CLIMBING UP THE LADDER TO HEADSHIP IN MEXICAN COMPULSORY EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF THE *ESCALAFON*, THE POINT-BASED SYSTEM CURRENTLY USED IN MEXICO TO APPOINT SCHOOL HEADS, AN EXPLORATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
(Leaders and Leadership in Education)

School of Education

College of Social Sciences

The University of Birmingham

August 2012

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Abstract

Given the importance of educational leadership Bush (2008) argues that preparation of aspiring school leaders should not be left to chance. This exploratory case study is a critique of the Mexican system for appointing school leaders. The study is a qualitative research which used semi-structured interviews to collect data pertaining the strengths, shortcomings, and possible improvements of the Mexican point-based system to appoint school leaders. The study revealed that there are some positive aspects in the Mexican system that could enable its consolidation. The study found a need to upgrade the current system of promotion since school leaders in Mexico are appointed by a system in which its regulations and procedures were promulgated almost 40 years ago. The current system of promotion does not enable the appointment of prepared school leaders, since preparation for the post is not mandatory. This study discovered that there is an emphasis on preparation in the areas of teaching and learning in the current system of promotion and a lack of preparation in the areas pertaining to the functions of school heads. The findings revealed a need for leadership preparation as a prerequisite for participants in competitions for deputy headships, headships and, also for those who are already holding a leadership position. The approach adopted to appoint leaders without previous preparation seems to be problematic as time is wasted in enabling their readiness to effectively enact headship. A model emerged of the types of school leaders that the system of promotion favours to appoint taking in consideration the preparation that the *Escalafon* considers for promotion to a leadership post, and the level of development of leadership skills at the moment of promotion. In the model, four types of school heads emerged: a developed head, a pedagogical and practical head, a theoretical head, and a practical head. The types of school heads were defined as managers instead of leaders, based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, since seemingly the conception of a competent head in Mexico must be a person who focuses mainly on managerial and administrative functions.

The study also explored other topics such as talent identification, preparation, and leadership learning. From these aspects, when compared to what is currently done at international level, it was evident that Mexico still needs to do more. The contribution of this study from a theoretical perspective is geared towards a deeper understanding of some elements related to leadership professional identity, talent identification, and leadership learning in headship. With regards to professional identity, there seems to be a hierarchy present of professional identities in incumbent heads. At the first level, seemingly there is an extended classroom teacher identity, then at a higher level the identity of a school manager, and finally a true leadership identity in which school heads go beyond the managerial and controlling functions of the school manager. In relation to talent identification, this study adds elements of self-identification, self-persuasion, and self-nomination to pursue the leadership pathway in the absence of talent identification programmes, as in the Mexican case. Leadership learning may also have different levels of learning since leadership learning can go from superficial to higher levels in the comprehension of what it means to be a school head and in the development of skills to properly enact the position.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to

GLORIA LOPEZ DELGADO	(5 April 1980 – 24 March 2012)
MAXIMIANA LOPEZ DELGADO	(8 June 1978 – 24 March 2012)
MARIA LUISA DELGADO GONZALEZ	(9 January 1960 – 24 March 2012)

You will live in my heart forever

And to all members of My Beloved Family who are experiencing the pain and sadness for this irreparable loss

Acknowledgements

A very special thanks to all twenty one participants in the study who shared their experiences and perspectives with me.

I am grateful to the Ford Foundation for their financial support to complete my doctoral degree at this prestigious university.

I offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Christopher Rhodes for his support, encouragement, and understanding during my doctoral programme and especially during these last months in which I had to complete my thesis under very difficult emotional circumstances.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The importance of school leadership in ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people has been demonstrated repeatedly in research, and is a key policy priority for governments worldwide (NCSLCS, 2009). Governments around the world are devoting unparalleled resources to develop aspiring school leaders, as well as those who are already in the role (Leithwood and Day, 2007). School leaders play a key role in the way education is delivered since they can influence the conditions that help or limit educational practices in schools. There is evidence from research that school leaders influence the activities that are at the heart of educational endeavours such as teaching and learning. It has been demonstrated that after the classroom teacher, heads are the next most influential factor in improving student outcomes (Owings et al., 2005; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Day et al., 2009; NCSLCS, 2009). There has been verification of how in schools with effective school leaders, teachers improve their practices at a greater pace than those with less effective leadership (Beteille et al., 2009). Schools with good heads teaching become more meaningful for students (Rourke and Hartzman, 2009 and Mero, 2009). Other activities taking place in the school are also positively influenced by the presence of an effective head. For instance, there is a positive association between having a good headteacher and the job satisfaction of teaching staff and interpersonal relations in the school (Cerit, 2009), enabling professional harmonic environments in schools. It has also been reported that

effective school leaders can be very influential in improving schools serving the most disadvantaged students (SREB, 2010).

Implementing processes of choosing effective school leaders is one of the most significant decisions educational systems have to make. Headteachers are responsible for setting school improvement agendas and teacher workplace conditions and for ensuring that schools perform in accordance with national policies and community expectations. The implementation of processes to appoint school heads committed to the success of their students has been a priority of educational systems. Currently, school leaders in many countries face a demand of higher levels of achievement on student standardised tests as proof of improvement, along with the daily challenges of the multiple functions they have to carry out. Most of the research conducted on the practices of appointing school leaders has been carried out only in a few countries. There is not a wide landscape of practices implemented elsewhere at an international level and the effects these practices have on appointing competent school leaders. That is the case of the processes of accessing headship in Latin America. Murillo (2005) points out that in Latin America there are three models of appointing school leaders: a public competitive examination based just on an exam; a ladder merit system, the case of Mexico; and a mix between an exam and ladder merit system. In this exploratory case study, I analysed the case of aspiring heads in elementary schools in Mexico in the state of Chihuahua.

1.1 The Focus of the Research

This research was conducted in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico to examine the current process to appoint school leaders established in Mexico by a programme known

as the *Escalafon*. A vertical system which assigns leadership positions in schools and the educational system based on the accumulation of points. This research intended to deepen the understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the programme based on the perceptions of administrators of the programme at state level, teachers who are currently participating in the competition for a leadership post, and incumbent heads who have been appointed by the point-based system. It is also intended to gain a deeper understanding and explore how this way of accessing to headship contributes to the selection of prepared heads, and also how through this process of appointment, school leadership during the accession phase, is strengthened or hindered on different facets such as leadership talent identification, leadership preparation and leadership learning. This research aims to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the Mexican system to appoint school leaders, and also to contribute to the educational policy-making debate currently ongoing in Mexico to inform policy of the implications of strengthening school leadership. In this sense, creating the conditions that fosters Mexican students' success to achieve the best of their potential means enabling access to headship for teachers who have shown an outstanding professional performance along with proper preparation to lead schools. In this way, they may improve factors in schools that have a positive effect on teaching and student learning.

1.2 Context of the Study

It is pertinent in this section to give a general description of the Mexican education system in order to locate in it the *Escalafon* to understand some points addressed in this chapter likewise others that will be addressed in this thesis. The

Mexican education system is organized into five levels: pre-primary education, which caters for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years; primary education, which consists of six grades (grades 1-6); lower secondary education consisting of three grades (grades 7-9); upper secondary (10 -12) also consisting of three grades, and higher education, which offers a range of courses delivered by universities and technological institutes. There is private education in all of the five levels described, however, public schools serve 87 percent of all students in the country (SEP, 2012). Pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education constitute the basic education system which is compulsory. Mexican public basic education enrolls around 35 million students and employs approximately 2 million teachers (SEP, 2012). The Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Union are the two main actors in the education policy arena. By law, all school personnel in all public schools belong to the Teachers' Union. Governance is centralised with the Ministry of Education setting the academic calendar, curricula, grading scales, graduation requirements, distributing free textbooks and, hiring and firing school personnel.

Santibañez et al. (2005) point out that although Mexico decentralised the compulsory education system to its 32 states in 1992, this reform was mostly administrative, and did not reduce the centralisation of decision making. Schools, teachers and headteachers have little autonomy in the system. This centralisation is also present in the appointment of school leaders since regulations and procedures are dictated at national level. The appointment of school leaders in compulsory education is carried out in a process known as the *Escalafon*, -a point-based vertical career progression system, controlled by the Ministry of Education (SEP) in partnership with

the Teachers' Union. Participants interested in a leadership post in a school or higher positions within the educational system, participate in a competition in which they are assessed in four factors: knowledge, aptitude, length of service, discipline and punctuality. In this system, the participant with the highest score gains the position. The programme is established with the same organisational structure in each of the 32 states and is administered jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Union in the Joint National Commission for Teacher Promotion (CNME). In the following chapter, the process of appointing school leaders in Mexico will be discussed in more depth; this will be based on a review of the literature available on this topic.

1. 3 Justification of the Research

One of the main reasons to study the process of appointing headteachers in Mexico is due to the not so favourable results in student academic achievement in both national and international evaluations of schools in Mexican compulsory education. This assertion is not to blame school leaders for the recent modest results of students because student academic success is influenced by a complex interaction of factors. However, the comment is with the intention to see the educational system as a whole and make the improvements in the needed areas, including school leadership as an essential component.

In relation to the academic results that show the current level of achievement of Mexican students, I bring forward two examples. In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam administered to 15-year-old students every three years since 2000 by the OECD to its members. In 2006, Mexico ranked in 43 in reading, 48 in mathematics and 49 in science out of 57 countries that participated (OECD, 2007).

In 2009 Mexico ranked 49 in reading, math and science respectively out of 66 countries that took the test, scoring statistically significantly below the OECD average (OECD, 2010). Similar modest results have been continually obtained with students in primary and secondary schools in the Mexican evaluation such as the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement.

This panorama of modest results in students' academic achievement in international and national assessments raises the debate that there is a need of improvement in many areas of education in Mexico. It seems that the results obtained do not match the financial efforts currently provided by the Mexican government since in 2009 Mexico invested 5.7% of its Gross Domestic Product in education (OECD, 2009). Mexico invests almost a quarter of government spending (23%) in education being one of the countries members of the OECD with most public expenditure (Schleicher, 2007). Among other things, school leadership strengthening needs to be considered as a priority due to the critical role played by headteachers in school effectiveness as usually there is not a good school without good school leader. In 2008 a recognised team of experts from the OECD and leading universities worked for approximately two years closely with Mexican educational authorities in order to understand the context of Mexican education and offer recommendations to improve schools. In the final report there are recommendations for different areas of the system. From those recommendations, two are specifically related to the need to strengthen school leadership:

- Recommendation 9: Develop a framework of occupational standards for school leadership and management focused on improving school outcomes.
- Recommendation 10: professionalise the training, selection and recruitment of school leaders based on the leadership standards (OECD, 2010).

As previously suggested, school leaders are associated with raising students' academic achievement by creating a supportive environment that encourages learning through the improvement of teaching practices. Therefore, one of the reasons for its relevance is that it could add to the academic debate of improving the process to appoint better prepared school leaders in Mexico.

A second reason to carry out this study is that the current process was established in the early seventies; consequently, there is perhaps a need to upgrade the procedures through which teachers get access to a leadership post. As early as the 1930's, heads in Mexico have been appointed using a ladder merit system. There have been several upgrades in the decades previous to the one that was conducted in 1973 (Vallejo, 2006) which is currently dictating how school leaders should be appointed in compulsory education. The ladder merit system was upgraded jointly by the Ministry of Education and the National Union of Education Workers; they formed an institution called the Joint National Commission on Teacher Promotion also known as the *Escalafon*. This committee has offices with the same organisational structures in all 32 states responsible for administering the procedures of competitions in which teachers are promoted to higher ranks in schools and the educational system. The present system has been implemented for long time, and there is a lack of research regarding the appropriateness to appoint heads by this system. This research intends to explore through the perceptions of current heads, teachers seeking leadership posts and administrators of the system its strengths and shortcomings, how does or does not enable the appointment of good heads, and how it could be improved.

1.4 Antecedents of the Study

The *Escalafon* is the padlock that opens or closes temporarily the gate to aspiring heads in Mexico; therefore, knowing the combination to open the door to headship is fundamental to aspiring heads. Basically the only way teachers could be promoted to a leading post through this system is by the accumulation of points during their teaching career. In the Mexican context a teacher who wants to be appointed through the *Escalafon* just has to accumulate points without having to show whether or not he or she has potential to lead or has had previous training in leadership and management. Canales and Benzies (2009) point out that usually under this system the journey to headship takes years for the tedious task to accumulate points. Slater et al. (2006) frames this situation accurately when they describe that to become a school leader in Mexico, a teacher must play the game of earning points and let time pass to gain seniority. Another element for teachers seeking a headship also to consider is the element of patronage even in the commission on promotion because "there is little trust in the *Escalafon* because no one really knows if the people hired are the most qualified or really have the greatest number of points" (Slater et al., 2006, p. 72). These researchers continue explaining that "people know of many incidents of malpractice when positions are directed away from the person with the most points" (p. 72). Even with the efforts to raise credibility there seems to be present the influence of the Teachers Union to appoint its supporters. In this regard it has also been written by Cordero et al. (2008) that the force of the Teachers Union could be felt in the process of appointing a school leader because it has always looked for mechanisms of control within schools. This researcher continues stressing that political relationships seem to

be the way to access a headship in many cases. Unlike other Latin American countries, the Teachers Union in Mexico plays a dominant role in education (Slater et al., 2006).

Internationally the training of aspiring heads shows a recognised concern to prepare and equip them with the theoretical, methodological and technical knowledge and skills to better accomplish their job (Brundrett and Crawford, 2008; Bush, 2008; Brundrett et al., 2006). In the case of Mexico, it is reported that heads do not receive training during their access stage in order to face the complex challenges to lead and manage schools (Zorilla and Perez, 2006). There are several preparation programmes in higher institutions throughout the country in school management that could support preparation of aspiring heads (Slater et al., 2006). On the other hand, it seems that the existence of these programmes may not have any impact on the preparation of aspiring heads because it is not mandatory to have previous training in educational leadership or management when teachers apply for a headship. Cordero et al. (2008) reported that aspiring and also incumbent heads have accumulated throughout their professional life a long list of courses, workshops and academic qualifications little related with their function as school leaders.

Most of the research concerning school leadership in Mexico has been carried out to describe the nature of school leadership in the Mexican context. Barrientos and Taracena (2008) acknowledge that school leaders in Mexico previous to The 1992 Agreement for Modernising the Basic and Normal Education, the contemporary most important and comprehensive educational reform carried out in the country heads had basically administrative roles within schools in which a central task was to control teaching staff following the established norms. These researchers point out that

important changes were promoted to establish environments in which heads assume their leadership through collective work and democratic decision making processes. However, in practice it seems that current ways to lead and manage Mexican schools are still highly influenced by the previous bureaucratic practices. Canales and Benzies (2009) suggested that Mexican heads job has focused on three areas: managerial functions, improvement of school's physical infrastructure, and on union related tasks. The opinion that heads practices are mainly administrative and managerial has been confirmed by the work of other researchers (e.g. Garcia et al., 2010; Barrientos and Taracena, 2008; Zorrilla and Perez, 2006; Slater et al., 2006; OECD, 2009). A head's job in Mexico is overwhelmed with paperwork which prevents them from focusing on teaching and learning (Slater et al., 2006). Canales and Benzies (2009) comment that heads as responsible for implementing educational policy simply collecting data and elaborating reports for the school supervisor. Zorrilla and Perez (2006) reported that even in schools that have implemented more democratic and shared decision making processes, as the Schools of Quality Programme (PEC), a school-based management programme implemented in some elementary and middle schools, school leaders point out that the only link between them and their supervisors is to carry out administrative procedures and paperwork. Another attribute of school leaders in Mexico is the focus on improvement of the physical facilities of the building (Slater et al., 2006; Zorrilla and Perez, 2006; Canales and Bezies, 2009). In some cases in rural areas, heads need to organise parents to build the school (Slater et al., 2005). A synonym of good school leaders depends much on their ability to obtain resources mainly with other governmental agencies and in a few cases with the private sector because the majority

of schools are modestly equipped and need infrastructure improvement and maintenance. An additional distinctive feature of Mexican heads reported in the literature is their involvement in the Teachers' Union related tasks (Barrientos and Taracena, 2008; Cordero et al., 2008) because for the Teachers Union school leaders represents an agent of administrative and political control over the staff (Vallejo, 2006).

