The Challenges in the Selection of and Recruitment to School Headteachers in the Spanish

Educational System

Abstract

Currently, the low number of candidates and the complex formation of the teams are great problems in the occupation of the school leadership position. This qualitative study aims to identify the main difficulties experienced from the perspective of the candidates. Based on the data obtained in various interviews, it should be noted how the headteacher selection process is influenced by different variables, both contextual and personal. The variables that condition this process include complexity of the decision to be a candidate or accept the appointment and the difficulty of forming and a team, among others.

Keywords: professional development, leadership, self-reflection, school, candidate, headteacher preparation.

Introduction

Currently, the importance of the headteacher in the educational context is unquestionable. As specified by Vázquez et al. (2016, p. 159), for "the role and tasks of leadership in schools they are essential." In this sense, numerous authors (Fernández, 2002; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Martínez Ruiz & Hernández-Amorós, 2020; Naidoo, 2019; Sfakianaki et al., 2018; Valiente Sandó et al., 2018) have stated that school leadership is a key element that directly affects both a school's improvement processes and improvement in the quality of teaching taught therein. Likewise, Fernández (2002) affirms that proper exercise of the school leadership is intimately linked to the school's proper functioning. For this reason and due to the great demand that holding a school leadership position entails, school leadership is described as a complex task that contains great personal and professional challenges.

The leadership competence of a school headteacher

Performance of leadership competence requires a high level of demand. Exercising leadership today is not an easy task, and many competencies, including competencies that span the executive, bureaucratic, innovation, integration and institutional levels, are required of a headteacher in the complex current context of social, technological, and cultural transformation (Ng & Szeto, 2016). Likewise, there are a wide range of competences that the leadership figure must face from a legislative perspective, as specified in article 132 of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE, 2013). The person that serves in a school's headteacher position must answer all necessary questions before the educational administration and must also propose the appointment and removal of the members of the leadership team. Its main executive functions include directing and coordinating all of the school's activities and exercising pedagogical direction. Under the integrative perspective, the headteacher should

promote coexistence in the school and establish relationships with families and institutions or organizations to promote joint collaboration. Finally, the headteacher must answer other questions of a bureaucratic or innovative nature.

In addition to all these functions, both educational management and leadership in the case of the Spanish educational system, teaching tasks must be included, demonstrating that the leadership figure must be versatile and multifunctional. For this reason, according to Welch and Hodge (2018), aspects such as autonomy, experience and leadership contribute to the projection of a competent professional profile capable of promoting the school's proper functioning. Likewise, other authors (Martínez-Ruiz & Hernández-Amorós, 2018; Naidoo, 2019; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020; Sfakianaki et al., 2018; Tan, 2018) cite leadership as a key factor for good performance in the headteacher position.

The selection process of selecting the a school headteacher

The process for choosing a headteacher is included in the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE, 2013) and considers the applicant's previous profile, including assessing the following requirements: seniority, teaching, accreditation certification of training for the leadership function and presentation of a leadership project. However, this profile is required to apply for the leadership position but has no relation to the functions the headteacher must perform after obtaining the position (Ng & Szeto, 2016).

Both the powers associated with the leadership figure and the guidelines for access to said position are included in the current legislation, accessible to anyone interested in participating in or knowing this process. However, what is the reality of the educational context? For legal purposes, the conditions are clearly specified, although many other factors influence the decision making of possible future candidates and, increasingly, the absence of candidates willing to serve

in this position is more frequent (Murillo, 2008), a problem in which our educational society is immersed.

Positive and negative aspects of the school headteacher position

From a positive perspective, access to the leadership position can be motivated by elements of a personal and professional nature. As specified by Rodríguez et al. (2013), such issues include personal satisfaction in contributing to the improvement of the school and all its components, as well as the social prestige associated with the position. However, many other factors explain the absence of candidates for the position, including different perceptions and obstacles that potential future candidates face in the selection process and in their subsequent development of the position.

