

Research Article

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The Leadership of Management Teams: A Fundamental Pillar in Building An Educational Culture for Coexistence and Participation

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Educational leadership plays a fundamental role in promoting a democratic school culture that fosters participation, coexistence, and inclusion. However, the development of such a culture largely depends on how leadership teams perform their roles and the leadership styles they adopt. This study aims to explore the perceptions of leadership teams and teachers regarding educational leadership and its influence on school coexistence.

Materials/methods. The study was conducted in 75 educational centres in Aragón (Spain) using a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from both teachers and school leaders through a questionnaire and a discussion group. The analysis focused on the functions, skills, and beliefs that shape educational leadership practices.

Results. The findings reveal a generally positive perception of educational leadership, especially regarding its role in creating a favourable organisational climate and promoting constructive interpersonal relationships. Competencies such as communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork emerged as essential to effective leadership. Additionally, the importance of collegial and participatory leadership practices was emphasised.

Conclusion. The study concludes that distributed leadership dynamics make a significant contribution to fostering inclusive and democratic school environments. This form of leadership not only enhances coexistence but also promotes the overall well-being of the educational community by encouraging the active engagement of all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

1. Introduction

Educational leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping a democratic school environment, acting as a key driver in promoting participation, coexistence, and inclusion within the educational community. However, effective leadership must go beyond the individual actions of headteachers or leadership teams; it requires the active involvement of all members of the institution. From this broader perspective, the present study explores the perceptions of both leadership teams and teaching staff regarding the role of educational leadership in fostering coexistence and participation in schools.

The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how leadership styles, practices, and beliefs influence the development of a collaborative and democratic school culture. By examining leadership dynamics within public, urban educational institutions in Aragón (Spain), the study aims to offer insights that can inform the development of more inclusive, participatory, and cohesive educational environments.

Building on these considerations, the primary aim of this study is to analyse the perceptions of leadership teams and teaching staff regarding educational leadership and its influence on fostering coexistence and participation in the school setting. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to identify the key leadership functions that support these processes, the essential skills required to promote them, and the leadership beliefs that underpin the advancement of participation and coexistence in schools.

2. Literature review

Educational leadership constitutes a fundamental pillar in the construction of a democratic school, as it serves as the driving force that fosters the participation of the educational community and promotes a culture of coexistence. However, to achieve this goal, leadership cannot be confined solely to the individual role of a school leadership team or headteacher. Instead, it must involve all members of the institution. In this regard, various authors have highlighted the importance of distributed and collegial leadership as a key element in achieving these objectives (Bass & Riggio, 2019; Bektaş et al., 2020; Bellibaş et al., 2020; Khaqan & Redondo-Sama, 2024; Silva Sánchez & Imbert Romero, 2024). Such leadership encourages greater involvement of all educational stakeholders, while also fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect, in addition to inspiring and motivating others towards the achievement of common goals (Bass & Riggio, 2019).

From the perspective of leadership teams, educational leadership represents an opportunity to enhance collaborative work within the school community and promote education based on coexistence and shared values. Within this framework, the success of an educational programme organised by a school institution largely depends on the coherence between the perspectives of the headteacher, the teaching staff, and the wider school community. Consequently, there must be a consensus on the true meaning of education and how the educational process should be carried out within the school (Elbadiansyah & Masyni, 2023; Martagón et al., 2024). The beliefs and values upheld by educational leaders have a significant impact on consolidating and promoting a democratic school culture. They also largely determine the nature of interactions within the institution, as well as the degree of cohesion generated (Liu et al., 2021).

These leaders face several challenges. One of them is the adoption of practices that respect and acknowledge diverse cultures and backgrounds, demonstrating sensitivity and understanding. Additionally, they must be willing to develop and implement new management and communication approaches that reinforce perceptions of impartiality, fairness, and inclusion within the institution. Therefore, leadership teams must be aware of the cultural context in which they operate and actively work towards fostering an open, inclusive, and democratic school environment (Mustoip et al., 2024).

In this regard, the OECD (2017) outlines four key domains that underpin school leadership: supporting and developing teaching quality, setting goals and evaluating progress, strategically managing resources, and collaborating with external stakeholders. These aspects contribute to a more holistic approach to school leadership, enabling institutions to align their resources with contextual needs.