In relation to this proposed research, a search was carried out of the specific antecedents or previous empirical research conducted on how leaders are appointed by vertical career progression systems as those implemented in Latin America. In both the Latin American and Mexican literature there is a lack of empirical studies that address this process of appointment. In Mexican literature, only two researchers were found who address the process to appoint school leaders. Vallejo (2006) writes about the *Escalafon* from a critical position based on documentary research and discourse analysis making analyses of the official documents that dictate the procedures of promotion. Slater et al., (2006) briefly analysed the process of promotion in few paragraphs given that their research mainly covered other issues on headteachers preparation. Most research related to school leadership in Mexico has been conducted with incumbent heads basically to describe the nature of school leadership in the Mexican context. In relation to this proposed study, even being a small project has been the largest empirical study conducted in the country so far to analyse the process of appointing school leaders through the point-based system.

This research was approached as an exploratory case study to gain a deeper understanding from the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The research was conducted in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico in urban schools. The method to

gather data and explore the perceptions of the participants was semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the documentation of participants' understanding on their own experiences to become school leaders. I interviewed four officials of the commission on promotion, two officials who represent the government, and two officials from the Teachers' Union. I interviewed 12 incumbent heads of elementary schools appointed through the point-based system and 5 teachers seeking a headship via this system. The total of participants interviewed was 21. A pilot was conducted in July and August 2010 as a preliminary test of the methodological approach, the research questions, and interview questions. In the pilot, five participants were interviewed: two officials of the commission on promotion, two incumbent heads, and one aspiring head. Some minor adjustments based on the pilot (see Appendix A) were implemented in regards to the interview questions.

1.5 Research Questions

By asking pertinent and relevant questions, researchers set themselves on the path that enables them the understanding of the phenomenon being researched. The focus of this research was on exploring the perceptions of participants in relation to the process implemented in Mexico to appoint school leaders. This proposed study sought to answer five central interrelated research questions which were used to guide and focus the research:

- What are the strengths of the Mexican point-based system to appoint school leaders?
- What are the shortcomings of the current system to appoint school leaders?

- What are the perceptions of heads, teachers in transition to headship, and administrators of the joint commission on promotion on how the current system established for the appointment of school heads enables the appointment of well-prepared school leaders?
- What are the perceptions of participants in the study regarding how the current system to appoint school leaders enables leadership talent identification, training and development for leadership, and leadership learning?
- Overall, how could the current system to appoint school leaders, and in general in Mexican compulsory education could be improved with regards to appointing better prepared school leaders?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Search Strategy

The search strategy implemented enabled the collection of different sources to obtain the essence of pertinent theoretical knowledge to build conceptual frameworks for the purpose of this research. The type of literature consulted included books, articles in journals and publications, and government documents. Most of the literature reviewed pertaining educational leadership was from the UK but literature was also drawn from authors in the USA and few papers from Mexico with relevant information of leadership and relevant for this study. Searches were performed using the following key words: leadership, management, school leaders, appointing school leaders, vertical ladders, school heads, talent identification, talent management, leadership learning, leadership preparation, aspiring school heads, and educational leadership. The review was done on a thematic basis by giving emphasis to the themes involved in informing this study trying to include different perspectives, viewpoints and empirical evidences when addressing each theme. It was conducted an internet search in databases and online library catalogues using the Library Services Direct provided by the Information Services at www.is.bham.ac.uk. In databases such as British Education Index and ERIC and from eJournal services articles in journals and publications were retrieved. In the library catalogue were identified books pertinent in helping to build conceptual frameworks for this thesis.

2.1 The role of Headteachers

A headteacher is the person responsible to direct and monitor the academic and non-academic activities of a school to provide the best possible education for the pupils. He or she is the pivot around which many aspects of the school revolve, being the person in charge of every detail of running the school, be it academic or administrative (Lydiah and Nasongo, 2009). School leaders are drivers of school improvement, determiners of achievement focus, and leaders of the school community (Hill, 2002). The traditional role of headteachers has been to lead and manage teachers, pupils and the curriculum. However, the role of a school head has gradually evolved in many countries across the previous decades as a consequence of reform efforts launched to improve the quality of education delivered to children and youngsters. Radosevic (1998) based on his research with primary school heads implied that there was a change in focus of the position of a school leader from headteacher to chief executive officer in the 90's becoming increasingly multi- faceted, complex and ambiguous. This evolving nature of the role of school leadership into one more complex and demanding was also supported by other researchers in the past decade. For instance, Lambert et al. (2002) pointed out that perceptions of teaching and learning have changed during the past ten years, and expectations of schools, and the headteachers who lead them, have changed as well. Current school leaders' responsibilities not only include the traditional task of efficiently managing students, staff, and grounds but also deep engagement in instructional and community issues (Whitaker, 2002). Current school heads are being asked to build professional communities of reflective practitioners who critically consider how schools can improve the learning and achievement of all pupils (Lambert et al.,

2002). More recently there has been an acknowledgement by the NCLSCS (2009) that school leadership is a profession in constant transition "there is now more variety in the types of roles that school leaders hold" (p. 25).

On the other hand, in a wider sense, it is difficult to frame the role of current school leaders within a specific profile since their functions are highly attached to the specific contexts of each country. For instance, a study conducted by Balanskat and Gerhard (2005) to identify headteachers' professional profile and roles across Europe concluded that roles of the headteachers are very diverse across the different European countries. Nonetheless, based on a review of the literature in a wider perspective regarding the role, functions and tasks that headteachers must carry out is reported that headteachers central functions are to pursue the educational objectives and educational policy set by the government (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2008; Raffo and Gunter, 2008; Townsed, 2010; Rapp, 2010), and influence the processes of teaching and learning (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001; Fullan 2004; Elmore 2004; Jenkins, 2009). New roles could be added for headteachers in the future because school leadership is constantly evolving since it is highly attached to the continual educational reform. The literature suggests that future school heads will have to think and act both locally and globally (Townsed, 2010), develop a culture in the school which respects and affirms the diversity of cultures (Magno and Schiff, 2010), and are ready to lead in the digital era successfully implementing ICT in schools (Makkawi, 2010).

For purpose of theoretical and conceptual analysis, the roles played by a school leader could be divided in two broad categories: those related to management and those to leadership. This is done with the assumption reported by the literature that

leadership is not the same as management. Cuban (1988) provides one distinction between these terms by leadership, he refers influencing and motivating others actions in achieving desirable ends. In his vision, leaders frequently initiate change to reach existing and new goals. In the case of management he asserts that managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. Jenkins (2009) points out that school leaders should seek a balance between both the instructional leader and the manager-administrator roles in order to be successfully operate and lead schools.

Pertaining their roles as managers, the literature indicates that implementation of effective organisational processes influences student achievement (Davis et al., 2005). This includes setting directions for the organisation by developing shared goals, monitoring organisational performance, promoting effective communication, and redesigning the organisation through the creation of a productive school culture, modifying organisational structures that undermine the educational work, and building collaborative processes (Leithwood et al., 2004). The manager role of a headteacher is related to the implementation, monitoring, and controlling of policies and activities which according to Newberry (2005) are designed at a higher level as the governmental, or at more local levels as the school districts or individual schools. As managers, school leaders focus on attending those functions that are mainly internal and crucial for the day-to-day operation of the school. It is assumed that seldom there is an effective leader who has not been a good manager. Good management brings a degree of order and consistency (Kotter, 1990).

Leaders on the other hand set a direction, align people, motivate and inspire (Kotter, 2001). "Leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organisation" (Yukl, 2002, p.2). Effective leaders are open-minded, ready to learn, flexible and persistent, and their success depends on their ability to apply leadership practices appropriately in the context of their school (NCLSCS, 2009). The National College for School Leadership in England in 2004 provided three defining characteristics of leadership:

> - A sense of direction or purpose; wanting to achieve, sustain or change something - Taking action without direct instruction to achieve this purpose
> - Persuading, influencing, encouraging (and sometimes, instructing) other people to act in pursuit of this purpose.

Leadership practice have been evolving and currently there has been a shift to more democratic and participative approaches as distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane et al., 2004), shared leadership (Lambert, 2002), democratic leadership (Starratt, 2001; Moller, 2002), and team teacher leadership (Little, 1990; Barth, 1999). This has enabled an evolution in the conceptualisation of leadership from the charismatic leader portrayed as super talented individual with exceptional gifts that transform schools as solo performer to alternative and shared approaches to face current demands in schools. This has enabled the participation and sharing of responsibilities from headteachers to middle leaders, teachers, students, non-teaching staff and parents because new challenges far exceed the capacities of any individual leader.

It is needed that both leadership and management work in harmony with one another if headteachers are to create high achieving schools. Leadership is the process

of influencing others, establishing direction, outlining people to move in that direction, motivating and inspiring them. Management, on the other hand, is helping people to focus on the right operational things in measuring progress towards achieving agreed goals and follow up on agreed actions to continual performance improvement. "One can be a leader without being a manager [and] conversely, one can manage without lead" (Schon, 1984, p. 36). Kapplan and Kaiser (2003) assert that "taking one leadership approach to the extreme while giving its complement short shrift leads to imbalance and ineffectiveness" (p. 20). They continue pointing out that leaders may be too task oriented and not sufficiently people-oriented, too tough and not responsive enough to people's needs, too big-picture-oriented with not enough emphasis on planning and follow-through. According to Northouse (2010) in practical situations leadership and management overlap: "when managers are involved in influencing a group to meet its goals, they are involved in leadership. When leaders are involved in planning, organising, staffing, and controlling, they are involved in management" (p. 11). Therefore, leadership effectiveness could be understood as the ability to draw freely from the two opposing sides as appropriate for a given situation.

2.2 Prepared School Leaders and Student Achievement

There is a need that schools focus on appointing effective school leaders who encompass their role as both effective leaders and effective managers. Sammons et al. (1995) accentuated that generations of research on school effectiveness show that exemplary leadership is always one of the main factors in high achieving schools. The idea that leadership matters is conventional wisdom, not only in education, but in many organisations (Watson, 2005). While the importance of leadership is sometimes still a

subject of debate in education, its significance is now taken for granted in business, politics, the military, and almost every other area of public life (Barber et al., 2010). It is assumed that schools with highly effective headteachers will positive influence students' academic achievement and the general performance of schools. This has enabled the interest to conduct empirical research to study the direct and indirect effects of leadership on student outcomes.

There are some reviews of empirical research that address the relationship between school leadership and student achievement (Bell et al., 2003; Witziers et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006). The typical conclusion drawn is that school leaders have small and indirect effects on student outcomes that are essentially mediated by teachers (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). In a meta-analysis conducted by Robinson et al. (2008) which focused on identifying the impact of transformational and instructional types of leadership on students outcomes. The results they obtained were that "the comparison between instructional and transformational leadership showed that the impact of the former is three to four times that of the latter" (p. 665). Robinson et al. (2008) concluded that "the comparisons between transformational and instructional leadership [and] suggested that the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes" (p. 636). This suggests that the work of effective school leaders is to focus their effort to improve the tasks that are more related to teaching and learning. These include the ways in which leaders directly participate in curriculum design and implementation; support and promote effective teaching and assessment practices; recognise individual and school

achievements; and adapt their leadership to address the needs of teachers, students, and other stakeholders (Waters et al., 2003). Therefore, school heads who primarily focus on teaching and learning and could be considered as prepared leaders who do not hesitate to remain connected to the classroom by coaching teachers, modelling lessons, or leading discussions pertaining the process of teaching and learning.

2.3 Enabling the Access to Headship of Prepared School Leaders

The quality of leadership enacted favours leadership effectiveness. Effective heads have a strong vision for their school, an inclination to innovate and take risks, and to engage the commitment of teachers. They establish clear goals, and ensure that teaching staff, students and parents are involved to accomplish them. This implies the need to create the conditions in schools and within the educational system to prepare and develop aspiring heads. Educational systems around the world have implemented different strategies to strengthen the appointment of effective school leaders. These strategies include leadership talent identification programmes (e.g. England and Singapore), and mandatory and non-mandatory leadership preparation programmes (e.g. England, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong-China, New Zealand, Singapore, most states in the USA, France, Scotland, Estonia, Eslovenia, and Malta).

However, in many countries training is not a requirement for an appointment to the post of headteacher and there is an assumption that a good teacher could become an effective headteacher (Nicolaidou and Georgiou, 2009). Bush (2010) points out that in many countries, school leaders begin their professional careers as teachers and progress to headship via a range of leadership tasks and roles often described as 'middle management'. Heads may continue to teach following their appointment,

particularly in small schools. Bush (2010) highlights that in these countries "there is an implicit assumption that professionally qualified teachers would be able to 'assume' leadership roles with no specific training" (p.7). Promoting promising teachers to administrative roles provides the most economical solution compared to the cost it implies to train and prepare them (NSVF, 2008). Reid (2008) questions the approach to appoint school leaders in which is considered that because a staff member is an effective classroom teacher he or she would be able to transfer their skills to a leadership role. He stresses that just because classroom teachers demonstrate exemplary skills in the classroom is not a guarantee that they will have the skills needed to lead a school. The competencies required to be a successful teacher are different to those needed in a leadership role. Under this approach implemented in many countries, classroom teachers are promoted to deputy headships, and then later in their career they are promoted to headship (Petzko, 2002; Retelle, 2003). It is important that schools and educational systems offer opportunities to develop teachers seeking headship in order that they could advance the best possible equipped to their new post. This could be addressed with programmes appropriated to identify potential leaders and train and prepare them for headship during their accession. In the following section, it is addressed how the accession phase could be strengthened by the implementation of leadership talent identification programmes.

2.3.1 Leadership Talent Identification

The effect of the more rigorous demands placed on schools makes the identification and preparation of school leaders an important part of leadership development. Talent-spotting is a standard activity in the private sector but often

neglected in schools (NCSLCS, 2009). More specifically regarding leadership talent identification, it still remains an under-researched area of leadership (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2005). Much commercial sector literature emphasises that the adoption of an indiferent attitude to the development of future leaders is irresponsible since the retention of talented individuals is seen as important part of succession planning (Rothwell, 2005). Hartle and Thomas (2004) have reviewed leadership succession practices in organisations outside the education sector and conclude that many organisations are now investing considerable resources to develop leadership talent in-house. High-performing educational systems identify potential leaders early and have mechanisms for developing their talents over time by providing them with opportunities to gain leadership experience (Barber et al., 2010). "Active succession management should seek to enable those with actual or potential leadership talent to be systematically developed" (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2009, p. 383). Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) commented that schools should focus on growing their own leaders and suggested that there need to be specific approaches to leadership talent identification and leadership succession planning. They also point out that talent identification involves well-targeted career development for talented individuals and senior staff working together to recognise and value the leadership potential of others. This development could be through leadership distribution (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2009), mentoring and coaching, school-based experiential learning, job rotation, shadowing internship, peer support, networking and formal leadership learning programmes (Bush and Glover, 2004).

Recently, shortages of school leaders have been reported in many countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, and the USA (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2006). The current crises of leadership in some places has determined that some countries and educational systems are now identifying leadership potential in the first years of teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) and developing a continuum of leadership preparation from pre-service to induction to in-service support. For instance in 2010, in England, the NCSLCS introduced the Accelerate to Headship Tomorrow's Heads programme to enable those with the highest potential to move rapidly to headship. Another example of talent identification could be the case of Singapore, in a study conducted by the Center for International Understanding established in the University of North Carolina (2008) in relation to the talent identification programme implemented reports that "Singapore has a formalised talent identification and training program that begins when one is hired as a teacher throughout one's career as an educator in Singapore, an employee will annually be rated based on 'leadership potential'"(p. 12). In this study it is pointed out that in Singapore, the process of talent identification and training begins with what they call middle management. Candidates for middle management positions are identified based on their leadership potential ratings and then interviewed and screened by a committee of school leaders.

