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The relationship between leadership preparation and the level of teachers' interest in assuming a principalship in Chile

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ABSTRACT
There is a vast body of knowledge supporting the critical role of principal for school improvement and improved students' learning outcomes. While, there is increasing evidence addressing the lack of interest in the principalship, training and preparation has been identified as a potential enhancer for principalship interest. The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyse the relation between teacher's interest in assuming a principalship and leadership preparation using a quantitative approach. A sample of 220 school teachers with no formal leadership responsibilities responded an online survey and their answers were analysed with descriptive, Pearson correlation and analysis of variance statistics. The findings indicated that age, professional training and opportunities to exercise leadership were relevant variables in understanding the level of interest of teachers. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

The relevance of school leadership for school improvement and improved students' learning outcomes has been generally accepted in recent years. There is strong evidence indicating a clear connection between effective leadership and the improvement of student's learning (Leithwood et al. 2006; Robinson 2007). In addition, the role of the principal has been identified as the major source of leadership within the school and a key factor in enhancing school change and development. This evidence underpins the assumption that you cannot improve schools without good principals (Barber, Whelan, and Clark 2010).

Despite the evidence about the relevance of the principal's role, studies have identified a global tendency for fewer applicants for the position. According to Mulford (2003), this gap was detected at the end of the 1980s in different parts of the United States and the UK. Since then, studies in different countries have confirmed a shortage of candidates interested in assuming a principalship (D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan 2002; Boerema 2011; Gaus 2011). While it is difficult to identify a simple and unique cause behind this phenomenon, the evidence suggests that principalship is becoming more complex, difficult and less rewarding, in comparison with the classroom teacher's role (Ferrandino 2001; Myers 2006).

Having in consideration a potential shortage of principals, many countries around the world have implemented national preparation programmes, not only aiming to improve school leaders' professional quality, but also to incentive the participation of teachers in formal management positions (Bush 2011). These actions are based under the assumption that principals, who are mainly selected among teachers, were originally trained for a different role and they require specific preparation (Bush 2009; Schleicher 2012). While leadership training has been identified as a major opportunity for increasing the interest in administrative positions, the evidence is not conclusive about its results. While some studies have identified that preparation and support is linked with an increase in the participation of teachers in the principalship, others describe something very different. For instance, a recent study of the NCSL (2010) in the UK, shows an increase in the interest of teachers applying for a principalship after their participation in a long preparation programme. On the contrary, MacBeath (2011) in Scotland, and D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan (2002) in Australia, indicate that teachers highly prepared in leadership are not interested in assuming the lead of schools.

Chilean educational policies have started to align with international trends in recent years. Relevant transformations of the technical and political framework have emphasised the role of principals, increasing their attributions and responsibilities (Weinstein and Muñoz 2014). Accordingly, a new process for principal selection and leadership preparation has been installed in the public agenda (Muñoz and Marfán 2011; Galdames, Rodriguez, and Peñailillo 2013). Probably one of the most relevant features of the 'leadership reform' is the possibility to implement a public and transparent process of selection of school principals, for the first time since the 1990s.

Considering this scenario, this study intends to characterise the level of leadership preparation and, to some extent, establish correlates to the level of interest in assuming a principalship by Chilean school teachers. The findings could inform both national and international researchers, decision-makers and aspiring principals, about the potential opportunities and challenges in applying for a principalship.

Theoretical framework

Principal leadership

As noted before, in the last decade, studies have characterised and identified the impact that good leaders can exert within the school (Leithwood et al. 2006; Robinson 2007). According to Leithwood et al. (2006), leadership affects student learning indirectly through enhancing staff capacities, motivation and work conditions. Robinson (2007) identified the size effect of leadership in student's outcomes using a quantitative approach. According to her results, instructional leaders who are focused on teachers and teaching have a great effect in improving student's outcomes.

Although the relevance of leadership has become undeniable, it is a concept that is difficult to define. Bush and Glover (2003), describe several definitions and interpretations for it, which also present great implications for leadership research and development. For example, some definitions of leadership emphasise the role of the leaders as builders of a common vision (transformational role), while others centre their attention on the leader as enhancer of teachers' capacities (instructional role). On the other hand, the

concept of distributed leadership changes the emphasis from an individual to a social per-spective (Bennett et al. 2003; Harris 2005; Spillane et al. 2008). While the distributed approach has shown a series of advantages and benefits to school improvement, job sat-isfaction and student's learning, it has also stressed the relevance of formal leaders and specially the role of the principal for a proper distribution of responsibilities within the school.