The role of leadership in building a democratic school encompasses various interconnected dimensions. These include fostering a positive organisational climate, promoting constructive relationships among members of the educational community, and encouraging the active participation of all stakeholders (Carrasco-Aguilar et al., 2024; Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018; Printy & Liu, 2021; Tedia & Redda, 2022; Zapata et al., 2024). Moreover, democratic leadership is centred on the equitable distribution of power and shared decision-making (Sergiovanni, 2019). This approach advocates for leadership that works towards a vision shared by the entire school community. In relation to this, Gamarra (2024) emphasises that a leader should be an inspiring figure and an agent of change, capable of mobilising the educational community towards common objectives. Accordingly, the leader plays a crucial role in shaping the organisational culture, developing and sharing initiatives with members of the institution, while also integrating perspectives from different subcultural groups and incorporating them into their vision. Ultimately, the aim is to establish more shared values than differences within the school.

Finally, it is important to highlight that educational leaders play a central role in fostering harmonious coexistence within school institutions. Their ability to create an environment based on respect, participation, and dialogue is essential for the effective functioning of the educational community. In this regard, leadership that promotes coexistence and participation requires strong communication skills, the ability to resolve conflicts constructively, and the development of positive social relationships (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). These competencies, alongside tolerance and respect, are fundamental to strengthening bonds among school members and fostering a culture of dialogue and collaboration (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). In this sense, headteachers play a crucial role in encouraging open communication based on active listening, which helps to create an inclusive and participatory school environment (Itzhakov, 2020; Kluger & Itzhakov, 2022).

3. Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative components. The choice of this methodology was justified by its relevance in addressing the specific objectives of the research. Moreover, the mixed-methods design adopted was of a convergent parallel type, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This enabled the comparison and integration of findings to ensure triangulation and enhance the validity of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). Descriptive approaches are particularly effective for identifying and characterising the properties, traits, and profiles of individuals, groups, or communities under analysis (Akerblad et al., 2021; Feters, 2020). In this case, the selected approach enabled the examination of perceptions concerning the role of leadership among leadership teams and teachers working in public, urban educational institutions within the Autonomous Community of Aragón (Spain). Furthermore, this methodological design facilitated the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, thus allowing for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.1. Participants

Purposive sampling was employed for participant selection. The sample comprised members of both leadership teams and teaching staff from the selected schools. Several inclusion criteria were established: participating schools had to be public institutions located in the Autonomous Community of Aragón; they had to encompass various educational stages, ranging from Early Childhood Education (ages 3–6) to Compulsory Secondary Education (ages 12–16); and they needed to reflect

a diversity of areas and neighbourhoods. In total, 51 Early Childhood and Primary Education schools and 24 Secondary Education schools participated in the study.

The final sample consisted of 251 respondents. Of these, 125 were members of leadership teams (65 headteachers and 60 members of the senior leadership team, including secretaries and heads of studies). The remainder were teaching staff from the participating schools. The gender distribution was relatively balanced. The largest proportion of teaching staff fell within the 41–60 age range (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the participant sample (N=251)

Variable	N	% of sample
Age		
20-30 years	22	8.8
31-40 years	34	13.7
41-50 years	95	38.2
51-60 years	92	36.9
Over 60 years	6	2.4
Gender		
Male	116	46.6
Female	133	53.4
Experience as Headteacher		
1-3 years	43	42.2
4-7 years	24	23.5
8-12 years	20	19.6
Over 12 years	15	14.7
Level Taught		
Early Childhood	50	20.0
Primary	116	46.4
Secondary	84	33.6
Position of Responsibility		
Headteacher	65	26.1
Leadership Team Member	60	24.1
Teacher & Department Head	17	6.8
Teacher & Cycle Coordinator	21	8.4
Teacher-Tutor	50	20.1
Teacher	36	14.5
TOTAL	251	100

3.2. Instrument

In the initial phase of the research, a survey was selected as the primary data collection method, and a bespoke questionnaire was developed. Its construction was grounded in an extensive review of the relevant literature, which served as the basis for drafting the indicators in accordance with the theoretical premises identified in the analysis (Bass & Riggio, 2019; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018; Elbadiansyah & Masyni, 2023; Gurr & Drysdale, 2021; Itzhakov, 2020; Kluger & Itzhakov, 2022; Mustoip et al., 2024; Printy & Liu, 2021; Tedia & Redda, 2022).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of expert judges comprising five professionals in the fields of education, psychology, and educational research methodology. These experts assessed the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items. In addition, the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded an overall score of 0.91, indicating high internal consistency.

The final version of the questionnaire included 23 items rated on a six-point Likert scale. These items were grouped into three dimensions: Functions of Educational Leadership (11 items), Leadership Skills (9 items), and Beliefs about Leadership (3 items).

