arguments fundamentally on the notion that gender polarisation has been reconsidered theoretically by the development of the postmodern paradigm and new feminism. These theoretical perspectives analyse hegemonic discourses and their agents; the contexts and contextual pressures; and the processes of identity construction involved when men and women take on challenges. In this case, the challenges presented by their professional responsibilities. Collard (2001) and Timms et al. (2006) show that institutional aspects, such as level of education provided by the school; school size; whether the school is public or private; educational projects; are linked with the gender of principals.

Data show that many women work in early childhood education and elementary education, whilst many men work in school leadership positions (European Commission, 2013; OECD, 2016a; Shaked et al., 2017; Timms et al., 2006). There is evidence that occupations and roles are segregated according to gender stereotypes. Segregation of occupations by gender works through limitations in accessing positions of power (“the glass ceiling”), women occupying difficult positions (“the glass cliff” and “jeopardy of failing”), and men abandoning or failing to enter occupations with low professional or social status (Eagly and Heilman, 2016; Jones, 2017). This is associated with certain differences in the motivations for accepting a position and continuing in it. Men who decide to take on a managerial role show more interest in doing so from the beginning of their teaching career than women do (Shaked et al., 2017). However, there are generally few candidates (women and men) in elementary education because of the expectation that the job will be difficult and that it will entail insufficient social status—even in countries such as the United Kingdom, where leadership is professionalized (Jones, 2017).

Accordingly, it is important that principals maintain a reflective practice (Valenčič and Marentič, 2014), associated with comprehensive, strategic and attitudinal competence and an understanding of professional identity throughout their career (Livingston, 2014). Contextualized, pedagogical, and distributed leadership promotes commitment, empowerment and motivation for academic success among teachers and students (Correa & Wagnet, 2011; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Hulpia & Devos, 2010).

How principals deal with challenges in professional practice depend on how responsibilities, priorities and achievement in the development of leadership functions are perceived; also, on motivations to access and maintain leadership positions. In short, these aspects inform the nature of identity construction in principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Collay, 2006; Ricoeur, 1996).

### **3 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN SPAIN**

In Spain, school leadership is semi-professional. In the last 40 years, since the consolidation of democracy, Spanish education policy and legislation has been subject to constant changes that have made it impossible to establish a stable model of education. However, recent Spanish legislation on education stipulate the function of “pedagogical direction” (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 2006). Leadership qualities are a criterion taken into account when selecting principals and an aspect of the training received by those who are qualified to lead schools (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2013). Specifically, at public schools, leadership candidates have to demonstrate that they

have received prior training. Leadership candidates are expected to defend an individual four-year leadership project before a committee; a project that develops well may be allowed to extend the duration of the project. Additional requirements include five years of accredited teaching experience, including a year in the school at which they are applying for a leadership position. At private and charter schools, access to leadership positions is discretionary.

In Catalonia, specific laws prioritise distributed and pedagogical leadership models, define the duties of school principals, levels of school autonomy, and the professional profiles of teachers to be selected as principals (Barrios-Arós, Iranzo-García, & Tierno-García, 2013; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014 and 2015). For example, Catalanian public school principals select teachers to help conduct leadership projects; projects are evaluated in accordance with accountability and performance indicators.

#### 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A large part of the research on school leadership in Spain is based on case studies (López & Lavié, 2010; Martínez, Badia & Jolonch, 2013; González, 2015). There is a need for studies such as this one, in which our method was to use representative samples. The aim of our study was to describe how leadership was perceived by school principals in the province of Tarragona in Catalonia.

Data was collected using an *ad hoc* questionnaire based on our literature review (Bolívar, 2011; Kotter, 1988; Woycikowska, De Clercq, Dufaur, Pfander-Meny & Pinard, 2006). The questionnaire consisted of nine thematic blocks: information about the school; information about the principal; access to the position of principal; leadership training; professional duties; leadership model; leadership satisfaction; school success indicators, and final reflections. The questionnaire comprised of a total of 34 open and closed questions. It was validated by five experts from various Spanish universities and the head of the education administration in one of two school districts in the province of Tarragona. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with two principals of schools that were not part of the sample.

