

School leadership and school management in underprivileged areas

Liderazgo pedagógico y dirección escolar en contextos desfavorecidos

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Abstract:

This study aims to raise awareness of the need for headteachers to be able to practice school leadership, especially in schools in underprivileged areas. A mixed methodology approach was used, including a survey of a sample of 282 teachers and interviews with 14 headteachers from disadvantaged schools in western Andalusia. Most of the headteachers interviewed display good school leadership, but there is still a tendency towards so-called academic freedom and individualism in teaching practice. The age of the teachers and their length of experience influence headteachers' supervision of teaching. Headteachers should be given greater powers and specific continuous training should be provided for those in charge of disadvantaged schools to enable them to implement collaborative culture.

Keywords: Leadership, teaching quality, poverty, headteacher.

Resumen:

El objetivo de este estudio es coadyuvar a la toma de conciencia sobre la necesidad de que los directores puedan ejercer un liderazgo pedagógico, especialmente en escuelas situadas en contextos desfavorecidos. Utilizamos una metodología mixta, efectuando una encuesta a una muestra de 282 docentes y entrevistando a 14 directores, de los centros de difícil desempeño de Andalucía Occidental. La mayoría de los directores investigados ejercen buenas prácticas de liderazgo pedagógico, pero sigue preponderando la mal entendida libertad de cátedra y el individualismo en las prácticas docentes. En la supervisión de la enseñanza por parte del director influyen la edad del profesorado y su antigüedad. Se deben dar mayores competencias a los directores y dotar de una formación continua específica a aquellos que dirigen este tipo de centros, que les permita instaurar culturas colaborativas.

Descriptores: Liderazgo, calidad de la educación, pobreza, director del centro.

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1. Theoretical framework

Many pieces of research emphasise the important influence of a school's management on its students' performance and so on improving the school (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008; Heng, Gurr, & Drysdale, 2015; Leithwood and Sun, 2015; Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). It has even been said that to ensure schools provide good learning for all of their students, headteachers must exercise true leadership that goes beyond their managerial role (Bolívar, 2010), as it is well-known that while headteachers exercise primarily formal authority in their schools, this does not necessarily mean that they exercise leadership (Llorent & Oria, 1998).

Leadership can be found at all levels of the school's organisational structure and not just in the figure of the headteacher, but it should not be forgotten that the headteacher is the school's primary leader and has a role that is vital for creating, distributing, and maintaining distributed leadership (García & Moral, 2015).

Of all of the styles of educational leadership that have proven effective in improving schools, the one known as school leadership is especially noteworthy. This term was coined in the 1970s by the «effective schools» movement after evidence had built up that made it apparent how leadership by the management leads to an improvement in the results obtained by the students (Leithwood & Sun, 2015). It moves from a focus centred on a bureaucratic style of management that emphasises organisation, to one more concerned with teaching (Murillo, 2006). The headteacher exercises leadership skills

and creates conditions that make it possible to improve the teaching practice of the teaching staff and, consequently, the students' academic results (Bolívar, 2010), and the headteacher's influence on the motivation of the teachers and the organisational culture of the school is especially important (Egido, 2013). In essence, this requires a headteacher who is primarily devoted to improving the educational processes carried out in the school (Aramendi, Teixidó, & Bernal, 2010).

Many studies have shown the positive impact of school leadership in the learning achievement by the student body (Seashore, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Mumphord, 2013; Leithwood & Janzti, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). This impact increases considerably in schools located in underprivileged areas (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and so we can infer that the impact of the quality of the headteacher's efforts on students' results increases as the proportion of students with limited resources in the schools increases (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa, 2013). Therefore, while school leadership is an essential requirement for improving any school, its impact is more apparent in more vulnerable schools (Anderson, 2010).

The high turnover of teaching staff is especially important among the many difficulties faced by schools working with students at risk of social exclusion¹ (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2004), with headteachers finding it very hard to attract and keep well-qualified and experienced staff (Mulford *et al.*, 2007). This

situation is being mitigated in some Andalusian provinces (such as Huelva and Seville) following the creation of «specific posts» by the Regional Education Boards². The training needs of teaching staff in these centres are also of great importance (Amores, Luengo, & Ritacco, 2012).

These situations, along with the lack of knowledge about which characteristics of effective leadership these schools' headteachers must put into practice (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010), inspired us to study school leadership by the headteachers, as we regard it as an important mechanism for improving learning by students with the greatest need.

We agree with authors such as Elmore (2010) that, if the mission of any school is teaching, the schools' management must focus on everything that makes it possible to improve the teaching-learning processes of the students, a strategy that is even more vital in schools where students are at risk of social exclusion (Zembylas & Lasonos, 2016). Essentially, it has been shown that student learning in schools with these characteristics is more successful when headteachers perform their role with the teaching-learning processes and the professional development of their teaching staff as the main goal (Muijs *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, the headteachers' ability to motivate the teaching staff is very important given the need for a greater commitment and capacity for sacrifice by these teachers (Murillo, Krichesky, Castro, & Hernández, 2010).

However, it is also important to consider the school management model in Spain, which has historically been sub-

jected to a series of upheavals according to the political force in power with a rapid succession of education laws (Montero, 2010) that have still not attained a desired consensual model (Gairín & Castro, 2010). This model lacks a professional character and contrasts with most countries in Western Europe because of its limited autonomy (Eliseo, 2013).