In the second phase of the study, a focus group was conducted to gain deeper insight into specific aspects of leadership. The group consisted of seven headteachers from participating schools. This qualitative technique allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives, providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. This qualitative input significantly complemented and enriched the research, offering a broader and more contextualised interpretation of the results. Thus, some of the questions included were: "What does it mean to you to exercise effective leadership in your school?", "What strategies do you consider most effective in encouraging teacher and student participation?" or "What factors hinder or promote a positive culture of coexistence in the school?"

3.3. Procedure

During the fieldwork phase, initial contact was made via email with the leadership of each selected school. These leaders then distributed a link to the online platform hosting the questionnaire to the teaching staff at their respective institutions. Prior to analysis, the dataset was examined for missing data and outliers. Cases with more than 10% missing values were excluded, and assumptions of normality and homogeneity were assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests, respectively. No major deviations were found. Once data collection was completed, statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software (version 22.0). Descriptive statistics—such as means and standard deviations—were applied, alongside inferential analysis. Specifically, Student's t-tests for independent samples were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in perceptions between members of leadership teams and teaching-only staff.

Subsequently, school leaders were invited to participate in a focus group designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences regarding the impact of educational leadership on participation and coexistence within the school community. Once the sessions were scheduled, the discussions were conducted in an environment conducive to reflective dialogue. A semi-structured interview guide containing the core questions and planned session structure was prepared in advance. All discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

The qualitative data were analysed thematically, leading to the identification of five main categories: Leadership Typologies (shared and participative leadership), Leadership as Energisation, Fostering a Climate of Coexistence, Key Skills, and Leadership Strategies. These categories were derived through a process of coding and categorisation following established qualitative research

standards (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The information gathered was interpreted with attention to the schools' contextual characteristics and the participants' profiles.

3.4. Ethical considerations

All ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participant privacy was fully protected, and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the online questionnaire. The research team adhered to all applicable legal data storage and processing regulations.

Participants were provided with all relevant information about the study, and any questions raised during the process were addressed promptly. Regarding personal data handling, the study complied with the guidelines established in Spain's Organic Law 3/2018 on Data Protection. The data were anonymised to safeguard participant confidentiality and stored securely in an encrypted digital folder, accessible only to members of the research team.

4. Results

The results of this study are structured around four key areas, aligned with the previously defined objectives: (1) fundamental functions of leadership in fostering coexistence and participation within the educational setting; (2) essential skills required to stimulate and support these processes; (3) beliefs about educational leadership that influence the promotion of coexistence and participation; and (4) complementary perspectives identifying core elements to strengthen school community life.

4.1. Leadership Functions

In relation to the dimension concerning leadership functions that support coexistence and participation (Table 2), a generally positive perception was observed among participants across most indicators. Creating and maintaining a satisfactory organisational climate ($M = 4.77$; $SD = 0.599$) and promoting positive relationships within the school community ($M = 4.61$; $SD = 0.648$) received particularly high ratings. Likewise, participants positively assessed leadership functions such as promoting participation ($M = 4.61$; $SD = 0.666$), collaboration ($M = 4.35$; $SD = 0.741$), and teamwork ($M = 4.42$; $SD = 0.777$). Nevertheless, certain areas were rated slightly lower, such as efforts to increase commitment to the institution ($M = 4.36$; $SD = 0.797$) or preserving the school's cultural identity ($M = 3.77$; $SD = 1.004$). Overall, the data suggest the existence of both strengths and areas for improvement, particularly in functions aimed at strengthening teachers' identification with and commitment to the institutional project.

4.2. Leadership Skills

In the second dimension, which focuses on the skills required by educational leaders to promote coexistence and participation, the results again reflect a high level of agreement. Among the most highly rated skills were strong communication abilities ($M = 4.76$; $SD = 0.484$), the capacity for conflict resolution ($M = 4.74$; $SD = 0.563$), and the ability to maintain social relationships ($M = 4.69$; $SD = 0.513$). Other aspects, such as tolerance and respect ($M = 4.60$; $SD = 0.610$) and negotiation skills ($M = 4.59$; $SD = 0.674$), were also valued highly. In contrast, slightly lower ratings were recorded for abilities related to building teams ($M = 4.31$; $SD = 0.738$), delegating responsibilities ($M = 4.32$; $SD = 0.746$), and motivating others in the face of challenges ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.701$). Despite this, the overall perception remains clearly positive, underscoring the importance of these skills for cultivating effective and inclusive school environments.