The questionnaire was made available online using the LimeSurvey platform, where it remained active for 90 days between 2014 and 2015. For the analysis presented in this article, all items in the *information about the school* and *information about the principal* blocks were considered independent variables. These were compared with the items relating to the motivation for accepting the position, responsibilities, priorities and satisfaction with the role of principal (dependent variables).

Open-ended questions were categorized via content analysis. Likert scales from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) were used for closed-ended questions; responses were analysed with the SPSS program (v. 22.0).

The reliability of the items analysed (Cronbach's alpha) ranged from 0.72 (acceptable) to 0.94 (excellent):

- Motivations for applying for the role of principal:  $\alpha=0.719$ , mean inter-item correlation=0.231, number of items=8.
- Responsibilities of the role:  $\alpha=0.938$ , mean inter-item correlation=0.659, number of items=8.
- Priorities for the role of principal:  $\alpha=0.857$ , mean inter-item correlation=0.307, number of items=15.
- Satisfaction with the role of principal:  $\alpha=0.852$ , mean inter-item correlation=0.299, number of items=15.

Descriptive and non-parametric statistics (one-factor ANOVA test) were used, focusing on significant differences (identified by Levene statistics and HSD Tukey or Games-Howell tests). The analysis presented in this article demonstrates the significant differences in the variables analysed, whilst our primary focus is on the analysis of gender.

#### **4.1 Participants**

The statistically representative sample comprised of elementary schools in one of two education districts in the province of Tarragona in Catalonia, Spain. The total number of participants in the survey were 217. Sample size was calculated using the statistical formula for a finite population with a 5% margin of error. This resulted in 139 schools, from which 128 questionnaires were obtained (response rate of 92.1%). The schools were selected probabilistically, the sample was stratified with proportional allocation by school funding model (private, charter or public), and by geographical location.

### **5 FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 Majority of schools in the district were public schools**

The sample reflects an education system where the larger part of schools are public schools (87.5% public vs 12.5% private/charter), with different sizes (considering the number of pupils): very small (16.6%), small (27.7%), average-sized (29.5%) and large (26.2%).

Most of these schools are urban (88.3% vs 11.7% from Rural Educational Zone). These are groups of schools that do not have all levels (incomplete schools) and that are usually in rural areas.

Few of the schools are categorized as disadvantaged (14.1% vs 85.9% no-disadvantaged schools). There are defined by the Education Authorities from indicators such as the educational and professional level of the pupils' parents, the number of foreign pupils and the number of pupils with specific educational needs (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2014).

#### **5.2 A comparatively larger number of men were principals**

Participants in the study comprised to 69.5% of principals who were women and 30.5% who were men (Table 1), even though the teacher population in the district comprised to 83.8% of teachers who were women and only 16.2% who were men (IEC, 2015). For this reason, we consider that the role of school principals is considered, to some extent, a masculine role.

[Table 1, Near here]

The age of principals ranged from 31 to 65 years. A total of 47.2% of the women were between 46 and 54 years old, while the majority of men (46.2%) were over 55 years old. Their experience in the position ranged from two months to 30 years, and the majority of both men and women had held the position for at least nine years. We observed more novice women (four years of experience or less) than novice men; this shows that a larger number of women had become principals in recent years.

We found that female principals contributed with comparatively more direct teaching hours. There were comparatively fewer women principals in private or charter (6.7% vs 25.6% men) and larger schools (47.1% vs 74.3% men). There were comparatively more women principals in rural schools (15.7% vs 2.6% men). Finally,

with regard to self-perception of management style, most women stated that they administered their schools, whereas men stated that they lead them.