In effect, school management in Spain has moved from an essentially bureaucratic model with a clear administrative focus, to being a post that is democratically chosen by representatives of the whole of the educational community. Therefore, the teaching staff and in particular the school council are the collegiate bodies that control and administer the centre, taking decisions that in other countries are taken by headteachers (Oria, 2009). This gives the management an eminently democratic character, but this model often becomes corporate in character owing to the limited real participation by the educational community in the election of the headteacher, with the result that this process is, to a great extent, in the hands of the teaching staff (García & Caballero, 2015). This situation means that, to some extent, headteachers depend on the centre's teachers. This situation of dependency, which could affect their independence, is why this model has been accused of being incompatible with true professionalisation in school management (Intxausti, Joaristi, & Lizasoain, 2016). In fact, the deficiencies of this school management model regarding educational leadership have been made apparent in several studies, such as the prestigious TALIS report (2013) which states that headteachers in Spain

supervise the teaching process in the classroom less than the OECD average and that a significant proportion have never received training in school leadership. In addition, in the TALIS report (2009), Spanish headteachers obtained the lowest school leadership score in the study.

In addition to this corporate model of school management, there are several traditional practices established in the culture of our schools that undoubtedly make it difficult for headteachers to exercise school leadership, namely individualism among teachers or a weak school ethos (Zaitegui, 2011), something Bolívar, López, and Murillo (2013) have described as the «Achilles heel» of school leadership in Spain. These circumstances primarily hamper the development of two practices normally associated with school leadership: supervision of teaching in the classrooms and collaboration with other schools.

Several years ago, the difficulties that headteachers of Spanish schools face for performing supervision of teaching were highlighted by Gago (2004), when he established that teaching observation was the second least performed activity by headteachers in secondary schools. It is, as Gago notes, a problematic function as it involves a head-on «collision» with a deeply-rooted tradition in our institutional culture based on the «academic freedom» of teaching staff. The study recently performed by Murillo and Hernández (2015) showed that Spanish headteachers dedicate more time to administrative tasks to the detriment of tasks relating to the curriculum and teaching. Similarly, López, García, Oliva, Moreta, and Bellerín

(2014) showed how teaching observation and the analysis of the projects that the teachers prepare were the activities least often performed by the headteachers.

On the other hand, this widespread individualism in teaching practice makes it difficult to establish collaborative relationships with other schools. This is even more worrying when current studies show the numerous positive outcomes of creating networks of schools, whose ease of sharing experiences makes them especially useful for disadvantaged schools (Zikhali & Perumal, 2016; Scanlan, Kim, Burns, & Vuilleumier, 2016). This lack of collaboration with other schools is identified in the TALIS report (2013) as a clear area for improvement in Spain, something corroborated by research such as that by García and Caballero (2015) who conclude that around half of Spanish headteachers participate little or not at all in schools networks, even though they consider it to be an important function that they should perform more frequently.

The functions that education legislation has traditionally attributed to the school's management in Spain have, in practice, tended to give it a role that is eminently administrative in character. Furthermore, until the enactment of the Organic Education Law of 2006 (*Ley Orgánica de Educación*), there was no reference at all to the competencies of headteachers in the educational leadership of the school: «Exercise educational leadership, promote educational innovation, and promote plans to meet the objectives of the school's educational project» (sec. 132. c). Subsequently, the current Organic Law regarding the Improvement

of Quality in Education (*Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad en Educación*) of 2013, states that headteachers should be given the opportunity to exercise stronger school leadership and management (preamble VII), but as government bodies intervene strongly in the selection of headteachers (sec. 135) they are given an administrative or managerial leadership profile.

Faced with the recent increase in population segments at risk of social exclusion in Spain and more specifically in Andalusia (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2014), our school system should guarantee quality teaching that leads to greater equality of opportunities for these groups and, accordingly, reinforce the schools that cater to them.

Most of the pieces that have concentrated on studying school management in underprivileged areas of Spain – centres that in Andalusia are currently called disadvantaged schools – have examined what is known as «inclusive leadership» and attention to the diversity of the student body by headteachers (Gómez, 2012). On these lines, what is known as «leadership for social justice» is becoming increasingly important. This promotes a comprehensive school model which values diversity and combats inequality with the aim of promoting a more just society (García & Moral, 2015), without undermining the importance of pedagogic improvements that guarantee optimal teaching-learning processes for students with the greatest needs (González, 2014), featuring processes of ongoing reflexion and debate between all members of the school (León, 2012).

Similarly, other pieces of research into leadership in underprivileged areas have underlined good management practices, such as taking care of the atmosphere and interpersonal relationships (López, 2010), developing a professional culture of collaboration and strengthening family-school relationships (Fernández & Hernández, 2013), and favouring relationships with community associations (Jiménez, 2012), among others.

The most recent research points towards school leadership, mainly exercised by the headteacher as the school's principal leader, as encouraging better academic results by the students. This influence is greater, and so needed more, in schools located in disadvantaged areas.

Given the limited amount of research carried out on headteachers' school leadership in underprivileged areas and the almost total absence of it considering Spain, we believe it is important and necessary to draw attention to the presence of a leadership style which we believe is very important for improving the academic results of the students and to contribute to its implementation.

2. Objectives

The general objective of this study is to contribute to boosting awareness of the need for headteachers to be able to exercise school leadership, especially in schools located in underprivileged areas. This aim is approached through the following specific objectives:

1. Establishing headteachers' school leadership practices in relation

to supervision, training, and collaboration with other schools.

2. Identifying possible factors associated with the opinion of the teaching staff about the school leadership of their headteachers and their training.

3. Analysing the possible training needs of teaching staff that further justify the influence of school leadership in them.

3. Method

We used a mixed methodology including quantitative and qualitative techniques. Specifically, we used a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. We designed an ad hoc questionnaire to ascertain the opinion of teaching staff from the schools that comprise our sample about the school leadership by their headteachers, and we also performed semi-structured interviews with the headteachers. In this way, we complemented the information obtained, covering in greater depth the phenomenon that

is the object of study (Hueso & Cascant, 2012).

4. Participants

The population comprises teachers who deliver classes in public early-childhood and primary schools that are currently classified as being disadvantaged or that benefit from so-called compensatory plans in the capitals of the provinces of western Andalusia.