In accordance with the aforementioned challenges, leadership continues to be an unattractive function, requiring a greater burden of responsibility and work with hardly any recognition. As previously emphasized, this is a complex job with a large task load, poor salary, little social recognition and little decision-making capacity, which are not very attractive conditions for performing this function (Vázquez et al., 2016). For this reason, the absence of candidates continues to be a problem in the educational context.

As mentioned above, some of the reasons for doubts or rejections when considering this position are the lack of training and the professionalization of the leadership function. In this regard, several authors (Fernández, 2002; Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Welch & Hodge, 2018) have mentioned the need for specific and competent training to properly perform this position, because it has many requirements and its daily practice is insufficient to address all issues attached to the position. In addition, the effort and personal responsibility necessary to pursue professional development and training for this role has been an impediment

to the professionalization of this leadership function, which should be recognized, without any doubt, as a profession.

In view of the aforementioned reasons and with the aim of understanding the access process for leadership at a public school with a nonuniversity scope, this study has examined the process using the experiences of various candidates for office. The main difficulties experienced throughout the process are identified, including a global vision of the access process, the decision to present or accept the position, the preparation of the merit-based competition, the preparation and presentation of the leadership project to the educational community, the presentation and dissemination of the application, and, finally, the selection process conducted and its evaluation.

Methods

Qualitative research with a phenomenological design focused on the subjective individual experience of each participant is presented. It aims to describe and understand phenomena from the viewpoint of each participant and from a collectively constructed perspective. The latter is based on the analysis of speeches and specific themes, as well as the search for their possible meanings (Hernández et al., 2014). For this reason, the phenomenological-interpretative approach, which is based on the understanding of lived experiences and the articulation of similarities and differences between meanings and human experiences, is the most appropriate to respond to the objective of this research.

Sample

To construct the sample, informants were selected through a theoretical-intentional sampling process according to criteria previously defined and related to the profile of the

headteacher of primary schools: a) professional work should be carried out in a public school; b) the school should be in one of the three provinces of the Autonomous Community of Aragon - Huesca, Zaragoza and Teruel-; c) both rural and urban contexts were considered; d) headteachers were in their first year as headteachers; e) the headteachers had been previously appointed by the administration; and f) the headteacher had to be a teacher in the primary education stage.

Conversely, the exclusion criteria responded to a series of indicators also related to the participants' sociodemographic characteristics: a) conducting their work in a private and/or private school; and b) having fewer than four years at the same school. Considering the set of criteria identified, the sample was finally assembled of 7 headteachers in their first year of practice. The "presentation/designation" variable refers to the way in which the headteacher has accessed his position. It may be that the headteacher presented himself voluntarily (presentation) or was appointed by obligation (designation). In addition, previous motivation refers to the interest and intrinsic desire that the headteacher had to conduct his position. Last, it should be clarified that an incomplete school is a school in which the teachings of at least one course are not included (within the six courses that primary education has in the Spanish educational system, which covers ages 6 to 12 years).

[Insert Table 1 here]

In the Spanish educational system, a headteacher acquires his/her position through a professional merit-based competition. The following requirements are established: a) the candidate must have been a teacher for five years, b) The candidate must have taught for five years in one of the school subjects, c) The candidate must have completed a leadership training course organized by the Ministry of Spain, and d) The candidate must present a leadership project. After all this, a

headteacher selection process is conducted in which the educational community and the educational administration participate.

Instrument

The semistructured interview was chosen as the technique to collect information. It is one of the most widely used instruments in phenomenological research. This type of phenomenological interview is a resource to find what meanings a subject attributes to their experience in a given situation. During these interviews, the researcher asks various open-ended questions so that informants can express their opinions and assessments (Longhurst, 2010). Considering the previous literature review, a thematic script was proposed to focus the interview on the following seven categories: global vision of the process of accessing acquiring; decision making to pursue or accept the position; constitution and cohesion of the leadership team; preparation in a merit-based competition; preparation of the leadership project (process and personal attitude); presentation and dissemination of the candidacy in the educational community; and, finally, the selection process, including the commission, process and evaluation of the same.

