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Distributed Leadership and Inclusive Schools

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Abstract

This article tries to answer the question of whether distributed leadership contributes significantly to the development of an inclusive school. For this, a systematic review of the literature has been carried out, based on the PRISMA strategy, of articles from 2011 to 2021 that describe 35 schools with distributed leadership. The findings reflect that there is a relationship between distributed leadership, promoted by the principal, and the achievement of an inclusive school. We found that elements of distributed leadership such as cooperative teamwork and decision-making lead to a focus on student-centred educational approaches, encouraging their participation, their families' participation, and sometimes, the need to count on people outside the school itself. It is also noted that distributed leadership promotes inclusive teacher training. On the other hand, some barriers arise that hinder the participation of students and their families. It concludes with the need to train management teams in distributed leadership and promote legislative changes to favour the participation of all students without exceptions.

Keywords

Distributed leadership, inclusive education, systematic review, school management, inclusion.

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El liderazgo distribuido y la escuela inclusiva

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Resumen

Este artículo de revisión trata de responder a la pregunta sobre si un liderazgo distribuido contribuye de manera significativa al desarrollo de la escuela inclusiva. Para ello, se ha realizado una revisión sistemática de la literatura, con base en la estrategia PRISMA, de artículos desde el 2011 hasta el 2021 que describen 35 centros educativos con liderazgo distribuido. Los hallazgos reflejan que existe una relación entre el liderazgo distribuido promovido por el equipo directivo y la consecución de una escuela inclusiva. Muestran elementos del liderazgo distribuido, como el trabajo en equipo y la toma de decisiones, que llevan a poner al alumnado en el centro de los planteamientos educativos fomentando su participación, la de sus familias y, en ocasiones, la necesidad de contar con personas externas al propio centro educativo. También se señala que el liderazgo distribuido promueve una formación del profesorado inclusiva. Por otra parte, surgen algunas barreras que dificultan la participación del alumnado y de sus familias no directamente imputables al propio centro educativo. Se concluye con la necesidad de formar a los equipos directivos en liderazgo distribuido y promover cambios legislativos para favorecer la participación de todo el alumnado sin excepciones.

Palabras clave

Liderazgo distribuido, educación inclusiva, revisión sistemática, dirección escolar, inclusión.

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Sustainable Development Goals show the path to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all (UNESCO, 2015). Goal number four promotes guaranteeing inclusive, equitable and quality education. From a rights-perspective, promoting an inclusive school is a duty (Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017; Escudero and Martínez, 2011; Ramberg and Watkins, 2020). It implies methodological and organizational changes to achieve societal educational goals in line with social justice and participation for all its actors (Haug, 2017).

Educational leadership is a key factor in promoting an effective school (Bolívar, 2015; Bolívar et al., 2013; Louis et al., 2010; Manaze, 2019). Therefore, educational leadership that promotes an inclusive school is necessary. Distributed leadership seems to be an idea that encompasses different types of leadership. García (2018) points out that: "The concept of distributed leadership is significantly overlapping with the concepts of shared leadership (Pearceand Conger, 2003), collaborative (Wallace, 1989) democratic (Gastil, 1997) and participatory (Vroom and Jago, 1998)" (p. 57). Also, some papers show that distributed leadership, in its broad concept, may encourage the goals of inclusive education (Miškolci et al., 2016).

We agree with Mayoral et al. (2018) in that, being a crucial issue, educational leadership is not sufficiently explored empirically. The objective of this article is to verify, through a systematic review, how distributed leadership promotes an inclusive school.

Theoretical Frame

Inclusive education has its origin in the integration of a school population classified as having special needs, but currently, this concept has been largely surpassed (Escudero and Martínez, 2011). Although there are different interpretations of the word inclusion (Nilholm, 2021; Ramberg and Watkins, 2020), each with underlying values, for us, an inclusive school is one that guarantees access for all students, and their social and cultural participation while promoting an improvement in their learning and their personal and emotional development (Bolívar et al., 2013; Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017; Ramberg and Watkins, 2020).

We find some instruments to measure the degree of inclusion in a school, such as the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) or the Inputs - Processes - Outcomes model (Kyriazopoulou and Weber, 2009). Reviewing the literature, we can find, at least, these dimensions in an inclusive school:

- Teaching practices that take into account the experience and prior knowledge of the students, making them feel welcome (Booth and Ainscow, 2002).
- Inclusive policies and practices (at a school level) that promote the participation of all students (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017) and their families (Ramberg and Watkins, 2020).
- School culture that positively values diversity (Ramberg and Watkins, 2020), and where values related to social justice and democracy are relevant (Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017; Escudero and Martínez, 2011).
- Well-prepared teachers in continuous training (Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017).

- Empathic teachers, who listen to their students and generate high expectations of them (Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017).

Given the above, we agree with S. C. Ward et al. (2015) in pointing out that inclusion is more than just adjusting the curriculum and changing the way of teaching. Schools have the responsibility to initiate an improvement process that will lead them towards a school with equity and increasingly inclusive, taking into account the points of view of the teaching team, the students, their families, and other members of the community (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Echeita Sarrionandia, 2017).

To produce the aforementioned changes, educational leadership consistent with them is necessary. Defining leadership as a process that allows different people to be mobilized towards shared goals without the use of force (Louis et al., 2010; Sibanda, 2018), we find different types of leadership in academic journals.

