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School Leadership: From Practice to Policy

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Abstract

School leaders' tasks have become increasingly complex, as a result of globalization, a shift towards knowledge based economies, greater student diversity and an increased government focus on education policy reforms targeting and affecting schools. The role of school principals has moved from administrative leadership towards focusing on student outcomes, with more autonomy and accountability, and increased responsibilities for implementing policy reforms in schools and classrooms. This article focuses on how policies can ensure that school leaders contribute to school improvement. It builds on an international OECD study on school leadership which analyzed practices across 22 education systems in 2008 and explores developments since to propose policy options that can contribute to support the professionalization of school leadership. Among the key strategies suggested that many countries have been taken up are: clarifying the role of school leaders based on the tasks that make most difference on school outcomes; ensuring there is specialized training and development: that working conditions are attractive to ensure that there are quality professionals in exercise and that it is a sustainable profession that is well supported.

Keywords: school leadership, principals, education policies, school improvement, teachers

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Liderazgo Escolar: de la Práctica a las Políticas

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Resumen

Las tareas de los líderes escolares se han vuelto cada vez más complejas fruto de la globalización, del giro hacia economías basadas en el conocimiento, de una mayor diversidad entre los estudiantes y de un mayor interés de los gobiernos en las reformas educativas dirigidas a las escuelas. La función de los directores escolares ha evolucionado desde un liderazgo administrativo a uno centrado en los resultados de los alumnos, con mayor autonomía y transparencia, y con mayores responsabilidades en la implementación de reformas en las escuelas y aulas. Este artículo se centra en ver cómo las políticas pueden asegurar que los líderes escolares contribuyen a la mejora escolar. Se basa en un estudio internacional de la OECD sobre liderazgo escolar que analiza prácticas en 22 sistemas educativos en 2008 y explora su evolución para proponer opciones de políticas que puedan contribuir a apoyar la profesionalización del liderazgo escolar. Entre las principales estrategias que muchos países han implementado se propone: clarificar las funciones de los líderes escolares en base a las tareas que tienen más influencia sobre los resultados, asegurar que haya una formación y desarrollo específicos, que las condiciones de trabajo sean atractivas para asegurar la existencia de profesionales de calidad y para lograr una profesión sostenible y bien respaldada.

Palabras clave: liderazgo escolar, directores, políticas educativas, mejora escolar, profesorado

S chool leadership has not been an education policy priority across many countries. It has only been rather recently when school management and leadership has started to be perceived as a different profession than teaching: in many countries one of the few requirements for becoming a school leader was to be a teacher for a minimum amount of years, without any specific kind of training or support beyond that required for teaching.

Yet, school leaders' tasks have become increasingly complex: our societies and economies are asking much more from schools; there is greater student diversity in schools and classrooms; the pervasiveness of ICTs in daily lives is challenging schools operations and learning; there is an increase of research and evidence of what works and; there is more government focus on education policy reforms targeting and affecting schools. These different forces have led to a change in the role of school principals from administrative leadership towards a focus on student outcomes, to having more autonomy teamed up with greater accountability, and to increased responsibilities for implementing policy reforms in schools and classrooms.

Policy makers have been slow to respond to the school leadership challenge: across selected OECD countries, school principals may not have appropriate training, development or support to ensure their capacity to exercise their role and often their working conditions do not seem to be aligned to the magnitude of the post.

This article focuses on the need to bridge the gap between actual practice and policies to ensure that school leaders can contribute to school improvement. It builds on an international OECD study on school leadership which analysed practices across 22 education systems in 2008 and explores developments since to propose policy options that can contribute to support the professionalization of school leadership.

Trends influencing schools and the role of school leaders

As we progress in the 21st century, the change in skills required to contribute to our societies and economies is evident. Globalisation, economic and labour shifts towards higher and different type of skills, the consolidation of the use of computers and ICTs for personal and professional purposes are

among other factors driving our knowledge based societies. At the same time, important socio demographic changes are taking place. Governments and their constituents are calling for more efficient and effective public services, with greater engagement, and schooling is at the heart of this public provision across OECD countries. These factors together are affecting schools and their school leaders, who have to be able to respond while also be part of these changes.