Analysis procedure

The participants were contacted through an email sent to the schools where they worked. All seven of the selected headteachers agreed to participate in the research. The Google Meet application was used to conduct these interviews, and permission was requested from the participants to record the interviews (in audio or video). The approximate duration of the interviews was 20-25 minutes each. All the interviews were transcribed to facilitate the

subsequent analysis of the information. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. Before being analyzed, these interviews were later translated into English. For this, a specialized translation service of a research group in which the researchers are included was used.

For the data analysis, the proposal by Huberman and Miles (2000) was considered, which consists of three linked processes. This process began with the collection of information that corresponded to conducting the semistructured interviews. Subsequently, its reduction was conducted. The information was selected, classified and coded according to the analysis categories. Subsequently, the conclusions were extracted and interpreted, taking as a reference the perspective proposed in the initial theoretical framework. In this phase, comparison and triangulation were used as procedures to ensure the information's validity. The information was triangulated considering the qualitative information from the interviews and the theoretical framework based on the subject of study. In addition, three of the researchers participated in the analysis and coding phase of the interviews. In this way, it was possible to triangulate the encoded information and compare it.

During the research procedure, a series of elements that are typical of the phenomenological approach were used. A thematic script was used to help the researchers maintain the focus according to their objectives. In addition, through the interviewer's personal and competence skills (acceptance of the other, interest in problems, and empathic action), close interaction and real communication were facilitated. Finally, and as a result of the reflective reading of the information collected, the categories and subcategories that included the lived experience of the interviewee were defined. Thus, the analysis of the information was facilitated, seeking to integrate the information as it was expressed by the participants and respecting their language, opinions and beliefs. The different descriptions provided by the participants were

considered as they correspond to the different ways of understanding. The logical relationships that can be established between these categories were also considered, a fact that constitutes the main result of a phenomenological study.

To endow the study with methodological rigor, four strategies typical of qualitative studies were used (Hernández et al., 2014). First, the dependency criterion was adopted; and the theoretical perspective, the position of the researchers, the design, the sample selection criteria, the methodological techniques, the context of data collection and the description of how data analysis was performed were adequately detailed. Second, the credibility of the information was guaranteed through textual transcription of the interviews, the use of triangulation of information in order to enrich and contrast the information, and reflection on the effects of the research team's presence in conducting the interviews. Third, the transferability criterion was ensured by describing the procedure conducted and the context in depth so that the research could be replicated. Finally, the criteria of auditability and confirmability were considered, whereby a record of the decisions made in the investigative process was made and all interviews were recorded in audio format. In addition, the informants' characteristics and the selection process were described, and the exact transcripts of the interviews were provided to the informants.

Results

The presentation of the results has been structured around the categorical analysis derived from the coding process used to organize information from the interviews. Figure 1 shows a synthesis of the analysis dimensions of the investigation results. A total of six categories are proposed and they are developed individually: a) the decision to pursue or accept the position, b) the formation and cohesion of the leadership team, c) the preparation of the merit-based