Although the traditional view of leadership pays attention to the individual characteristics that make a person a leader, distributed leadership considers leadership at the school level as the interactions between a group of people in a context (Spillane et al., 2001). In fact, the Index for Inclusion itself presents an inclusive approach to leadership as one of the indicators to adopt to evaluate inclusive policies and practices (Miškolci et al., 2016). We are aware that there is a difficulty with this definition of distributed leadership (García, 2018; Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Katewa and Heystek, 2019; Sibanda, 2017; Spillane, 2005) giving rise to different conceptions such as "shared", "collaborative", “disperse”, “democratic”, “participatory”,…

In agreement with the point of view of the European Policy Network on School Leadership (Duif et al., 2013), we define distributed leadership as a process where leadership emerges from the actions and interactions of many people. Therefore, a school with distributed leadership will have different leaders (Harris, 2011; Spillane et al., 2007) and there will be collaboration and cooperation between teachers, families, students, and other people in the school context (Alyami and Floyd , 2019).

Hulpia et al. (2012) developed a tool to measure the degree of distributed leadership in a school considering several dimensions such as teacher participation in school decisions, the quality and distribution of support and supervision by the principal, and cooperative culture. López Alfaro and Gallegos Araya (2018) also point out that the culture of cooperation needs group cohesion as an essential element, moreover Çakir and Özkan (2019) consider that a shared vision, as well as the division of responsibilities and trust, are also significant dimensions of distributed leadership.

Taking into account all of the above, we can consider distributed leadership not so much as a model but rather as a diagnostic tool that allows us to analyze schools (Harris, 2011; Harris and Spillane, 2008). So, we can test our hypothesis in this article, namely that distributed leadership promotes an inclusive school. This idea is mentioned by different researchers (Ainscow & West, 2006; Clark, C. et al. 2018; Miškolci et al., 2016) and we aim to find, through the review of the descriptions made of schools with distributed leadership, more scientific evidence that demonstrates the relationship between distributed leadership and an inclusive school.

Research Questions

The goal of this article is to examine, in an empirical way, whether distributed leadership fosters an inclusive school. A systematic review of the distributed leadership practices that are carried out can enlighten us to respond more precisely to the following questions:

1.- Do schools with distributed leadership promote an inclusive vision of the school?
In other words, we wonder if distributed leadership fosters inclusive values such as democracy, social justice, appreciation of diversity, trust in the potential of all students, generation of high expectations, empathy, and support, among others.

2.- What elements or characteristics of distributed leadership foster an inclusive school?
The idea is to determine which factors of distributed leadership –such as teamwork, together with cohesion and trust, shared decision-making, and the common vision of the school's objectives– promote inclusion.

3.- Are the results obtained in schools with distributed leadership coherent with those of an inclusive school?

Knowing that inclusive schools promote not only the improvement of the learning of all students but also their personal and emotional development as well as teachers in permanent training, we seek to determine if the schools with distributed leadership achieve these objectives while promoting inclusive educational practices.

Methodology

In order to answer appropriately to the objectives, set out above, a systematic review of the literature based on the PRISMA guide has been carried out (Moher, 2009; Sánchez-Meca, 2010; Sánchez-Meca & Botella, 2010). The systematic procedure, therefore, includes a search strategy, selection criteria, and data extraction, as well as their evaluation and analysis.

Table 1 shows the selection criteria. As we are interested in studying the current situation, we have selected articles published in peer-reviewed journals or theses from 2011 to 2021 that describe, qualitatively and as a primary source, distributed leadership in schools (from nursery to secondary schools) in Spanish or in English. In addition, as we do not have the primary data of the investigations, we have selected only those articles with an adequate length that allow us to carry out the correct analysis for the objectives in which we are interested. An important factor in limiting the papers we have considered is that the article should describe distributed leadership and the school in its particular context. In this way, we can know better if the school achieves an inclusive vision.

Table 1

Inclusion criteria

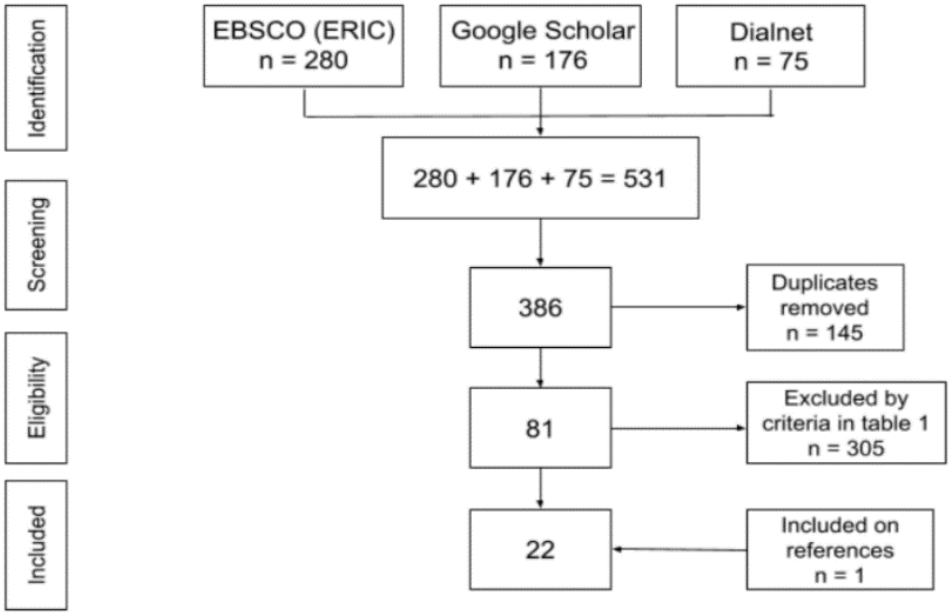
Items
- Published from 2011 to 2021
- Peer-reviewed articles in journals or published theses
- Publication language: English or Spanish
- Papers with a length greater than 8 pages
- Original investigations describing distributed leadership schools as a primary source
- Papers describing from nursery to secondary schools
- Qualitative or mixed methodology