Most economic and labour indicators show that in the past 20 to 30 years, jobs have changed, employment in services and high skilled jobs have increased and the use of IT has modified not only the types of skills required for many jobs, but also the way we work across the board (OECD, 2013a). In most OECD countries, high skilled jobs have increased, while middle to low skilled jobs have remained stable or decreased (Figure 1, shows evolution in 24 OECD countries). Figure 2 shows the change in the demand for skills in the US, which has increased for non-routine interpersonal or analytical skills and decreased for manual or more routine skills. Skills or knowledge initially developed in schools lay the foundations for adulthood, for further learning and for better integration into societies and economies.
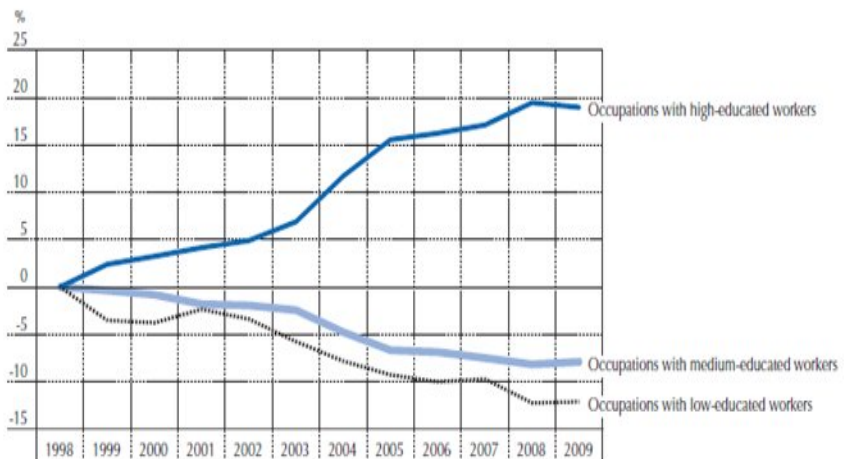

Figure 1: Evolution of employment by occupations defined by education levels (% change in share of employment since 1998, by occupation groups according to workers level of education). Source: OECD (2013a) (PIAAC).

At the same time, societies are evolving to become more diverse: migration has become a larger reality across the world, accounting more than 10% of populations across the OECD average in 2010 (figure 2) and the structures of homes and families are changing: more monoparental families, more women in the workforce and more elderly in our populations (OECD, 2013b). This diversity is more evident in schools and classrooms across OECD countries, and school leaders and teachers have to respond with effective teaching and learning strategies for all students.
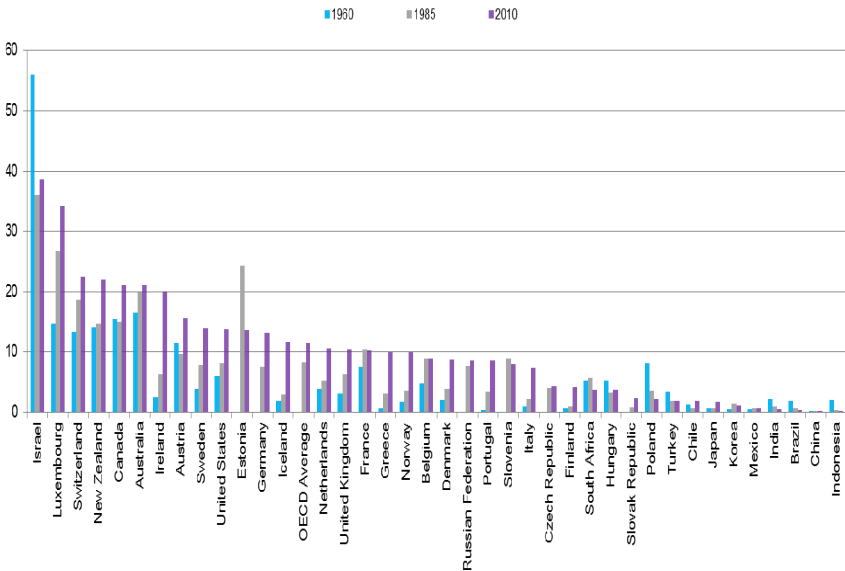

Figure 2: International migrants as a percentage of the total population 1960, 2000 and 2010. Source: OECD (2013b).

ICTs have also become more pervasive, with at least 60% of households across OECD countries having access to computers or internet at home in 2010, with widespread use across families (OECD, 2013b). At the same time, ICTs are slowly being integrated into schools to different degrees in teaching and learning, for management use, for tracking progress and in almost 40% of schools across OECD for publication of student achievement data (Figure 3).