Schools and educational systems need to be aware of individuals displaying leadership potential in a range of ways. Brundrett et al. (2006) suggest pro-activity in the development of leadership successors requires the recognition of potential leadership talent in others. Once potential leadership talent has been identified then there is a responsibility to find ways to better attend to their development (Fink, 2005). However, it

needs to be ensured that the needs of the individual are being met. Southworth (2005) claims we should avoid adopting a one size fits all approach to leadership identification and development. The undertaking of developing potential leadership can be made more difficult if the identified individual lacks the confidence to take on a leadership role. Building his/her confidence could be by giving the individual opportunities and support needed. To ensure the aspirant leader's confidence is developed, senior leaders need to actively and purposefully support leadership development that encourages staff to take on new roles and to aspire to leadership positions (Brundrett et al., 2006). It is important for the development of potential and aspiring leaders to be given the opportunity to engage in the practice of leadership to build their confidence (Southworth, 2007). Hartle and Thomas (2004) point out that to grow leadership talent, headteachers need to provide their teaching staff with opportunities to take risks with leadership responsibilities however they do emphasise that school heads also need to support those teachers taking the risk to engage in the practice of leadership.

2.3.2 Leadership Learning

Another important aspect pertaining enhancing the possibility to appoint school leaders prepared for their role is the opportunities that teachers seeking a leadership post have for learning how to lead. The first leadership learning experiences for teachers aspiring to leadership roles usually occur when they are in their teaching post. Lieberman and Friedrich (2008) found that many teachers grow into leadership roles by developing their own teaching expertise. Such teachers are willing to learn, hard-working and empathetic and have an awareness which extends beyond their classroom perspectives (NCSL, n.d.). DEECD (2010) asserts that those teachers by achieving

improved student outcomes are led to become models for others who seek their advice. Teachers who perceive themselves as leaders adapt their teaching practice to meet each pupil needs, improve student learning, and help transform their schools by collaborating with others (Jantzi and Leithwood, 1996). In this regard, Robertson and Stranchan (2001) point out that there is a relationship between teachers' perceptions and their professional self-efficacy.

Teachers feel that developing their own teaching practices could be the foundation for their credibility and support as leaders with their colleagues. These practices help teachers to better understand and respond to the needs of students and colleagues (Lieberman and Friedrich 2008). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) mention that teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond their classroom influencing others towards the improvement of educational practices. These events as successful classroom teachers seem to be the first leadership learning experiences in which they notice that they could have the potential to lead and assume greater responsibilities. This increases the possibility that they could think in the possibility to aspire for leadership roles. The positive experiences that they had as classroom teachers could favour the development of their identity as potential school leaders. Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) pointed out that the development of a leadership identity is an ongoing process that changes as the individual learns through lived experiences shaping and reshaping their identity. Leadership identity development could be perceived as Brown-Ferrigno (2006) indicated when there is a professional growth by the mindset shift of classroom teacher to that of an educational leader.

The main forms for leadership learning could be through their professional experiences as teachers and in the post once are appointed as incumbent heads. Boud and Garrick (1999) argue that learning at work has become one of the most important areas of development in the fields of management and education. On-the-job learning is the learning that occurs when teachers and school leaders engage in their daily work performing their job duties, by doing and reflecting on their experiences. The job of school leaders can be conceptualised as practical problem-solving, a type of thinking embedded in activity, which draws on a large repertoire of previous acquired knowledge (Leithwood et al., 2004). According to Lieberman (2004) the concept of learning-in-practice is viewed as foundational to an understanding of leadership. Another source of leadership learning comes from the formal training and preparation programmes which will be reviewed in the preparation of aspiring school leaders' part.

2.3.3 Practical Meaningful Opportunities for Leadership Learning

Important elements in leadership learning are the real opportunities to engage in the practice of leadership. These opportunities to practice leadership start to emerge at classroom level by either formal positions such as department head or curriculum specialist or by informal roles as in the case of role models or volunteers. In some cases the practice of leadership at middle levels enable their motivation to continue climbing up the ladder, while in others these practical opportunities to engage in leadership and the understanding of the implications of the headteachers role make them not to continue in their journey. Key opportunities to get closer and engage in the real job of a headteacher are deputyships, acting headships, and teaching headship which could enable the desire to pursue headship and at the same time leadership learning.

In the case of deputy headships Pellicer et al. (1990) reported that deputy heads who had a stronger leadership role demonstrated higher levels of motivation, self-efficacy and the desire to pursue headship. Harris et al. (2003) pointed out that the time spent as a deputy head offers a preparation and entry point to headship. This is favoured when deputy heads are in schools in which leadership is distributed. In this regard, Muijs and Harris (2002) address that in these schools deputy heads are emergent leaders who share responsibility for leadership with the headteacher and other teachers. On the contrary, in schools in which deputy heads do not have the opportunity to engage in decision making and exercising leadership could not enable a meaningful understanding of the implications of headteachers' role and strengthen their preparation if they want to pursue a headship. In this regard, Ribbins (1997) in his study demonstrated that a large number of headteachers found their experiences as deputy heads particularly frustrating or disappointing because of the lack of leadership influence they felt had within the school.

In the case of acting headships, Draper and McMichael (1998) assert that experience in a temporary leadership post has been found to be influential in subsequent career decision-making encouraging some to seek further promotion. Also Draper and McMichael (2003) in their study with 63 acting heads found that nearly all felt that temporary headship offered a chance to formalise themselves with headship and to take on new responsibilities. However, there are also critical perspectives on acting headteachers. For instance, West (1987) in his study of seven acting heads reported that participants found their acting posts just as caretaking rather than full

headship role. Gardiner (1988) described his experience in an acting headship and suggested that acting headship was temporary, narrower and limited.

Regarding teaching headships in small schools, they offer opportunities for leadership learning and may motivate teaching heads to seek headship in larger schools. Bell and Morrison (1988) recognised that teaching headships enable a deeper understanding of teaching, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships, and the ability to operate a collegial leadership style due to the connection to teaching while having the responsibility to lead the school. However, there are also perspectives which address the difficulties of teachings heads. Dunning (1993) addressed this as the "double load" of the professional concerns of teaching and the demands that managing a school brings. In this sense some of the research (e.g. Galton, 1993; Wallace, 1988; Way, 1989) suggests that teaching and managing in small schools are different from that in larger schools. Some of the difficulties experienced by teaching heads are the lack of support in preparation and development which seems to be more accentuated than in larger schools. This was addressed in research conducted more than a decade ago. For instance Wilson and McPake (1999) reported that many of the 22 headteachers interviewed in their study in Scotland considered inadequate their preparation and training. However, it also seems that some countries are addressing the preparation and training of teaching heads e.g. England (NCSL, 2006), Australia (Clarke, 2002), Finland (Kalaoja and Pietarinen, 2001), and Norway (2001).

2.3.4 Preparation of Aspiring School Leaders

It is widely accepted that teachers need both initial training to be effective classroom practitioners and continuing professional development throughout their

careers (Bush and Jackson, 2002). Matters (2005) observes that school leaders should receive preparation for the post in order to generate the best possible performance in their roles. This concurs with the claim made by Marzano et al. (2005) that schools must have leaders who make well-informed decisions on the type of work that will have the greatest impact on student achievement. Moorosi and Bush (2011) point out that not focusing on leadership preparation means that there is a chance that school are placed in the hands of unqualified personnel. Researchers point to the need for training to headteachers to provide leadership and management skills not included in teacher training (Devos and Tuytens, 2006). Bush (2010) argues "that headship is a specialist occupation that requires specific preparation" (p. 113). Thomas and Bainbridge (2002) acknowledge that effective educational leadership emanates from school leaders demonstration of knowledge.

In countries such as Denmark where training is not common practice, 90% of school leaders feel a need for mandatory initial training (Pont et al., 2008). Training is having an impact on improving leader's knowledge so as to promote changes in the way schools are led and managed (Pont et al., 2008). Preparation seems also to foster identity transformation from classroom teacher to that of a school leader. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) in one of the findings of her study conducted with aspiring heads engaged in a programme of preparation for headship emerged the role identity transformation as a result of the preparation programme. In this regard, Battey and Franke (2008) point out that identity is shaped by the knowledge and skills we acquire.

Since the mid-1990's, training and development for school leaders have been introduced or strengthened in many countries either as preparation for entry to the post

or to further develop the skills of active heads (Huber, 2008). The approaches implemented by several countries to strengthen school leaders could be grouped under the following approaches a) pre-service or preparatory training to take up the position, b) induction training for those who have recently taken up the position and c) in-service training provided to practising principals (Pont et al., 2008). Some countries have all types of provision running in parallel, while others provide only one or two types. For example, England, Finland, Northern Ireland, Israel and Slovenia offer leadership development training at all steps in a principal's career (Pont et al., 2008). For instance in the case of England, Caldwell (2004) highlighted that among nations with comparable proposals for reform, only England has created a national system through its National College for School Leadership (NCSL). Inspection of evidence produced by The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) has guided the UK government's work on identifying and preparing prospective heads, and developing experienced ones through the NCSL (Southworth, 2002).

The strengthening of school leaders by means of preparation has become a priority at international level. For instance, in the United States, a master's degree in educational administration is a requirement in most states in applying for a leadership position (Hillman, 1992 cited in Wong 2004). Another example is in Ontario Canada in which prospective heads have to follow the Principal Qualification Programme offered by ten universities in Ontario (Huber and West, 2002). In a study conducted by Pont et al. (2008) at international level, "overall, of the 22 countries/regions analysed, a majority have pre- service training, in most cases as a pre-requisite for the job" (p.108). Then,

the assumption guiding the requirement for preparation is that to have competent heads leading schools is necessary prepare them before they are appointed.

There is general consensus among practitioners, researchers and policy makers that professional training and development of aspiring and incumbent heads have an impact on participants by improving their knowledge, skills and dispositions (Pont et al., 2008). This can contribute to more competent and effective leadership performance and eventually lead to improvements in teaching and learning (Davis et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) since the relationship between high quality school leadership and educational outcomes is well documented. Several studies on school effectiveness show that excellent leadership is invariably one of the main factors in high performing schools (Reynolds 1991). In the case of new heads, the need for specific preparation is illustrated by Daresh and Male's (2000) comparative study of first year principals in Britain and the United States. They point to the culture shock of moving into headship for the first time: "nothing could prepare the respondents [. . .] for the change of perceptions of others or for the intensity of the job" (p.95). When school leaders take up their position they may not necessarily be competent as pedagogical leaders and they often lack knowledge in certain areas (Pont et al., 2008). It is the school head who is in a position to ensure that good teaching and learning spreads throughout the school and that ineffective practices are rapidly identified and rectified. Clearly, the quality of training headteachers receive before they assume their positions, and the continuing professional development they get once they are hired throughout their careers, has a lot to do with whether school leaders can meet the expectations of their jobs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Research on headteachers preparation and development suggests that certain programme features are essential for developing effective school leaders (Davis et al., 2005). They reported that evidence indicates that effective programmes are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between the programme and schools. According to Knowles, adult learners require learning that is self-paced, relevant to personal or career interests and participatory in nature. Adults learn by addressing real problems in everyday life (Foley, 2004). They reflect on possible causes of problems, choose solutions and apply these.

Wilson (2008) suggests a quadripartite model for preparation using two axes relating to an emphasis on practical skills (low to high) and theoretical knowledge (low to high). In his model there are four possible categories: low skills and low theoretical knowledge, high theoretical knowledge and low skills, high skills and low theoretical knowledge, and high skills and high theoretical knowledge. This implies that leadership preparation needs to find a balance between the theoretical part and the practical part in order to be meaningful. Good preparation should offer a mix of didactic methods like group work, case studies, problem-solving activities, practical applications of theory, theory construction on the basis of analysis of practice, reflection, self-discovery, and cooperation (Karstanje and Webber, 2008). Davis et al. (2005) found that effective programmes are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in real contexts, use cohort grouping and mentors and structure for collaborative activity between the programme and the schools. These learning activities provide a scaffold on which new self-directed knowledge is constructed, foster deep self- reflection, link past

experiences with newly acquired knowledge, are problem- rather than subject-centered, and offer multiple venues for applying new knowledge in practical settings (Granott, 1998; Lave, 1991).

An important aspect that must be addressed and appropriately strengthened in the preparation of schools leaders is the ethical aspect. Schools are also moral institutions in which teachers and school leaders serve as role models for the students. This seems to be aligned with the claim made by Campbell (2000) who points out that the increased awareness of the ethical dimension and responsibilities of teaching is essential for both enhanced professionalism, and improving teaching practice. Lovat (1998) recommends the need for the development of professional ethics on the basis that public accountability and recognition are necessary for the teaching profession. Lumkin (2008) asserts that teachers and school leaders should display behaviours reflective of moral values such as fairness and honesty, and adhere to professional codes of conduct due to the influential role they have in the lives of young people. De Hartog et al. (1999) cited by Brown and Trevino point out that survey research has linked perceived leadership effectiveness with perceptions of the leader's honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. Brown and Trevino (2006) assert that followers emulate ethical leaders' behaviours because such leaders are attractive and credible models who display appropriate behaviour. There are proponents to assess applicants to leadership posts in their ethical performance as educators. Sparks (2000) proposed the development of code of ethics in schools in order to be the guidelines for teachers' evaluation which could also be used as tools for promotion. However, it has also been acknowledged that whenever we are faced with the need to express a position on

issues of moral ethical significance as individuals or to assess right from wrong our held values come to light being these assessments subjective (Campbell, 2000). Nonetheless, for its importance, it must be addressed the preparation in ethical leadership in leadership preparation.

2.4 Appointing School Leaders

Headteachers are responsible for setting school improvement agendas and ensuring that the school performs in accordance with state/national policies and community expectations (Clifford, 2010). Therefore, educational systems implement processes to appoint school leaders that best match the challenges to lead and manage schools in accordance with the expectations set by the goals and policy of each country. Each country has tailored its own practices to appoint school leaders: "is important to recognise that there are contextual differences between systems, and that what works in one system may not work in another" (Barber et al., 2010, p. 3). There is not a standard process to appoint school leaders; therefore, every educational system has its own procedures to carry out this process. For instance, Alvarez (2003) point out that in the European Union there are several processes to appoint headteachers: national competitive exams as in France, Belgium and Italy; a public competition taking into account teaching experience and credentials as in Germany; or by selection committees as in the case of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.

From a theoretical perspective, the appointment of school leaders could be classified into two approaches according to Bryan (2008):

> (a) school leaders are selected based on criteria that have little to do with the position (kinship, filiations, partisanship, favoritism); and (b) school leaders are selected based objective criteria that emanate from some merit based assessment (prior performance, satisfaction of pre-established criteria,

> completion of a pre- service or in-service program; participation in a carefully constructed mentor program). (p. 6)

These two forms of selection process are understood in terminology defined by Perrow as particularism vs. universalism (Bryan, 2008). According to Perrow (as cited in Bryan 2008) "particularism means that irrelevant criteria are employed in choosing employees" (p. 8). It could be argued that using particularism in the case of selecting a school leader means that irrelevant criteria pertaining to the role of school head are used. However, these criteria may be relevant for the cultural context. The social structure and stability of a country or region may be quite dependent upon social forces that arise from particularism in selecting individuals for positions (Bryan, 2008). In this regard, Johnson (1995) pointed out that in South Africa "over the years there has been increasing evidence that political considerations influenced the selection process of school leaders" (p. 224). Or, as exemplified by Aghammadova (2006) who point out that a teacher in Azerbaijan could get a higher position by paying a fee. Bush and Onduro (2006) explain that personal characteristics, including gender, are often used when selecting a school leader in Africa.

Universalism, on the other hand, is the opposite to particularism. Bryan (2008) asserts that:

> Under universalism, selection is made by attempting to match the talents and capabilities of the individual with the requirements of the position [and] individuals are selected after they have successfully responded to a set of external demands grounded in what the system claims are indicators of competence (p.7).