### 5.3 Motivations for becoming a principal

There were no notable differences between men and women in the way they gained access to the position of principal. Positions for public school principals are usually obtained via a public selection process with only one candidate (77.6%), though occasionally, several candidates competed for the position (3.6%). For new schools where no candidates have applied, or the previous principal has retired, a new principal may be appointed by the education administration (18.8%). In the case of private and charter schools, 50% of principals were appointed by the owners of the school (discretionary appointment). The rest are appointed following a selection process with only one (31.25%) or several (18.75%) candidates.

We observed that there was no great interest in, or competition for, obtaining managerial positions. On the other hand, initial reasons for applying to the position of principal varied, among successful candidates. The reason most often cited by both men and women was to *improve school processes* ( $\bar{x}=4.53$ ) (e.g. management, community relations, and innovation). Table 2 shows the reasons for becoming a principal, for which statistically significant differences were found.

[Table 2, Near here]

The following differences were not gender related. *Promoting innovative projects* was valued comparatively more by principals of private and charter schools (4.93 and 4.42) than by principals of disadvantaged schools (4.05 vs 4.56). Interest in *making decisions* more autonomously obtained an average score, and this interest was stronger in average-sized schools where the majority of principals were men (41% vs 24.1% women), in contrast to small schools (3.3 vs 2.37). Improving *specific aspects* (such as promotion, finance and prestige) was comparatively less valued, but there was a significant difference in the desire to *obtain merit for promotion* among younger principals compared to older ones (2.76 vs 1.74). Principals of rural schools stood out by a comparatively greater concern for job stability and promotion (2.92 vs 1.97).

The following differences were gender related. Aspiring to obtain *financial bonuses* (2.33 vs 1.80) and *greater prestige* (1.80 vs 1.41) are significantly more valued by men. To verify whether motivations changed over time, we analysed 99 statements collected in response to an open question. The majority of statements (59.3%) indicated that initial motivations were maintained over time. However, perceptions varied according to gender.

Women were more likely to report an improvement in their approach to the position and recognize that their experience had made their approach to leadership more realistic and more pragmatic “*I keep fighting to achieve the same goals, but I am much more aware of the potential obstacles*” (ID026-woman). Women agreed that they have learned strategies for managing time and relationships to achieve their objectives. This had helped them to maintain initial motivation. “*I still have the principal motivation of improving the school and leaving it in a better position than when I found it, and of improving the quality of all our processes and the satisfaction of all members of the education community*” (ID003-woman). More women than men recognised that serving as principal has been a learning experience. The perception of their own efficiency, in undertaking a managerial role and responding to challenges, was constructed in a positive manner.

Men were more likely to report the difficulties that changes in either legislation or their financial, historical and social situation created for their work procedures, though these changes had not directly affected their initial motivations “*My motivation has not changed. I find myself in a political and social moment that makes it difficult to carry out an ambitious project*” (ID028-man). 29.5% of the statements collected indicated that motivation had increased, as initial motivations were consolidated with new challenges. “*They have been expanded and solidified through experience*” (ID017-man) and “*I started highly motivated, and I still am. For me, each academic year is a new challenge, and I take it with excitement and enthusiasm*” (ID061-woman).

Regardless of gender, 11.2% of the statements mention a decline in initial motivation due to work conditions (the wide range of tasks required and the lack of recognition) and poor experiences with families, teachers or students “*Sometimes it is difficult to get the teaching staff to be involved in new projects because, in general, they have lost their motivation due to the cuts to resources and to their wages... they put in their hours, and that is it*” (ID036-man) and “*My motivation has diminished over the years because now you need more time for other tasks that correspond to other professions such as social services, psychologist, doctor, police officer, etc.*” (ID031-woman).