This greater use of data is also part of a wider trend towards more accountability of school resources and outcomes. Schools have national or regional results of students, have teacher evaluations and assessments, school evaluations, and publication of test results, and a greater overall following of school progress with the use of data (OECD, 2013e).
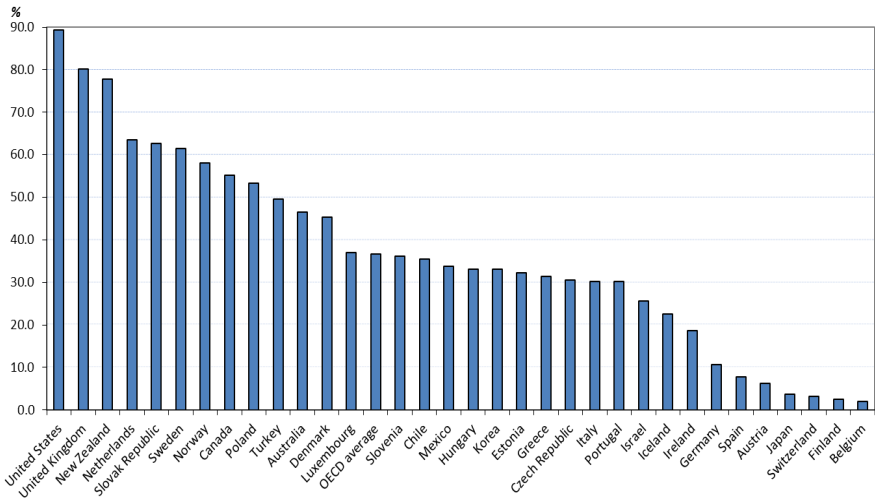

Figure 3: Student achievement data posted publicly, PISA 2012.Source: OECD (2013c), PISA database.

And to add to the complexities, schools and education policy has been more decentralised, providing schools with more autonomy. At least 40% of decisions are taken at school level, rather than regional or national government, although there is much variety across different school systems (Figure 4). According to an OECD project on Governing Complex Education Systems, it is more and more challenging to steer education systems given an increasingly complex environment with many different stakeholders engaged and with a tendency towards greater decentralisation and accountability. The responsibilities of institutions and different levels of government vary from country to country, as does the relative importance and independence of non-public providers (OECD, 2013d).
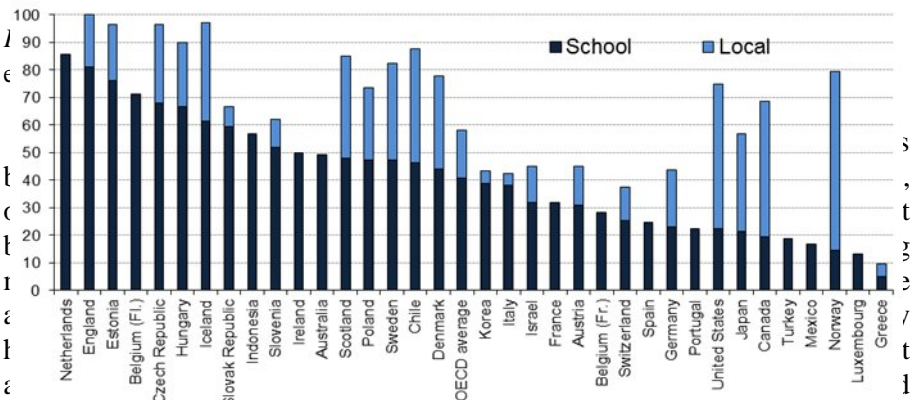
dispositions to respond, and who can work with teachers and others to raise achievement of their students.

School leadership makes a difference: focus on teaching and learning

There is increasing evidence pointing to the fact that from the different factors that are policy amenable to school improvement, after teaching, school leadership has been found to be the most important school level factor in improving learning outcomes. Most of this evidence points that school leaders have an indirect impact on results by influencing the school environments they lead to ensure effective teaching and learning (Robinson et al., 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Pont et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2011;

Heargreaves and Shirley, 2011). At the same time, school leaders have the capacity to introduce and implement reforms to ensure they reach the classrooms.

Even further, research shows that there are specific practices where school leaders can make a difference in teaching and learning. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) show how leaders in turnaround and already high performing schools use a set of core practices that they align to the different growth stages or context of the school. The practices that the research literature has demonstrated to have most impact are those focused on working with, supporting and developing teacher quality (Louis et al., 2011; Pont et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2009).

An OECD study on School Leadership (Pont et al., 2008) summarised that school leaders can make a difference in school and student performance if they are granted autonomy to make important decisions while having support. In addition, it clarified that the core responsibilities of school leaders need to be clearly defined and delimited, based on an understanding of the practices most likely to improve teaching and learning. Major domains of responsibility key for school leadership to improve student outcomes (instructional leadership) were defined as follows:

• *Leadership focused on supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality* is widely recognised as a core component of effective leadership. Teacher quality has been recognised as the most important school-level determinant of student performance. The leadership responsibilities associated with improved teacher quality include coordinating the curriculum and teaching programme, monitoring and evaluating teacher practice, promoting teacher professional development and supporting collaborative work cultures.