4.3. Leadership Beliefs

The third dimension assessed beliefs about leadership that support coexistence and participation. Results showed a generally favourable perception of these beliefs. Particularly high ratings were given to the view that leadership should be collegial and collaborative ($M = 4.20$; $SD =$

0.968), and that leaders should act as energisers ($M = 4.05$; $SD = 0.730$). Furthermore, the belief that leadership practice must be grounded in democratic values stood out as particularly important ($M = 4.56$; $SD = 0.771$).

4.4. Comparative Analysis by Role

Subsequently, an inferential analysis was carried out to explore whether there were statistically significant differences in the three dimensions of the questionnaire based on whether the participants were part of the leadership team or not. As shown in Table 2, Levene's test for equality of variances confirmed homogeneity ($p > 0.05$) for all items. No statistically significant differences were observed between groups regarding the functions of educational leadership. Both members of management teams and teachers consistently scored on the indicators related to creating a satisfactory organizational climate, promoting positive relationships, and enhancing teacher participation. This suggests a shared vision of leadership's structuring role in schools' culture and functioning. Furthermore, the only statistically significant difference observed was in the skill related to delegating responsibilities ($t = 2.049$; $p < 0.001$). In this case, staff who were part of the leadership team expressed a higher level of agreement regarding the importance of this function compared to teachers who did not hold leadership responsibilities. The remaining skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, and team building, showed similarly high levels of assessment and no significant differences between groups. Finally, in the Beliefs about Leadership dimension, both groups believed that leadership should be exercised collegially, based on democratic values, and aimed at energizing the educational community. This consensus indicates the presence of a shared conceptual framework on educational leadership among all participating professionals, regardless of their role.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions and mean contrasts based on professional role

	Professional role				
			Management team	Faculty	
	M	SD	M (SD)	M (SD)	t
Functions of educational leadership					
<i>Preserving the culture of the centre</i>	3.77	1.004	3.92 (9.65)	3.72 (1.019)	1.347
<i>Ensure that teachers identify with the school.</i>	4.36	.820	4.31 (7.33)	4.38 (0.852)	0.604
<i>Bringing together and harmonising collective interests</i>	4.57	.684	4.60 (0.646)	4.57 (0.693)	0.348
<i>Enhancing positive relationships between members</i>	4.61	.648	4.63 (0.618)	4.60 (0.662)	0.298
<i>Creating a satisfactory organisational climate</i>	4.76	.599	4.74 (0.472)	4.64 (0.645)	1.167
<i>Creating and preserving a tolerant atmosphere</i>	4.37	.721	4.33 (0.721)	4.38 (0.725)	0.446
<i>Enhancing participation</i>	4.61	.666	4.67 (0.696)	4.59 (0.646)	0.874
<i>Awakening members' commitment to the organisation</i>	4.36	.797	4.38	4.35	0.212

			(0.769)	(0.812)	
<i>Facilitating teamwork</i>	4.42	.777	4.46	4.41	0.395
			(0.829)	(0.753)	
<i>Generating collaboration</i>	4.35	.741	4.30	4.38	0.724
			(0.768)	(0.726)	
<i>Cultivate solidarity and democratic values.</i>	4.41	.784	4.41	4.42	0.145
			(0.828)	(0.763)	
Leadership skills					
<i>Communicative</i>	4.76	.484	4.67	4.79	1.694
			(0.531)	(0.463)	
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	4.74	.563	4.72	4.75	0.353
			(0.591)	(0.550)	
<i>Negotiation</i>	4.59	.674	4.53	4.64	1.169
			(0.737)	(0.628)	
<i>Tolerance and respect</i>	4.60	.610	4.59	4.60	0.178
			(0.602)	(0.617)	
<i>Skilled in social relations</i>	4.69	.513	4.64	4.72	1.167
			(0.542)	(0.498)	
<i>Team building</i>	4.31	.738	4.37	4.30	0.679
			(0.705)	(0.749)	
<i>Concern and interest in the group</i>	4.52	.651	4.49	4.53	0.452
			(0.656)	(0.652)	
<i>Delegation capacity</i>	4.32	.746	4.47	4.26	2.049***
			(0.675)	(0.768)	
<i>Stimulation in the face of challenges, empowerment of others</i>	4.28	.701	4.23	4.30	0.702
			(0.731)	(0.694)	
Beliefs about leadership					
<i>Leadership must be exercised in a collegial and collaborative manner</i>	4.20	.968	4.19	4.21	0.151
			(0.697)	(0.816)	
<i>Leaders must be energisers</i>	4.05	.730	4.01	4.10	0.234
			(0.782)	(0.795)	
<i>Leadership must base its practice on democratic values.</i>	4.56	.771	4.60	4.51	0.231
			(0.687)	(0.805)	

4.5. Qualitative Results: Focus Group Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the discussion group revealed various trends and approaches in the discourse of the participating headteachers.