The evidence showing that principals are critical for school success is substantial. In a recent study for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Schleicher (2012) describes the fundamental role of school leaders setting a vision and enhancing the capacities of the school community to achieve it. Similarly, other studies have identified core leadership practices exercised by principals including building vision, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the curriculum (Leithwood et al. 2006).

In the last 20 years, research has strongly suggested a major shift for principals in terms of demands, responsibilities and expectations. A change from a role placed in stable and pre-dictable environments to a complex and always changing setting has been well documen-ted (Simpson 1998; Mulford 2003). Moreover, the introduction of the accountability agenda in many educational systems has added new tasks and responsibilities for school leaders (Møller 2009; Leithwood 2010; Knapp and Feldman 2012). Thus, it appears that while prin-cipalship demands increase, the appeal of the position decreases, even resulting in princi-pals quitting and teachers presenting less interest in assuming the position, creating a potential insufficiency of candidates (Walker and Kwan 2009; Adelman and Taylor 2011). Considering the relevance of principals for school improvement and the effect on student's learning, a shortage of candidates could deeply affect the performance of schools.

Shortage of candidates

In recent decades, studies have identified a lack of candidates interested in the principal-ship. According to Newton et al. (2003), this issue has increasingly affected all types of schools across the United States. Hartle and Thomas (2003) describe a similar scenario in the UK, while D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan (2002) identified the same problem in Aus-tralia. Although all the cases consider contextual complexities, they identify similar poss-ible causes. Newton et al. (2003) summarise these causes in three trends: principals from the baby-boomer generation are massively retiring by age; current principals are leaving tired and disappointed with the position and prefer returning to the classrooms; and finally, school teachers are reluctant to assume formal leadership positions. In this paper we investigate further the latter trend considering the implications that classroom tea-chers' interest on assuming principalship could have on leadership preparation and tea-chers' professional development.

Many studies indicate that teachers want to assume principalship to improve the life of students (Cranston 2007), in complement with other issues such as the improvement of their status and remunerations (Shen, Cooley, and Wegenke 2004) gaining more auton-omy and flexibility (Walker and Kwan 2009) and professional career aspirations (Al-Omari and Wuzynani 2013). However, research also identifies elements that could be negatively influencing the interest of teachers to assume the role of the principal. One key element that affects teachers' interest is the perception of principalship as more demanding, difficult and complex than the teacher position (Pounder and Merrill 2001;

MacBeath 2011; Smith 2011; Bush 2011a; Al-Omari and Wuzynani 2013), often without improving their current salary (Shen, Cooley, and Wegenke 2004). Thus, teachers evaluate if the transition is worthwhile by comparing the potential risks and benefits, sometimes coming to the conclusion that the transition to a leadership position is not worth the effort (Pounder and Merrill 2001).

Other studies have focused on the political and administrative context that could block teachers' participation in a leadership position. Research suggests that across educational systems, teachers do not have the information to properly apply and prepare for recruitment processes (D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan 2002; Gaus 2011). In addition, evidence also suggests that some teachers do not trust selection processes, identifying biases such as age, religion and gender (McLay 2008; Gaus 2011). For example, female teachers face disadvantages when applying, considering a general assumption among different school systems that leadership requires 'masculine' attributes (Newton et al. 2003; Lepkowski 2009; Smith 2011).

Another line of studies address this issue from a professional development perspective, suggesting that the lack of candidates is related with poor opportunities to develop leadership capacities in teachers (Rhodes and Brundrett 2006). Bush (2011b) describes that while there is a common agreement about the relevance of leadership preparation, there is not a clear sense about how to put that in practice. Considering the increased complexity of the principalship in recent years, studies have indicated that teachers are not feeling confident enough in assuming a leadership challenge (Sanchez and Thornton 2010). Consequently, one of the main assumptions of our study is that professional development, understood as leadership preparation, is a critical variable to understand the level of interest in assuming a principalship, and therefore it is worth exploring their relationship.