The systematic review began by searching through three databases with search engines and the above selection criteria, using the words "School" and "Distributed leadership" or something similar, such as "shared leadership", "Collaborative leadership", "Democratic leadership" or "Participatory leadership", both in English and Spanish.

We found 531 documents, and, with the Zotero software, we eliminated the duplicates, leaving 386. After analyzing the summaries and considering the selection criteria, we obtained 81. Finally, after reading the articles, we discarded those that did not explain the context of the school. Examples of rejected papers were those analyzing the impact of a distributed leadership program or those interested in the perceptions of principals or teachers in distributed leadership schools while they do not describe the schools. Looking at the references in the articles, we identified another paper to end up with 22 articles that directly show distributed leadership and describe its outcomes in 35 schools. The PRISMA flowchart (Moher, 2009) shows the process for determining the studies considered in this systematic review in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram



The 35 selected schools achieve a distributed leadership beyond a delegation of tasks (Hallinger and Heck, 2011) and describe the appearance of new sources of leadership in the school. In table 2 we have the characteristics of the schools reviewed.

Table 2

Characteristics of schools reviewed. (Source: own elaboration)

School	Characteristics	Country
IPS1	School in a rural area. It has a population of 632 students from nursery to Year 7 and 52% are girls. Families' educational level and socio-economic level very low.	Pakistan
IP1	A large, urban, Mid-Atlantic public school with a population of 306 students from Pre-K (nursery) to grade 5.	USA
IP2	A large, urban, Mid-Atlantic public school with a population of 466 students from Pre-K (nursery) to grade 5.	USA
IP3	A large, urban, Mid-Atlantic public school with a population of 313 students from Pre-K (nursery) to grade 5.	USA
IP4	An urban school with a population of 194 students from kindergarten through fourth graders). High proportions of Latino students and low-income families.	USA
IP5	School with, approximately, 100 students in four regular classrooms (Kindergarten or (nursery), Years 1-2, Years 3-4, Years 5-6), five full-time teachers and one teaching principal. It is located in an urban area.	Australia
IP6	Fairly new and multicultural school with preschool through grade 9. Low target achievements in the national tests. It is located on the outskirts of a medium-sized Swedish municipality in an area with a large proportion of pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish.	Sweden
IP7	Urban school in Murcia with 449 students and 38 teachers. 30% of families are immigrants from foreign countries with a medium-low socio-economic level.	Spain
IP8	Two-sites rural schools with 224 students (90+134) and 22 teachers. Families with a medium-high socio-economic level and 30% of students living outside of the school's immediate neighbourhood.	Spain
IP9	Urban school in Madrid with 550 students and 27 teachers. Families with medium-high socio-economic level. They are attracted from a distance to the school's location by its educational programme.	Spain
IP10	Urban school in a city with less than 10 000 inhabitants. 713 students and 34 teachers. Diverse educational level in the families with notable contrast: medium-high in Spanish-born families and low in immigrant families.	Spain
P1	A large urban elementary school in California with high-poverty (72%), predominately Latino (99%) student population with 50% of the students identified as English learners.	USA
P2	A large urban elementary school with a high-poverty student population (87%), predominately Latino (95%) and 82% of the students identified as English learners.	USA
P3	A suburban elementary K-6 school in the northeastern United States with 498 students who are predominantly white and middle class and with 25% of families with low economic level.	USA
P4	An urban, low-income, K-5 elementary school of 228 students located in the centre of the Rockland neighbourhood.	USA
P5	A school on the border of a major urban area, which serves children from a mix of blue-collar, public housing, and middle-class neighbourhoods. It is a small K-6 school with approximately 350 students. There are two classroom	USA