These data were requested from the Department of Education of the Regional Government of Andalusia (2016), giving a population of 955 teachers (document provided by the Department of Education). Using the formula for estimating proportions for finite populations (Albert, 2007) and establishing a confidence level of 95% (significance level $\alpha = 0.05$) with a margin of error of 5%, we obtained a sample of 282 teachers. We used proportionate stratified sampling, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Study population and sample.

| Population and sample | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Provinces | No. of centres | No. of teachers | % of the total | Sample P value | Rounded |
| Seville | 27 | 601 | 62.931937 | 177.5435812 | 177 |
| Huelva | 6 | 108 | 11.308901 | 31.90467016 | 32 |
| Cordoba | 11 | 229 | 23.979058 | 67.64971728 | 68 |
| Cadiz | 1 | 17 | 1.7801047 | 5.022031414 | 5 |
| Total | 45 | 955 | 100 | 282.12 | 282 |

Source: Own elaboration.

We also interviewed 14 headteachers from the centres studied. The interview process ended when we started to reach theoretical saturation, obtaining similar information that did not add anything relevant to what was known (Valles, 2014).

5. Instruments

The instruments used in this research are a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

The questionnaire was arranged in three blocks of questions, with the aim of collecting the teaching staff's views on three broad areas of the school leadership by the headteachers of their centre: A. teaching supervision, B. teachers' professional development, C. external openness. We used a Likert-type scale with five options for answers (1=never, 5=always).

Before preparing the definitive version, we ran a pilot study of the ques-

tionnaire, administering it to 60 teachers from centres with the same characteristics. These centres were not included in the final sample. To complete and guarantee the validity of the questionnaire we used two processes:

We used an appraisal by external experts specialising in research methodology and school leadership. This enabled us to improve the relevance and clarity of the proposed items for the questionnaire.

In addition, for construct validity we used the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's sphericity test, obtaining results that demonstrate its pertinence for performing the exploratory factor analysis. This analysis was performed using the principal component analysis extraction method for each dimension of the questionnaire, obtaining saturations with a value greater than 0.40 in each factor. In Table 2 below we show the results of the construct validity.

TABLE 2. Construct validity.

| Dimension | Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test | Bartlett test | | | Saturation coefficients | % variance |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------|----|------|--------------------------|------------|
| | | ÷ 2 | df | Sig | | |
| 1 | .704 | 64.865 | 3 | .000 | .878-.884-.818 | 74.022% |
| 2 | .712 | 42.546 | 6 | .000 | .825-.797-.592-.674 | 53.032% |
| 3 | .726 | 81.049 | 10 | .000 | .805-.770-.700-.713-.583 | 51.600% |

Source: Own elaboration.

With regards to reliability, we used Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency. We obtained results close

to unity for both the total of the scale (.884) and for the three dimensions of the questionnaire (.823, .674, .762).

Finally, we prepared a semi-structured interview, combining the flexibility of structured interviews with directionality as an instrument to obtain data on a specific topic (Cubo, Martín, & Ramos, 2011).

The interview comprised a series of introductory questions such as sex, age, years of experience in the post, and questions about the procedure for accessing the management of the centre. In addition, considering the objectives of our study, we focussed on the school leadership practices for which we had decided it was important to examine the information obtained with the questionnaire in greater depth.

After preparing the interview guide, we planned the sessions so that they could be carried out with sufficient time, guaranteeing the full confidentiality of the data provided. Once they had been carried out, we set up the system of categories according to the answers.

6. Procedure

After the data collection instruments had been prepared, we proceeded to collect data during the 2015-16 academic year. To ensure greater standardisation in the collection of information through the interviews, they were all performed

by the same person, an education graduate specialising in school management. This made it possible to standardise the interviews and go into greater depth in some of the information provided by the informants. The quantitative data was analysed using the SPSS v. 23 program, after preparing the corresponding code-book, using descriptive and inferential statistics between some variables, using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis H, and chi-squared tests. The Atlas.ti v. 6.2 program was used for analysing the qualitative data, using a system of categories we developed following an inductive process and concept maps that graphically represent the codes used, their frequency, and the relationships between them.

7. Results

7.1. School leadership practices related with teaching supervision

The results of the opinions of the teachers surveyed are shown in Figure 1, based on the assumption that supervision of teaching in the classroom by headteachers is an important school leadership method for improving teaching practice and, consequently, students' learning.

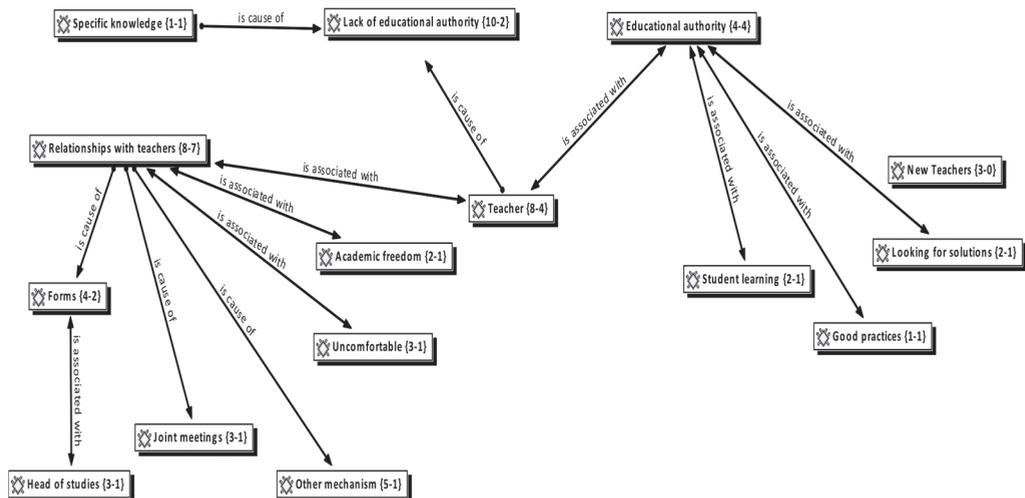
FIGURE 1. Headteachers supervise the centre's teachers or perform observations of their teaching activity in the classroom to improve teaching-learning.