Leadership preparation

There is an international interest in preparing school leaders, mainly developed under two assumptions: leadership preparation makes a difference (Bush 2009), and teachers need complementary training in order to perform properly in a leadership position (MacBeath 2011). Although both issues have been stressed because of the increased complexity and demands added into the principal's role, evidence indicates that many education systems do 'not present formal requirements to access principalship and preparation is a personal option under the judgement of each candidate' (Schleicher 2012). Nonetheless, in some countries leadership preparation has become a political priority presenting mandatory preparation and specific selection criteria. For example, Barber, Whelan, and Clark (2010) argue that the world's top school systems invest a large proportion of their educational budget preparing their principals. Bush (2009) calls this an 'entitlement' (377), addressing the moral obligation of the educational system to prepare their school leaders.

From a technical perspective, evidence indicates widespread alternatives for school leader's development. Studies suggest that it is not possible to describe a unique development path of principalship, given that a chaotic environment surrounds it (Harris and Townsend 2007). This idea is underpinned by the notion that different people learn through different strategies (Glatter 2009), and that leadership development is highly sensitive to the political influences on each context (Bogotch 2011). Moreover, while different countries prescribe a similar leadership curriculum, they change its emphasis and

methodologies (Bush and Jackson 2002). For instance, Barber, Whelan, and Clark (2010) identified that high performing countries train school leaders through formal professional development programmes, while other countries focus their attention in early detection and capacity development within the schools. Simkins, Close, and Smith (2009) describe that while the diversity of leadership development is great and most of the experiences are performed through formal preparation by course and training programmes, it is the informal experience like peer support, mentoring or presenting early leadership responsibilities that are greatly appreciated by the trainees.

Recently, several educational systems have implemented formal preparation for future principals, characterised by a strong presence of content-based programmes. These programmes introduce the participants to a common leadership curriculum, using theory, tutorials and reflecting activities, allowing the development of similar capacities and identities along a community of school leaders (Bush 2009). The main criticism to this approach relates with the assumption that leadership happens in context, therefore it should be learned considering the particular setting and needs of each school and the characteristics of every school leader (Kelly and Saunders 2010; Mertkan 2011).

Additionally, evidence highlights the relevance of informal experience into leadership development. Simkins, Close, and Smith (2009), describe that after a shadowing programme within the school, teachers positively change their perception about the role of principals, acquiring a deeper understanding of the complexities of the role and the relevance for student's learning. Similarly, investigating the internship of the United States' future leaders programme, Earley (2009), describes an increase in the self-confidence of teachers after exercising leadership responsibilities, considering the impact on personal and professional perceptions, after they successfully lead an activity.

Both formal an informal types of leadership development are greatly affected by the role of current principals within the schools (Kelly and Saunders 2010; MacBeath 2011). Principals affect teacher's development directly exercising guidance and support, but also indirectly allocating time and resources for teacher's preparation. The role of principals has been linked to identity construction in teachers, supporting their potential transition for the new role. It appears that teachers build their identity as leaders in relationship with their early experience with their own principals (Earley 2009; Simkins, Close, and Smith 2009), something that our study also attempts to address.

The Chilean context

The Chilean school system presents very specific features that set a challenging context for both teachers and principals. Since the beginning of the 1980s, during the dictatorship in Chile, the school system has operated a market-driven model for educational services (Valenzuela, Bellei, and de los Ríos 2013). The state subsidises the demand of parents as they choose between three different types of schools: municipal schools, administered by municipal governments; private-subsidised schools, administered by non- and for-profit institutions and individuals; and private schools, also administered by non- and for-profit institutions and individuals (OECD 2004). The first two types of schools are funded with a state voucher, based on student enrolment and average attendance, and constitute the public (state) system for compulsory primary and secondary education (Ahumada, Montecinos, and González 2012).

The regulations are different for municipal and private-subsidised schools, both in terms of selection and funding, leading to differential performance that often favours private-subsidised schools (OECD 2004). This situation has led to harsh social segregation and inequality in the system, which has been shown by an important body of evidence (Mizala and Romaguera 2000; Elacqua, Schneider, and Buckley 2006; Hsieh and Urquiola 2007; Elacqua 2012; Mizala and Torche 2012; Valenzuela, Bellei, and de los Ríos 2013). The problem of differential performance and social segregation echoes issues of poor quality and equity conditions in Chilean education, which have persisted despite a series of reforms to the school system put in place after the end of the dictatorship, from 1990 onwards (Raczynski and Muñoz 2007).