Taking into consideration the principles of universalism to appoint school leaders, the literature is revised in accordance with the assumptions of the approach that school leaders must be nominated matching the professional capabilities of their roles following

an established process. Still within this paradigm to appoint school leaders there are variations in the way each country nominates its headteachers. Barber et al., (2010) conducted a study in Alberta and Ontario (Canada), England, New York (United States), New Zealand, The Netherlands, Singapore, and Victoria (Australia) aimed to analyse the practices that the world's top school systems are implementing. In the study it is reported that “the selection and appointment process varies widely across school systems" (p. 13). It is also evident that even in the countries and regions in which the strengthening of school leadership has been a priority there are differences in the procedures to appoint school leaders. In Barber and colleagues' study it is also highlighted how some countries are moving towards the appointment of school leaders based on direct observation of candidates performance. This could be illustrated with the words of a system leader from New York: “The best way to select principals is to watch them work. After six months, you know who you want” (p. 13). Another example pointed out in this study is how in some school districts in Alberta, superintendents are highly involved in the selection of school principals. Superintendents are expected to observe, assess, and support potential leaders over a long period and advise them during the application process.

2.5 The Process to Appoint School Leaders in Mexico

The official process to appoint school leaders in Mexico comply with the principles of universalism given that leadership positions are granted to those who meet specific requirements related to the post in a selection process. In Mexico in compulsory education composed by the educational levels of preschool, elementary, and middle education, school leaders are appointed by a vertical system called The *Escalafon*. The

vertical career ladder is a structured sequence of job positions through which a teacher progresses in the educational system. The ladder describes the progression from lower to higher positions which typically also imply higher pay, skills, responsibilities, and authority. The career ladder is used to encourage, recognise, and reward capable teachers performance. In research conducted in ladder systems Peterson et al. (1985) pointed out that several studies reported significantly greater learning from students whose teachers have high rather than low FPMS, The Florida Performance Measurement System, a system used by school districts to assess performance and appraise teachers. Used for promotion Hart (1992) reported high reliability in the promotion of good teachers to higher posts when they we evaluated in several aspects in the Utah Teacher Career Ladder Programme.

The Mexican career ladder known as the *Escalafon* was established in the early 1930's with subsequent upgrading along the decades. The last upgrading took place in 1973 by the Ministry of Education and the National Union of Education Workers that created the Joint National Commission for Teacher Promotion which is currently dictating the procedures to appoint school leaders. According to The Regulations of the Promotion System of the Workers of the Ministry of Education (RETSSEP) “The *Escalafon* is the organised system in the Ministry of Public Education to carry out the promotions of teachers holding tenure" (Article 1, p. 1). This mechanism to appoint school leaders is compulsory mandated by the promulgation of the Federal Act on State Employees (LFTSE) promulgated in 1963, issued under article 123 of the Constitution that is the cornerstone of Mexico's labour laws. LFTSE controls the labour relations between employees working for the government. In LFTSE Section 3 is pointed out that

government employees have the right of a vertical ladder system for promotion in order that promotions are granted based on knowledge, aptitudes, and length of service. In this law it is mentioned that promotions of public servants will be done by the *Escalafon*. Being teachers and hence government employees, these legislations also apply to them.

2.6 Origin of the *Escalafon*

In 1930 the Law for Teacher Promotions and the Immobility Law were promulgated (Arnaut, 1998). This legislation enabled the creation of the *Comision de Escalafon* (commission in charge of salary and promotion) formed by teachers that represented the union and officials of the Ministry of Education "to supervise the compliance with the laws, register teachers professional records, and classify teachers" (SEP, 1930, p.223). The possibilities of a classroom teacher of being promoted to a higher post were favoured if the teacher had a diploma granted by a Normal Training School, several years of teaching experience, and professional training (Vallejo, 2006). In 1933 a new Law for Teacher Promotions was promulgated since "the Teachers' Union had achieved an extraordinary power to appoint school leaders, sometimes even more influential than official authorities of the Ministry of Education" (Ramos, 1976, p. 85). The Teachers' Union members used their seats on the commission to reward their loyal following and to build a power base within the profession by a selective distribution of promotions and raises (Britton, 1979). This new law had its as main objectives: to restrict the influence of union leaders by increasing the influence of the Ministry of Education in the promotion of teachers, and the improvement of the professional preparation of teachers (Vallejo, 2006). Under this version, academic qualifications and

professional training accounted for 50% of the assessment for promotion, and teaching experience accounted for the remaining 50% (SEP, 1933). In 1947 a new law dictating the procedures to appoint school leaders was created within the framework of other important reforms in public Mexican education pertinent for that time. Vallejo (2006) points out that the main amendments for this new law were: a new redistribution of the sphere of influence of both the Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education in the promotion of teachers, the establishment of a system to assess more accurately teachers' performance, and the continuation with the professionalisation and credentialisation of teachers. In this new schema, academic qualifications along with professional training represented 30%, evaluation of teaching practice 70%, relevant merits 15% (this accounted as additional points for material published, cultural and artistic participation and production), and years of service were not considered (SEP, 1948).

2.7 The Current Version of the *Escalafon*

The last upgrading to the *Escalafon* took place in 1973 by the Ministry of Public Education and the National Union of Education Workers that created the Joint National Commission for Teacher Promotion. In November 1973 The Official Gazette of the Federation published a new version for the Regulations of the Promotion System of the Workers of the Ministry of Education (RETSSEP, by its abbreviation in Spanish). Moreover, it was also necessary to specify how the assessment of the teaching practice was going to be carried out. For that reason, a second regulation was promulgated, the Instructions for Issuing the Annual Evaluation of Teaching Performance issued in 1974 to guide the assessment of teachers' performance. The *Escalafon* is a promotion

system that enables that teachers gradually could be promoted to different hierarchical levels during their professional career. After 6 months of holding an appointment code 10 (tenure), classroom teachers could start climbing up levels in their journey to leadership within Mexican schools and the educational level in which they teach. "The workers of the Ministry of Public Education with a minimum of six months of tenure are entitled to be appointed to a higher post" Article 10 (RETSSEP, 1973, p.2). Once the definitive or permanent code 10 or tenure is granted (usually 6 months after they started their teaching career), classroom teachers are legally entitled to participate in the public competitions for deputyships and headships.

Each educational level preschool, elementary and middle education has its own hierarchical positions. For instance, in preschool level the first post is classroom teacher, then deputy head, the next level is technical pedagogical advisor who is an assistant of the zone inspector and finally zone inspector who is responsible for the proper functioning and performance of several kindergartens (the equivalent to an school district in other contexts). In the case of the elementary level and secondary levels the hierarchical posts are similar to those of preschool with one and two additional posts respectively. Usually the process to be promoted within the Mexican system is gradual, level by level. However, there are cases in which a classroom teacher could get promotion to a headship without holding a deputy post. This happens more common in the rural areas where not many urban teachers want to participate in the competitions for these posts because the implications to move from the city to the countryside. This is also contemplated in the regulations for promotion: "In absence of participants from the required level, it will be given the opportunity to candidates of an

immediate inferior post" Article 89 (RETSSEP, 1973, p. 16). A school leader in Mexico is appointed through the *Escalafon* by an assessment of four areas regulated in the article 100 of the RETSSEP (1973): Academic Knowledge 45% (in which academic preparation accounts for 20% and continuous professional training for 25%), Aptitude 25% (composed by 20% assessed in the Evaluation of Teaching Performance and 5% of other activities such as publication of academic articles), years of service 20%, and Discipline and Punctuality 10%. A promotion will depend on the accumulation of points in each category and subcategory which then are added up. This will give a final score expressed in the total points a teacher has accumulated during his/her career.

2.8 The Operational Process to Appoint School Leaders in Mexico

When there is a vacant deputy headship, headship or any other higher hierarchical post, the department of the educational level in which the post occurs has to notify to the commission on promotion. However, classroom teachers are also entitled to notify a vacancy to the commission when there has not been an official notification by the educational level in which the vacancy occurs. In the case that there exists a vacancy and the commission has been notified either by the department of the educational level in which the post is vacant, or by a teacher interested in the post, the commission has "a maximum of 10 days to advertise the post" Article 78 (RETSSEP, 1973, p. 14). To advertise a vacancy, the CNME elaborates a call for applications with a list of details that the applicants must comply with in order to consider their applications as valid. Teachers who want to participate in a competition for a post have first to open their personal file in the level in which they are currently teaching. Every time there is a competition a teacher can participate in one or several competitions at the same time,

even taking place on the same day. When there is a call for an application, if teachers that will participate have opened their personal file several years ago, they would only upgrade it with new documents to be taken into account and accumulate as many points as possible such as new academic degrees obtained, new courses or workshops attended, and the annual assessment of their teaching performance of their 5 previous years. Teachers with several years of teaching experience that have not opened their file and decide to participate in the competition for a deputyship or headship can open their file at any time during their career. In this case, all the academic qualifications and professional training accumulated during their career will be taken into account. It is important to point out that in the taking into consideration of teaching practice there is a disadvantage for teachers with few years in service given that the points for evaluation of teaching are cumulative up to five years.

Once the call for applications has finished, the commission has 30 days to assess every applicant and decide who will be offered the post (RETSSEP, 1973). The process of reviewing applications and counting the number of points a teacher has accumulated is done jointly with the presence of union officials and those of the ministry of education. The RETSSEP (1973) also points out that if there is kinship to third degree by blood between the applicant and any of the reviewers or if there has been any proved conflict between them either in their personal or professional life, the reviewer cannot participate in the assessment process and another person is designated to review the file. After the 30 days for reviewing the files of all applicants, the commission calls for a meeting with all the participants to announce the results and the person who obtained the highest score in points. In the meeting, all participants are given a

summary of the assessment, the opportunity to see their own file, and further clarification if it is needed. The person who obtained the highest score has 10 days to give a written notice if she/he accepts the position (RETSSEP, 1973). There is also a period of 15 days after the results in which a participant has the right to formally complain and demand a new review if he/she feels that their file was not properly assessed. In this case then the commission has other 30 days as maximum to reconsider the results.

In a competition for a higher post, when the personal file of each participant is assessed, the reviewers judge four factors: knowledge, aptitude, length of service, and discipline and punctuality. Each factor accounts for a percentage of the total assessment, and also has a maximum in points (See table 1, p. 55). The percentage of each factor is the same in every educational level as is the total maximum of points (2,400); however, there is a variation between levels in the points granted to academic qualifications. Nonetheless, this is not a problem because teachers only compete for posts in the level they are currently teaching. In the case of primary schools, the first factor, knowledge, is divided in two sub factors with a 45% of the total score and a maximum of 1080 points. The first sub factor of knowledge is academic preparation being 20% of the total assessment, and having a maximum of 480 points. The other sub factor is professional and cultural development having a value of 25% and a maximum of 600 points. The second factor, aptitude, is 25% of the total computation. This factor is divided in two subfactors as well. The first subfactor of aptitude is initiative, laboriousness, and efficiency counting as 20% of the total score with a maximum of 480 points. This part is evaluated in the teaching evaluation report by the headteacher of the

school where the participant is currently teaching. The second subfactor of aptitude is other activities being 5% with a maximum of 120 points. The third factor judged in a competition for a post is length of service being 20% of the total score and counting for a maximum of 480 points. A teacher is given 16 points for every year of teaching taking into consideration a maximum of 30 years. And, the fourth factor assessed in a competition is discipline and punctuality that is also evaluated in the teaching evaluation report being 10% of the total score and a maximum of 240 points.

Factor	**Sub factor**	**Percentage**	**Maximum of Points**
Knowledge	a) Preparation b) Continuous Professional Development	20% 25%	480 600
Aptitude	a) Initiative, effort, and efficiency b) Other activities	20% 5%	480 120
Years of Service		20%	480
Discipline and Punctuality		10%	240
			Total = 2400

Table 1. Factors and sub factors assessed for promotion

2.9 Perceptions of the Process to Appoint School Leaders in Mexico

As this research intends to look both the positive aspects and the areas of possible improvement of the system to appoint school leaders in Mexico, this part of literature review was done trying to be objective keeping a balance including both positive and critical perceptions. However, the available literature focuses mainly on the shortcomings of this system. A first critic of the *Escalafon* is "that is so obsolete, that is almost impossible to consider leadership skills" (Cuellar, 1989, p. 11). Under this promotion system is not mandatory to have professional training in leadership. Even though there are several programmes across the country that focus on school management (Slater et al., 2006), it is not a requisite to have special training in that area to participate in a competition for deputyships, headships or higher positions. One of the things that could contribute to make it obsolete is that a teacher holding a masters' degree in any area of education has the same number of points that a teacher holding a masters' degree in school management. This means is that a teacher holding a master's in any other area of the broad field of education, which does not train teachers to lead and manage schools, get the same amount of points than those with a degree in school management. Another critique of this system is that usually enables those teachers with more length in the service win the competitions "the ladder system functions in a bureaucratic way which favours those applicants with the greatest seniority and those who follow the bureaucratic procedure with the most detail" (Cuellar, 1989, p. 11). In the study conducted by Cuellar (1989) found that teachers who obtained a promotion were those who worked as teachers between 16 and 30 years.

Another critique is that in the practice a promotion is seemingly based basically on two factors: qualifications (45%) and years of service (20%); leaving aside aptitude (25%) which contains the evaluation of teaching performance, and also discipline and punctuality (10%). Vallejo (2006) points out that in practice headteachers when assessing teaching performance and discipline and punctuality of the schools' staff usually give the maximum points to all teachers. In a way this extended and common practice eliminates the real assessment of teaching and discipline and punctuality basing the appointment merely on qualifications and years of service. The teaching evaluation report has to be signed by the headteacher, the school union representative, and teaching supervisor, and If a headteacher gives a low assessment, the union representative would not sign the report creating labour conflicts with the union. So, usually headteachers give high scores in order to avoid political and labour conflicts (Santizo, 2010). Silva (2009) in his study that took place in Mexico City of how headteachers deal with underperforming teachers points out that when a headteacher does not assign the highest score to a teacher the headteacher is obligated to present evidence that explains the decrease in the score. This described process to assess teacher performance in Mexico City presents a fair and objective approach. However in the majority of the country perhaps the practice is to give the highest score to teachers in order to avoid confrontations with the Union.

Other perceived perceptions of the *Escalafon* are that this system to appoint school leaders has generated "an economy of points" (Sandoval, 1997; Vite, 2004) for the importance given to academic qualifications that has enabled the proliferation of low quality masters and doctoral programmes. It has also been questionable that

participation of students and parents in the assessment of teaching has been absent, and also their lack of involvement in the appointment of heads. Another critique is the lack of linkage between *Carrera Magisterial* another programme that assesses teacher performance seemingly more accurately than the *Escalafon*. Santibanez et al. (2007) point out that Mexico's *Carrera Magisterial* is one of the pioneer teacher incentive programs in the world. This programme seems to assess more accurately teachers' performance (see Ortiz, 2003).

2.10 The Teachers' Union in the Process to Appoint School Leaders

Other unavoidable aspect that arises when reviewing the literature on the process of appointment of school leaders in Mexico is the influence of the Teachers' Union. Santizo (2010) points out that the rules in the Mexican education system (written and non-written) give the Teachers' Union the capacity to decide who becomes a teacher and sometimes a headteacher in Mexico. "The Mexican Teachers' Union, the single organisation that has represented teachers since the mid-1940s plays a very large role, in hiring, retaining, and promoting teachers" (Reimers, 2006, p. 287). According to the Federal Act on State Employees, the regulatory law of Section B of the Constitutional Article 123, entitles the Union to decide who is appointed in 50% of new teaching posts, while the other 50% is for the Ministry of Public Education. This situation has generated that the entrance to the educational system is based on political affiliation to the Union favouring the existence of an informal market in which occurs the selling, buying and inheriting of posts (Guevara and Gonzalez, 2004; Barrera, 2009; Aguayo, 2010; Zuckerman, 2010). In relation to the promotion to higher positions such as headships or supervisions, "it is based on the relationships that those seeking a post

have with the union more than their pedagogical and leadership abilities" (Hevia, 2010, p. 25). According to Ornelas (2008) the commission on promotion in reality is controlled by the Union due to the process of colonisation and occupying of posts by its operational members since in Mexico all teachers have to be part of the Union, and most posts in the Ministry of Education are occupied by teachers. This means the Union could negotiate for positions for its closest supporters and operators within the Ministry of Education and in schools. Thereafter in the commission on promotion, the officials representing the government as officials of the Ministry of Education also belong to the Union. This questions the commission of truly being a joint committee. This could enable malpractices in the promotion processes in order to appoint school leaders who are loyal to the Union to have a tight control of teachers at school level. In this sense Slater et al., (2006) comment that there is a lack of trust in the *Escalafon* since "people know of many incidents of malpractice when positions are directed away from the person with the most points" (p. 72).