The importance and necessity of teamwork and shared leadership among the different actors within the educational institution were strongly emphasised. Similarly, the significance of a collegial leadership model was highlighted—one that promotes a participatory and democratic approach

based on consensus and respect. This includes an equitable distribution of responsibilities, delegating tasks with trust in the teams, and fostering shared commitment. In fact, delegation was perceived as a strategy to encourage autonomy and empowerment within the team.

"[...] More than being a leader, it's almost a task of a team of leaders. A teacher if you're in a school with ten people, of course, the headteacher must exercise that leadership well. But here we're talking about eighty teachers and one headteacher [...] They need to delegate some of the tasks. In the end, they need to rely on 'mini-headteachers' such as the heads of departments." (D4M)

"[...] A leader in education can never act alone; they must always have teams—teaching teams, teams with parents [...] If you don't have functional organisational structures, the school will never work. Therefore, I always work from a group perspective." (D2M)

"Let's see, leadership understood as personal and collective commitment within a team changes a school completely." (D7H)

"[...] Distribute responsibilities [...] I think a headteacher should be bringing things together, not having direct responsibilities in organisation, direct pedagogical responsibilities, and direct academic responsibilities. I think those responsibilities need to be perfectly distributed. [...] So, what I've set up here is the scheme: generate ideas, inspire, distribute responsibilities, and bring things together. That would be, for me, our role." (D7H)

"Those things I mentioned earlier are fundamental – knowing how to facilitate, organise, exercise that leadership... but at the same time delegate, knowing how to coordinate an activity while also making sure it's being done as it should be, or as you believe it should be." (D4M)

"In a school, you need to bring things together. [...] You must centralise everything and then distribute it. It's very important for a leader to know how to delegate tasks – to whom, how, and when." (D1H)

On the other hand, a unanimous view was identified regarding educational leaders as facilitators who mobilise all members of the educational community.

"[...] You need to be a facilitator, a person who involves all members of the educational community [...] And from my point of view, if you are able to organise the work of all the individuals and energise it, that's when it works. I am convinced that it's about being a facilitator." (D2M)

Another key aspect to highlight is the promotion of a positive coexistence climate, where respect and the peaceful resolution of conflicts are encouraged. Dialogue, consensus, and the management of social skills were recognised as essential competencies for creating this environment. Similarly, the strategies necessary to achieve this were clearly identified, with a particular emphasis on empowering the various stakeholders.

"Fundamentally, it's about achieving a framework for coexistence. If there is good coexistence, projects can be carried out; if there is no good coexistence, no project will move forward. Coexistence in general, coexistence between students, teachers, and everyone." (D5H)

"For me, values like respect and responsibility are very important, of course, values such as trying to be equitable with everyone. [...] tolerance is very important, as is self-criticism, which people don't have much of today [...] and sincerity and honesty." (D1H)

"[...] And knowing how to treat each person according to who they are and how you can make the most of their capabilities. Perhaps you won't get anything out of some people, but you can always get something out of others" (D3H)

"We need to manage social skills very well. Social skills in leadership teams must be fundamental, in addition to many other things, but social skills are very important." (D5H)

"I believe that, furthermore, the headteacher or leader must be very skilled in personal interactions and human relations. In the community of Aragón, one of the problems we face in schools is related to human relations. These relations exist within the group of students, among colleagues, between teachers or professors, headteachers, and non-teaching staff." (D3H)

"[...] The headteacher is the one who supports their colleagues [...] in terms of leadership, with the emotional aspect of supporting colleagues." (D5H)

"It's about having social skills, empathy, and organisational ability, being a facilitator, transmitting a series of human values, and being seen as someone integral. [...] The ability to listen is important [...] and a leader must also have patience [...] and have the calmness necessary to channel those demands." (D2M)

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has shown that educational leadership is a key factor in promoting coexistence and participation within the school environment. Through the actions of leadership teams, the conditions are created that can either facilitate or hinder the involvement of the entire educational community. Several studies (Bass & Riggio, 2019; Bektaş et al., 2020; Bellibaş et al., 2020) have emphasised the significance of leadership in fostering a positive and participatory school environment.