School	Characteristics	Country
	teachers at each grade level, with a full complement of exceptional education, support services, and ‘‘special’’ teachers (PE, Art, Music). The population in this community is becoming increasingly diverse, though the majority of children attending the school are Caucasian.	
P6	A rural school with a very high staff renewed. Families and students with a medium-low socio-economic level. Some concerns with families just coming to the area and families already living there.	Spain
P7	An old industrial building is serving as a rural school with families and students with a medium-low socio-economic level.	Spain
P8	A new rural school with a very high level of staff turnover. Families and students with a medium-low socio-economic level.	Spain
P9	A rural school with a very high level of staff turnover. Families and students with a medium-low socio-economic level.	Spain
P10	A school with a population of 250 students, approximately, in nine regular classrooms (one classroom per year from Year 1 to Year 9) and sixteen special classrooms only for students diagnosed with SEN or disability. The school had approximately 30 full-time teachers, one teaching principal, and one teaching deputy principal and it is located in an urban area.	Slovakia
P11	A small K-8 Catholic school (approximately 140 students) in Stockton, California, with a principal and five teachers. The school is comprised of approximately 50% Hispanic and 50% Filipino students. The families are considered low-income, with over 70% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunches, and 100% of students receiving some form of financial aid. The school is organized in multi-grade classrooms.	USA
S1	A small urban high school with 421 students in grades 9 through 12 and 25 staff members. The student body includes 95% ELLs, and 5% former ELLs; 8% of these are special education students. High diversity with 20% Asian; 29% Black, composed primarily of Haitian and African students; 38% Hispanic; and 13% who identified as White. Girls accounted for 43% of the students enrolled.	USA
S2	A high school near Lisbon where 19% of attendees are migrants from diverse countries, mostly from Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries, but also from Eastern European countries.	Portugal
S3	A school situated in a suburb of Lisbon with great cultural diversity. Often, even with second-generation immigrant students, languages and cultures of their parents’ origin were predominant at home.	Portugal
S4	A school located in a “dormitory” town near Lisbon with a high rate of immigrants from Portuguese-speaking African countries, Eastern Europe and Brazil. The majority of students are from low-income and low-academic achievement families.	Portugal
S5	A small, rural, secondary school (grades 8-12) with a population of fewer than 200 students located in central British Columbia	Canada
S6	A high school in Eastern Cape with a community program to decrease the number of learner pregnancies that allows parents to teach about abstinence.	South Africa
S7	A high school in Eastern Cape with a community program to decrease the number of learner pregnancies through a comprehensive sex education.	South Africa
S8	A rural, sixth to eighth grade middle school of 205 students in California.	USA
S9	A national secondary boarding girls’ school (that admits students between 14 to 18 years of age from the whole country), with over 70 teachers, and about 800 students.	Kenya
S10	A vocational-technical high school with approximately 1500 students through Year 9 to Year 12, with a faculty of over 110 teachers. 50% of students are	USA

School	Characteristics	Country
	low-income and slightly more than 50 % are either African-American or Hispanic. It is located in a lower to moderate-income first-ring suburb.	
S11	A Bilingual High school serving 595 students (aged between 13 and 18) and a faculty of 58 teachers. Families with a very low socioeconomic level, unemployed, and often, with social destructure. Also, many gipsy ethnicities are present.	Spain
S12	A middle-high boarding school that has successfully adopted the teaching model of flipped classroom supported by ICT (Bring Your Own Device) in the northern part of China. It has six grades from 7 to 12 and requires boarding for all students. The school has 161 classes, 713 employees and 9200 students.	China
S13	A comprehensive high school serving students in grades 9-12 where they remain on campus for the entire school day.	USA

We realize that there is a high proportion of schools whose families have a medium to low socio-economic level (9 out of 35). Also, many rural schools are on the list (7 out of 35). These characteristics of the selected schools introduce a bias in our results that we must take into account.

Next, each selected document has been read with the Qualcoder version 2.7 software and an analysis of content has been carried out, distinguishing the descriptions made of the schools. The analysis has been carried out in two phases. First, different memos of the documents have been annotated considering each school. In a second reading, taking into account the different memos together with the revised theory and the research objectives, we codified them and grouped them by schools with the following categories indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

Categories of analysis (Source: own elaboration)

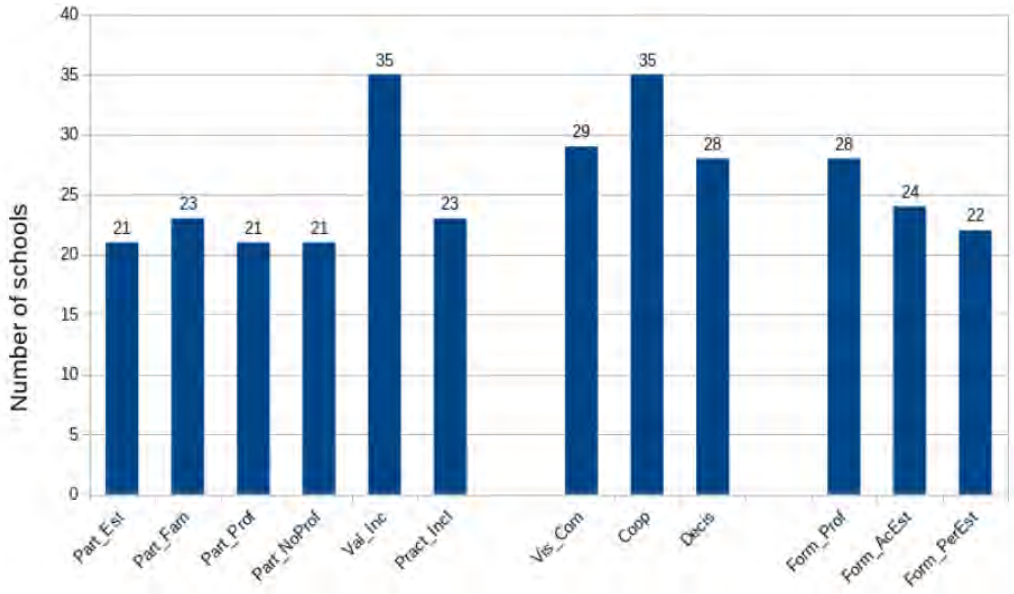
Inclusive School	Definition
Part_Prof: Teacher participation	Showing how the teaching staff is involved in the school and assumes initiative and responsibilities.
Part_Est: Student participation	Pointing out the students' involvement in the school.
Part_Fam: Family participation	Mentioning the relationship of families in the school.
Part_NoProf: External participation	Showing the way in which people from outside the school participate.
Val_Inc: Inclusive values	When talking about values such as democracy, fair treatment, empathy, the positive appreciation of diversity, trust, support,
Pract_Incl: Inclusive Practice	When describing educational practices that attend to diversity from an inclusive point of view, such as a good reception for all students, peer learning,
Distributed Leadership	**Definition**
Vis_Com: Common vision	By showing the purposes that the school has agreed with the educational community through consensus.
Coop: Cooperation and teamwork	When describing practices such as teamwork, supervision, assignment of responsibilities.
Decis: Decision making	When mentioning how the school makes decisions, who starts the initiatives, how a consensus is reached.