This and other problems within Mexican compulsory education are present according to Hevia et al., (2010) because there is a Teachers' Union with responsibilities that go beyond just labour representation, which make it a strong actor with the capacity to make decisions within the Ministry of Education and override others that go against its interests. This interference of the Union is protected by an atypical legal framework (Hevia, et al., 2010, p. 25). The Union has the monopoly of teacher representation -the only union in the country legally recognised to represent teachers with 1.4 million members forced by law to membership, administrative power inside the Ministry of Education, and the capacity to operate and mobilise its organisational

structures and members for political campaigns (Raphael, 2007; Ornelas, 2008; Aguayo, 2010). "The Teachers Union has the capacity to mobilise thousands of votes in decisive moments in an election" (Hevia, et al., 2010, p. 34). This gives the Union the capacity to negotiate key positions in the government either at state or federal level. Therefore, the Union is a strong actor in compulsory education, and it could have a strong influence in the appointment of school leaders.

2.11 Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter analysed a number of important and relevant themes for this study. The review was conducted on a thematic basis attempting to provide an overview of some of the key terminology pertinent for this research such as leadership, school leaders, appointing school leaders, talent identification, talent management, leadership learning, and leadership preparation. The literature has clearly established the value of the importance of school leaders as facilitators and enablers of high performance in schools. The literature emphasised in the importance of preparation, training and development of school leaders. In this review it was reflected on the processes to appoint school leaders in particular the review provided a foundation to understand the mechanisms of appointment in Mexican primary schools. These aspects of the literature are pertinent to this study and provide the basis for the research. The next chapter discusses the methodology of the research.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This research was framed as an exploratory case study given that this design enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of aspirant headteachers, incumbent heads, government officials and union officials in relation to the process implemented in Mexico to appoint school leaders. The methodological strategy, according to Mason (2002), is "the logic by which you go about answering your research question [and] it is the logic which underpins the way you design your research project as a potential answer to your research questions" (p. 30). De Vaus (2001) states that the function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as clear as possible. Thereafter, the most suitable approach to answer the proposed research questions with relevant and rich descriptions of the current process to appoint heads in Mexico was through a qualitative framework using the methodology of case study. By the nature of the type of research questions proposed this methodology enabled me capture the views in greater depth and breadth from the perspectives of the different participants. This study also followed a humanistic approach which seeks to gather and theorise from the experience of those who are leaders and locate them within specific, social, cultural and historical settings (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002; Ribbins, 2003). The assumption guiding the humanistic approach is that every person has their own unique way of perceiving and understanding the world, and that the things they do are compatible with their perceptions.

3.2 Wider Framework

In order to gain knowledge about an educational phenomenon researchers could adopt quantitative, qualitative or a combination between both paradigms. Lichtman (2006) points out that a quantitative paradigm looks for a single objective reality testing hypothesis, looking for causes and effects and making predictions, while within qualitative paradigm there are multiple realities constructed by social interactions the researcher tries to understand and interpret. Quantitative research has been associated with positivism which holds that the scientific method can be applied to human experiences (Phillips, 1983), whereas qualitative can be described as phenomenological, hermeneutical, experiential and dialectical (Hathaway, 1995) and also naturalistic, inductive, and relativist (Moss, 1990). Therefore, what reality is and what knowledge is has a different meaning in each paradigm. Within the quantitative paradigm, the ontological assumption is that there is a reality that can be apprehended, and its epistemological assumption is that the researcher and the object of research are independent from each other; thus, the object can be researched without having any influence by the researcher. On the other hand, within the qualitative paradigm, the ontological assumption is that the researcher interacts with the object of research; consequently research findings are created through interaction between the researcher and the researched. The present study will be approached from the qualitative paradigm as an exploratory case study to explore the appointment of school leaders in Mexico by a vertical ladder system. Qualitative paradigm was the most comprehensive and suitable approach by the nature of the research questions posed and pursued in the

present project. Qualitative research is a research methodology that uses an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The exploration of the appointment of school leaders under the qualitative paradigm enabled to gain insights and comprehension of the researched phenomena perceived by participants by interpreting and making sense of reality perceived by them. The study could be located between knowledge for critical evaluation and knowledge for action in the typology identified by Wallace and Poulson (2003) to place a study in a wider perspective in relation to the type of knowledge it aims at contributing. It was intended to explore the positive and negative aspects of the system of promotion in order to possibly present them to the Ministry of Education and perhaps generate changes and improvement based on empirical research.

3.3 Philosophical Approach

Researchers' ontological and epistemological positions can lead to different views of the same social phenomena (Grix, 2002). To approach a problem, researchers have to choose between competing philosophies, theories and analytical traditions (Bates and Jerkings, 2007). The ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher have profound implications for research, the choice of the problem, the formulation of questions, methodological concerns, the kinds of data sought and the mode of treatment all will be influenced or determined by the viewpoint held (Cohen, et al., 2000). If the researcher believes that knowledge is tangible waiting to be discovered, the approach to its discovery, and how they communicate their findings will be different from those who believe that knowledge is the result of an individual personal experiences and mental constructs (McGrath, 2005). In this sense, the

ontological and epistemological assumptions of a researcher could fall into the continuum of a positivist or an interpretivist. The positivist paradigm denotes the dominant view of principles of natural science applied to social science where researchers who follow this paradigm assume that an objective reality exists that can be apprehended by experimental and manipulative procedures. On the other hand, qualitative researchers assume that there is no objective reality and social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it.

Blaikie (2000) states that ontology are claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. Ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality (p.8). Ontology is what is real or true for us, what the reality or truth out there to be known is. It is our understanding of how the social world is constituted and how we perceive reality. On the other hand, epistemology studies the theory of knowledge, is a position or stance on what should be considered as acceptable knowledge (Spratt et al., 2004). Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge in regard to its methods, validation and the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality whatever it is understood to be; it is claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known (Blaikie, 2000, p.8). Consequently, all researchers are driven by particular epistemologies and all research is imbued with epistemological beliefs. Thereafter, researchers' epistemological and ontological assumptions of what reality is, what knowledge is, and the position adopted by them to gain knowledge and understanding about a particular reality is going to frame all the research process.

For the study of objects and phenomena in natural sciences my personal stance is that positivist methods work well. However, when studying the social world, a positivist approach cannot accurately describe it since the social world does not operate with universal laws and truth that is waiting to be explored by the scientists given that human beings are not just natural elements. They are acting individuals with their own perceptions, and part of a social community. Human behaviour is subject to constant changes and cannot be predicted on the basis of absolute laws and experiments. As a result, my approach cannot adopt a stance that quantifies the social world, test hypothesis which allow explanations of laws of it, is conducted as a value-free process, or is translated into numerical scales. For that reason, I proposed an exploratory case study to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena being studied. An exploratory case study enabled me to find the "truth" from the individual views of the participants and also through the commonalities and patterns that reflect the shared nature of their experience and meanings given to them. It is important to point out that the selection of a set of research methods in any study must begin with the self-examination of our ontological and epistemological assumptions. The epistemological positions are in close relation to methodological approaches and they affect research processes in that they permit us to develop questions, design the study and adopt appropriate research strategies (Yeganeth et al., 2004). The researcher's stance will influence the way in which the research is undertaken from the design to the conclusions. In this sense, I approached the pursuit of the truth and search for knowledge to answer my research questions through the qualitative approach which assumes that realities are constructed by social actors and the researcher interacts with the object of research.

3.4 Research Strategy

Judging from the nature of the research problem and the research questions, a qualitative phenomenological approach was considered to be appropriate for this study. The assumption in this study is that participants' experience of being appointed as heads or being actively seeking headship via a vertical system will illuminate the understanding of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, the process to appoint school leaders in Mexico. This assumption leads to adopt an interpretivists phenomenological approach as research strategy. According to Van Manen (1990) phenomenological research is an exploration of the essence of lived experience. It is a way of describing something that exists as part of the world in which we live such as events, situations, experiences or concepts. The purpose of qualitative phenomenological research is then to describe how individuals experience a phenomenon, and how they interpret their experiences. Interpretivists take an experiential view toward understanding such phenomena, highlighting human experience as not only valid, but of great importance to understanding human existence. Phenomenologists study people's experiences of life episodes and the meanings these events have to them; as such it is particularly relevant to the exploration of incumbent and aspiring heads experiences of the promotion system. This approach enabled the capture of the participants' descriptions of their experience, their perceptions and understandings of how they experienced, in the case of incumbent heads, or are experiencing, in the case of teachers seeking headship, the process to appoint school leaders by a point-based system.

Interpretivist phenomenological approach is concerned with methods that examine people and their social behaviour (Gill and Johnson, 1997). Within the interpretivist phenomenological paradigm as the proposed in the present study, the researcher intends to understand the experiences of participants as sound, abundant, and enriching sources of knowledge. The central focus in phenomenology is exploring how people make sense of their experiences individually and shared to determine what these experiences mean to them. Interpretivists do not view human experience as an inaccurate source of data; rather they see it as the foundation of knowledge about human phenomena. Bruyn, (1966) states that phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these individuals see it. According to Moustakas (1994) the phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective analysis that depicts the essence of the experience. A phenomenological approach usually involves obtaining data from different individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon, so that phenomenological researchers often search for commonalities across individuals rather than only focusing on what is unique to a single person. In phenomenological research data are commonly gathered through face to face interviews to gain insights into the views and experiences of the participants. In this research it was used interview as the data collection method, Patton (1990) stated the objective of interviewing specifically as to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, and this is precisely the aim of the phenomenological studies, the comprehension of lived experience. In this sense, the most suitable method to approach the present

exploratory case study was through interviews as the method for collection data to have the opportunity to illustrate their experience fully.

3.5 Methodology

The exploration of the perceptions of the established system to appoint school leaders in Mexico was done through the qualitative paradigm as a case study. Yin (1994) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p.13). This assertion emphasises that an important advantage of case studies is the ability to carry out the research of a phenomenon in its context. Yin (2003) argues that case study should be utilised when context is highly important. In the current study it was explored the process to appoint school leaders by a point-based system in elementary schools in Mexico in which the phenomenon under study was strongly contextual and specific. Case study is the most suitable approach for exploratory research (Rowley, 2002), and this type of studies are well suited in areas of research in which existing theory and knowledge seems little researched (Mayer and Greenwood, 1980; Eisenhardt 1989). On this point, the process of appointment of school leaders in Mexico has not been researched from an empirical perspective, and there are no current meaningful empirical studies in this regard. Although small, this study is the first to analyse the appointment of school leaders through the promotion system from an empirical perspective. Thus, the methodological approach of using case study seems to be justified in this project. The case study approach is often used to build a rich picture of an entity, gathering the views, perceptions, experiences, and/or ideas of individuals relating to the case (Hamilton, 2011). The use of multiple perspectives is characteristic of case studies and seems to

lend weight to the validity of the findings. Yin (1994) stressed the need to use multiple sources of data collection in case studies. However for Stake (1995) a case study is more related to the uniqueness of the object of study or the case than the number of methods or techniques used for data collection. This study concurs with Stake's (1995) viewpoint that a case study is more related to its uniqueness than to the number of methods of data collection. However, Yin's (1994) perspective was also taken into consideration in order to ensure trustworthiness of the data collected. In the present study, the element of multiple perspectives was regarded as a priority in order to have a more sound discernment when reflecting on the topics addressed in this study; this was implemented by interviewing participants who could have a different perspective of the case being studied. Therefore, three types of participants relevant to the unit of study were interviewed: teachers pursuing headship, incumbent heads, and administrators of the system of promotion. This ensured respondent triangulation which increased the trustworthiness of the data collected. In this regard Rhodes (2012) states that respondent triangulation entails posing the same, or very similar questions to more than one group of respondents. Interviewing multiple participants enabled the study of the current system of promotion to be approached from various different angles. In the present research, call it a case study seems justified due to the uniqueness of the case being studied and also due to the collection of data from multiple perspectives, which ensured respondent triangulation to increase trustworthiness.

3.6 Method

I decided to use interviews as the main method for data gathering because I consider it as an appropriated method that fits with my stance and humanistic approach.

I wanted to explore through the method of semi-structured interviews, the strengths and areas of possible improvement of the current process implemented to appoint school leaders in Mexico, and how through this process of nominating school leaders, school leadership is strengthened or hindered on its different facets such as leadership talent identification, leadership training and development and leadership learning. In this research, I wanted to explore in-depth all these issues through the voices of those who are directly involved in the administration of the programme as well as those pursuing a headship, and incumbent headteachers who had the opportunity to get a headship via the vertical point-based process. Interviews as method of data collection were the way to obtain meaningful information from the voices of all research participants. The interviews conducted took place mainly in the participants' offices and lasted approximately 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews as one-to-one conversations are usually used to obtain information in the form of verbal responses about particular situations, problems or topics. According to Turner (2010) interviews provide exhaustive information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic. Participants for interviews are usually selected based on their knowledge about a topic. Qualitative interviews are suitable for studying people's understanding of their world, for describing their experiences, and for clarifying and elaborating their perspectives of their world (Seidman, 1998). Interviews are essential sources of information for case study research (Yin, 1994), and through them, researchers can best access case participant's views and interpretations of actions and events (Walsham, 1995). Interviews can reveal ideas and deliver insights that no other research method can.

However, it is important to acknowledge the possible limitations of using interviews as a data collection method in order to minimise its possible influence in the research. A first limitation suggested by Diefenbach (2008) is that studies based on interviews can be partially biased due to the way the sample is obtained. Only interviewees selected have the opportunity to express their worldviews and influence the outcomes of the research. Another limitation identified by Alvesson (2003) is related to the collection of false and misleading data, since it might be possible that an interviewer provides answers that he or she assumes are expected from them or that, the interviewer wants to hear, or they may provide answers that are deemed to be socially acceptable. Referring to the number of participants in interviews, Deem (2001) argued that only conducting a few interviews will limit the findings of the research, especially for projects in which the case to be studied includes a big population. Another criticism for using interviews as a method of collecting data was acknowledged by Jensen and Rodgers (2001) who mentioned that interviews could provide just “a snapshot” of the unit of study. This might be problematic, particularly when the research focuses on issues for which change and development over a longer period of time, is a crucial aspect. A limitation pertinent to internal validity was observed by Winter (2000) who expressed a concern in relation to how well the statements made by the interviewees regarding their perceptions and opinions, are mirrored in the presentations of the findings. This is related to what Wainwright (1997) perceives as a limitation of qualitative research, in which the selection and grouping of data, working on transcripts, searching for categories and patterns, marking up and cutting up the data depends to a large extent on the judgment of the researcher.

These limitations on using interviews were considered in this study before the collection of data. In order to present a complete perspective of the system of promotion, the different types of participants relevant for this study were identified; only those who could provide insights and perceptions from different perspectives were sampled. For this study, it was considered pertinent to interview teachers pursuing a leadership post, incumbent heads, and administrators of the system. This enabled the inclusion of multiple perspectives and an analysis of the system of promotion from different angles without privileging any of them. On this point, Diefenbach (2008) reports that using data from different interviewees who are referring to the same issue, will provide a much broader picture of the phenomenon being studied. The number of participants interviewed could be considered another form to lessen the limitations previously described and also to ensure representativeness and trustworthiness. There is however no agreement amongst scholars regarding the appropriate number of participants to include when carrying out interviews (see Baker and Edwards, 2012). Several interviews enable the interviewer to cross-check and compare the data which could favour respondent triangulation (see Rhodes, 2012). The data might lead to emerging patterns and, hence, to deeper and better insights into the matter being studied. Therefore an increase in the amount of interviews carried out increases the quality of the research.

3.7 Sampling

The process to identify from whom the data will be acquired should be done with sound judgment. Sampling is an important component of a research process given that for practical reasons is usually difficult to work with the full population of interest.

