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Leadership: its importance in the management of school coexistence

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Abstract

This paper discusses educational leadership in the management of school coexistence. To this end, we examined a series of variables that may be included in a committed and transforming leadership model that encourages a positive climate of coexistence. A survey type methodology was followed. The sample included 46 secondary schools in Andalusia integrated in the network «School: Space for Peace», taking 46 teachers and 46 families as interviewees. The main conclusion reached with the model proposed in this research shows that a leadership committed to a culture of peace exerts a degree of influence over the management of school coexistence and the promotion of preventive measures.

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Keywords: School coexistence; leadership; management of coexistence; culture of peace; issue of coexistence; contrary behaviour

1. Introduction

The scientific community acknowledges that managing coexistence in schools is a complex multidimensional and global process (Suárez, Roldá, & Calvo-Mora, 2014). In this regard, we can identify works focused on the study of specific factors with a direct influence on coexistence. As an example, the studies by Álvarez, Del Río, Vila, & Praiz (2014), demonstrate the positive correlation of leadership (factor afforded relevance through studies such as Campo, & Grisaleña, 2011) with other factors such as resources management, programming... and other variables that favour a positive climate of coexistence. Contributions such as those of Tuvilla (2013) highlight the sense of community, showing the influence of teacher motivation on educational leadership and management style. The literature identifies leadership as one of the critical success factors that must be assumed by those responsible for improvement of schools

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and their programmes. This calls for competent management, which involves clarity in decision-making and coherence in order to adopt the most valuable actions to encourage transformation of the centres and the development of projects for improvement (Bolívar 2010; Muñoz & Marfán, 2011). Development of the improvement initiatives applied in schools depends on the coordination capacity and motivational style of the leader, so that the programme can be executed under the auspices of a culture and climate of collaboration, where everyone can see themselves as active members and creators of meaning in the educational community. This task is the basis of leadership management, achieving the commitment of other organisations, entrepreneurs and administrations to be incorporated as stewards sharing responsibility for these innovative practices ((Bernal & Ibarrola, 2015; Sans-Martín, Guàrdia, & Triadó-Ivern, 2016). When studying the relationship between leadership and school climate, analysing the activities of the principals leading the centres helps to discover, according to Tirado & Conde (2016), the ‘organisational style’ that the leader hopes to help create. And if this were the case, one might think that not only do the school leaders hold their own beliefs on the type of organisation they lead, but also that these beliefs might constitute a significant influence on the atmosphere and climate that develops in the institution. In short, while acknowledging the differences between the different types of leadership, we must also recognise the importance of maintaining a degree of impetus in order to harness their influence on the climate of schools. As noted by Murillo & Hernández-Castilla (2015), it is the leaders who shall clearly and significantly determine how receptive the organisation is to alternative interpretations and proposals for change.

2. Study aims and hypotheses

The general aim of this research consists of analysing the importance of educational leadership in the management of school coexistence. The specific objectives proposed are as follows:

- To validate the construct of interplay of factors associated with a leadership committed to the culture of peace.
- To confirm the influence of leadership in demonstrating its commitment to the peace culture in management of school coexistence and promotion of preventive measures.
- To confirm the influence the management of school coexistence has on the promotion of preventive measures.
- To find out to what extent the management influences a reduction in contrary behaviours.

The theoretical model subjected to empirical testing is presented below (see figure 1):

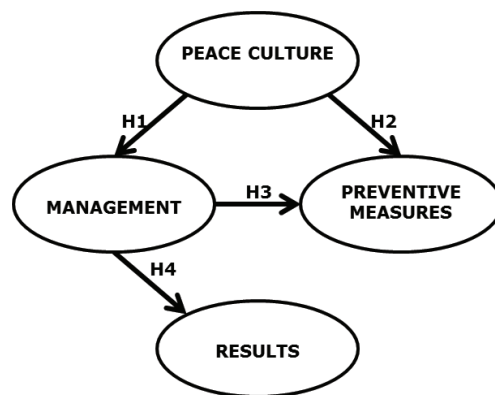


Fig.1. Hypotheses tested

Following the model proposed, the hypotheses put forward are:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): Leadership that demonstrates its commitment to peace culture directly influences coexistence management.

- Hypothesis 2 (H2): Leadership that demonstrates its commitment to peace culture directly influences the promotion of preventive measures.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): Leadership involved in managing coexistence in schools has a direct influence on the promotion of preventive measures.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): Leadership involved in coexistence manager influences the reduction of contrary behaviours.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, taking years of service and experience as the objective criterion. Specifically, the sample consisted of 46 secondary schools in Andalusia integrated in the network «School: Space for Peace» for a period of over 8 years.