Outcomes	Definition
Form_Prof: Teacher training	Showing how teachers are prepared or how they learn and improve.
Form_AcEst: Academic achievements of the students.	By pointing out aspects related to the academic success of students.
Form_PerEst: Other achievements for the students: personal achievements.	By pointing out aspects related to the training of students in their social and emotional aspects.

Results

In the first place, considering which categories describe the different schools, we see in figure 2, that in the 35 schools analyzed the inclusive values are indicated (Val_Inc category). Also, we find evidence of teamwork among the teaching staff (Coop category) that, on some occasions, extends to students, families and other agents outside the school. For example, in school IPS1, Afzal Tajik and Wali (2020) express: "[principal] argues that a school cannot be effectively run and led by an individual; every member of the school community must contribute to smooth running of the school" (p. 8). Also, in S11 school, Martínez-Valdivia et al. (2018) mention: "Among his roles as principal, one of the most important is to make teachers, students and parents feel useful, getting the best of each one" (p. 10).

Figure 2
Categories vs. Number of schools (Source: own elaboration)



Observing Figure 2, we remark that all the categories used to analyze the selected articles appear in more than half of the schools, being those related to distributed leadership: common vision, cooperative teamwork and decision-making, which appear in more schools together

with the inclusive values category. In other words, the selected schools have a distributed leadership (although, on occasions, not all of their characteristics are described, since in six of them it is not stated that they acquire a common vision and in seven they do not describe the decision-making process) and all the schools show elements that give rise to an inclusive vision of education.

Analyzing the frequency of the categories, we find that 48.36% of the annotations describe the school as an inclusive school. In this sense, they mostly refer to inclusive values such as support (43 times), trust (23 times), or help (19 times). Also, at a lower rate, we find ideas such as respect (13 times), needs (13 times), care (12 times), democracy and social justice (9 times), appreciation of diversity (8 times), and freedom (6 times).

Distributed leadership category represents 29.55% of the annotations, mainly describing the teamwork that is carried out in the school (115 times). These annotations mostly refer to teamwork carried out by the teaching staff. The students' participation is also mentioned, mainly to find out their opinions than to really take part in decisions. When talking about teamwork with families, some dilemmas appear. On the one hand, concerns arise regarding the role of families in the school, both from the point of view of teachers, administration or the families themselves (Afzal Tajik & Wali, 2020; Ishimaru, 2013; Martínez-Valdivia et al ., 2018; Traver-Martí et al., 2021). To solve some of the problems, sometimes schools assume the need to also train families so that they can participate properly (Ishimaru, 2013; Sun & Gao, 2019). For example, Ishimaru (2013) points out the impressions of a father:

> We [parents] discovered that we had much more right than they who were the principals and teachers, and that gave us a lot of strength and a lot of power. We understood that if we joined together, more people joined together, we were stronger. In addition, it was learning to speak out . . . to the people [in the district], how to speak out to them, not fight, but rather speak out . . . using the right words and demanding what we really had to demand, what we deserved, what our children deserved, what they weren't giving us. (p. 23)

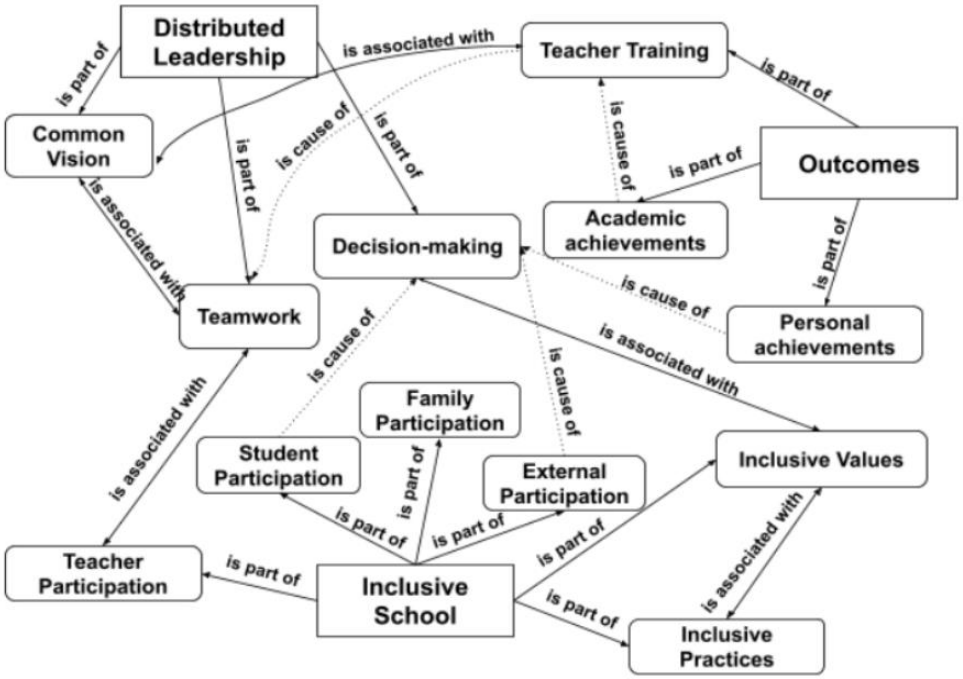
Finally, the rest of the annotations, 22.08%, describe the teacher training. This category is found in 80% of the schools. The relevance of teacher training in the academic achievement of the students as well as in their personal and emotional education is present in 62% of the schools.