competition, d) the draft leadership, e) the presentation of the leadership project to the educational community, and f) the defense of the leadership project. All of these categories emerged as a result of a reflective process conducted by the researchers on the information collected. All this took the review of the literature initially conducted as the starting point.
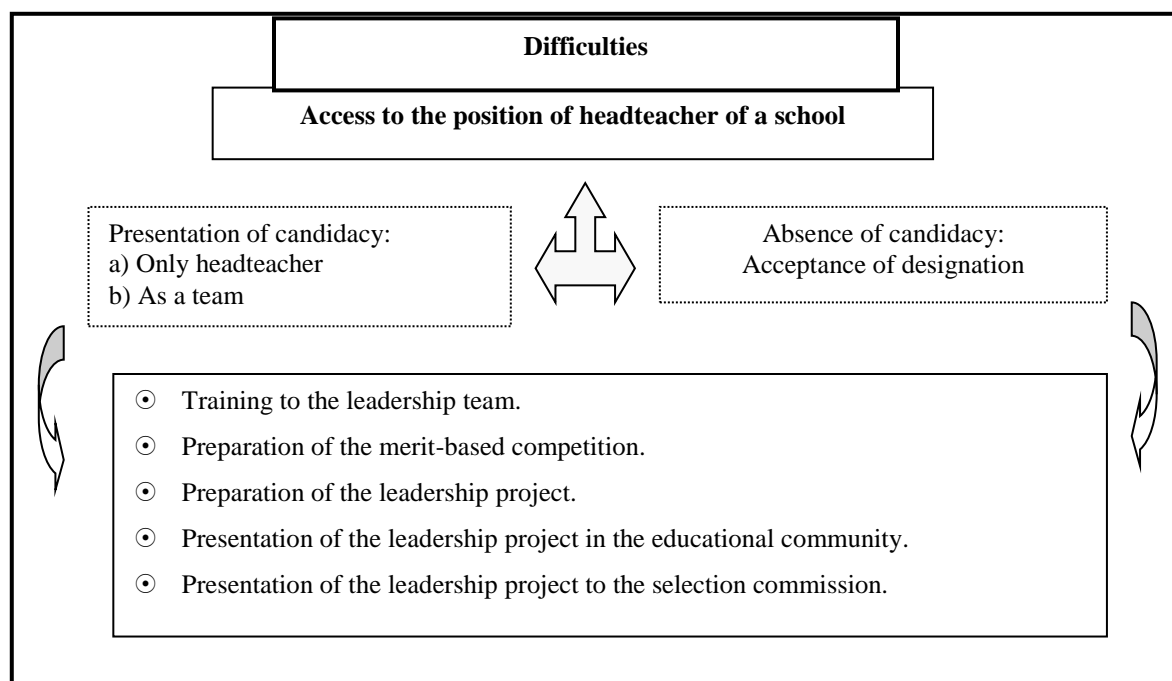

Figure 1. *Analytical dimensions of the study results*

Decision to present or accept the position

Regarding decision making, different practically dichotomous perceptions are observed. However, the factors that truly determine these perceptions are directly related to the presence or absence of candidacy. A synthesis of these perceptions can be seen in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Expanding the analysis of these arguments, the appraisals of this decision fluctuate between a decision-making process considered complex and difficult and an assessment of this

process as simple and not a difficult. In both cases, an influence of the variable related to the absence or presence of candidates for leadership has not been detected. In addition, motivation has been valued as another of the determining factors when making the decision. This motivation or demotivation is usually linked to the presentation of the candidacy or the absence of candidates. It is appreciated how those teachers who had not volunteered are those who show less intrinsic motivation. This fact is reflected in the following argument of one of the participants:

> *Participant 1: "[…] the administration made the decision that I carry out the position. I had never previously been part of the leadership team of a school and personally, I did not feel motivated to do so, but I had been appointed […]"*

Another aspect that was reiterated by several interviewed school principals was the time factor and the absence or presence of candidates. In other words, less thoughtful and hasty decisions were conditioned by the immediacy with which the administration demands a response to a demand. In contrast, before a candidacy is presented by a teacher voluntarily, it is appreciated that the decision is more thoughtful. In other words, these teachers are not pressured by the time factor and have an important prior motivation to conduct their positions as headteachers. Both opposing positions are shown in the following testimonies:

> *Participant 6: "For me, it was very difficult, and as I said earlier, it was a very quick decision, I never considered practicing as the principal of any school, least of all in this hasty way."*
>
> *Participant 5: "[…] It is not a quick decision-making process. I have been thinking about it for a long time."*