Source: Own elaboration.

As we can see, there is a wide range of responses (SD = 1.097), which is related to the information collected in the

interviews with the headteachers. This is shown below in the following concept map (Figure 2):

FIGURE 2. Concept map of teaching observations by headteachers.



Source: Own elaboration.

In effect, most headteachers say that they do not perform any supervision in the classroom; meanwhile, a smaller percentage state that they do perform it and consider it to be genuinely important.

We therefore detected a serious impediment to headteachers of the centres analysed putting school leadership into practice when we established that:

– Most headteachers say they do not feel that they have sufficient pedagogic authority to supervise the teaching activity of the teachers in their centre, and even less to criticise them or tell them to modify their teaching practice at a given moment.

– They believe that to have this authority it would be necessary for them to have specific educational knowledge that they do not have.

– They feel that they lack authority as each teacher has academic freedom in their daily activity, and they state with some frequency that «every teacher has their own book» (I.13)³.

– On the whole, they confuse supervision of teaching in the classroom with the confidence they have in the teaching staff, seeing it as a form of questioning whether their colleagues are fulfilling their duties.

– They believe that it is a rather uncomfortable question that might negatively affect their relationship with the teachers from the centre, and that they could even be seen as questioning the professionalism of the teachers.

Furthermore, they believe that as they are part of the centre's teaching staff

–albeit temporarily removed from it– and they have similar training to the rest of the teaching staff, it might affect their relationship with them if they were to supervise their teaching activity: «They will no longer see me as a colleague and the thing is I am, I have the same qualification and I am a primary school teacher. I have a certain role, but next year I will leave management and return to the classroom» (I. 14).

However, all of the headteachers interviewed paradoxically think it is necessary to carry out this school leadership practice and believe that their priority is to improve teaching-learning processes in their centre.

In contrast, headteachers who do supervise teaching by the staff at their centre, see this activity as something vital for this type of school, in particular supervision relating to guiding and advising new teaching staff who join the centre, and relating to detecting good practices among teaching staff so they can be shared with the rest of their colleagues.

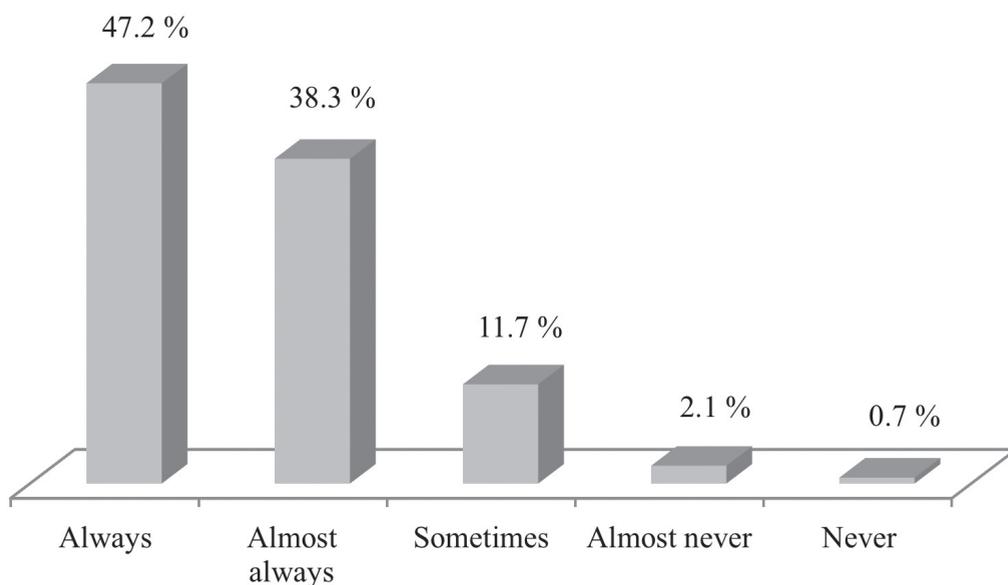
These headteachers, unlike those discussed above, decouple this practice from domineering and authoritarian attitudes and try to find joint solutions: «The thing is we look for solutions: How about we do this? How many options do we have? I always say to them, what I say to you is an idea, not an order. But if you have another idea, go ahead with it» (I.8).

They therefore use this method as an important tool to guarantee what is truly important: students' learning. They do not consider whether the teachers might feel uncomfortable or if their relationship

with them might suffer. They tend to establish horizontal relationships with the teaching staff and establish feelings of community in their school, convincing the teaching staff from their centre that it is a practice that is beneficial for everyone.

In Figure 3 we show the results of the opinion of the teaching staff about the knowledge the headteachers have about their lesson plans and evaluation procedures.

FIGURE 3. Knowledge of lesson plans and evaluation procedures of teachers in their centre.



Source: Own elaboration.

Most of the teachers believe that the headteachers from their centre are often up to date with these practices.

We believe it is important to establish whether there are significant differences in the opinion of the teaching staff regarding headteachers' supervision of their teaching in the classrooms according to

the age of the teachers, as well as whether headteachers are familiar with the lesson plans and evaluation procedures of the teachers according to how many years' experience they have as teachers in the centre. To establish which statistical test to use to perform the comparison of means, we performed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness of fit test (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness of fit test.

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---|--------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----|------|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Supervision of teaching in the classroom by headteachers | .203 | 282 | .000 | .912 | 282 | .000 |
| Knowledge of teachers' lesson plans and evaluation procedure | .281 | 282 | .000 | .774 | 282 | .000 |

Source: Own elaboration.