#### **5.4 Responsibilities associated with the role of principal**

To address the responsibilities associated with the role of principal, we draw on the most current Catalan Education Law (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2009). Principals reported performing all the functions outlined in the regulations. The most difficult responsibilities were seen to be engaging in pedagogical management, leadership, and serving as the head of human resources. We did not observe a statistically significant gender difference in this (Table 3).

[Table 3, Near here]

Functions explicitly associated with staff management (*head of human resources* and *planning staff schedules*) were identified as particularly difficult for younger principals. The same was true for functions related to *administration* (4.20 vs 3.14). This aspect also presents more difficulties for those with less experience (4.13 vs 3.41). *Relations with the school community* are less difficult in schools whose principals teach more hours (often women) than in schools whose principals teach less (2.88 vs 3.73), see Table 1.

#### **5.5 Priorities in the role of principal**

The variables that generated significant differences in the prioritisation of actions in serving as a principal are shown in Table 4. Among the differences, the following stand out. A high number of teachers, at the school, affected the *monitoring of agreements*, *teacher motivation*, *relationships with families*, *understanding of schooling as a collective activity* and *stress management*. The funding model made an important difference; because public schools prioritize *family-school relationships*, *conflict mediation*, *schoolwork as a collective activity* and *management of resources*. Gender was the third significant variable. Women emphasised *conflict mediation* (4.73 vs 4.33), *stress management* (4.54 vs 4.26) and *resource management* (4.67 vs 4.31) aspects as priorities.

[Table 4, Near here]

## 5.6 Satisfaction with the role of principal

The majority (almost 60%) of the 298 statements provided in response to an open question indicated a climate of good relations among teaching staff, between teaching staff and leadership, and the development of results-based projects. On the other hand, only 8% of the statements mentioned pupils or collaboration with families and the education community. Managing change and achieving external recognition were scarcely mentioned. Overall, there were no differences between men and women in the sources of satisfaction. However, several significant differences in their satisfaction with specific aspects were observed (Table 5).

[Table 5, near here]

The variable that generated the most significant differences was the school funding model. Principals of public schools valued more strongly the satisfaction provided by *support from administration* (3.77 vs 3.06), *coordination and cooperation with the social environment* (4.07 vs 3.44) (less so in rural areas), and *effective procedures for managing resources* (4.03 vs 3.44). The last aspect received a lower score from new principals (3.38 vs 4.18) and those in disadvantaged schools (3.50 vs 4.03) (who also believe they are given less *social recognition* (2.84 vs 3.54). On the other hand, principals of private and charter schools, especially larger ones, were more satisfied with the *honouring of agreements* (4.81 vs 4.29), the *effectiveness of the educational project in defining the school's values* (4.75 vs 4.15) and *autonomy in making decisions* (4.56 vs 4.13). The last aspect was highly valued, especially by principals who stated that they lead their schools as opposed to the principals who stated that they serve as administrators of the school (4.41 vs 4.02).

Principals with less experience in managerial positions derived greater satisfaction from the *involvement of teaching staff in the school's day-to-day operation* (4.61 vs 4.33) and *opportunities for creating innovative projects* (4.40 vs 4.12). The *teaching competence* of teaching staff was valued more by principals who spent more time teaching (4.59 vs 4.14) and those in very small schools (4.60 vs 4.03), to a large extent women. In relation to the gender variable, women reported being more satisfied with *participation and collaboration by pupils in school projects* (4.38 vs 4.03).

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is without doubt important to investigate the conditions under which the identity of school principals is constructed. It is important also to investigate the close link between this identity and the performance of their managerial duties of a regulatory or other nature. For example, how do principals describe themselves, what they say they do, and how they perceive their personal and professional context (Collay, 2006; Ricoeur, 1996).

In general, resignations and low recruitment levels among principals are common (Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Jones, 2017; Timms et al., 2006). Although the school administration in Catalonia is not professionalized, there is a tendency for staff to stay in the position once they have entered it, renewing their appointments every four years, if they have positive evaluations (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2010b).