Regarding their feelings about the decision-making process, there was a certain tendency to manifest the choice as a decision accompanied by fear, uncertainty and insecurity rather than by emotion and enthusiasm. This emotional duality is linked to the various factors that influence and determine decision making. These include personal motivation to perceive the leadership position as a challenge; the perception of having a team willing to work, collaborate, and support; and the experience of having previously been part of a leadership team. Added to all this is the in-depth knowledge of how the school works and, finally, the perceived need to introduce changes or improvements regarding the school's situation. The prevalence of feelings such as fear or insecurity could perhaps be explained by the numerous responsibilities that the headteacher has in a school. After all, a school is still a system of roles in which the person ultimately responsible for any action or circumstance that occurs in the school is the headteacher of the school. In certain cases, the influence of some exogenous variables has also been highlighted, such as the possibility of obtaining a transfer to another school that responds to personal or family interests (for example, wanting to transfer to a school in the city where the teacher lives). Clear examples of this are shown in these testimonies:

Participant 3: "I have been afraid (and I am) not living up to what is expected of me and what needs to be done and not being able to improve the previous leadership. I see my limitations (which are many) and I feel insecure [...]. The situation of the school has also been decisive since we see that with another leadership model, leadership and satisfaction of all can be greatly improved [...]."

Participant 2: "[...] the leadership challenge became more attractive, more exciting, and I submitted a candidacy."

Participant 7: "The idea of 'team' is what made me decide the most when it came to

assuming the position. Despite the fact that the visible person is the headteacher and that ultimately she is the one who must assume most of the responsibilities, having a team that supports you at all times and making the decisions together was something that made the decision easier for me ."

Participant 5: "[...] to have more points and be able to move to Zaragoza".

Participant 3: "The situation of the school has also been decisive, since we see that with another management model, management and satisfaction of all can be greatly improved [...]"

Formation and cohesion of the leadership team

In the category related to the formation and cohesion of the leadership team, aspects of interest can be highlighted. First, the leadership team is considered a basic aspect. In fact, in the exceptional cases in which there was no such leadership team and in which the leadership figure was the "person for everything", this need is more strongly stressed. In this way, the teaching staff's support is sought - collaboration out of the management team - because the task is very difficult otherwise.

Participant 1: "Since we only have four people, the leadership team is only made up of the headteacher; there is no secretary or head of studies. I have a good team of colleagues who help in everything I need"

The essence of the team stands out in the leadership team's constitution. Under this attribute are uniting criteria, working on the same line, and adopting coherence as a guiding principle on a daily basis. For his or her part, generally, the headteacher formulates the criteria for selecting team members, and these criteria correspond to many characteristics. Among the

criteria, some of the most relevant include knowledge, skills, experience, motivation, trust, and involvement, and the conditions and demands. In addition, among the resources that leaders use to form the team, persuasion and conviction are distinguished, especially given the low availability of candidates. Finally, among reasons why the members agreed to be part of the leadership team, they reference the need to obtain points for transfers, to the motivation to live the experience and the challenge, and to interest in breaking work routines.

> *Participant 7: "The three members of the team have the idea that in order to carry out this project, the three of us must work in the same line. Of course, each one contributes her different vision in specific questions".*

> *Participant 5: "The assignment of management positions has been assigned by me taking into account the criteria they were telling me, their knowledge of organization or computer science, or if they belong to the group of teachers."*

> *Participant 3: "Trust has been decisive, both for the personal and professional merits of each one."*

Preparation of the merit-based competition

The preparation of the merit-based competition is considered in the next step. There are two somewhat tautological possibilities: on the one hand, a good preparation to present the candidacy promoted by the motivation reflected in the elaboration of the leadership project and in the training that has been acquired for the position; on the other hand, a lack of preparation due to the lack of candidacy. This fact translates into assuming the post by administrative appointment. Obviously, the implementation of the management project is also conditioned by the motivation (at least at the beginning). Once again, it is the intrinsic motivation to volunteer as

a candidate for a school headteacher that influences the choice to dedicate time and effort to preparing the merit-based competition.