However, there are few annotations of other categories, noting they are not as frequently used as the former to describe the school. For instance, we find inclusive educational practices in 5.49%, how teachers participate and take the initiative in 4.67%, and the participation of other agents external to the schools in just 3.62%.

We also analyze how the different categories in the articles are related, finding the following relationship map (figure 3):

Figure 3

Relationship between categories (Source: own elaboration)



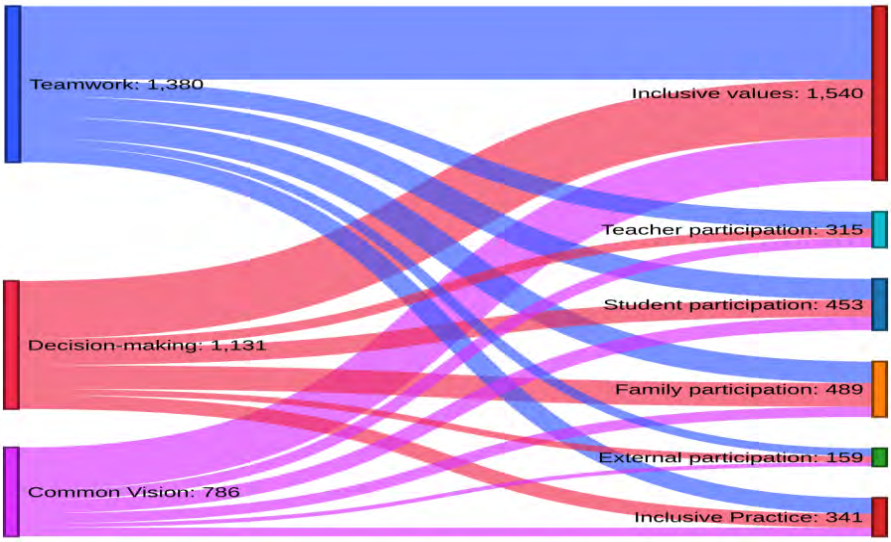
With this map, we can see the relationships that are indicated in the different articles with the set of categories used. We can infer that there must be mechanisms that reflect relationships such as students and their families participating more when they also influence how decisions are made at school. For instance, in S3 school, Caetano et al. (2020) point out: "Parents' and teachers' participation on the Facebook page was also noteworthy, as they expressed their opinions about the activities, suggesting new ones and encouraging students to participate" (p. 13). Also, the common vision of the teaching staff and their teamwork influence the training of the teaching staff and consequently better academic performance of the students. In S13, Ward et al. (2018) found "shared leadership brought the teachers together by allowing their input toward the ultimate goal of student achievement" (p. 4).

Shared decision-making promotes inclusive values stressing a personal formation for students as it is well documented, for instance, in IP3 school, Clayton and LaBatt (2019) remarks: "decision-making processes and school structures that support equity and excellence included a focus on the social and emotional needs of students and modeling expectations" (p. 7). It is noteworthy how shared decision-making sometimes leads to promoting the participation of external agents, for instance, in describing how to face a problem in the teachers committee at S10 school, Louis et al. (2013) write: "This is big enough that we'd better call in more people and look at it from a lot of different angles" (p. 18).

In addition, we obtain the Sankey diagram from the proximity relationships between the categories of distributed leadership and inclusive school.

Figure 4

Relations between categories of distributed leadership and an inclusive school. (Source: own elaboration)