• School leadership that concentrates on *setting learning objectives and implementing intelligent assessment systems* has been found to help students develop their full potential. Aligning instruction with national standards, setting school goals for student performance, measuring progress against those goals and making adjustments in the school programme to improve individual and overall performance are the dynamic aspects of managing curriculum and instruction. School leaders' purposeful use of data is essential to ensure that attention is being paid to the progress of every student.

Different authors have defined effective school leadership practices with different terminology, but most come to share the concept of working

collaboratively with teachers as the key role of school principals that raise student outcomes. Spillane (2013) reviews how teaching is the core subject of leadership, as education leaders have to focus on the practice of leading teaching in the classrooms.

A recent survey with US teacher data demonstrated that shared leadership and instructional leadership, together with ensuring trust of teachers for their principals was at the heart of observed improvement (Louis et al., 2011). Also, recent work on teachers has proposed that ensuring that teachers work together to support school improvement, either by developing professional communities of practice, or led by school principals is also an effective approach. A study by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) on how to improve the teaching profession suggests that quality teachers embody professional capital, which brings together individual human capital, collective social capital and decisional capital (which refers to making decisions in complex situations). The authors highlight the importance of social capital, which refers to the work undertaken collectively by teachers. And it is school leaders who can take on the key role of bringing teachers to work and develop together rather than as isolated teachers within the walls of their classrooms.

School leaders' practices across countries

While there is evidence on how principals can have impact, it is also possible to explore the practice of school leadership across countries to see if it aligns with the evidence. Are school leaders effectively working with teachers? Are they defining objectives and establishing intelligent assessment systems? Practices can vary, and depend much on the context that surrounds schools and their leaders, on their specific preparation and also on the specific policies that may be implemented to develop school leadership.

Context matters

The actual practices of school leaders can vary depending on the context of the education system: their historical development, whether schools have autonomy to take on different responsibilities and the degree of support they

receive, the types of schools available, whether comprehensive with large student diversity, or systems that practice tracking and student selection, or whether rural or urban schools, primary or secondary, or the quality of the teaching workforce overall. These factors have implications on the practices of school leaders.

It is important to note that these can be the result of historical or cultural developments. In some education systems, the concept of leadership in schools has not been fully developed as democratic models of managing schools with the teaching body have prevailed. This is the case of Nordic countries, or of Spain for example. In more anglo saxon education systems, the concept of leadership has had greater development historically.

Spillane (2013) explains how education systems may differ in ways that are consequential to teaching and learning and have implications for the work of leaders. He poses the example of the difference of school leaders work in education systems that select the "best and the brightest" into teaching or those in education systems that do not exercise much quality control. When designing school leadership policy, it is important to take these context factors into account to ensure the profiles and needs of principals and respond more effectively (Southworth, 2002).

One of the key contextual factors that impinge on leadership practice is the degree of responsibilities or autonomy that schools and their leaders have at the school level, whether for resources, including hiring teachers, or having responsibility for curriculum and assessment for example. According to PISA 2012, school systems that grant more autonomy for curriculum and assessment have better results, while those that have more autonomy for resources do not show strong associations with school performance. This particular indicator of school autonomy over curricula and assessments combines a set of questions on whose responsibility it is to establish student assessment policies, choose text books, determine course content or decide the courses to be on offer, referring to 15 year old students in schools as reported by the principal (OECD, 2013c). Autonomy has more positive results when this is compounded with accountability or quality work between the teachers and the school leaders.

Leadership practices

From what the research says to actual practice across countries and schools there may be differences: as has been reviewed before, among the practices that can be more conducive to school improvement, are developing the curriculum and assessment and working with teachers.

Figure 5 shows that there are wide ranging practices in terms of responsibility for curriculum and assessment, as Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom among others, have a high degree of responsibility, while there is a large group of countries where schools do not have this responsibility. This is a challenging task for school leaders who may not have been effectively trained to develop curriculum at the school level, or to instrument broad school level assessment practices (OECD, 2013e). Working effectively with teachers on curriculum development and implementation can be key for effective school leadership.
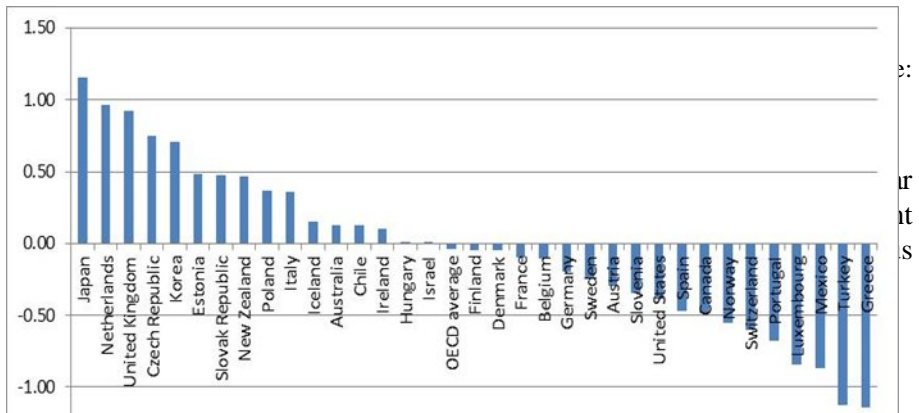
curriculum offered by teachers and experienced by students and the effects of a rigorous curriculum on gains in student achievement" (Goldring *et al.*, 2007). According to their reviews of research, teaching focused on ambitious academic content leads to increases in student performance (Teddlie and Springfield, 1993; Wong *et al.*, 1996) and the performance of low-achieving students can be improved by providing them with better content (Biancarosa and Snow, 2004).