For both variables, we obtained a significance level of less than 0.05 ($p = .000 < .05$), which led us to affirm the existence of significant differences between the distribution observed and the normal distribution. Therefore, we used a non-parametric statistical test to perform the analysis, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis H test for k independent samples.

After performing this test, we obtained significance levels below 0.05 ($p = .004$ and $p = .029 < p < .05$), and so the null hypothesis of equal means was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, affirming with a confidence level of 95% that there are statistically significant differences in both cases. The results of this test are shown below in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Results of the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test.

| | Age of teaching staff | N | Mean rank |
|---|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Teaching supervision in classroom by headteachers | Under 25 | 6 | 217.3 |
| | 25-35 | 88 | 157.6 |
| | 36-45 | 90 | 125.8 |
| | 46 or older | 98 | 136.8 |
| | Total | 282 | |
| | Years teaching at centre | N | Mean rank |
| Knowledge of teaching staff's lesson plans and evaluation procedures | Fewer than 5 | 157 | 135.7 |
| | 5-10 | 81 | 161.1 |
| | 11-15 | 23 | 133.4 |
| | More than 15 | 21 | 117.4 |
| | Total | 282 | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Teaching staff aged under 25 are more likely to believe that the headteachers of their centre supervise their teaching in the classroom to a greater degree than those who are aged between 36 and 45. Similarly, longer serving teaching staff are less likely to believe that headteachers are familiar with their lesson plans and evaluation procedures than those who have spent fewer years teaching in the centre.

The interviews with the headteachers corroborate these results. In them, the headteachers told us that they give greater importance to supervising the teaching practice with newer teachers, arguing that these staff members require more guidance to teach effectively, both with students and with students' family members. They also state that they give less attention in these aspects to staff who have spent more years teaching in the centre, as they trust in their experience and professionalism.

8. Headteachers' promotion of training by teaching staff and professional development

The promotion of professional development of teachers through training is another of the school leadership practices considered effective (Leithwood & Janzti, 2008).

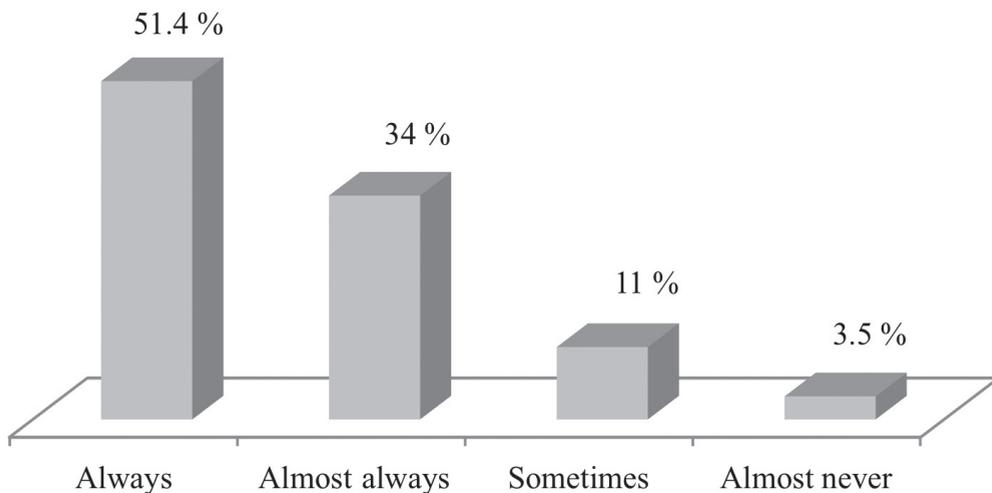
Firstly, we wanted to establish the teaching staff's view of the initial training they received. It is important to note that 90.4% of the teaching staff believe it is necessary to receive more specific initial training to prepare them genuinely to work optimally in this type of

centre, as their characteristics and demands are very different from those of a more normal setting. Furthermore, using the chi-squared statistical test we established that they hold this view independently of their initial training and their years of experience as teachers, obtaining levels of significance greater than 0.05 ($p = .069$ and $p = .452 < p = .05$) in both cases.

Examining this aspect in greater depth showed that a large part of the teaching staff (44.9%) identify intervention with the student's families as one of the main problem areas in their training. This is followed in order of importance by aspects related to solving conflicts and coexistence (20.2%) and attention to diversity (12.9%). To a lesser extent they identify emotional education (6.7%), innovative teaching methods (6.2%), education in values and social skills (3.2%), and finally carrying out teaching practices in this type of institution during their initial training (2.6%).

Based on these results, we believe that in this type of schools it is, if possible, even more important for the school's management to guide and advise teachers joining the centre. Figure 4 shows that a large majority of the teaching staff feel that the headteachers of their institutions provide guidance and training to new teachers. These results are ratified by the importance the headteachers give this question in their interviews: «You have to guide and advise new teachers continuously, for example, with the subject of the families. You have to give them guidelines» (I.11).