According to Trochim (2006) sampling is the process of selecting units from a population of interest so that by studying the sample we may fairly generalise our result back to the population from which they were chosen. In the case of the present study, purposive sampling was used because the main participants were deliberated chosen by the researcher: teachers that are actively seeking headship via the point based system and incumbent heads appointed by the system. The administrators of the programme were also interviewed to insure that all viewpoints are adequately represented. "In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 103). In relation to purposive sampling Bernard (2002) acknowledges that the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience.

The criteria to recruit participants were based on the knowledge and experience of the phenomena being studied. In this sense, it is considered that three types of participants could meet these criteria, administrators of the commission on promotion, teachers seeking headship, and incumbent heads. The members of the commission interviewed were four: two representing the Ministry of Education and two representing the Teachers' Union. Other participants of the study were 5 teachers seeking headship and participating continuously in the competitions for headship, and 12 heads who were appointed via this system. Two aspiring heads withdrew from the study so that two more incumbent heads were included. The perceptions of aspiring and incumbent heads influenced in a greater degree the conclusion of the study as they were the main participants. The study was conducted in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico in primary

schools. The exploratory study was not intended to get the perceptions from a gender perspective, from particular age groups or years in the educational service. From the 21 participants fifteen were women and eight men, and the length of service was between twelve and twenty five years.

3.8 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded in Spanish, and once all interviews were carried out, they were accurately translated into English and transcribed verbatim identifying the participants only by type: teachers aspiring headship, incumbent heads, and administrators. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001) data analysis means making sense of, or interpreting the data. Gall et al. (2007) note that interpretational analysis means a process of examining data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied (p.466). In the current study thematic analysis was undertaken to manage with collected data. Thematic analysis was the procedure adopted in the analysis of interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly et al., 1997). This is a method for identifying, describing, analysing and reporting themes and patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). By identifying common themes in the text, the researcher groups and distills a list of common themes in order to give expression to the communality of voices across participants. Thematic analysis allows for either a rich description of the data set related to a broad research question or a detailed description of a particular theme within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes are constructs

that researchers identify before, during, and after data collection (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Themes also come from reviewing the literature, from the characteristics of the phenomena being studied, from already-agreed-upon professional definitions, from local common -sense constructs, and from researcher values, theoretical orientation, and personal experience with the subject matter (Bulmer, 1979; Strauss, 1987; Maxwell, 1996). The thematic analysis was carried out by creating a coding system which enabled to identify themes in the transcript to trace them back to specific extracts of the transcript. In this sense, it is claimed that a good code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). Encoding the information organises the data to identify and develop themes from them. Boyatzis defined a theme as "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (p.161).

3.9 Validity and trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1988) argue that a researcher can only persuade his or her audience that the inquiry is worthwhile if the research findings are trustworthy. In research, this is achieved through validity which is defined as the best available approximation to the truth or falsity of a given inference, proposition or conclusion (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. Studies guided by an interpretive epistemological orientation tend to employ trustworthiness to judge the quality of inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry s findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Merriam (1998) points out:

> [Rigour] in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions and rich, thick description (p.151).

In the case of an exploratory case study as the present is not concerned with the traditions based on positivist epistemology in which generalisation is one of the criteria for the judgement of the quality. In qualitative research, an account is valid if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise (Hammersley, 1987). Case study research is concerned about how to understand phenomena at length rather than how to generalise research findings. Stake (1995) notes, the real task of case study is particularisation not generalisation. Case study research presents in-depth interpretation of phenomena. For case study research, how to obtain sufficient and in-depth data is more important than how to generalise research findings.

Pertaining this research, a part of trustworthiness was addressed when the interview questions were piloted. As the semistructured interview was the primary data gathering method for the research, the interview questions were piloted with participants of all the three types that took part in the research. The piloting of interview questions enabled testing questions in order to make sure "they actually work[ed] in practice - how people [understood] them" (Maxwell 1996, p. 75). Another form to address trustworthiness was by respondent triangulation at the moment to conduct the data collection in the interviews in which participants were asked the same questions. By asking the same questions to the different participants, researchers seek patterns of commonality as well as points of difference of the same topics given that taking into account lots of different people's view of the same phenomena gives a more whole and

reliable picture. In order to carry out a deep analysis of respondents' transcripts and reflect their perceptions, a process of continuous reflexivity of returning to the data again and again to check if my interpretations were true to the data was another form to ensure trustworthiness.

3.10 Recruitment Process

The ability of researchers to recruit appropriate participants is one of the components to successfully complete social research. Recruitment is the conversation between a researcher and a potential participant that takes place prior to the initiation of the consent process. It begins with the identification, targeting and enlistment of participants. In the case of the present study, in order to get more complete perceptions from different angles of the point-based system, three types of participants were recruited: administrators of the programme, teachers that have been actively participating in competitions for a headship, and incumbent heads. The four officials of the Commission on Teacher Promotion were approached in person in their offices previous appointment to explain the project and the importance of their contribution. In relation to the incumbent heads and teachers seeking a headship, they were identified through the databases available in the office of the commission on promotion. Once the list of candidates to participate was created, they were approached in person (Appendix B, the form used to recruit participants).

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a discipline that has to do with rules of "correct", "good", "moral" human behaviuor (Bruckstein, 2005). Ethics has been defined as "inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality where the term morality is taken to mean moral judgments,

standards and rules of conduct" (Taylor, 1975, p.1). Research ethics involve a consideration of the conduct of researchers in relation to their own personal behaviour as well as how they relate to and treat others during their research. The current research was carried out to the highest ethical standards, and it was designed and conducted in such a way that meets ethical institutional and professional principles of the University of Birmingham. The well-being of research participants must be our top priority whenever we conduct research on people (Mack et al., 2005). For this reason, the present study conformed to the same ethical and regulatory standards to which research conducted in England, and conformed to applicable local laws and norms of Mexico. In the case of England, the guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (2004) were used as the compass to maintain an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research, and academic freedom in this study. In the case of Mexico, the Mexican protocol and guidelines to access to public information regulated by The Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information (2006) was also the base to comply with the ethical part of the research. The most relevant aspects for the ethical part concerning to the participants of the present study were informed consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw.

3.12 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a voluntary agreement to participate in a study. Obtaining consent involves informing the subjects about purpose of the study and their rights. Subjects in the study must participate willingly. Consent was obtained in person once the participants understood the importance of their contribution. They were asked to

sign a form of consent (Appendix D) after the participants verbally agreed to participate. It was explained the study in general perspective, its aims, how data was going to be used, to whom it was going to be reported, and why their involvement was important. Before signing the form of consent, it was made sure that they understood the information of the project in relation to what will be expected of them if they participated and how their privacy was going to be respected. All their inquiries were answered to their satisfaction making sure they had agreed to audio recording of the interview.

3.13 Confidentiality

Privacy is an area of ethical concern in this research. It was made sure that participants trust that their personal privacy was maintained. The researcher made the highest commitment to the highest standards of conduct in keeping the anonymity of the participants in all the phases of the study. While conducting the interviews, personal information or seemingly information never was solicited. Transcription and translation of the interviews was done with the aim that none of the participants could be identified. A key was assigned to identify if a transcript was from an administrator, a teacher seeking headship, or an incumbent head. Recordings of the interviews were erased once the transcription process is completed.

3.14 Right to Withdraw

Researchers should make clear to participants their right to withdraw from the study at any time at the beginning of the research. It was explained to participants that they could withdraw from the research without any explanation to the researcher. They were able to ask that their data was destroyed after debriefing. It was explained both verbally and also written in the form of consent to address the right to withdraw.

3.15 Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research assumes that the researcher is an integral part of the research process. As opposed to research conducted in the positivist paradigm where the researcher is separated from the phenomenon being studied, the researcher in the phenomenological interpretivist paradigm interacts with the participants to understand their social constructions. In this study, I as the researcher was the primary means of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. As the primary instrument, those reading the report need to know relevant aspects about the researcher such as biases and assumptions, expectations, relevant history. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that any qualitative research is influenced by the personal biography of the researcher who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective (p. 29). I have already made explicit my position in relation to pursuing of the truth and search for knowledge when studying social phenomena in which my stance is that social reality is constructed by social actors. On the other hand, in relation to the present study, I consider myself an insider to a certain degree of the phenomenon being studied. I am a middle school teacher in public schools in Mexico. Previously to enroll in my doctorate in education, I had taught two years in the Mexico-US border region, four years in the rural areas in middle school level, at the same time that I was teaching in the rural areas I was the pedagogical adviser of the school zone (school district) in the afternoon shift. I started my teaching career in the rural areas in a multigrade elementary school where I taught in that level for a year. I have also participated in two public competitions for a deputyship in the middle school level through the *Escalafon*, but there were other teachers who had accumulated more points

during their career than me. Thereafter, my stance will be of someone that is familiarised in some degree with the Mexican educational context in general and also with the Mexican system to appoint school leaders. In this research I tried to be as objective and neutral as possible without taking for granted that the system to appoint school leaders is good or bad. I tried to be as object as possible by assuming the role of researcher and distancing myself of the object of study.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with 21 participants. This study is exploratory in nature given that there is not sufficient previous research about the topic of investigation. The study aims to answer the research questions through the data obtained through the interviewing of the following participants: candidates pursuing a headship (n=5), incumbent heads (n= 12), and administrators of the programme (n= 4). In this chapter, each of the 5 research questions will be presented in turn separately. Research questions 1, 2 and 3 will be answered by interview questions 1, 2 and 3 respectively, whereas research question 4 with interview questions 4, 5 and 6. In the case of research question 5, it will be answered with interview questions 7 and 8. The findings derived from the semi-structured interviews will be presented thematically using emergent themes which will be dealt individually in turn using relevant quotes from participants. Anonymity of participants will be maintained at all times using a code when presenting quotes instead of their real names or pseudonyms. When referring to the number of participants who agreed on a particular theme, all participants will be included together since the same interview questions were asked to all participants. It will also be pointed out if there are specific perceptions expressed by a particular group of participants. A summary follows the findings of each research question and the chapter concludes with an overall summary.

4.2 Research Question 1: What are the strengths of the Mexican point-based system to appoint school leaders?

4.2.1 Introduction

This system to appoint school leaders based on the accumulation of points throughout a teacher's career in different areas was established with the assumption that it has benefits in the appointment of leaders. The research question guiding this section was designed to explore from the view of all participants the positive aspects of this system. The following interview question was asked to the participants to gain their viewpoints and perceptions on this matter.

Interview Question 1: What do you think of the current process to appoint headteachers? From your viewpoint what are its strengths?

4.2. 2 Findings

The 21 participants gave their viewpoint on the strengths of the ladder-merit system used to appoint school leaders in Mexico. After a thorough analysis of the participants' opinions, the following themes emerged as relevant in this regard: increased trust in the system, equal opportunities for all teachers to aspire for a headship post, the system promotes academic preparation, the system promotes engagement in continuous training, and there is a holistic evaluation of candidates participating in the competitions. The themes are discussed and explained with relevant extracts from the respondents.

Increased trust in the system

In Mexico all teachers working in public compulsory education are entitled to seek leadership posts via the point-based system. The majority of respondents (n= 17)

mentioned that they have plenty of trust that the appointment of leadership posts such as deputy headships, headships, and higher posts are carried out in accordance with the law and established procedures.

> "Now a little bit or more of transparency, trust that the rules are strictly observed. The points in a competition are awarded in strict observance of the aspects that must be assessed" (TSH3)

> "The main strength is that it is a transparent process. I say it because it was that way in my case, yes, I share what I experienced" (HT9)

Some participants (n= 4) made reference to the previous past experiences to appoint school heads, and how now participants trust that appointments are carried out following the procedures established by the *Escalafon*. Here are two examples of the participants' responses:

> "It is not how it used to be in the past because in the past if you had a relative or friend in a high rank in the educational system you could get a leadership post in a school" (ADM3)

> "When I was a classroom teacher I said I want to be a headteacher, then I said 'well, I am going to compete in the *Escalafon*, I will get my post with my preparation, and courses that I have attended" (HT3)

However, one headteacher who was seeking a headship few years ago still experienced some problems related to transparency by the commission staff. This is described in the following extract of the interview:

> "I handed in documents to the staff of commission to be added to my personal file; then, when I participated in competitions some documents magically disappeared. My scores were really low. It always happened the same, so I decided to write complaint letters to higher officials in the ministry of education, even to the governor of the State" (HT11)

This headteacher lasted 5 years participating in competitions for a post until she was able to win a competition. During those years she also struggled with the uncertainty that competitions were fair and in accordance with the law and established

procedures. However, she recognises that things have now changed and improved, and she feels that she has contributed to that change:

> "I think things are changing and improving. Now the majority of school leaders are appointed by the system in a fair process. I believe I am one of those persons who contributed to the change" (HT11)

All the administrators (n= 4) of the commission on promotion strongly believe that one of the strengths of this system is that now is ensured that all teachers have the possibility of getting access to a leadership post in a fair and legal process. One administrator stated:

> "We are trying to make everything transparent, fair, and legal. The staff in the commission is very professional. We are trying to be as ethical as it could be possible because we do not have any preference with any of the persons who compete" (ADM2)

Another administrator stated a very similar response. It seems that there has been an effort by the staff of the commission to ensure that legal and transparent processes are followed in the competitions:

> "The strength I see is that there are not benefits and advantages for anybody. Here, the person with more qualifications and the one who is continuously taking courses is the person who will access to leadership posts" (ADM1)

To ensure the trust of participants is not just good will and rhetoric, it seems procedures to guarantee that the process is equal and fair for all participants have been implemented. This starts with the checking and reviewing every participant's file and documents. Every file and document is reviewed and checked separately by three persons, and if the participants do not agree with the points awarded by the commission there is a fourth reviewer. This is illustrated with the following description:

> "I am not the only reviewer; we are three plus the main administrator, we are four in total. Each participant's file is assessed for at least three persons. The file

> that I assess with its final score has to be checked by other two persons. All we have to agree on the score" (ADM3)

A recently appointed headteacher mentioned that she was very satisfied with the process:

> "In my case it was a legal and transparent process, they gave us a list of all participants with the score that each one has obtained. There is a ceremony in which the results are given" (HT9)

If still with the final review in presence of all participants, there is someone who does not agree with the results, the participant is entitled to ask for another detailed review of his/her file at the end of the competition. The joint commission has 10 days to carry out this review:

> "After results are given to the participants, they still have the right to complain. Participants could say 'I want another review of my personal file because I feel that there is something wrong, I do not understand this and that'. In few days the review is carried out carefully" (ADM4)

Equal opportunities for all teachers to pursue a headship post

Another strength that some participants (n= 14) perceived by this system to appoint school leaders is that it offers equal opportunities for all teachers to pursue a headship post. This aspect is closely related with the previous one -the increased trust- as all teachers in compulsory public education have the right to pursue a headship via the *Escalafon*. However as mentioned before, this right was not completely respected several years ago. Currently, it seems that available leadership posts within schools and the system are accessed based on the promotion system in which anyone interested could participate.

One administrator of the system commented:

> "This is a competition because posts are not assigned anymore by other mechanisms. In the *Escalafon* all have the opportunity to participate under the same conditions" (ADM2)

This is confirmed by a headteacher who believes based on her experience that this system offers the same opportunities for anyone who decides to pursue a headship:

> "I believe that the ladder-merit system is very positive because all teachers have the same opportunities" (HT11)

However, in reality teachers in their first years of service will be in equal conditions to participate for a leadership post in comparison to older teachers after 5 years of teaching. This contrasts with the view expressed in the previous interview extract that all teachers have the same opportunities and conditions when participating in a competition. According to another administrator, teachers can open their personal file in *Escalafon* after 6 months of tenure "once a teacher gets his/her teaching post in tenure" (ADM2). Teachers could participate in any competition for a leadership post in their first year of teaching. However, teachers who begin their service will have the same opportunities after 5 years of teaching. This happens because the evaluation of teaching takes into account the last five years of service. Teachers who are in their first years of service even if they are highly academically qualified will not have the same opportunities as those teachers who have already at least five years teaching. This is illustrated by the comments of an administrator of the system:

> "In order to have the same conditions, it is needed to have a minimum of 5 years teaching. At the end of every school year, a teaching evaluation report is given, so if a teacher has only a year of service and competes in the *Escalafon* it will only be taken into consideration just one report and the other participants will be taken up to the last five" (ADM4)

On the other hand, it seems that there is an effort by the commission to communicate to most teachers when there is a competition. The traditional way to

publicise vacant positions has been carried out by communicating in a written form with the supervisors of the school. Then they inform to each school head, and then headteachers inform to all teachers regarding the vacant posts. It is acknowledged by the administrators that the time it usually takes this path to reach classroom teachers is long and sometimes teachers know about a vacant post few days before or even after the competition. But now the *Escalafon* is using the internet to publicise vacant posts; this way vacant post are announced with enough time to recruit participants.