> *Participant 1: "I had not considered the possibility of nominating myself because I prefer the classroom [...]. At the beginning, it was honestly hard to assume a responsibility that you don't want and it wasn't easy, but throughout the course I am aware of the good results and trying to improve the not-so-good ones."*

Leadership project

Continuing with the variables that hinder access to leadership positions, most of the interviewed headteachers referred to the elaboration of the leadership project. In general, this idea is determined by three factors: first, the perception of having a leadership team that collaborates and is actively involved or, conversely, not having this team (or it simply does not exist); second, the assessment made of the team, that is, whether contributions to the team are perceived as isolated events or, rather, as collaborative work; and third, the perception of the direction project as a formalism or as an important element for the school. Each of these factors affected the process of preparing the leadership project, on certain occasions facilitating and on other occasions hindering.

Considering the way in which this project is conducted, the way of preparing the task, the intended objective, the temporal aspects and the motivation in the elaboration are also considered. Regarding the way of preparing the project, in most cases where there is a leadership team, this task is conducted with the collaboration and support of the different members. Despite this, on some occasions when a management team (made up of three people: the headteacher, the

head of studies and the secretary) is "theoretically" constituted, the project is conducted alone but with certain differences. It can only be conducted alone but still values the contributions of other professionals. If there is no team, the construction of the project is characterized by being personal and alone. However, on some occasions the opinions of other teachers at the school with experience in the lines of action or philosophy of the school are also considered.

> *Participant 7: "[...] I prepared the project, always counting on the contributions of the other two team members and sharing new issues that were arising so that the three of us agreed on what was reflected in it".*

> *Participant 2: "[...] the leadership project was personally prepared considering some of the contributions of my colleagues."*

The leadership project's objective includes the educational philosophy of a specific school. This objective includes their lines of action; their intentions, objectives or goals, and the collected projects. This is usual and logical in this type of job. However, the headteachers interviewed here have appreciated that this is not a job, much less an easy job. This is mainly because it involves an analysis of reality to design and making proposals for action. Once again, the lack of an evaluative culture in the teaching staff is appreciated.

> *Participant 3: "The main difficulties were being able to define the lines of action. It is easy to recognize and analyze the problems and needs detected, and even though the objectives were clear, it seemed to us that the actions to be carried out to develop them remained more in a declaration of intent than in more concrete proposals."*

The time spent developing a leadership project is highly variable. Thus, respondents indicated time spans ranging from a short time (two or three days) to a longer time (weeks and even months). No link was observed with the factors initially raised. At this point, it should be

noted that some of these school headteachers envision the project as more than a mere formality. Therefore, the effort invested in it will be higher quality and, consequently, will lead to greater motivation. These facts can be seen in the following arguments:

Participant 4: "To prepare the project we stayed two afternoons after school hours, [...]".

Participant 3: "[...] as a team: several sessions, and many hours, the result of debate and consensus."

Participant 2: "In my opinion it is not a mere formalism. For the elaboration of the project I thought in depth about aspects of the school that could be improved, in lines of action and real objectives".

Based on the opinions of the study participants, a leadership project is more realistic, effective and efficient when its preparation results from teamwork and a shared vision. In this process, it is essential that perceptions are not limited to mere formalism. If its importance is considered, the implication and dedication to its elaboration is better quality and is more adjusted to the contextual needs.

Presentation of the leadership project to the educational community

The presentation of the leadership project to the educational community varies in its forms and in the process followed. However, it is common to go from the informal to the official, that is, from an informal and relaxed presentation to classmates (for example, a conversation in a classroom) to a more formal or bureaucratic step. In the latter case, the presentation of the leadership project follows more organized and structured steps. A series of associated management activities are added to all of this. Two of the interviewees expressed this as follows:

Participant 4: "The teachers were aware of the presentation of the application in a tabletop gathering. Since we are few teachers, it was done officially when the representatives of the commission had to be elected and the representatives of the school council were also notified."