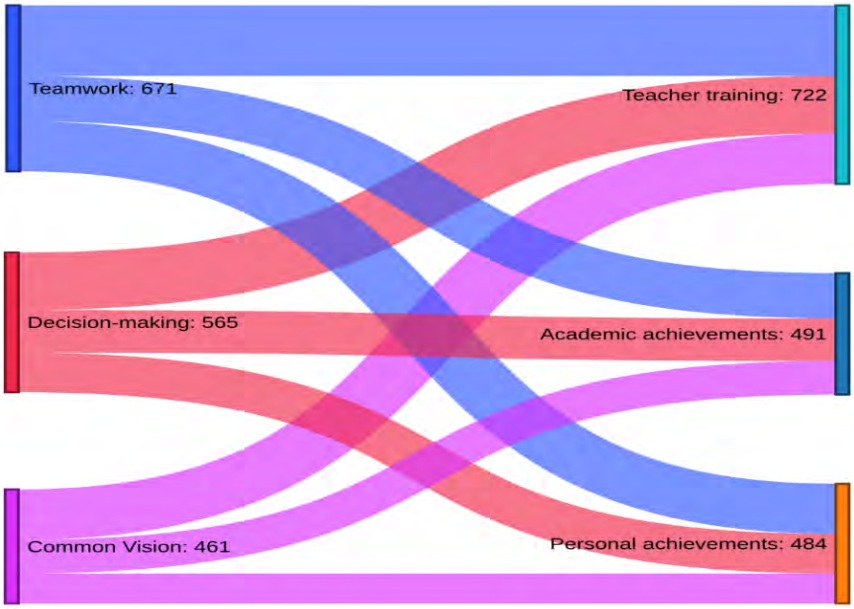


The proximity of these relationships also shows how elements of distributed leadership promote some characteristics of an inclusive school. We observe that teamwork or cooperation and shared decision-making in school are related to the acquisition of inclusive values since 75% of the annotations on inclusive values appear close to both categories. Both factors also seem to encourage family participation by 82%. All the categories that define distributed leadership contribute to student participation, although their relationship with the common vision is low, having only 26%. All this seems to indicate that, although families and students participate, they still need to be considered an essential part of the school, so they are not incorporated into that common purpose. Also, we note that the common vision that characterizes distributed leadership is largely unrelated to inclusive values (just 25%). This can be explained since, although there seems to be a relationship between cooperation and teamwork together with the reflections that arise there with the assumption of a common vision (Mayoral et al., 2018; S. Ward and Graham-Brown, 2018); a common vision, in isolation, does not always have to be in line with the goals of an inclusive school (Miškolci et al., 2016).

Another Sankey diagram (figure 5) analyzes teacher training and student formation (academic and beyond) with the categories of a school with distributed leadership. In this sense, it is noteworthy that both the structures of cooperation and teamwork, as well as decision-making and the acquisition of a common vision, appear to be related practically in the same way to the expected results of an inclusive school, although precisely the teamwork of the teaching staff is the element that appears most related to teacher training (39%), the academic training of students (37%) and the personal training of students (43%).

Figure 5

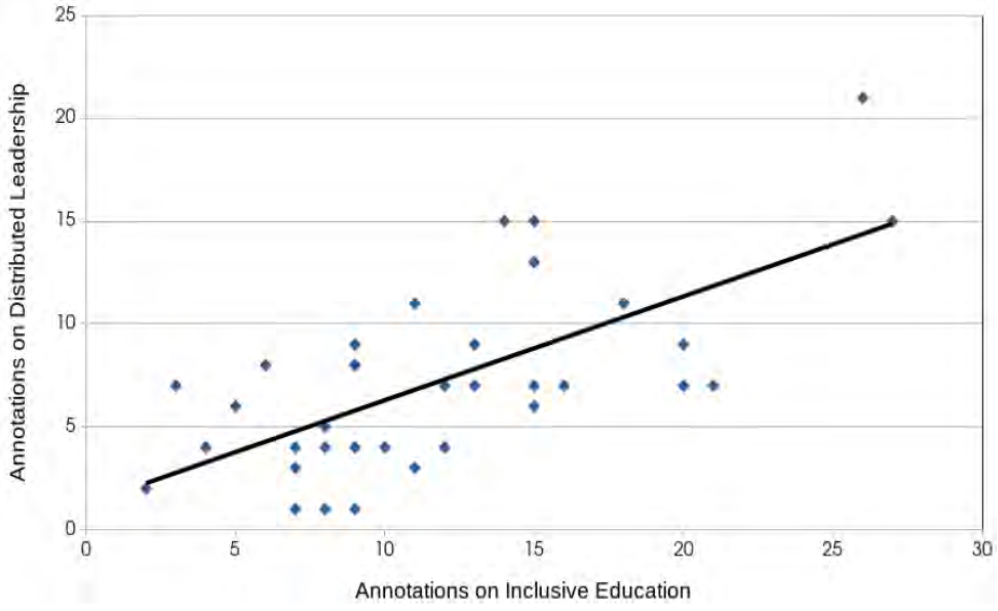
Relations between categories of distributed leadership and outcomes of an inclusive school (Source: own elaboration)



Finally, considering that both inclusion and distributed leadership are continuous concepts, we can see what relationship exists between the number of categories that describe one and the other for every school. Therefore, each point in figure 6 represents a school.

Figure 6

Relationship between the number of categories that describe distributed leadership and inclusion for each school. (Source: own elaboration)



We see that there seems to be a certain correlation (with a Pearson coefficient, r = 0.671) between the number of annotations that describe distributed leadership of a school and the number that shows the development of that school towards inclusion.

Discussion

Given the results obtained, we can say that there is a relationship between distributed leadership and an inclusive school. In all the schools analyzed, the preponderant role of the principal in achieving this distributed leadership is observed (Miškolci et al., 2016; Petersen, 2014; Sun and Gao, 2019; Traver-Martí et al., 2021).

The teamwork developed by teachers in these schools, as well as more distributed decision-making, lead them to acquire an inclusive vision (Caetano et al., 2020; Miškolci et al., 2016), to support and help each other to achieve the common goals that arise. In many cases, they maintain educational approaches whose centre is the student (Cherkowski and Schnellert, 2017; Petersen, 2014; Sun and Gao, 2019; Traver-Martí et al., 2021). This fact promotes, sometimes, the need for student participation (Martínez -Valdivia et al., 2018). Support structures also appear for students who need it (Auslander, 2018; Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2018; Proehl et al., 2013) and the culture and context of their students are taken into account (Caetano et al., 2020; Gcelu, 2019; Ishimaru, 2013). The selected schools, therefore, achieve an inclusive vision of education to a greater or lesser extent and seek to prepare all their students for life beyond school not only from an academic point of view but also worried about their personal and emotional formation (Clayton & LaBatt, 2019; Damiani and Wieczorek, 2017; Proehl et al., 2013).