Internationally, the segregation of occupations by gender continues and is associated with exclusion from access to positions of power, the so-called glass ceiling experienced by women. Also, the phenomenon of women occupying difficult positions is increasingly apparent. The terms "glass cliff" and "jeopardy of failing" have been used to describe these working conditions experienced by women; a result of men abandoning

or failing to enter occupations with low professional or social status (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Jones, 2017).

Moreover, in semi-professional school leadership, this change is occurring with little visibility or recognition. To understand this shift, theoretical criticism such as *critical feminism* and *multiple masculinities and femininities* (Jones, 2017; Timms et al, 2006) advises us to focus, above all, on revealing sociocultural and identity forming processes by which people carry out their professional functions. Understanding the constraints of stereotypes imposed by centuries of patriarchal societies is necessary in order to ascertain how work conditions affect the professional performance of principals.

The teaching profession remains dominated by women in the Catalan context in Spain that we have analysed in this paper. Our sample consisted of elementary schools of various sizes, most of which were public schools. School leadership in this context was dominated by men, whilst the proportion of men among teachers was low; especially, in private or charter schools. Women principals were younger than principals who were men; the number of women who are entering school leadership is increasing. The sample analysed consisted mostly of women and is thus representative of the situation in Catalonia. Nevertheless, we have observed significant differences between principals who were men and principals who were women.

With regard to their motivations for becoming principals and the type of actions they indicated as priorities, both men and women reported being motivated by a desire to improve the school. Prestige and financial bonuses were conditioning factors for men more so than for women (Sánchez Bello, 2012). The capacity to make decisions and be in charge of human resources was a clearer motivation in larger schools, where the majority of principals were men. The capacity to exercise pedagogical leadership was in this context valued as a priority.

Women prioritized involving the education community in decision-making and were more likely to consider conflict-mediation strategies important. Women were more likely to value relations with the school community highly—indeed, they rely on it—and to report that they learned from their experience as principals. On the other hand, they were less likely to discuss difficulties arising from legislative, social or economic changes, among others. Promoting innovative projects was a key factor for motivating all principals; especially, private and charter school principals, who were mostly men.

The distinction between management and leadership of schools appears to be rather undefined. Regulations in Catalonia identify the functions of management more than those of leadership; greater control is promoted. This emphasis legitimises managerial roles in which predominantly masculine models are traditionally exercised. The discourse also idealises leadership functions that require a fair amount of autonomy and involve considerable uncertainty (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Iranzo-García, Tierno-García & Barrios-Arós, 2014; Schleicher, 2012). The idealisation of leadership functions is more dangerous in semi-professional and gender-segregated contexts. School administration (management and leadership) must therefore be reconceptualised, especially since it has strong relational, emotional and collaborative foundations within the education community and the sociocultural environment.

When principals carry out their managerial duties, their formation of professional identity is undermined by the lack of definition between legitimised and non-legitimised elements. Specifically, gender is central to the construction of identity, not only because of the limits that may be set by the perpetuation of disparities but also because new disparities may be concealed by compensatory discourses. Some authors maintain that the managerial style of women is more democratic or participatory than the more autocratic or executive style of men (Burke & Collins, 2001; Kaufmann, 1997); a

desirable competence that should be described and promoted in democratic societies. If a “glass cliff” that segregates women into difficult positions does exist, then the phenomenon should be recognized (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Jones, 2017). Paradoxically, these circumstances are not reflected in how access to leadership positions is regulated; or in the initial or continuing education and training of leaders. Consideration should be given, for example, to the promotion of models that were perceived as common among women leaders. In fact, research suggests that principals who are women tend to adopt more contextualized, distributed and pedagogical leadership styles (Hallinger et al., 2016; Timms et al., 2006). It is also important to note that the differences between men and women related to motivation affect their access to school management positions and their career development (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

Certain contextual school determinants (funding model, size, location, regulation and the social status of families) must also be addressed in order to understand the circumstances under which principals construct their professional identity and carry out their functions (Adams, 2016; Ball & Reay, 2000; Collard, 2001; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Raelin, 2016; Timms et al., 2006). Our research shows some different expectations linked to the funding model variable. Private or charter schools were comparatively more often managed by men, who perceived managing their schools from a pedagogical leadership perspective. Small, rural and disadvantaged schools were managed by women who envisioned their role as carrying out comparatively more care-based education duties; leaders who were women combined management and leadership tasks with comparatively more teaching hours, than men who were leaders.