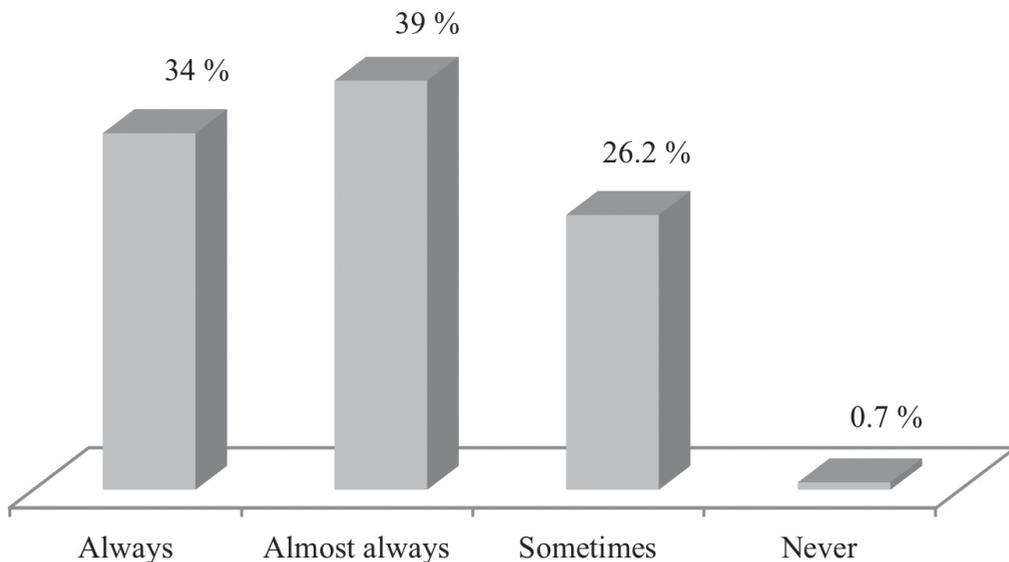
FIGURE 4. Provides guidance and training to teachers who have recently joined the centre (new).



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 5 shows the teaching staff's views of the suggestions the headteachers make to them about carrying out continuing training activities.

FIGURE 5. The headteacher suggests that teachers carry out continuous training activities.



Source: Own elaboration.

As this shows, a large majority of the teaching staff consider that the headteachers encourage their continuing training reasonably frequently. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that despite this being a function that is highly valued by teaching staff, many of them (26.2%) believe that the headteachers do it only sometimes.

Furthermore, it was established with a confidence level of 95% that

there are statistically significant differences in teachers' perception of whether their headteacher suggests that they perform continuous training activities according to whether they consider more specific training to be necessary. Consequently, once the normality of the sample was established, the Mann-Whitney U test was used, obtaining the result $p = 0.01 < p = 0.05$ (Table 5).

TABLE 5. Non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test.

| | The headteacher suggests that teachers perform continuous training activities. |
|--|---|
| Mann-Whitney U | 2469.500 |
| Z | -2.569 |
| Asymptotic significance (2 sided) | .010 |

Source: Own elaboration.

In this way, it was established that the teachers who believe that more specific initial training is necessary for working in these centres also believe that their

headteacher suggests that they carry out continuous training activities more than the teachers who do not regard it as necessary (Table 6).

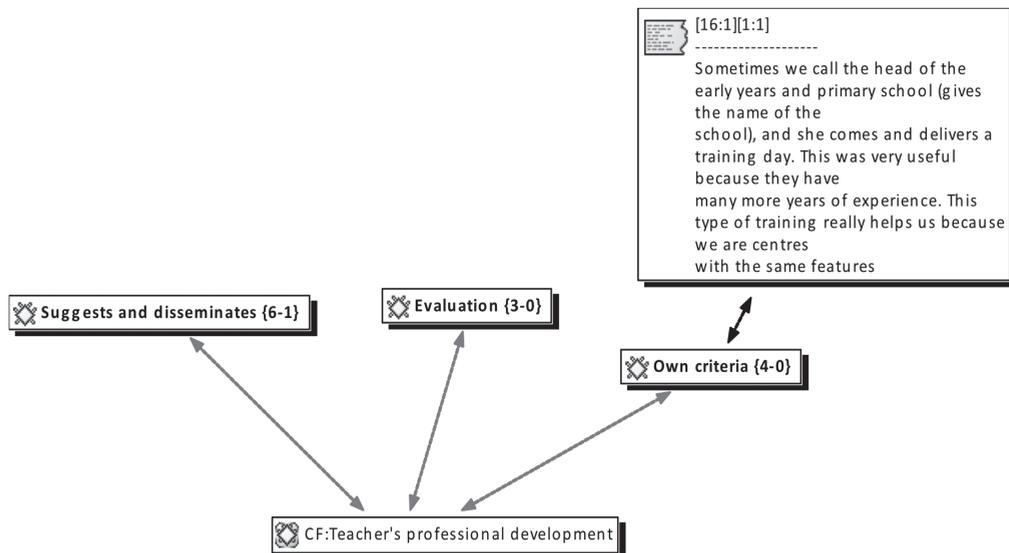
TABLE 6. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test.

| | Do you think more specific initial training is necessary for working in these centres? | N | Mean rank | Rank sum |
|--|---|----------|------------------|-----------------|
| The headteacher suggests that the staff carry out continuous training activities. | Yes | 255 | 145.35 | 37055.50 |
| | No | 27 | 105.46 | 2847.50 |
| | Total | 282 | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

The following concept map (Figure 6) is based on the interviews with the head-teachers.

FIGURE 6. Concept map of teachers' professional development by the headteacher.



Source: Own elaboration.

We established that headteachers promote training of teachers at their centres, either by suggesting to them personally the thematic areas they believe might be of interest for the centre as a whole, or by constantly disseminating the lines of training that they receive from the CEP (Professional Studies Centre), businesses, or associations, so that the teachers themselves decide on the areas in which they want or need training.

The training lines proposed at the centre-level for all staff often derive from the joint assessments where the results of the centre's students are analysed. They reveal whether the objectives proposed as

targets have been reached, and they propose areas for action where training for the teaching staff is required to deliver an improvement in teaching-learning.

Few of the headteachers interviewed used mechanisms to encourage the centre's teaching staff to carry out continuous training and so improve their skills for working in these schools, other than each teacher individually attending a course offered by an external body. As an example, we cite a pair of good practices matching in different centres.

A. The teaching staff is divided into groups to take various training courses picked by the headteacher. The groups

subsequently meet to exchange the knowledge they have acquired. In this way, the headteachers can encourage the culture of cooperation and exchange between teachers in their schools that is so necessary in this type of centre.