One of the later reforms has focused on school leadership, especially in disadvantaged contexts, following the international evidence described above about the influence of leadership on students' performance. The introduction of school leadership into the reform efforts came after issues like school infrastructure and resources, curriculum and assessment system, and teacher training and professional development (Cox 2003, 2004). The late introduction of school leadership into the reforms can be explained by the presence of specific legal constraints imposed at the end of the dictatorship, which made virtually impossible to remove school principals appointed during that period (Núñez, Weinstein, and Muñoz 2010). This situation changed between 2003 and 2005 when the law was modified to allow for incumbent principals to be removed and new applicants to come into principalship, and the Ministry of Education published a document outlining a professional framework for school leadership (*Marco de la Buena Dirección* or MBD for its acronym in Spanish) to support selection and induction of principals (Montecinos et al. 2009).

This framework defines performance standards that aim to contribute to the professionalisation of principalship, refocusing its role from administration to management in schools. These standards are organised in four areas where principals develop their practice. The first area is Leadership and it is concerned with how the principal steers the school and its pedagogical project. The second is Curriculum Management, which aims at fostering effective learning in the school. The third area is Resource Management and considers financial, material and professional resources necessary for achieving the school's learning goals. And the fourth is School Climate and Ethos, which points to the development of appropriate organisational conditions in the school for collaboration and learning (MINEDUC 2005).

According to Núñez, Weinstein, and Muñoz (2010), the changes introduced in this period allowed for the role of primary and secondary school principal to focus on providing pedagogical leadership for their schools. This was a stark contrast to the restricted administrative role of the principalship in Chile that dominated for more than 20 years, to which now principals had to add tasks such as supervising teaching and learning, providing pedagogical support to teachers, developing a pedagogical plan for the school and providing information to the school community about the progress of students. Similarly, a number of initiatives aimed at promoting quality assurance practices in schools, involving institutional self-evaluation, development of school improvement plans and public accountability (Ahumada, Montecinos, and González 2012), added to the new responsibilities of school principals. Thus, a series of new and demanding tasks were associated with principalship for which incumbent and newly appointed principals had little preparation.

To assist principals in this changing context, the Ministry of Education, through its continuous professional development centre (CPEIP, for its acronym in Spanish), has launched a number of initiatives for strengthening the professional competences of school leaders. The first of these initiatives were professional development workshops, designed and implemented by university departments in different regions of the country between 2006 and 2008, which aimed to familiarise principals and their management teams with the leadership framework, the national quality assurance system and assist them in leading school improvement plans (Montecinos et al. 2009). On the other hand, the private offer of professional development programmes for principals, which is dominated by universities, does not varies greatly in terms of methodology and contents, or whether it is aimed at newly appointed or experienced principals (Muñoz and Marfán 2011). Moreover, there is no evidence available of the impact of these programmes in current principals' practice, if it manages to attract new candidates for principalship or whether they appropriately qualified to undertake that role.

However, in 2011 the Ministry of Education launched a large initiative nationwide to prepare current and future principals (MINEDUC 2011). The 'Principals of Excellency' (*Directores de Excelencia*) is programme designed to prepare school leaders focusing on instructional practices (Campos et al. 2014). Current principals and aspiring teachers apply through the Ministry to obtain a scholarship (90% of the tuition) and select a preparation programme from different institutions (mostly universities). In return, once the participants complete their programme, they must apply to at least three principalship public tenders. According to the Ministry, over 2000 professionals have graduate from these programmes during its four years of implementations, half of them are schoolteachers. Unfortunately, there is no official information about how many graduate teachers have obtained a principalship after completing their programmes.

It is not clear if the recent launch by the Chilean government of this massive initiative to enhance the preparation of future school principals will be sufficient to create interest and provide suitable preparation for future principals. Considering the gap of studies within the Chilean context addressing this issue and relevance that leadership for student's learning, this research pretends to present relevant information for teachers, local and national authorities regarding the factors that influence the level of interest of suitable principalship candidate to improve principals and leadership preparation.

Study aim, research questions and method

The aim of the study was to ascertain the relationship between the level of interest in becoming future principals and leadership preparation in Chilean school teachers. The following research questions framed the study:

(1) What is the level of interest in assuming a principal position in Chilean teachers?
(2) What is the level of leadership preparation in Chilean teachers?
(3) What is the relationship between leadership preparation and teachers interest?

Considering the aim and research questions, the methodological approach of the study was an exploratory one (Johnson and Christensen 2012), looking to determine what is the level of interest in principalship and leadership preparation of school teachers. The chosen

method for the study was a questionnaire. According to Gillham (2008), questionnaires offer several advantages that are relevant to this study, for example, easily providing information from a large number of people on specific topics that can be analysed in a straightforward manner. Additionally, questionnaires provide suitable data for testing hypothetical links between certain variables, such as leadership preparation and interest in principalship.