In her meta-analysis of research, Robinson (2009) shows that "direct oversight of curriculum through school-wide coordination across classes and year levels and alignment to school goals" has a small-to-moderate positive impact on student achievement. She also shows that school-level professionals in higher performing schools spend more time on managing or coordinating the curriculum with their teaching staff than leaders in otherwise similar lower performing schools, a finding that is supported by research on instructional leadership (Heck, 1992; Marks and Printy, 2003; Marzano *et al.*, 2005) also list school leaders' direct involvement in design and implementation of the curriculum as one of the leadership practices that had a statistically significant correlation with student achievement as measured by standardised assessments in the United States.

New data evidence from PISA 2012 asked school leaders about their practices in relation to teacher participation in management, framing and communicating school goals and on instructional leadership practices. Figure 6 shows how principals perceive that teacher participation in management is more developed in selected countries, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Canada or Finland. In many of these countries, there have been policies targeted to this end. In fact, across the OECD, more than 70% of students were in schools whose principals reported that the schools gives staff the possibility to engage in school decision making or are involved in building a culture of self-improvement at least once a month (OECD, 2013c).
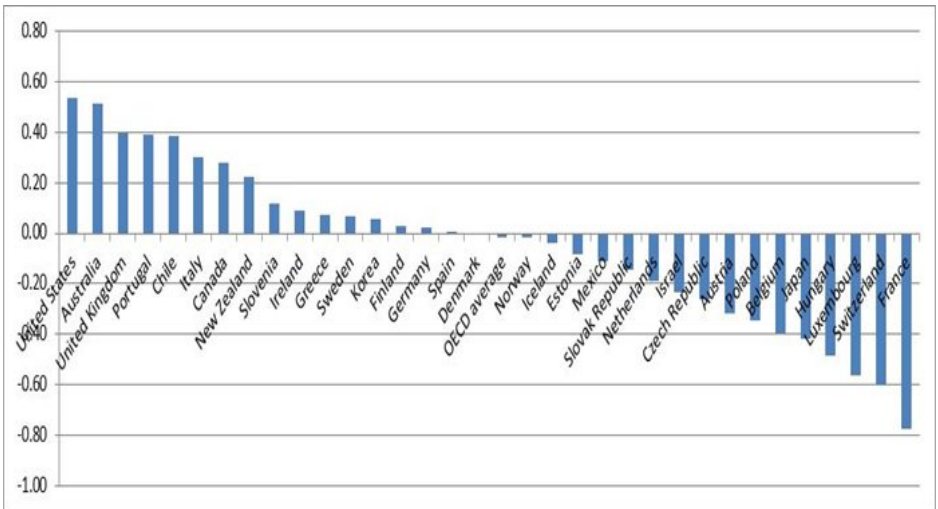
Figure 6: Principals' leadership in teacher participation, PISA 2012.
Note: This index of school management: teacher participation was derived from
school principals' responses about the frequency with which they were involved in
the following school affairs in the previous school year: 1) provide staff with
opportunities to participate in school decision-making; 2) engage teachers to help
build a school culture of continuous improvement; and 3) ask teachers to participate
in reviewing management practices. Higher values on these indices indicate greater
involvement of school principals in school affairs.
Source: PISA (2013c) PISA database.