For data collection, we opted to recruit 46 teachers and 46 family members as interviewees to take part in the coexistence committees of the secondary schools selected.

3.2. Instrument and variables

The instrument consisted of the design of a questionnaire devised to assess the importance of educational leadership in managing coexistence in schools. The questionnaire consists of four ad hoc scales: 'Commitment to Peace Culture', consisting of five variables, rating how the management team visibly demonstrates its commitment to the culture of peace and improving coexistence; 'Management', consisting of four variables, estimating how the school coexistence committee channels initiatives from all sectors of the educational community to improve coexistence and mutual respect, while fostering the peace culture and peaceful resolution of conflicts; 'Preventive measures', consisting of three variables, where we assess how the coexistence committee encourages the preventive measures needed to ensure the rights of all members of the education community and compliance of the school's rules of coexistence; and 'Coexistence Plan Outcomes', consisting of 14 variables, evaluating the effects of the Coexistence Plan in terms of the reduction in contrary behaviour. Each of these variables is analysed using a Likert scale with values from 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Not at all' and 4 is 'A lot', also including the 'Don't Know/No Answer' option. The instrument was developed following the guidelines issued by the Regional Administration of Andalusia, laying down measures for the promotion of Culture of Peace and Improved Coexistence adopted in the Schools (Order of June 20, 2011; Decree 19/2007), as well as references consulted and the review of the questionnaire by the group of experts, assessing the relevance of the coexistence indicators in each of the scales.

3.3. Data analysis

First, it is necessary to study the internal validity of the model. To do so, we applied two procedures. Cronbach's alpha is found in each of the scales proposed and in second place we assessed the unidimensionality of the different scales used in this research, performing a factor analysis on each scale by the principal components extraction method.

Finally, we conducted a confirmatory analysis using a structural equations model to check the model's suitability, including as latent variables those factors that achieved the highest scores in the different scales.

All these analyses were performed using the SPSS 17.0 programme. The structural equation analysis was carried out in AMOS 18.0.

4. Results

4.1. Internal validity analysis of the model

Applying Cronbach's alpha to estimate the internal consistency of the scales in a sample of 92 subjects obtained fairly high scores in all factors.

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha scale reliability

Scale total	Alpha	Number of elements
Commitment	0.645	5
Management	0.936	4
Preventive measures	0.910	3
Plan outcomes	0.898	14

To assess the unidimensionality of different scales, a factor analysis was performed using the principal components extraction method. The analysis is relevant given the high KMO indices of the scales, with values ranging between 0.729 and 0.831, admitting the suitability of the factor analysis. Similarly, the Bartlett sphericity test, which assesses the applicability of factor analysis for all scales, has a significance index of <0.001, so the factorial analyses can be applied.

4.2. Structural equations analysis

After the factorial and correlation analyses, we included those factors which seemed to have a greater explanatory level (Figures 2 and 3) in the model. The absence of the other variables in the model is due to inclusion in it of those that presented strong correlations. The factors selected were: ‘Culture of peace’; ‘Management’; ‘Prevention measures’ and ‘Reduction of contrary behaviours’. The peace culture factor is defined by three indicators: VC2-The Management Team defines a model of coexistence; VC3-Management Team generates the necessary changes in attitudes and behaviours and VC4-Management Team facilitates activities for ongoing improvement. The management factor is explained by the following indicators: VG6-The Coexistence Committee prepares the information gathering method and instruments; VG7-Coexistence Committee collects and discusses information from all and with all sectors of the educational community; VG8-Coexistence Committee sets the times and designates the people responsible for the coexistence analysis; VG9-Coexistence Committee identifies the human and material resources required. In turn, the Prevention Measures were as follows: VMP10-Procedures are in place to explain and disseminate the coexistence plan (informative journals, tutoring sessions, meetings, etc.) among school staff; VMP11-There are procedures for explaining and spreading the coexistence plan (news magazines, tutorial sessions, meetings, etc.) among the students; VMP12-There are procedures to explain and spread the coexistence plan (news magazines, tutoring sessions, meetings, etc.) among families and their environment; the Contrary Behaviour Reduction factor is explained by: VR21-The coexistence plan has helped curtail the serious deterioration of school facilities, resources and materials; VR24-Improving pupil-pupil relations; VR18-Reducing damage to school facilities, material resources or documents; VR23-Improving teacher-family relations; VR19-Minimising damage to belongings of members of the educational community.