> "The announcement of vacant posts are now on the internet, a lot of participants and teachers know the website www.seech.gob.mx" (ADM1)

Academic preparation

In the assessment of candidates' application for headship up to 45% of the final score could come from the factor knowledge, which is divided into two sub factors: academic preparation and continuous training. It seems that when teachers pursue a headship post a logical thing to do under this system is to strengthen as much as possible their qualifications. Participants in the study perceived this situation as a strength of this system. The main perceived strength is that under this system new appointed heads arrive to the post prepared academically. Typical responses were the following:

> "In the *Escalafon* win those with more qualifications; I think that is a strength. It enables that new heads come to the post prepared" (HT6)

> "I have been headteacher in this school for four years, and the school has had several deputy heads appointed by the *Escalafon*. I have seen that they are prepared and knowledgeable this means that the *Escalafon* works" (HT12)

Another reason why academic preparation is pointed to as strength is that it is a fair system which rewards with high scores those teachers who have made the effort to

pursue higher academic degrees such as master's. Based on participants' responses the *Escalafon* is a promotion system which highly rewards teachers for their academic preparation. This is illustrated with quotes from two participants:

> "the *Escalafon* rewards teachers who have given priority to their preparation" (ADM4)

> "I think teachers have done many efforts, they have invested many years to get their bachelor's degrees, and their masters" (HT5)

The value that academic degrees have as a means to get promoted has enabled that teachers pursuing a headship have put in considerable efforts and years to obtain them:

> "Here some teachers who win the posts hold two bacherlor's degrees, some even 3, there are some who have even 3 master's degrees" (ADM2)

> "Each qualification has a value, from high-school certificates to doctoral degrees" (ADM3)

A headteacher who described her journey to headship mentioned how when she started to compete she compared herself to other participants in the number of points she had accumulated; then, she decided to start a master's degree because that way she could pass other competitors:

> "I always took care of my score, after my first competitions I realised that I needed the points offered by a master's degree; that is why I decided to complete my master's" (HT3)

It seems that academic preparation has been the only way younger teachers aspiring to headship could rely on to be promoted in early or medium stage of their career. This has forced younger teachers to study postgraduate degrees at the beginning of their career if they want to be promoted. Responses concerning this topic were the following:

> "There are young people with 10, 12, 15 years of teaching service who complete a master's degree, then another, then another and then another, obviously those qualifications favour that they have a high score" (TSH1)

> "There are teachers with 15 years of teaching service who hold two bachelors' degrees plus two masters" (ADM3)

It seems that in some cases years of teaching is not such a determinant factor to appoint headteachers as it used to be in the past given that younger teachers are enrolling in graduate courses in their first years of teaching which enables more points and they are able to surpass teachers with 15 or 20 years of service. Older teachers have basically relied to be promoted on the points accumulated during their years of service. This was mentioned by an administrator of the system:

> "Nowadays it does not mean that a teacher with many years of teaching service will have an easy access to headship. Nowadays, teachers recently graduated from their undergraduate degree continue their masters" (ADM1)

Continuous training

Another strength mentioned by (n= 10) participants is that the point-based systems enables the appointment of highly trained headteachers in areas related to teaching and learning. This is related to the previous perceived strength –preparation, given that as mentioned earlier both continuous training and academic preparation could account for almost half of the total points. This was positively perceived by some participants as the rewarding of a big percentage in continuous training encourage teachers pursuing a headship focus their effort for being engaged in constant training through short courses and workshops. This was pointed out by one of the participants who is seeking a headship:

> "I feel that it allows continuous training; it makes those who are pursuing a headship post to enrol in courses and be pedagogically updated" (TSH2)

Another participant also seeking headship pointed out:

> "By means of continuous training it allows the opportunity to be at the vanguard regarding pedagogical knowledge at national and international level" (TSH4)

However, in the case of some participants (n= 4) the attendance to short courses and workshops seems to be done with the aim just to gather as many points as possible in order to be just promoted. A headteacher mentioned:

> "When I was pursuing headship, I decided to enrol in as many valid courses as I could, all courses that were valid in the *Escalafon*" (HT2)

Another headteacher in the same aspect shared:

> "I took a keen interest in the points I needed to get promoted; I enrolled in any course that I could; for instance, in the national courses" (HT3)

Holistic assessment

Another strength mentioned by some participants (n= 7) is that the system implemented assesses the performance of candidates in several factors. Participants considered that the appointment of school leaders based on the performance in several areas could positively influence their acting as headteachers. A participant commented in this regard the following:

> "I think that the point-based system is good because it takes into consideration many aspects, years of teaching, qualifications, and courses, and perhaps that could influence on their performance" (HT1)

In order to get promoted to leadership posts, teachers need to accumulate points in several areas which could enhance their professional improvement while they are in the post of classroom teachers and also in their performance as school leaders once promoted. In this regard, a headteacher pointed out:

> "Everything is assessed; you get a post through much hard work, courses, experience, academic preparation, and teaching assessment. All preparation

taken has a positive influence in improving your performance as teacher and later as leader" (HT7)

4.2.3 Summary

All the participants in the study offered their response to the question on what they think about the current process to appoint school leaders, and from their viewpoint, which its strengths are. They reflected and shared their opinion based on their experience of what they believe are the main strengths of the promotion system. In total 5 themes emerged from the responses of participants and were presented with relevant quotes in order to incorporate their voice in the report. The participants considered that the strengths of the system are the following: an increased trust in the system, it offers equal opportunities for all teachers to participate in competitions, the system promotes academic preparation, the system promotes that teachers seeking headship get involved in a process of continuous training, and candidates participating in a competition for a headship are assessed in several aspects which could favour the appointment of good heads.

4.3 Research Question 2: What are the shortcomings of the current system to appoint school leaders?

4.3.1 Introduction

As it was important to explore the strengths and positive aspects of the point-based system to appoint school leaders, it was also to explore its shortcomings. This research question was conceived to have a more comprehensive landscape looking at the things that still need improvement based on the viewpoint of participants. The following interview question was posed to all participants in order to get their understanding on this matter.

Interview Question 2: From your viewpoint, what are the weaknesses of the current system to appoint school leaders?

4.3.2 Findings

In relation to the weaknesses of the system all 21 participants in the study gave their responses and the following themes emerged: the system is ruled by an obsolete set of regulations, the system promotes credencialism, there is a lack of previous specific preparation for the post, headship is not attractive, the system still needs more transparency, the system does not evaluate ethical performance of candidates, the assessment of teaching performance is not real, and the information of vacant post sometimes does not arrive on time to schools. The following will be each theme presented with relevant quotes from the responses received from the participants.

The system is ruled by an obsolete set of regulations

The need to upgrade the current regulations ruling the appointment of leadership positions regarded as important for (n= 17) participants. The system operates with a set of rules that were promulgated 1973 which are seen as a shortcoming by participants. They regarded as obsolete and out-dated some of the rules, and urged for the need to upgrade some of them:

> "We have rules that are 40 years old which favours seniority and academic preparation, but other skills needed for the post are put aside" (ADM2)

> "I believe that it would be interesting that the regulations were updated given that they have been in effect since 1973" (ADM4)

It seems that there are several parts of the current regulations that according to the participants in the study need to be amended. For instance, it was mentioned by

some participants (n=4) that there are some rules which could be understood in multiple ways:

> "Some rules could be understood in two ways" (TSH3)

> "There are some rules that could generate problems for the interpretations that could be given" (ADM4)

There was also mentioned that there is a limit of points awarded in two factors: knowledge and years of teaching. The limitation of points which could be awarded in those two factors is perceived as a shortcoming of the system. For instance, it was reported by some participants (n= 3) that the factor knowledge, which is a combination of two sub factors: academic preparation (20%) and continuous training (25%), the maximum of points awarded are 1080. Some participants (n= 3) acknowledge that some candidates seeking headship pass the 1080 points for all their academic preparation and courses that have taken during their career. However, they are only awarded with 1080 as the most for the limit imposed by the current regulations. Here are the comments of an administrator of the system regarding this issue:

> "Many teachers with the academic qualifications they have are passing the maximum of 1080 points, and then, the preparation and training after the limit will not be taken into account" (ADM1)

In relation to this, a teacher seeking headship commented on how teachers attend regularly to professional training, and then, after some years they get discouraged to continue attending courses or workshops because those courses are not valid anymore once teachers have reached the limit of points:

> "There is a limit in the number of points we can accumulate in training, if we reach that limit, why then take more courses and if they are not valid?" (TSH1)

Another factor that needs amendment according to two administrators is the factor related with years of teaching. In the current rules, it is specified that it should be taken into account a period of 30 years of teaching practice. However, as participants pointed out there are teachers who teach for more than 30 years. An administrator expressed his opinion on this matter:

> "With the new reforms on retirement most teachers will work more than 30 years, and the existent regulations take into consideration 30 years. I think also this aspect needs upgrading" (ADM1)

However, according to the administrators (n= 2), the modification and amendment of current regulations could not be carried out at local or state level; it has to be at national level. Therefore, it is not on their hands to carry out these modifications: "the modification of the regulations has to be at national level, and it is carried out in Mexico City, so I cannot change them at local level" (ADM4)

The system promotes credentialism

Another weakness perceived by (n= 8) participants is the credentialism the system based on points promotes. This causes teachers pursuing a headship to complete academic degrees and short courses just to accumulate points in order to get promoted. It was mentioned by some participants (n= 3) that there are cases of teachers who have completed two bachelor's degrees plus three masters. The following are the responses expressed by two appointed heads:

> "It is just credentialism, being just accumulating documents, certificates, and diplomas, but I think most of the persons who get promoted do not have the specific preparation for the post" (HT2)

> "Sometimes I wonder why their academic preparation does not have an impact on their job. Sometimes I think teachers complete their masters just to get promoted" (HT5

According to some participants (n= 8), the high value that academic preparation and continuous training have enables the appointment of school leaders based mainly on academic preparation. One headteacher stated the following in this regard:

> "I think that one of its main weaknesses is that the appointment is based mainly on the accumulation of qualifications and courses. It is not appropriate to choose headteachers based only on the accumulation of documents" (HT3)

A teacher seeking headship stated:

> "Not necessarily a new appointed headteacher with many academic qualifications will be a good headteacher" (TSH1)

The emphasis given to academic preparation has generated the proliferation of low quality graduate degrees. Two participants expressed their opinions in this regard pointing out that some master's and doctorates do not have the required quality as graduate degrees, and the *Escalafon* has to accept them because they are officially recognised by the Ministry of Education. An administrator shared her opinion on this topic:

> "There are teachers that pursue low quality master's degrees since they are easier to obtain as long as they are officially recognised they are valid here in the *Escalafon*" (ADM2)

A teacher seeking headship shared how other teachers have made comments about his second master's degree in which he is currently enrolled:

> "A lot of co-workers tell me that I am studying just to get points; they tell me that my master is patito (Mexican slang literately translated as 'little duck' which means very low quality'), but I do not care as long as it is valid" (TSH2)

Lack of previous preparation for the post

Even with the strong emphasis on academic preparation and continuous training participants perceived that newly appointed heads do not have specific preparation for the post. Participants (n= 14) stressed the importance of being prepared in school

leadership and receive previous preparation to develop specific skills needed for the post:

> "I think that is needed a specific preparation for the post before teachers are promoted to headship. The staff of the *Escalafon* should say 'I know that you are a person with a lot of preparation and qualifications, but you need this course in leadership'" (HT7)

> "I perceive a weakness that we arrived to the post without preparation in leadership" (HT9)

And also another participant mentioned that there is a need to be trained in knowing the documents that headteachers are responsible to manage:

> "I think it is a weakness not knowing even the names of the forms and documents we are supposed to submit to the supervision" (HT6)

Headship is not attractive at early stages of teaching

Participants (n= 4) perceived that there is a lack of interest to pursue a headship by some teachers in an early stage of their career for the lack of economic incentives. This could damage early identification of talented teachers to be developed as future leaders. Participants commented that the increase in their salary once appointed as headteachers is not significant. There is in Mexico a programme of economic incentives composed of different levels that has more impact on a teachers' salary than a leadership post, and in which it is easier to advance as a classroom teacher than as it is in a leadership postion. According to participants in the study, classroom teachers prefer to reach a high level in the incentives' programme and then seek headship:

> "In a competition for a leadership position participate people who want to be school leaders, the increase in salary is not big. Yes, there is an increase, but is not as big as it is in *Carrera Magisterial*. Many teachers prefer pursue a headship after they have achieved a high level in *Carrera*" (HT10)

A newly appointed head shared her experience when she participated in a competition for a headship stressing the low number of participants in the competition:

> "I won the first time I competed. I do not know why teachers do not participate, perhaps they are participating in *Carrera Magisterial* because is easier to progress in *Carrera* as classroom teacher than as a headteacher" (HT4)

Other reasons according to the participants that have an influence for teachers not participating in competitions for headship are related with other factors such as being at school in the afternoon shift, being in schools located far away from the participants' place of residence, and being schools in which there are usually staff tensions:

> "When the vacant post is in a problematic school, a school in the afternoon shift, it happens that many teachers do not participate in competitions" (HT1)

The system needs more transparency

Some participants (n= 8) in the study, 6 incumbent heads and 2 teachers seeking headship, considered that the system still needs more transparency in relation to the process of the counting points that every participant accumulates given that the final score determines who gets the promotion. A teacher who is participating in competitions has witnessed other participants disagreeing with the score they get. This teacher recommends that there should be a webpage in which participants could see how everyone was assessed. The following is an extract of his view on this issue:

> "I have full and total trust in the commission on promotion, but it will not be an inconvenient that the competitions were more transparent. If there was a webpage in which participants were able to see their scores and how they and other participants were assessed. I have sometimes seen very unsatisfied participants with the results" (TSH2)

Another issue raised by some participants (n= 5) is that sometimes the commission do not announce all the vacant posts. A participant shared his view on this topic:

> "Sometimes some vacant posts are not announced; it is as if the staff in the commission said this vacant post will be announced and this will not" (TSH1)

Something similar was shared by another participant who a year ago had moved from Ciudad Juarez, the largest city in the State, in which it seems that the commission is not advertising all the available positions, and some promotions seem not to be assigned by the established system:

> "In Juarez I was the assistant of the schools' supervisor. In the educational sector that our school zone belonged to none of the 29 school heads had been promoted by the *Escalafon*. I had always thought that the *Escalafon* was a myth" (HT4)

Ethical performance is not assessed

Another shortcoming mentioned by some participants (n= 6) is that this system to appoint heads does not include the assessment of ethical performance of candidates throughout their careers. According to the participants, the *Escalafon* does not consider factors that assess the proper ethical and professional behaviour of candidates since in competitions could participate anyone without importance if they had been in problems for professional performance and misconduct. According to two the administrators, as long as candidates are active as teachers, they have the right to compete for the post without taking into consideration if they had or are having problems in their acting as teachers. An administrator shared his view on this issue:

> "Just imagine that come to the post a person who was about to be fired four or five times, what kind of school leader they are is going to be? The day they needs to reprimand a teacher the teacher will reply: wait a moment, how come you demand me if you were the main example of irresponsibility?" (ADM2)

The assessment of teaching performance seems not to be real

Teaching performance is assessed at the end of the school year. It is carried out in every school by the headteacher who assesses the teaching staff, and teachers get an evaluation report that grants a maximum of 720 points. It was pointed out by some participants (n= 9) that the evaluation of teaching performance is not carried out properly. It was mentioned that the common practice is to give all teachers the 720 points to avoid unfairness given that some schools assess teachers with rigour and following the procedures, while other schools just give the 720 to all teachers. This has led to a generalised practice to give all teachers in most schools 720 points, being the accurate assessment of teaching practice in many cases unreal. A headteacher expressed his viewpoint on this matter:

> "The evaluation of teaching performance is not real. Almost all of them get the maximum of 720 points because in a school the assessment could be done correctly, but in another could not, since we do not know, a common practice is to give the highest amount of 720 points to all teachers" (HT2)

Information of vacant posts sometimes do not arrive on time

Some participants (n= 4) pointed out that there are also occasions that information of vacant posts does not arrive on time to schools, and it does not enable the participation of all teachers that could be interested in a leadership position. A participant in the study pointed out that there is not a verification mechanism that information of vacant posts arrives to all teachers in all schools. She described how she knew that there was going to be a competition for a vacant headship through an informal taking with a teacher from other school:

> "When I participated in the competition in which I got promoted, I never knew, I realised that there was a competition by an informal talk with a colleague" (HT9)

4.3.3 Summary

All the 21 participants offered their response to the question on the weaknesses of the current point-based system of promotion. From their own perspective and position as teachers pursuing a headship, incumbent heads, and administrators of the programme, they reflected and expressed their viewpoint concerning the weaknesses of the system. In all, 8 themes emerged from the responses and were presented with relevant quotes from the participants. The responses indicated that the system needs an upgrading and updating in its regulations given that some of them seem to be obsolete. It also emerged as a weakness of the system that the big value of academic preparation and continuous training has enabled a credentialism in which teachers seeking a headship complete courses and academic degrees just with the intention to accumulate as many points as possible. It was also pointed out that the current system does not promote previous preparation in leadership and other skills needed for the post of headteacher. Another weaknesses that emerged is the lack of interest in headship since, from an economic point of view, teachers can increase more their salary through the programme of incentives than a leadership position. Respondents also suggested the need to increase the level of transparency in the assessment of documents and assigning of points to participants in a competition. Other themes that emerged were the lack of ethical performance assessment of participants, the evaluation of teaching performance seems not to be real, and that sometimes information of vacant posts do not arrive on time to schools.