Participant 3: "We were commenting to the other classmates that we were preparing a project for the school's leadership and that we expected them to make contributions and suggestions about the aspects they considered appropriate. We wanted to give everyone the opportunity to participate in this project. They congratulated us, some were surprised, others were skeptical ... [...]. Then, we communicate the candidacy to the school board."

Defense of the leadership project

The defense of the leadership project to the selection commission is characterized by various points that must be considered. According to the Spanish educational regulations that organize the selection of the headteacher of a school, this selection is made by a specific commission. This commission is made up of representatives of the educational administrations and other representatives of the school. One of the most common points is the nonexposure of the project to the selection commission. This fact highlights the debate on whether or not the personal presentation of the project by the leading figure is necessary. Regarding the interest that the process of defending the leadership project provokes, some interviewees perceived a lack of interest on the part of their colleagues. As they suggest, it seems to only interest those who are truly involved. Evident examples of this are collected in the following testimonies:

Participant 7: "I did not expose the draft direction to the commission since I was not asked to, [...]".

Participant 2: "I did not expose my project because I had not yet joined the position. I know that the inspector read it, there was a debate and later it was assessed (I ignore the mechanisms)".

Participant 4: "In the selection process, the day the commission met I asked if they wanted me to present the project and they said no."

Participant 5: "There was not much interest; many were very rested when they already knew that I was going to be the headteacher because they did not want to be named (although there are also some who do not like this process)".

Regarding the temporal dimension, a general agreement on the most suitable moment to conduct the selection process was found. This is temporarily located in the middle of the course (2nd term). Regarding temporal perception, there are two predominant positions on the part of headteachers: first, the perception that the process is too long, lasting three months, and second, the perception that its duration is adequate. In very few cases, it is considered insufficient. In any case, it is a management task to which sufficient time and effort must be devoted.

Participant 2: "The most opportune moment to carry out the process is halfway through the year as the climate at school is usually more relaxed than at the beginning or at the end. In addition, this gives time to adapt to the change that is to come, and the leadership team that leaves office can help the team that enters."

Participant 5: "I think it takes too long because many of you work preparing projects and talking to people. You have some illusions and if everything turns out great, but if not fatal, you lose a lot of mental strength along the way in your professional life."

Participant 3: "*[…] the fixed period of time seems adequate to me. It is enough to debate and elaborate the project, as well as the commission to evaluate it*".

Discussion and Conclusions

The selection process of a school headteacher is based on a certain leadership model and a specific headteacher profile. Within the current selection process, broadly considering the information analyzed, the managers interviewed in this study manifest a varied set of difficulties that they must face throughout the selection and appointment process. Among other issues, this could be due to the process's varied contexts and the attitude one takes towards it. The starting point for difficulties is detected in the phase of deciding to accept the leadership position. Precisely for this reason, in general, it is a thoughtful decision and sometimes is rejected (an absence of candidates) (Vázquez et al., 2016). Once the situation is accepted voluntarily (or imposed), a series of threads are triggered that constitute the requirements or demands for access. With certain habituality, these processes become obstacles and dilemmas to overcome. Among the obstacles and dilemmas are the preparation and cohesion of the leadership team, the preparation of the leadership project, the preparation of the merit-based competition, the defense of the leadership project to the selection commission, and other additional procedures.