    In addition, from principal responses on their instructional leadership
practices, it seems that there is not a majority of countries using them. It is in
a specific subset of countries, including more anglo saxon ones and others
such as Slovenia, were instructional leadership has been more developed
formally. Nordic countries school leaders stand around the OECD average.
On the other side of the spectrum, in France, Japan, Switzerland or Spain
these types of practices are not often promoted or used, following more
administrative leadership.
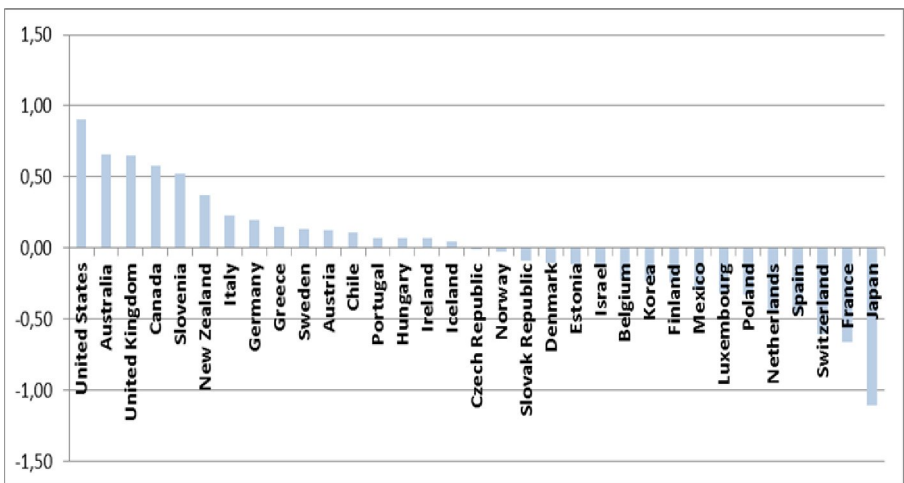
Other factors that are important to understand school leadership practice is whether there are specific policies targeting school leaders. Often, the definition of their roles may have not been made explicit, or may be too ambitious, with long lists of expected tasks they have to undertake that are difficult to accomplish, or focused on administrative tasks or overburdened by the need to respond to accountability mandates. But whether there exists the mandate for school leaders to have specific training, specific support, whether there are working conditions that are attractive to possible future

school leaders or those in service to make the best of their position is also key for leadership practices.

The analysis of policies implemented in selected OECD countries shows that few policies have been introduced in the areas of school leadership in comparison to other school improvement areas (OECD, 2013f). When they have been introduced, many of the policies have or are addressing school leadership as a profession, covering professional standards and career development (Australia, Chile or Mexico). Countries have also introduced more specific reforms on professional development, recruitment and working conditions. Australia's *Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)* for example provides a school leadership framework, which includes leadership standards, a professional learning charter and incentives to promote quality school leadership. Australia, Chile, or Ontario's professional standards for school leaders can serve as a clear framework and reference of the skills and competencies needed of a school leader as well as serve as a reference for the professional development of school leaders.

the professional development of school leaders.

Countries requiring a minimum period of compulsory training before or after appointment as school head, 2011/12

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Length	120 h	150 h	⊚	⊚	100 h	⊚	104 h	240 h	⊚	⊚	40h-14 months	1 year	3-4 months	⊚	⊚	⊚	⊚	⊚	60 ECTS
	●	●	O				●	●			●	O	●						●

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK (1)	UK-SCT	HR	IS	TR	LI	NO
Length	⊚	12 ECTS	210 h	250 h	1 week	144 h	160 h	15 ECTS	30 ECTS	6-18 months	⊚	⊚	15 ECTS	⊚	15 ECTS	⊚
		O	●	●	●	●	O	●	O	●			●		●	

● Before appointment   O After appointment   ⊚ No headship training required

Source: Eurydice.   UK (1) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

public support. Initial or pre-service training is available in many OECD and European countries but maybe optional, or a short introduction rather than (Pont et al., 2008). In Austria, England, or Slovenia, school leadership

programmes have been available for different stages of the leadership career. Norway is one of the countries which has recently introduced *a leadership and development programme* (2009) to improve the effectiveness of school leaders. To try to attract more school leaders, Chile introduced a financial incentives-based policy, a *School leaders' training plan (Plan de Formacion de Directores de Excelencia,* 2011-13) and more than 1 500 school principals and teachers have participated in the programme.

The working conditions for principals are also important for their engagement in their practice. Whether they have long working hours, recognition of the value of the post, in terms of prestige, of salaries, or possible career paths to exercise after a leadership post can change the types of candidates applying for the posts and also the way they work. In school environments with greater diversity, with much higher levels of accountability, where school leaders are expected to provide clear leadership for improved school outcomes, the incentives and working conditions in relation to other professions are important. Policies need to ensure that there are attractive working conditions to have high quality professionals.

From practice to policy: school leadership for improvement

The increasing evidence of the role of school leadership in setting the environment for successful teaching and learning, and more data available on the actual practices leaders exercise, provide opportunities for targeting leadership policies that can be effective. Building on current leadership practices, contextualised policies can weave together different components to professionalise school leadership. In recent years, education systems have been slowly moving towards building the profession focusing on improvement, but more progress needs to be made. Among the policies that can be reflected upon are (Pont et al., 2008):

Define school leadership responsibilities for improved student learning

There is evidence from research and country practices to encourage country, regional and local policy to use evidence on core leadership dimensions to design and define job responsibilities for their leaders. Two interrelated leadership responsibilities have consistently been identified as associated with improved learning outcomes:

1) Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality: To develop the capacity of school leadership to support, evaluate and develop teacher quality as one of their core practices, policies can:

• *Encourage school leaders to promote teamwork among teachers* across the school by explicitly recognising the core role of school leaders in building collaborative cultures and sharing and disseminating best practice.