As Carroll & Levy (2010), Dalgıç & Bakioğlu (2014) and Jones (2017) have shown, we urgently need to ascertain further what principals are being asked to do, to meet the challenges they face. We need to determine how principals, particularly semi-professional principals, are influenced by the conditions under which they are constructing their identities as leaders. The gender perspective has turned out to be relevant in this matter.

### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Table 1: Profiles of school principals

	n=128	% n=128	% women n=89/69,5%	% men n=39/30,5%
<b>Age (years)</b>				
45 or younger	29	22.6	23.6	20.5
from 46 to 54	55	43	47.2	33.3
55 or older	44	34.4	29.2	46.2
<b>Years' experience in the position</b>				
1 or less	9	7.25	7.2	5.1
between 2 and 4	17	13.7	13.7	5.1
between 5 and 8	39	31.45	31.5	35.9
9 or more	59	47.6	47.6	53.8
<i>Lost data</i>	4			
<b>Experience in other managerial positions</b>				
Head of studies	43	33.6	30.3	41
Secretary	27	21.1	21.3	20.5
<b>Number of hours taught by the principal</b>				
8 or fewer	52	41.3	35.6	53.8
between 9 and 16	56	44.4	44.8	43.6
17 or more	18	14.3	19.5	2.6
<i>Lost data</i>	2			
<b>Self-perception of management style</b>				
I coordinate	22	17.2	16.9	19
I administrate	59	46.1	50.6	36
I lead	38	29.7	24.7	41
I direct	0	0	0	0
Other (e.g., mediate, make the most difficult decisions, and serve the community)	9	7	7.8	5

Source: Authors

Table 2: Motivations for applying for the role (ANOVA)

<b>To promote innovative projects (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.48)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 119)=4.581, <b>p=.034</b>
*Disadvantaged/No-disadvantaged schools	F(1, 119)=5.949, <b>p=.016</b>
<b>To have the capacity to make decisions (<math>\bar{x}</math>=2.89)</b>	
*Number of teachers in the school	F(1, 110)=3.260, <b>p=.024</b>
<b>To gain experience that will help with career promotion (<math>\bar{x}</math>= 2.07)</b>	
*Urban/rural schools	F(1, 107)=6.670, <b>p=.011</b>
*Age	F(2, 106)=5.852, <b>p=.004</b>
<b>To obtain financial bonuses (<math>\bar{x}</math>=1.97)</b>	
*Gender	F(1, 108)=6.063, <b>p=.015</b>
<b>To acquire social prestige (<math>\bar{x}</math>=1.54)</b>	
*Gender	F(1, 106)=4.558, <b>p=.035</b>

Source: Authors

Table 3: Difficulties encountered by principals in performing responsibilities (ANOVA)

<b>Head of human resources (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.93)</b>	
*Age	F(2, 117)=8.664, <b>p=.000</b>
<b>Planning staff schedules and timetables (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.76)</b>	
*Age	F(2, 120)=4.585, <b>p=.012</b>
<b>Administration (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.62)</b>	
*Age	F(2, 114)=9.137, <b>p=.000</b>
*Experience as a principal	F(3, 110)=2.857, <b>p=.040</b>
<b>Relationship with school community (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.39)</b>	
*Number of teaching hours imparted by principal	F(2, 117)=4.085, <b>p=.019</b>