Population and sample

The target population was defined as school teachers with no formal leadership roles (principals and deputy principals were excluded) from the region of Valparaiso, the third most populated in Chile. A sample was drawn from the population using convenience and snowball sampling (Czaja and Blair 2005). Over 254 total responses were received, only 220 were useable and 34 were excluded. The great majority of the participants were female (74%), the average age was 41 (a minimum of 22 and a maximum of 54); and most of them work in state-municipal (60%) and medium sized schools (51%). See Table 1.

Instrument

A questionnaire was designed using relevant literature on school leadership and the opinion of 10 experienced Chilean principals currently working. Items regarding interest in principalship and leadership preparation were considered. Most items were designed in a 10-point scale, from 1 (low) to 10 (high); others were presented as dichotomy (yes or no). Demographic data were also collected.

The first item asked teachers about their interest in becoming future principals in a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high). Responses between 1 and 3 were considered as low interest; between 4 and 7 as medium interest; 8 and 10 as high interest.

The second item asked teachers about their self-perception about their leadership capacities, in a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high). In order to define leadership capacities, the item used as a reference the four areas of professional standards from the framework for school leadership, which is described in the section.

The third item asked teachers about their formal preparation in leadership considering courses, diplomas and masters' programmes. In the Chilean context there is not a clear and formal differentiation between these programmes, however courses in general tend to be short (between hours and a few days) and are delivered by different organisations. Diplomas tend to be longer (around a year) and are usually delivered by universities and present some form of admission requirements. Finally Masters' are longer programmes (between 1 and 2 years), include admission requirements and are only offered by universities.

Table 1. Sample personal characteristics.

Variable	Percentage of total
Sex	74% females; 26% males
Age	41 years (average); minimum 22 – maximum 64
Level of teaching	10% early childhood; 51% primary; 28% secondary; 11% other
School type	60% public; 30% semi private; 10 private
School size	36% small; 51% medium; 13% large

The fourth item asked teachers if they exercised informal leadership roles within and outside the school. The responses for both questions were designed in a yes or no format. Teachers were encouraged to give examples about this role when necessary.

The fifth item asked teachers about their professional relationship with their principals, including two question: if the principals consider them as leaders and if the principals have supported them in developing as a school leader. The responses were in scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through an online survey, between April and June of 2012. Using a local database, the researcher contacted school teachers from the Valparaiso region via email. The email included a formal introduction of the study presenting its objectives, confidentiality regulations and a link to access the online survey. Teachers were encouraged to forward the email to their peers.

Data from the questionnaire were analysed with a confidence level of 0.05. For research questions number 1 and 2 a descriptive analysis was performed presenting means and standards deviations. Pearson correlation and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed for research question number 3. The analysis was assisted using SPSS version 20.0.

Limitations of the study

The sampling and the data collection could affect the results of this research. Firstly, the teachers who participated in this study are from one specific region of Chile. This issue presents difficulties in transferring conclusions to the entire population of teachers in Chile.

In addition, the sampling was performed using a convenience and snowballing technique. Teachers were contacted using information from a University database and encouraged to invite others to participate in the study via email. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that the original sample presented some previous connection with the University, which could explain a difference in the responses and therefore a higher preparation level than the rest of the population.

Secondly, data were collected using an online survey. This could affect the participation of teachers allowing more responses for teachers with more access to and capacities for online activities. Moreover, considering that the content of the survey was leadership, it could also affect the participation of teachers who had a previous relationship with this topic.

Findings

Level of interest

The first objective is to determine the level of interest in assuming a principal position. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were used to achieve this objective. As presented in Table 2, the mean value for the level of interest in assuming the principalship is 5.36 (SD = 3.42). The large standard deviation suggests polarised responses among teachers, identifying a group with high interest and another with low interest in principalship.

Table 2. Level of interest.

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Interest	5.36	3.42	220

Leadership preparation

The second objective is to identify the level of leadership preparation in Chilean teachers. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were used to achieve this objective.

In terms of the teacher's perception of their own leadership capacities (defined according to the Chilean framework for school leaders, the MBD) teachers generally perceive themselves as unprepared. While the four areas of leadership presented similar results, the highest score corresponds to Climate Management with 6.57; and the lowest corresponds to Resources Management with 5.79. Similarly, as the previously mentioned item, a large standard deviation is presented, which suggest the existence of two groups (see Table 3).