• *Provide training for school leaders in teacher monitoring and evaluation*, either as part of initial training for school leaders or through continuing training and that school leaders have the time necessary to fulfil this core task satisfactorily.

• *Specify the role of school leadership in teacher professional development:* School leaders can ensure that teacher professional development is relevant to the school context and aligned with overall school improvement goals and with teachers' needs. To enhance school leaders' capacities in developing their staff, policies should consider devolving discretion over teacher training and development budgets to the school level.

2) Supporting curriculum development, goal-setting, assessment and accountability: Goal-setting, assessment and school accountability are key responsibilities of school leaders in most countries, while responsibilities for curriculum vary across countries. To ensure school leaders' capacity for school improvement processes, policies can:

• *Strengthen school leaders' responsibility in curricular decision making* so that they can adapt the teaching programme to local needs and ensure coherence across courses and grade levels to achieve school goals and performance standards.

• *Provide school leaders with discretion and skills on strategic direction setting* and enhance their capacity to develop school plans and goals aligned with broader national curriculum standards and responsive to local needs. Support and training opportunities for school leaders can ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to use data and monitor effectively to improve practice.

• *Encourage school leaders to distribute tasks related to assessment and accountability within schools* by developing teams competent in analysing and using data to design appropriate improvement strategies.

Countries have developed school leadership frameworks or standards that can bring clarity and a metric for processes to strengthen the role, such as initial training, selection or continuous professional development.

Frameworks can also serve to signal the essential character of school leadership as the provision of leadership for learning. But it is important that leadership frameworks allow for local and school level criteria.

A recent comparative study of leadership standards (CEPPE, 2013) shows their use across education systems in OECD countries. They have been used for specifying the function of school principals, guiding professional development, defining criteria for assessment, guiding the selection of principals. There exist a range of examples of leadership standards from Australia, Chile, England, New Zealand, Ontario or Quebec (Canada). The Australian National Professional Standard for Principals (NPSP) provides a valuable example. It presents three leadership domains: vision and values, knowledge and comprehension and personal qualities and social and communicational skills. These requirements are displayed in five areas of professional practice: leading teaching-learning processes: developing self and others; leading improvement, innovation and changes; leading the management of the school; and engaging and working with the community (CEPPE, 2013).

Develop skills for effective school leadership

To be able to respond to their widened roles and responsibilities, including the need for practicing pedagogical leadership, school leaders need specific training. Professionalising school leadership can be partly attained by developing and strengthening leadership skills related to improving school outcomes through initial and continuing training and mentoring. However, in some countries, the only requisite to exercise the profession is having a certain number of years of teaching. Figures 6 and 7 shows how different country school leaders use pedagogical leadership or teacher engagement in their daily practices.

To support the change required for professional school leadership, and for success in implementation of reforms, research shows that building their skills and competencies is necessary. Over the long-term, policies cannot do much with schools if they do not have the appropriate skills. Many of the required roles of working to develop and evaluate teachers, to define and put into action assessment systems and to respond to accountability, rely on

schools capacity to use these strategies and turn them into improvement of their classrooms and their students learning.

This is why it is important to offer strong professional training programmes focused on the leadership practices that have the highest impact on improvement, as reviewed above. Australia, Ontario or England have strong programmes and more recent efforts geared towards this approach include Norway or Chile.

Professionalising leadership is broader than specific training programmes or interventions. It requires a combination of formal and informal development processes throughout the different stages and contexts of leadership practice. This requires designing and offering programmes to support the school leadership career throughout:

• *Initial leadership training:* Initial school leadership training can be voluntary or mandatory, and this can depend on governance structures and funding strategies, as an important issue is who will pay for training. There are different approaches that may be implemented: either governments can define national programmes, or collaborate with local level governments who have responsibility for hiring principals and secure incentives for participation. Often, it may be local governments who include the pre-requisite of having specific leadership training when announcing vacancies, which is an incentive for principals to take this type of training. Efforts also need to be made to find the right candidates.

• *Induction programmes:* Induction programmes are valuable to prepare and shape initial school leadership practices and they provide vital networks for principals to share concerns and explore challenges (Pont et al., 2008). In Austria, Ireland or New Zealand this has been one of the main pathways for leadership training. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland use this as a complementary feature of initial training. These programmes are often optional and may include in-depth training on legislative, financial and other topics. They are particularly useful for new principals because the provide mentoring during the first years in exercise and help new principals develop support networks.