The goodness-of-fit indices of the model are shown below, in terms of the different hypotheses put forward:

- -Hypothesis 1 (H1): Leadership that demonstrates its commitment to peace culture directly influences coexistence management.
- -Hypothesis 2 (H2): Leadership that demonstrates its commitment to peace culture directly influences the promotion of preventive measures.
- -Hypothesis 3 (H3): Leadership involved in managing coexistence in schools has a direct influence on the promotion of preventive measures.
- The goodness-of-fit indices for hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, in this case, indicated that the model was well-adjusted to the data. (Table 2). The lowest goodness-of-fit data were found in the NFI index, given their nature subject to sample size.

Table 2. Model adjustment rates in response to hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

	Fit Index	Recommended Value	Observed Value
Absolute fit index	Chi-square/degrees of freedom	≤ 3.00	1.44;p< 0.001

Comparative fit	IFI (incremental fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.96
	NFI (normed fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.88
	CFI (comparative fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.95
Error of approximation	RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)	0.06 ≤ 0.08	0.1

This model analyses how the different leadership-associated factors are interrelated.

The adjustment indices show that the model fits the data well. The indices of significant regressions ($p < 0.001$) that make up the model allow acceptance of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

The model is organised into three exogenous latent variables, namely «peace culture», «management» and «prevention measures». Each of these variables expresses high levels of its respective regression variables observed, or endogenous; values ranging from 0.62 to 0.94. The hypothesis postulates the direct effect that the presence of a leadership commitment to the culture of peace has on management and governance of the coexistence plan. In this regard, positive regression rates were manifested for the ‘peace culture’ factor over the ‘management’ factor (H1) ($\beta=0.38$; $p=0.034$), as well as in the promotion of ‘preventive measures’ (H2), albeit to a lesser degree ($\beta=0.13$; $p=0.39$). The leadership involved in management of school coexistence has a direct influence on the promotion of preventive measures (H3); this third hypothesis presented positive and significant regression rates for the «management» factor over the «prevention measures» factor ($\beta=0.55$; $p<0.001$).

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Leadership involved in coexistence manager influences the reduction of contrary behaviours.

The goodness-of-fit indices, in this case, indicated that the model was discreetly well-adjusted to the data (Table 3). The lowest adjustment data were again found in the NFI index, due to its nature, subject to the sample size.

Table 3. Model adjustment rate in terms of hypothesis

	Fit Index	Recommended Value	Observed Value
Absolute fit index	Chi-square/degrees of freedom	≤ 3.00	1.46; $p < 0.001$
Comparative fit	IFI (incremental fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.92
	NFI (normed fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.78
	CFI (comparative fit index)	≥ 0.90	0.91
Error of approximation	RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)	$0.06 \leq 0.08$	0.1

The fourth hypothesis introduces a new latent factor into the equation, the reduction of conduct contrary to school coexistence. This factor is composed of the observed variables ‘The coexistence plan has helped curtail the serious deterioration of school facilities, resources and materials’ ($\beta=0.84$; $p<0.001$); VR24. ‘Improving pupil-pupil relations’ ($\beta=0.67$; $p<0.001$); VR18. ‘Reducing damage to school facilities, material resources or documents’ ($\beta=0.97$; $p<0.001$); VR23. ‘Improving teacher-family relations’ ($\beta=0.6$; $p<0.001$); VR19. ‘Minimising damage to belongings of members of the educational community’ ($\beta=0.75$; $p<0.001$), with high levels of variance in each of the same. Likewise, a regression was incorporated which attempts to measure the influence of leadership involved in the management of school life on reducing contrary behaviour.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to analyse the importance of educational leadership in management of school coexistence, examining those dimensions that may be predictors of a committed and transforming leadership model which favours a positive climate for coexistence. The main conclusion reached with the model proposed in this research shows that a leadership committed to a culture of peace exerts a degree of influence over the management of school coexistence and the promotion of preventive measures.

Thinking of a leadership committed to the culture of peace is an essential aspect as the basis for construction of school coexistence, identified with an executive team that defines a coexistence model that generates the changes

needed in attitudes and behaviours and which facilitates activities for continuous improvement. (Order of June 20, 2011; Decree 19/2007).

The school coexistence committee appears to be a fundamental element in managing and channelling the initiatives from all sectors of the educational community to improve coexistence and mutual respect, while encouraging a culture of peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts; (Order of June 20, 2011; Decree 19/2007; Campo and Grisaleña (2011). Here, the coexistence committee's leadership in managing school life seems to influence the instatement of preventive measures. Although no direct influence on reducing these contrary behaviours was found, these measures may be understood as a moderating dimension in reducing this type of conduct. In this sense, it should come as no surprise that the direct influence exerted by the coexistence committee's management carries little weight in reducing contrary behaviour, due to the multiple factors that can affect this aspect and taking into account that this research only addressed the influence of a single facet, leadership involved in the management of coexistence in schools, among the sundry elements that may also have an influence.

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