Distributed leadership promotes not only the academic and personal formation of students but also training for teachers themselves (Bagwell, 2019; Cherkowski and Schnellert, 2017; Mayoral et al., 2018). In fact, distributed leadership is sometimes pointed to as a necessary element to achieve a professional learning community (Louis et al., 2013; Zakaria et al., 2018), and discussions in faculty meetings are considered as a formative element that helps them to move towards educational inclusion (Bagwell, 2019; Miškolci et al., 2016).

However, the papers reviewed reveal the existence of barriers to participation. On the one hand, descriptions of distributed leadership always speak of teamwork among teachers, but there seems to be a lack of a culture of participation and collaboration with other sectors, such as students or families. For example, Damiani and Wieczorek (2017), point out: "While the principal acknowledges the role students play in making the school function, he is not inclined to take their lead or use their voice to support their experiences of school or learning" (p. 8).

On the other hand, educational legislation can also hinder participation (Afzal Tajik & Wali, 2020; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2020). For example, Börü (2020) expresses teachers' unwillingness to take responsibility considering that regulations establish that the principal is the leader of the school and teachers only have authority in their classrooms. Sometimes, it is the administration itself that puts up obstacles to participation, since there is a certain fear that families will become empowered and claim their rights (Ishimaru, 2013).

Other concerns are also found, such as the lack of training or the weak collaborative culture of some families to participate (Auslander, 2018; Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2018), solved, on

occasions, with adequate training for families (Sun and Gao, 2019). Also, Miškolci et al. (2016) point out that the dominance of the educational excellence discourse may be inconsistent with the sustainability of inclusion in schools.

Even so, several schools have had successful experiences where, in addition to the participation of teachers, students, their families and other agents from outside the school collaborate with each other, achieving integration with the environment and transforming it (Caetano et al., 2020; Mayoral et al., 2018; Traver-Martí et al., 2021).

An important limitation of this article refers to the methodology used. Since this is not a primary study and we are referencing other sources without having access to all the data, we must point out that, although all the articles show schools with distributed leadership and describe their results, in many of them, they do not seek that inclusive approach that we analyze here. That is, as these were not the objectives of the selected investigations, it is possible that the authors of these articles had not pointed out aspects relevant to educational inclusion when describing these schools. Similarly, when showing the proximity relationships between the different categories, it must be considered that they may be due both to the descriptions made of the schools and to the style of writing of the researchers themselves in the selected articles.

Also, as noted above, the proportion of schools with a low socio-economic index (25.71%) and located in rural areas (20%) in the selection of the schools can introduce a bias to the results obtained that we are not aware of. Perhaps this is because distributed leadership and inclusive schools are more common in this type of school. Although some studies support these ideas (Liu, 2020; Liu et al., 2018), we point out the need to find more scientific evidence to verify what characteristics of schools credit their progress to educational inclusion.

We also consider it necessary to carry out more empirical studies that describe schools with distributed leadership and its relationship with inclusion since, in the 10-year period studied, only 35 schools have been analyzed in this review of scientific literature.

Considering the limitations presented, the conclusions of this research are clear to answer our three research objectives.

1 Distributed leadership, supported by the principal, promotes an inclusive school.
2 Teamwork and collaborative decision-making give rise to a common vision of the school. Also, teachers' training by themselves, with structures of support and trust, leads the teaching staff to develop an increasingly inclusive education.
3 Teacher training is indicated as a result in 80% of the schools analyzed.

These schools share a student- centred education with the aim of preparing them, without any exclusion, not only academically but also for personal and emotional formation. Each school, since there is no single formula valid for all, does it in a different way and each school reaches a certain level of inclusion. Therefore, we can affirm that the results of a school with distributed leadership are consistent with those of an inclusive school.

Conclusions

From a socio-critical perspective, an inclusive school is much more than a transformation of the structure of the school. Moving towards excellence with greater equity for a school means developing leadership consistent with inclusion. This article presents empirical evidence that distributed leadership facilitates an inclusive vision of the school in coherence with what is stated by other researchers (Ainscow and West, 2006; Miškolci et al., 2016).

The role of the principal to achieve a distributed leadership school is essential to facilitate the change towards an increasingly inclusive school. Barriers to participation have also been found due to legislation and the scarce collaborative culture that exists in schools and society. Therefore, the lack of inclusion in a school cannot be due solely to the teaching staff, although teachers, frequently, must change their collaborative culture to favouring the participation of students, families, and other people in schools. Finally, we find that distributed leadership promotes teacher training that advances towards educational inclusion.

In view of the results of this systematic review, we suggest carrying out more empirical studies to deepen the relationships found and answer questions like what type of schools are moving towards inclusion? Is school size important to become an inclusive school or to distribute leadership? How is shared decision-making implemented by people from various sectors?

We also believe it is necessary to reflect on possible legislative changes that favour participation in the school of all people based on their condition and context, but without "labelling" them. Finally, an important aspect is reviewing the selection of management teams and offering them adequate training in distributed leadership to achieve a more socially fair and inclusive school (Azar and Adnan, 2020; Kılıçoğlu, 2018).

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