Source: Authors

Table 4: Priorities of principals (ANOVA)

<b>Monitoring of agreements (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.83)</b>	
*Urban/rural schools	F(1, 120)=4.209, <b>p=.042</b>
*Number of teachers in the school	F(3, 118)=2.830, <b>p=.041</b>
*Number of teaching hours imparted by principal	F(2, 117)=4.985, <b>p=.008</b>
<b>School's academic success (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.81)</b>	
*Age	F(2, 115)=5.113, <b>p=.007</b>
<b>Teacher motivation (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.81)</b>	
*Number of teachers in the school	F(3, 118)=4.129, <b>p=.008</b>
*Age	F(2, 119)=3.212, <b>p=.044</b>
<b>Shared leadership with management team (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.80)</b>	
*Principal's experience in other roles	F(1, 121)=6.418, <b>p=.013</b>
<b>Relationship between families and the school (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.76)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 119)=10.244, <b>p=.002</b>
*Number of teachers in the school	F(3, 117)=3.084, <b>p=.030</b>
<b>Conflict mediation (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.60)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 118)=8.627, <b>p=.004</b>
*Gender	F(1, 118)=9.564, <b>p=.002</b>
<b>School work as a collective activity (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.56)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 117)=8.406, <b>p=.004</b>
*Number of teachers in the school	F(3, 115)=3.430, <b>p=.019</b>
<b>Managing school resources (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.55)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 118)=28.406, <b>p=.000</b>
*Gender	F(1, 118)=8.664, <b>p=.004</b>
<b>Managing the stress that comes with the job (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.45)</b>	
*Number of teachers in the school	F(3, 117)=2.816, <b>p=.042</b>
*Gender	F(1, 119)=4.127, <b>p=.044</b>

Source: Authors

Table 5: Perception of satisfaction (ANOVA)

<b>Commitment of the teaching staff to the school's day-to-day operation (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.48)</b>	
*Experience in other managerial positions	F(1, 122)=5.780, <b>p=.018</b>
<b>Level of compliance with agreements (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.35)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 122)=10.087, <b>p=.002</b>
*Number of pupils in the school	F(3, 118)=4.448, <b>p=.005</b>
<b>Competence of teachers in the school (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.31)</b>	
*Number of pupils in the school	F(3, 117)=4.638, <b>p=.004</b>
*Teaching hours directly dedicated to pupils	F(2, 118)=3.916, <b>p=.023</b>
<b>Participation and collaboration of pupils in the projects (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.27)</b>	
*Gender	F(1, 121)=4.936, <b>p=.028</b>
<b>Opportunities for starting innovative and creative projects (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.27)</b>	
*Experience in other managerial positions	F(1, 121)=4.400, <b>p=.038</b>
<b>Usefulness of the educational project in defining the school's values (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.23)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 120)=9.566, <b>p=.002</b>
<b>Freedom and autonomy in decision-making (<math>\bar{x}</math>=4.19)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 120)=4.822, <b>p=.030</b>
*Self-perception of management style	F(2, 111)=3.610, <b>p=.030</b>
<b>Coordination and cooperation with the school's social environment (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.98)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 120)=7.802, <b>p=.006</b>
*Urban/rural schools	F(1, 120)=6.288, <b>p=.013</b>
<b>Procedures for managing resources (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.95)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 121)=7.846, <b>p=.006</b>
*Disadvantaged/No-disadvantaged schools	F(1, 121)=6.888, <b>p=.010</b>
*Experience as a principal	F(3, 115)=3.381, <b>p=.021</b>
<b>Support from the administration for your tasks as principal (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.86)</b>	
*Funding model	F(1, 118)=7.754, <b>p=.006</b>
<b>Social recognition received as principal (<math>\bar{x}</math>=3.43)</b>	
*Disadvantaged/No-disadvantaged schools	F(1, 119)=7.600, <b>p=.007</b>

Source: Authors

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