One of the fundamental elements identified in this relationship is the creation of a satisfactory climate for coexistence, based on positive relationships among the different members of the school community. The results of this study confirm that participants place a high value on creating and maintaining a positive organisational climate and promoting harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it is essential to examine the specific challenges leaders face when attempting to preserve institutional culture and the discrepancies between leadership beliefs and actual practices. Nevertheless, the preservation of institutional culture was noted as an area requiring greater attention. In this regard, some authors (Liu et al., 2021; Mustoip et al., 2024) argue that maintaining and reinforcing the school's culture—understood as the shared set of values, beliefs, and norms guiding interactions within the institution—is essential.

The necessary skills for fostering participation and coexistence through educational leadership include social and communication competencies, as well as the ability to resolve conflicts effectively (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). The present study also highlights the relevance of competencies such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and the ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships. However, despite the benefits of distributed and shared leadership demonstrated by Nguyen and Hunter (2018), the findings also underscore the ongoing need to strengthen delegation skills and to build effective working teams—areas identified as requiring improvement. These results suggest that while leadership is highly valued, there remains a need to reinforce strategies that promote the autonomy and empowerment of teaching teams. In this respect, Birdwell (2018), Gurr and Drysdale (2021), and Sergiovanni (2019) all stress the importance of fostering a sense of belonging within the educational community through leadership. Such belonging arises through collaboration between teachers and colleagues, the development of shared objectives, mutual support, and constructive feedback. The leadership team, therefore, plays a vital role as facilitator of these processes (Brezicha, et. Al, 2019; Itzchakov, 2020; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

With regard to leadership beliefs, the study found a positive perception among participants towards a collegial and distributed model of leadership, grounded in democratic values. There was broad agreement that leadership should not be regarded as an individual task but rather as a collective effort, with the delegation of responsibilities seen as a key strategy for reinforcing team commitment. Furthermore, the perspectives of the headteachers reinforce the need to create organisational structures that enable the equitable distribution of tasks and the promotion of management practices based on consensus and respect. These findings are consistent with previous research (Bass & Riggio, 2019; Bektaş et al., 2020; Bellibaş et al., 2020; Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018; Nadeem, 2024; Printy & Liu, 2021; Sergiovanni, 2019; Tedia & Redda, 2022), which underscores the centrality of collaboration among all members of school communities.

This research reaffirms the essential role of educational leadership in promoting participation and coexistence within school settings. While strengths were identified—particularly in the

perception of leadership as a facilitating agent and in the recognition of key competencies for managing coexistence—areas for improvement were also evident. These include the preservation of institutional culture, the delegation of responsibilities, and the development of structures to support collaborative work. To address these areas, it is suggested that future initiatives focus on bridging the gap between leadership beliefs and practices, especially in terms of culture preservation and responsibility delegation. In this regard, it is considered pertinent to implement training programmes focused on distributed leadership, to encourage greater participation of teaching staff in decision-making processes, and to consolidate an inclusive and democratic organisational culture.

6. Limitations and further directions

Finally, it is important to reflect on some of this study's limitations. The main limitation concerns the generalisability of the results, as the study was confined to public, urban educational institutions. Consequently, the findings might differ in rural contexts or in private or semi-private (concerted) schools. On the other hand, the study has a geographical limitation, as it only gathers data from one of Spain's autonomous communities rather than from the country as a whole.

Moreover, although triangulation represents a strength of the study, the qualitative analysis could have been enriched through the use of additional techniques, such as in-depth interviews, which might have provided an even more detailed and individualised perspective.

At the same time, this study opens up new avenues for future research. It would be particularly valuable to design and implement training programmes aimed at developing the competencies and tools necessary for the effective application of distributed leadership models in schools. Further research could also investigate the impact of such initiatives on improving school coexistence and participation and extend the research to include leadership teams from across Spain.

Declarations

Author Contributions. S.V.T. and C.L.C.: Literature review, conceptualization. S.C.B. and M.M.L.: methodology, data analysis. S.V.T., C.L.C., S.C.B. and M.M.L.: review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article.

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Ethical Approval. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Autonomous Community of Aragón (Meeting on January 25, 2023, Record No. 02/2023).

Data Availability Statement. (The data supporting the results of this study are not publicly available due to participant privacy concerns. However, the data necessary to replicate the findings are included within the article.

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