Likewise, each process is conditioned by the context and the numerous variables that influence its development. Nevertheless, an element of considerable importance is observed that has a relevant impact on all processes. This element refers to the decision to appear with a team. This decision represents one of the variables that enable a subsequent coherent and exciting project to be drawn up and the minimization of difficulties. Thus, one of the great current concerns arises: a significant number of headteachers continue to be appointed by the

administration or "forced" by an inspection or colleagues, which is basically the same. Even if they are not counted as "not elected". However, some of these principals have found themselves motivated to take over school management while considering it an opportunity for school improvement and personal and professional development (Coronel et al., 2012; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2013). Nonetheless, this represents a visible concern because leadership teams are essential pieces for the optimal function of life within a school (Murillo, 2008).

The perceptions of these interviewed headteachers show the diverse interpretations they made regarding their particular ascensions to the leadership position. Among this mix of ideas, there are no static models or equal positions. Some of them have seen their leadership process as a completely centralized action in themselves. Others have remarked that the leader must always present himself/herself as a figure who motivates the team as a whole towards negotiation skills (Garza et al., 2014; Naidoo, 2019; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020; Sfakianaki et al., 2018).

However, a predilections for teamwork, commitment and collaboration are qualities that promote a functional climate within leadership teams and among groups of teachers. Thus, in the analysis of leaders' and teachers' perceptions that Murillo (2008) conducted, involvement and willingness to collaborate were also highlighted as elements that promote optimal professional performance. Regarding the election of the members who constitute the leadership team, the headteachers highlighted that the selection is guided by significant qualities and skills that give them differentiating elements from the rest of the school's teachers. This pattern is in line with the definition of "leader" that has traditionally been exposed in previous literature (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Young et al., 2017). In the definition, voluntariness, initiative, motivation and the ability to respond to demands are emphasized as fundamental characteristics. Shirky

(2008) refers to the fact that sharing, acting collectively and cooperating are priority actions to develop in any educational institution that has efficient leadership.

Understanding the commitment required to have the skills to master the difficulties that occur in the leadership role is a fundamental factor for performing resilient leadership. Therefore, the work of a school headteacher is not without difficulties. The results presented here are supported by the implications of the study by Coronel et al. (2012). In that study, family situations or socioprofessional preferences are highlighted as barriers that condition decision making regarding the acceptance of this professional position. In the current study, the fear of a lack of adequate time management is also an element that conditions that decision. Even with this, the testimonies from most of the professionals in this research emphasize the importance that this position acquires in their life and professional trajectories.

In short, this study represents a significant contribution by analyzing the manifested difficulties faced by the leader of a school in depth (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Coronel et al., 2012; Fernández, 2002; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020; Oplatka & Arar, 2017). Although a number of obstacles have been reflected in accessing the leadership position in schools, these difficulties could be transformed into challenges for opportunity. In this way, the search can be made for answers on what and how to introduce changes and improvements. Some advances could be reflected in the promotion of dialogue and shared decision making, in the establishment of fluid communication networks and in curricular innovation, among others. Consequently, coresponsibility and change in attitude emerge as the basis on which participatory and democratic education is established.

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Tables

Table 1. *Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample*

PARTICIPANTS	Gender	Province	Context	Type of school	Presentation /designation	Previous motivation
Participant 1	M	Teruel	Rural	CRA (grouped rural college)	Designation	No
Participant 2	F	Huesca	Rural	Incomplete school	Designation	No
Participant 3	F	Zaragoza	Urban	Bilingual French School	Presentation	Yes
Participant 4	F	Zaragoza	Urban	School	Presentation	Yes
Participant 5	F	Huesca	Urban	School	Presentation	Yes
Participant 6	M	Zaragoza	Rural	Incomplete school	Designation	No
Participant 7	M	Teruel	Rural	CRA (grouped rural college)	Designation	Yes

Table 2. *Subcategories in the perceptions of decision making*

Perceptions of decision making	
Difficult, complex decision.	*Not difficult, simple decision.*
Decision coordinated by motivation.	*Decision coordinated by demotivation.*
Thoughtful decision.	*Rushed decision by the time factor.*
Decision mediated by feeling of fear and uncertainty.	*Emotion and enthusiasm.*