• *Continuing training for specific needs:* In-service programmes need to be seen in the context of prior learning opportunities for school leadership. Where there are no other initial requirements, basic in-service programmes should encourage development of leadership skills. In-service training should be also offered periodically to principals and leadership teams so they

can update their skills and keep up with new developments. Networks (virtual or real) also provide informal development for principals and leadership teams.

Make school leadership an attractive profession

To improve the quality of leadership focused on improvement, it is important to provide appropriate conditions for suitable candidates to take on the post. Selected evidence shows that possible applicants may not be attracted into the position due to heavy and challenging workloads of principals, often low remuneration in relation to other positions, or low levels of support. In addition, recruitment procedures and lack of career development prospects for principals may also deter potential candidates. Strategies to attract, recruit and support high-performing school leaders have been defined as follows (Pont et al., 2008):

• *Professionalise recruitment.* Recruitment processes have an impact on school leadership quality, as it is an important decision in the selection of the best possible candidates. While school-level involvement is critical to contextualise recruitment, at the system level policies need to ensure that procedures and criteria are, transparent, consistent and effective. Often in selected countries there is considerable weight on seniority and processes may be undertaken by the school board, often composed on non-professionals who have not been prepared for this role. Recruitment procedures can go beyond traditional job interviews to include more tools and procedures to assess candidates. Succession planning – proactively identifying and developing potential leaders – can boost the quantity and quality of future school leaders.

• *Provide incentives to make school leadership attractive*: The relative attractiveness of salaries for school leaders can influence the supply of high quality candidates. Monitoring remuneration in relation to comparable grades in the public and private sectors and making school leadership salaries more competitive. Establishing separate salary scales for teachers and principals can attract more candidates from among the teaching staff. At the same time, salary scales should reflect leadership structures and school-level factors in order to attract high performing leaders to all schools.

• *Provide options and support for career development*. After years of practice, school leaders may want to shift careers or make lateral moves to avoid burnout. However, in some countries school leadership is not often perceived as a professional career with different steps, which may not be conducive to attract good candidates. Having further career development prospects can help avoid principal burnout and make school leadership a more attractive career option. Different education systems have made the profession more flexible, allowing school leaders to move between schools as well as between leadership and teaching and other professions. Current country practice provides some examples to draw from, including alternatives to lifetime contracts through renewable fixed-term contracts and options for principals to step up to new opportunities such as jobs in the educational administration, leadership of groups of schools or consultant leadership roles.

A word on policy implementation

Finally, it is important to understand that going from practice to policy requires taking into consideration the context and challenges of implementation. Every policy reform can be different because of the system's political structure, social, cultural and economic context. Educational researchers show that the process of implementation is as important as the design of policies themselves (Skalde and Pont, 2013; Levin, 2012).

Many studies on education reform have concluded that often, reforms fail to take hold in schools and classrooms (Anderson and Stiegelbauer, 1994; Cuban 1992; Kirst and Meister 1985; Datnow 2005). Reforms may change institutional or organisational structures in schools, but often they do not reach into the classrooms and do not affect the core of what teachers do or how students learn (Tyack and Cuban, 1995; Elmore, 1996). In addition, as more reforms have been introduced across education systems, schools may have the tendency to stay away from yet one more reform and continue with their day to day operations.

In the analysis as to why many of these reforms fail to take ground, reform research in recent years has focused more on what are the conditions for implementation: when, why and for whom some policies will work and some will not (Honig, 2006). The recognition of the factors that are critical

for success in education policy reforms calls for policy makers to have better knowledge on how to respond.

In the implementation of school leadership policies, there needs to be a) alignment to governance structures and b) consideration of the capacity and respective responsibilities of different actors.

The degree of decentralisation and autonomy has an impact on the responsibilities that school leaders can actually take and exercise. When there is much national prescription, school leaders may play a more limited role than when they have more autonomy.

This also depends on the quality of the existing workforce, including teachers and school leaders. If the teaching workforce do not have incentives, have low levels of skills and have individualised approaches to teaching, the types of policy approaches and implementation can be different than if teachers are highly prepared professionals.

Education systems may also have additional institutions or structures supporting schools, such as local level governments, evaluation institutions or school improvement advisors.

Furthermore, implementation of education reform is influenced by different factors. There is a wide range of stakeholders (including students, parents, teachers, employers and trade unions) who are involved and have stakes in education outcomes. Their engagement in implementation of reforms is required, as many are those who are on the frontline of education delivery. Without their cooperation, reforms may not have their desired effects (Wurzburg, 2010).

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