Teachers present low frequency in participation in leadership roles inside and outside the school. As presented in Table 4, only 35.9% of the participants declare some form of leadership responsibility within their schools, while 25.9% exercise leadership roles outside their school. The leadership responsibilities inside the school include: being in charge of student association centres, members of curriculum and assessment teams, and Information Communications Technology, library or sports coordinators. In terms of responsibilities outside the school, teachers describe widespread activities including faith leaders, union representatives, business owners and arts coordinators.

In terms of formal programmes, most teachers do not present formal preparation in leadership. From the total, 24.5% have participated in a leadership course, 25.9% have a leadership diploma and only 8.6% have a Masters' degree in leadership (see Table 5).

Table 3. Descriptive for leadership capacities self-perception.

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Educational leadership	6.18	3.03	220
Curriculum management	6.16	2.72	220
Climate management	6.57	2.69	220
Resources management	5.79	2.97	220

Table 4. Descriptive for leadership responsibilities inside and outside the school.

	No	%	Yes	%	Total
Inside	141	64.1	79	35.9	220
Outside	163	74.1	57	25.9	220

Table 5. Descriptive for formal preparation.

	No	%	Yes	%	Total
Course	166	75.5	54	24.5	220
Diploma	163	74.1	57	25.9	220
Master	201	91.4	19	8.6	220

Table 6. Descriptive for Principal's appreciation.

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
The Principal considers me as a leader	6.61	2.83	220
The Principal has support me to develop as a leader	4.67	3.24	220

Overall, teachers do not perceive themselves supported by their principals. The results in Table 6 show that teachers do not feel consider as leaders by their principals with an average score of 6.61 (SD = 2.83). In addition, teachers feel poorly supported in their leadership development by their principals with an average score of 4.67 (SD = 3.24).

Relationship between level of interest and leadership preparation

The third objective is to identify the relationship between interest and the level of teacher's preparation in leadership. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) and ANOVA were used to achieve this objective.

Considering the Chilean leadership framework as a reference, there is a significant and positive relationship between teacher's perception about their leadership capacities and their level of interest in becoming future principals. The highest correlations are between educational leadership and interest ($r = 0.310$, $p = .000$) and resource management and interest ($r = 0.299$, $p = .000$). These results suggest that teachers who perceive themselves more prepared also present more interest in assuming the principalship (see Table 7).

In terms of the principal's support, there is a significant and positive correlation between consideration and interest ($r = 0.266$, $p = .000$), and also between principal's support and interest ($r = 0.292$, $p = .000$). These results suggest a relationship between teachers' perception of and relationship with their principals, and their interest in applying to the principalship.

The results of the variance analysis show that formal preparation makes a difference in teachers' level of interest to assume the principalship. Teachers with formal preparation present higher interest than those without it. Considering the type of formal preparation courses, diplomas and postgraduate degrees, the difference was only significant in the case of teachers who had a leadership diploma ($F = 14.99$, $p = .000$). Holding a Masters' degree did not present a significant effect ($F = 3.67$, $p = .057$), however, the small number of participants who declare to have a Masters' degree in leadership ($n = 19$) could explain that difference. This suggests that longer programmes make a difference in terms of interest although the proportion of teachers with theses qualification is small (see Table 8)

Table 7. Correlation between level of interest with leadership capacities and Principal's appreciation.

	Level of interest	
	Pearson	Sig (two-tailed)
Educational leadership	0.310	0.00
Curriculum management	0.286	0.00
Climate management	0.260	0.00
Resources management	0.299	0.00
The principal considers me as a leader	0.266	0.00
The principal has support me to develop as a leader	0.292	0.00

Table 8. Variance analysis in formal preparation and exercising leadership.

	Answer	Mean	N	F	Sig
Course	No	5.34	166	0.27	0.869
	Yes	5.43	54		
Diploma	No	4.85	163	14.99	0.000
	Yes	6.82	57		
Master	No	5.22	201	3.67	0.057
	Yes	6.79	19		
L. inside	No	5.08	141	2.667	0.104
	Yes	5.89	79		
L. outside	No	5.09	163	3.879	0.050
	Yes	6.12	57		

In terms of exercising leadership, the results show that teachers who have leadership responsibilities present a higher level of interest in becoming future principals. However, the effect is significant for teachers with leadership responsibilities outside the school ($F = 3.879$, r 0.050), but not for teachers with responsibilities inside the school ($F = 2.667$, $r = 0.104$). This could be explained by the small number of participants who declare to exercise leadership roles.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to identify the relationship between practitioners' interest in becoming future principals and leadership preparation in Chilean school teachers. The results indicated that in most of the cases teachers with more preparation expressed more interest in assuming a formal leadership role. Although the findings are statistically significant, the low effect size of the relationship between both variables, and the methodological limitations caution us to present a generalisable conclusion. Nevertheless, several relevant findings can be extracted from the results.