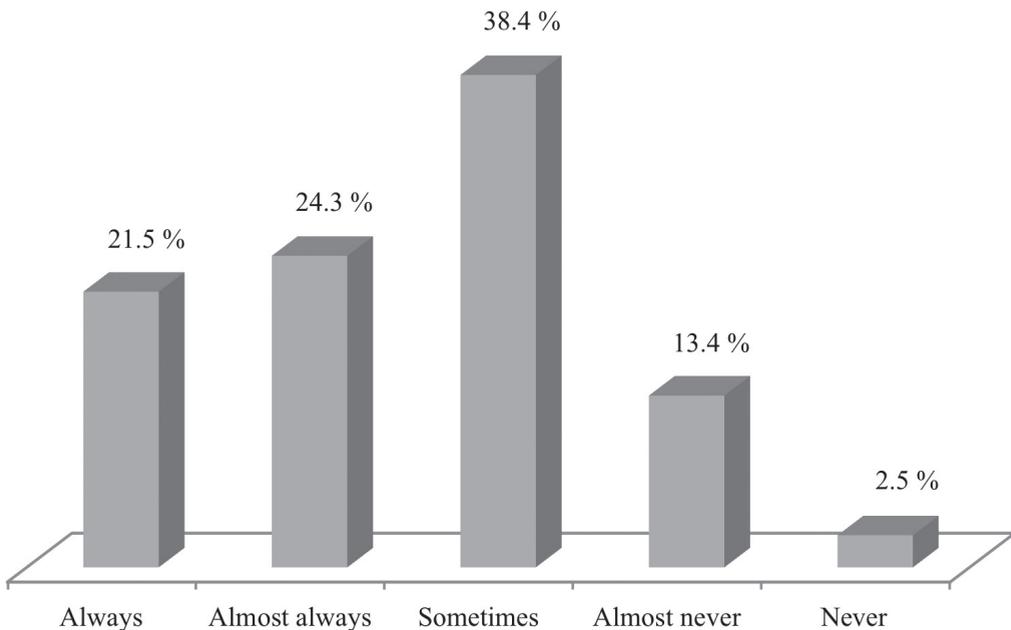
B. The practices of centres with similar characteristics and a good track record or that have a headteacher with considerable experience are studied. In this way, training related to everyday reality and based on experience is acquired, in contrast with an excessively theoretical training that some headteachers associate with the courses on offer, and so inter-

centre training becomes an excellent option.

9. School leadership practices related to cooperation with other schools

To establish the degree of cooperation between schools that work under similar conditions, we asked the teachers whether the headteachers establish cooperative relationships with other schools to exchange training initiatives, knowledge, experience, and educational practices (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. The headteacher establishes cooperative relationships with other schools to exchange training initiatives, pedagogical knowledge, good practices, etc.



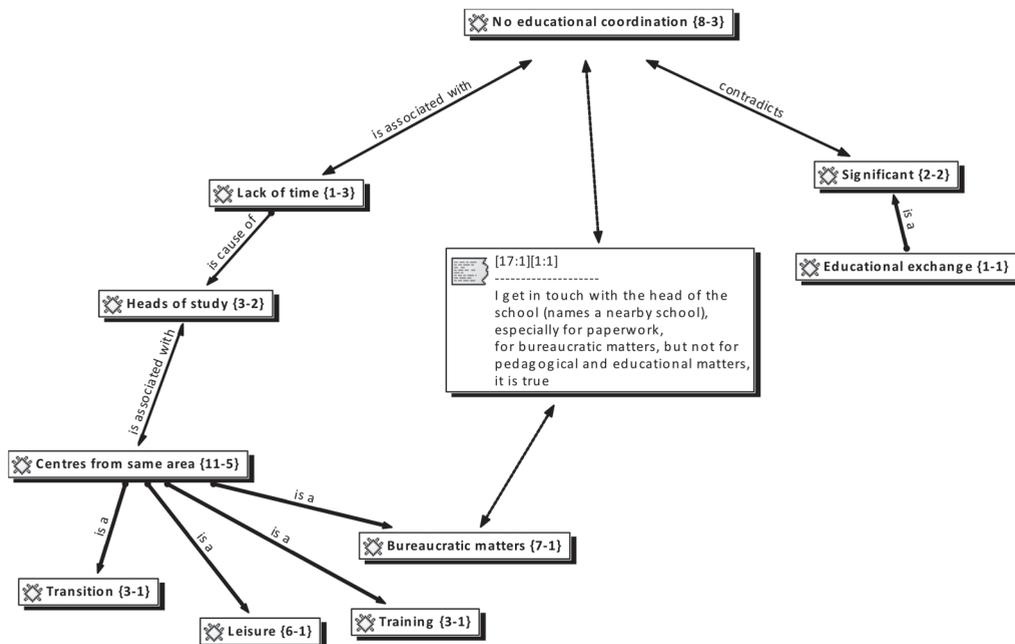
Source: Own elaboration.

Most of the teachers believe that their headteachers only do this «sometimes»,

there being a wide range of attitudes being apparent in turn (s.d. = 1.048).

The concept map prepared from the analysis of the interviews can be seen below (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8. Concept map of cooperation networks with other schools.



Source: Own elaboration.

As a result of the interviews, we were able to ascertain that, while good relationships are maintained between schools that are in the same area and work under compensatory plans, it is usually heads of studies who meet most frequently to organise play and transition activities with the students: «The heads of studies meet once a month and propose shared activities for all of the centres from the area but of the sort where you go to the community centre to do an activity» (I. 9).

As we noted above, there are very few occasions when headteachers use the rela-

tionship with other disadvantaged schools to encourage inter-centre training. They normally maintain contact to cover bureaucratic matters, as shown in the diagram above. As reasons for this, they allude to lack of time for holding periodic meetings where teaching experiences that result in a better performance by the students are discussed. This and other difficulties could be ameliorated with some potential resources that the education administration does not provide them:

We should have this sort of resource in the centres so that you can say: we'll have

an area meeting every Monday. But so you can go from your centre calmly with your classes covered. We would need to meet systematically every two weeks, at least or once a month calmly (I.12).