Firstly, a third of the participants present a high interest in becoming a principal in the future. Although some methodological concerns could be affecting this result, considering possible biases in the sample, it is still a noticeable finding. The evidence indicates that within the international context, the level of interest is much lower than for Chilean teachers. For instance MacBeath (2011) describes that only 8% of teachers desire to apply for a principalship in Scotland. Despite the optimistic results, studies also indicate a distance between what teachers declare and what they finally do. Barty et al. (2005) say that while around 30% of the teachers in Australia explicit their desire to apply for a principalship, only few of them actually do it.

Secondly, in terms of preparation, only a small proportion of teachers present some experience on leadership training. Considering formal preparation, only few teachers have participated in longer professional experiences in leadership such as diplomas and masters' programmes. While there is not enough evidence to explain this finding, it could be related with access to such programmes. Other studies suggest that teachers sometimes do not have resources to prepare themselves considering economical, practical and geographic barriers (Shen, Cooley, and Wegenke 2004; McLay 2008; Moorosi 2010). As previous studies have stressed, professional development becomes critical not only to prepare but also to promote participation in the principalship (Bush 2011). In addition, only few teachers describe having leadership responsibilities beyond their classroom.

Especially relevant is the low participation of teachers in leadership roles within the school. Harris and Townsend (2007) describe the relevance of distributed responsibilities among teacher and the impact of these practices in increasing the interest of teachers for formal leadership roles. However, the authors also recognise the difficulties for schools and especially for principals to include teachers in leadership responsibilities. Accordingly, Rhodes and Brundrett (2006), in a study in the UK, note that the distribution of leadership is also affected by the schools' characteristics, for instance size. They found that in smaller schools teachers used to work closely together which encourage leadership roles, while in larger schools, work could be more fragmented and isolated.

Maybe the most relevant finding in the present study is the significant relationship between the different types of preparation and level of interest in assuming a future principalship. Although it is not possible to establish causality between these two variables, it is reasonable to make a connection between them. International experiences suggest caution on this point considering that not always these two variables present a positive correlation. Studies in England (Simkins, Close, and Smith 2009), and Australia (D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan 2002), show that teachers with capacities, preparation and experience in leadership, present low interest in assuming the direction of schools. It appears that when teachers have more knowledge about the implications and responsibilities of the role, present less desire in applying. In contrast, other studies have identified that teachers greatly benefit from working alongside principals, increasing their interest and motivation for assuming a formal leadership role (Rhodes and Brundrett 2006; Earley 2009). The results in this study show that only few teachers describe being supported by their principals, although there is a significant correlation between principals' support and level of interest.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this study to identify which form of leadership preparation was the fittest to enhance teacher's interest into the principalship. The aim is modest, presenting one of the first empirical approaches to the perception of Chilean teachers about their professional careers and allowing a better understanding of this phenomenon in the Chilean school system. In broader terms, teachers who perceive themselves as more prepared, and have experienced formal and informal leadership preparation, present a higher interest in becoming principals.

The results are not conclusive but indicate an orientation for practitioners and policymakers in order to enhance leadership preparation and development. Currently, the Chilean government has increased greatly the expenditure on leadership development, starting a rapid professionalisation of school principals. According to our data, this could affect the interest of teachers to apply for the position. Further research is advised in order to understand the effects of these new policies in leadership development and specifically in school teachers' interest in assuming a leading role in schools.

Finally, the results showed that not only formal preparation is affecting the interest of teachers, but also informal experiences. National policies could encourage the participation of teachers in leadership initiatives within schools. This could also be an important aspect of the leadership programmes integrating participants with no direct interest in assuming a principalship in the near future, but who desire to assume other leadership

roles in different school activities. Succession planning should be addressed from a strategic perspective, presenting middle and long terms plan to enhance leadership interest in teachers working in different levels of the educational system.

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