Despite what is stated above, the headteachers all describe this as a highly beneficial practice that should be encouraged in their schools.

10. Discussion and conclusions

This study has enabled us to establish the opinions of teachers and headteachers from Andalusian schools located in underprivileged areas about the school leadership practices considered effective for contributing to improving the student body's learning.

With regards to teaching supervision in the classroom by headteachers, we agree with previous studies such as that by Gago (2004), where scores in this practice even more modest than those from our research are obtained.

The results we obtained allow us to infer that there are significant differences deriving from the factor of the age of the teaching staff with regards to supervision of their teaching by the headteachers. We found more supervision of new teaching staff in the schools, something closely related to the importance given by these headteachers to guiding and advising teachers who arrive at these centres for the first time, given the difficulties and obstacles they will face.

Headteachers are more reluctant to request information from the teachers in their centre about their lesson plans and

evaluation methods when the teachers have been in post for longer. We established that this is regarded as a rather problematic and uncomfortable practice for the headteachers that is sometimes at odds with trust in the professionalism and experience of the teaching staff. This is especially the case with teachers who have been working at the centre for longer.

The fact that the teaching staff are a key group in selecting the headteacher of their own centre sometimes becomes an obstacle to the headteacher exercising true school leadership. This leadership unavoidably involves supervising teaching and guaranteeing good practices, especially when the students are at risk of social exclusion (Zembylas & Lasonos, 2016).

The results of our study illustrate the headteacher's limited power to enter the classroom and supervise teaching practices. This impedes the desirable feedback with the teaching staff, as a misunderstood academic freedom and deeply-rooted dominant individualism frequently found in teaching practices (Zaitegui, 2011), something we believe to be worrying in schools where there should be a greater culture of cooperation to confront the challenges and difficulties that teaching in these contexts entails.

For this reason, we believe that it is truly urgent that collaborative cultures be established in these schools between all members of the educational community, in particular between the teachers and headteachers and the rest of the staff. Our findings show that headteachers

who have to some extent managed to consolidate a collaborative culture in the centre have also managed to participate in improving teaching practices, thus exercising greater school leadership and minimising individualist traces in teaching practices. In turn, they have also ensured that when teachers from the centres they manage see observation as a guarantee of good teaching-learning practices for students who are at risk of social exclusion, this tends to become a positive practice for all sectors of the centre.

We also established that headteachers are to a significant extent involved in ensuring that teachers do continuous training, something that might be related to the fact that most teachers who work in schools located in underprivileged areas recognise that they have considerable shortcomings in their initial training, mainly with regards to intervention with the families of the students who attend these centres (Amores *et al.*, 2012). We have also detected that the headteachers do this more with teachers who recognise that they have shortcomings in their initial training.

Apart from in the good practices exercised in this area by just two of the headteachers interviewed, we again find the above-mentioned individualism as well as a worrying lack of knowledge of how to encourage continuing training of teaching staff with strategies that go beyond offering them the training courses, which, as we have established, some headteachers believe are not very practical and are disconnected from the reality of these schools.

We suggest cooperation with other schools as a practical and effective means of exchanging training initiatives, knowledge, experience, and educational practices. While most of the teachers believe that the headteachers of their centres sometimes promote this practice, a result that is slightly better than that of García and Caballero (2015), we found that the headteachers on many occasions use these relationships for bureaucratic matters. One matter that is undoubtedly surprising is that it occurs in this type of centre, where cooperation between schools entails innumerable advantages (Scanlan, Kim, Burns, & Vuilleumier, 2016), including encouraging training that is more practical and connected with their situation that would make it possible to ameliorate in some way the training shortcomings that we have shown. In this way, contrary to what we expected to find, an individualism in teaching practices that goes beyond the limits of the school is again apparent.

We believe it is necessary to emphasise the importance of the fact that in Spain managerial tasks are defined considering the actions that lead to achieving better academic results (Egido, 2013), among which stand out those related with school leadership that are decisive for improving the performance of students at risk of exclusion. For this reason, Spanish headteachers must have the skills to allow them to participate in improving the teaching activity.

On the other hand, we believe it is a real priority to provide the headteachers of disadvantaged schools with specific continuing training in school leadership to enable them to implement good practices.

This claim is supported by the headteachers themselves when they state that their priority should be to focus on improving the teaching-learning process, but that they have limited pedagogical knowledge about the other practices. This training must also help with the implementation of collaborative cultures in their schools in contrast with the individualism that we have established is present in most cases, this being incompatible with schools that should feature processes of reflection and joint enquiry into teaching. This assertion was backed-up when we established that those headteachers who implement collaborative cultures exercise greater school leadership even though they have the same skills.

Finally, we believe that the presence of a leadership model focussed on pedagogy in centres should be made visible where it is really needed, since, as González maintains (2014), for there to be leadership for social justice in schools located in underprivileged areas, the headteacher must be able to guarantee that the students will receive optimal teaching-learning processes that help to counteract the inequalities.

Notes

- ¹ Risk of poverty or social exclusion is understood to be when, according to the AROPE indicator (At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion) the population is in at least one of these three situations (European Commission, 2010):
At risk of poverty (disposable income below 60% of the median).
Severely materially deprived (with shortcomings in at least four categories from a list of nine, such as going on holiday, eating protein at least every second day, arrears on payments, etc.).

In households without work or with very low work intensity.

- ² Resolution of 27/05/2005, from the Department of Human Resource Management, dictating instructions to govern calls for public competitions on merits to cover, on the occasion of a vacancies, certain specific teaching posts. (Official Gazette of the Regional Government of Andalusia [BOJA] 06/06/2005).
- ³ I = interview, followed by the number of the interview performed.

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