4.4 Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of the participants in the study of how the current system to appoint school heads enables or does not enable the promotion of prepared school leaders?

4.4.1 Introduction

The third research question shown above aimed to find out a balanced perspective of how the current system enables or does not enable the promotion of good heads. The findings are presented in a balanced perspective without assuming that the current system enables or does not enable the appointment of effective heads; rather, the findings explored from the voices of participants which areas the system does or does not favour the promotion of prepared heads. In order to explore this matter, the 21 participants were asked the following question in the interview:

Interview Question 3: From your perspective do you consider that the point-based system enables the promotion of effective school heads? In which areas it does, and In which areas it does not?

4.4. 2 Findings

The interview question was posed to all respondents on this matter, and the responses were then analysed to find similarities which could group the responses according to emergent themes. The interviews about this aspect were subdivided in two categories: those that favour the appointment of effective school heads, and those that not favour the appointment of competent heads. For the first category the following themes emerged: some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* may be considered good, it is favoured the promotion of experienced teachers, and successful deputy headships experiences could enable the promotion of good heads. In the case of the

second category it emerged that: headteaches are only appointed based on a high score in points, newly appointed heads reach the post deficient prepared in leadership, and there exists a lack of practical meaningful experiences in leading and managing. The ensuing discussion of the findings will be presented in the two categories previous mentioned with the corresponding themes and quotations from the respondents.

a) The system could enable the appointment of prepared school heads

Some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* may be good

The four administrators and two incumbent heads considered that heads promoted by the *Escalafon* could be regarded as good school leaders. These Participants consider that heads appointed by the system have been able to improve the conditions, stabilise and better the performance of schools facing problems when they were promoted.

> "This was a very problematic school, but little by little I got along with every teacher. I started to work closer with parents, little by little I stabilised the general conditions and now we are working with a lot more harmony" (HT10)

In this regard, an administrator of the system shared his view that some schools are led and managed by appointed heads through the *Escalafon* are stable and well managed institutions:

> "Some of teachers who are promoted through the *Escalafon* have a good performance, the schools they manage are very stable" (ADM4)

Experienced teachers

Another aspect that some participants (n= 8) considered that facilitates the promotion of good heads is the appointment of experienced teachers to headship. All incumbent heads in the study had taught and worked in at least 3 different schools before being promoted, and the majority of participants (n= 18) had started their

teaching service in rural remote areas. According to the participants, these experiences in different sociocultural contexts have made possible that they could deepen their pedagogical knowledge and develop other skills as educators. For instance, the following is an extract of the interview with an incumbent head who regards her experience in several schools as positive in her performance as teacher and now as headteacher:

> "I started teaching in Boquilla Chihuahua; then, I was transferred to the town of Saucillo; then, I taught in many other little towns until I was transferred to Chihuahua City. All those experiences are useful now that I am a headteacher" (HT12)

Another incumbent head described her first year of teaching more than 20 years ago in a multigrade school located in a rural remote area, and how it helped to develop her teaching and leading skills:

> "I started my teaching service in a multigrade school when I was 19 years old. I was teaching from 1st to 6th grade. I did a lot of work for the community and for the school. All those experiences helped me to develop my skills as teacher and school leader" (HT5)

Some participants (n= 5) pointed out that the experiences of having taught in different schools and contexts have enabled them to observe other headteachers acting in the post and learn from them:

> "I used to observe how the headteachers I worked with managed the schools. I learned a lot of things from them that I apply now that I am a headteacher" (HT4)

> "I learned a lot from the headteachers in charge of the schools I used to teach" (HT3)

Other experiences that headteachers appointed though the *Escalafon* bring with them apart from their teaching experiences are those related to other positions they have held in the educational system. Half of the incumbent heads interviewed (n= 6)

were technical pedagogical adviser of a school zone responsible to assist zone inspectors in the managing several schools prior to their appointment either as deputy heads or headteacher. Others (n= 3) were involved in union related positions within schools while teaching, and some (n= 2) worked in special education, and 1 of them was responsible for a cultural centre.

Successful deputy headship experiences

Although having a successful or unsuccessful deputy headship experience is not the responsibility of the point-based system, this is perceived to influence the promotion of competent heads. From the participants (n= 8) point of view a successful deputy headship facilitated them to strengthen their learning on their journey to headship. Some participants (n= 4) mentioned that during their post as deputies they had the opportunity to observe from a closer perspective the leading and managing of a school and what implies to be headteacher. Other participants (n= 3) commented that their experiences as deputies was a chance to work and interact with parents and teaching staff; and also some of them (n= 4) were given the freedom and support of their headteachers to coordinate and implement projects geared to the improvement of teaching conditions in the schools they were assigned. The following are the perceptions shared by two headteachers:

> "As a deputy head, I learned to interact with the teaching staff, parents, and educational authorities. The experience in a deputy headship gave me learning, and professional improving" (HT1)

> "In my experience as deputy head I think that a very positive influence was the headteacher whom I made team to work with. He gave me much freedom when I suggested any improvement for the school. He used to say yes, you do whatever you want" (HT10)

However, there were also other participants for whom their experience in a deputy position was not meaningful regarding their preparation for headship:

> "When I was a deputy head, I did not make any decisions. I think that my experience as deputy was not very meaningful since I did not know if I was an office secretary, or the person who substituted teachers when they were absent, I did not know exactly which my functions were" (HT8)

These experiences are also related to the type of school heads that deputy heads were working with as it is described from a teacher pursuing headship:

> "There are school heads who make sure deputy heads do not get involved and know all the things they as heads do, so this also influences in not having a complete experience of what means to be a headteacher" (TSH3)

b) The system could not enable the appointment of prepared school heads

Headteachers are only appointed based on a high score in points

Some participants (n= 14) considered that the appointment of headteachers based on the accumulation of points, even though are assessed different factors, is not enough for the appointment of competent school heads. According to these participants high scores are not a guarantee that newly appointed heads will be effective heads. They expressed their concern that other practices should be implemented to complement the current system. They considered that base promotion only on the accumulation of points is a narrow criterion if it is expected that schools are to be led and managed by good heads. Typical responses concerning this matter were the following:

> "I have met people who were in the post as headteacher and I used to ask myself, 'how does this person is managing a school?', I know that there was a competition in the *Escalafon* but I think is not enough, numbers are too cold, something else should be done than just giving a leadership post based on the accumulation of points" (HT12)

> "I believe is wrong to award leadership positions based only on a number. I think there should be implemented other mechanisms which complement the system if we want good heads; a number does not guarantee a competent headteacher" (TSH4)

Deficiency in preparedness in leadership, management, and people skills

The deficiency in leadership preparation and deficiency in management and human relationships preparation also emerged in this question as it was addressed by some (n= 12) participants. The participants considered that at the beginning of their post as headteachers the lack of preparation in these areas had an effect on their initial performance especially in schools facing problems since they struggled to consolidate the commitment of all teaching staff. Two headteachers shared their opinion in this issue:

> "I think if I had had preparation in leadership and human relationships I would have struggled less in my first months in the post" (HT3)

> "Many of the problems that schools have are related to human relationships. Most problems are related to trait and interactions between school leaders and teaching staff. The system does not demand preparation in this area" (HT9)

Lack of practical meaningful experiences in leading and managing

Some participants (n= 8) expressed their concern that newly promoted heads arrive to the post with insufficient practical experiences in management and leadership skills. Even though the majority of participants considered that previous experiences as classroom teachers and also in some cases deputyships enable them to have an idea of what implies to be a headteacher they consider they still arrive to the post poorly equipped with direct practical experiences in leading and managing a school. From the viewpoint of participants newly appointed heads come to the post with little practical knowledge of how to run a school successfully.

> “Once in a leadership post, I felt I lacked practical knowledge of how to run a school. I had the experience as classroom teacher and deputy head, but headship is very different. I think I needed more practical experiences” (HT12)

A participant shared his view on how the lack of practical experiences in managing and leading in authentic contexts sometimes has enabled the appointment to headship of teachers who were excellent classroom teachers, but once in the post they are not as competent as they used to be when they were classroom teachers:

> “I have seen teachers who as classroom teachers they were excellent, my respects to them, really good, but not as school leaders. I think many of these problems are due to the few real experiences in leading schools before promotion” (HT2)

4.4.3 Summary

This research question was designed to find out how the point-based system enables the promotion of effective school heads, in which areas it does and in which areas it does not. In all, 5 themes emerged from the responses and were presented with relevant quotes from the participants. Three themes emerged on how the system favour the promotion of competent heads: some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* may be considered good, the system enables the appointment of experienced teachers, and a successful deputy headship enhance the possibility of a successful headship. On the other hand, two themes emerged on how the system does not favour the promotion of effective heads: newly appointed heads arrive to the post deficient and poorly prepared in leadership, management and human relationships, and newly appointed heads lack of practical experiences in leading and managing of schools.

4.5 Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of participants in the study regarding how the current system to appoint school leaders enables leadership talent identification, training and development in leadership, and leadership learning?

4.5.1 Introduction

This exploratory case study sought to explore from the perspective of participants of how the established system for appointing school leaders favours the identification of potential school leaders, the training and development in leadership, and leadership learning. Therefore, this research question as shown above focused on this aspect. They were asked how potential leaders are identified, if the current system enables the preparation and training in leadership, and how school leaders in Mexican primary schools learn to lead. The following three interview questions were used to extract perceptions from the participants in these topics.

Interview Question 4: What do you think about talent identification, how potential leaders are identified?

Interview Question 5: How does the current system enable preparation and training in leadership?

Interview Question 6: What do you think about leadership learning, does the system enable leadership learning, and how do school leaders in Mexican compulsory education learn to lead?

a) Interview Question 4: What do you think about talent identification, how are potential leaders are identified?

4.5.2 Findings Interview Question 4

This interview question was posed to all the participants, and all of them offered their views on the topic addressed in this question. The themes that emerged were that there exists an informal process of talent identification in primary education, temporary leadership posts enables the identification of future leaders, and teaching headships also favours the identification of leaders. Each theme will be presented individually with relevant quotations from the participants.

Informal talent Identification

The four administrators of the joint commission on promotion pointed out that a formal talent identification programme does not exist either in the joint commission or in the educational system. An administrator indicated that talent identification is not contemplated in the current regulations of the *Escalafon*; that is why they do not have a programme focused on that aspect. However, they mentioned that potential leaders are identified informally by the supervisors of schools:

> "No, we do not do the identification of future leaders, this is not our job, and the current regulations do not assign us that responsibility. I also do not think something like that is carried out in the educational system" (ADM4)

> "The *Escalafon* does not have the responsibility of identifying the best potential leaders in schools, but when there is a temporary vacant leadership post, the school staff along with the school's supervisor identify the best candidate" (ADM1)

The responses from the participants (n= 18) seem to show that in the identification of potential leaders is carried out informally at school level by the school supervisors and teaching staff when there are available temporary posts:

Temporary leadership posts

Seven of the incumbent heads out of the twelve that took part in the study identified that they emerged as school leaders from an informal process of talent identification. Four of the participants were promoted as temporary headteachers in the school they were teaching. The process of promotion to a temporary headship occurred in two ways either they were invited directly from the school's supervisor or they were elected in a democratic process by the teaching staff. Other participants were invited to assist the school supervisor with managerial and training roles. And, a participant was promoted as a deputy head in the school she was teaching invited by the school head. It seems that teachers who are promoted to temporary leadership posts are regarded by their co-workers and school supervisors as exemplary teachers. This could be inferred with the following extracts of the interviews with and administrator and an incumbent head:

> "When there is a temporary leadership vacant, the school's supervisor identifies the person who could lead the school for few months" (ADM1)

> "My first experience as headteacher was on a temporary commission by an urgent need, my co-workers nominated me" (HT12)

It also seems that after teachers were in a temporary leadership position it motivates them to pursue a leadership post due to the confidence they develop in the practical experience of leading a school. Some of the them (n= 3) competed in the first opportunity that there was a competition advertised by the *Escalafon* and won it, while others competed and did not win it, but they enrolled in master's programmes and short courses to accumulate points to be able to win a post. It seems that the experience of having been in a temporary leadership post may motivate teachers to pursue a

permanent leadership position being this process an indirect way to identify future school leaders.

Headship in small schools

Participants (n= 7) considered that another aspect which favours the identification of future school leaders occurs in small primary schools which are led and managed by classroom teachers who are teaching and acting as heads at the same time. Participants pointed out that the experience of headship in a small school favours the identification of future school leaders because many teachers show interest in leadership posts, and they enrol in academic programmes to later compete through the *Escalafon* for a leadership post in larger schools.

A teacher seeking headship described how at the beginning of his professional career as teacher he was assigned to be responsible of a small school, and how this experience encouraged him to pursue headship as a career:

> "My first year of teaching service was in a small school in a rural remote area, and I was a classroom teacher and the school's head at the same time. This favoured that I enjoyed the responsibilities of a headteacher that is why I am studying my master's and participating in the competitions for a headship" (TSH4)

b) Interview Question 5: How the current system enables the preparation and training in leadership?

4.5.3 Findings Interview Question 5

This interview question was asked to all participants in the study. There were 3 themes that were identified for this question: there is limited available preparation and professional training in school management, preparation in leadership and management is not mandatory, and there is an expressed need in leadership and management

preparation before promotion. The discussion on each of the themes will be supplemented with relevant quotes from the respondents.

Limited available preparation in leadership

Participants (n= 10) manifested that there is a master's programme in school management available at a local university which could strengthen the preparation of teachers seeking headship. Participants suggested that candidates pursuing a headship who want to strengthen their knowledge and understanding in the areas of leadership and educational administration could do so by enrolling in the available master's programme and also in available short courses. Two participants who had completed the master's programme regarded it as good in their preparation.

Of the 12 incumbent heads who participated in the study, 3 have completed the master's programme aforementioned and 1 is currently enrolled; 5 of the other incumbent heads hold a master's degree from other areas of education, and 2 of the incumbent heads do not have a graduate degree. In the case of teachers seeking headship 2 have completed the master's programme and 2 are currently enrolled in it; the other participants either have completed or are enrolled in another master's programme related to education.

Preparation in leadership is not mandatory

The administrators (n= 4) pointed out in the current system to appoint school leaders is not mandatory to have preparation in school leadership. They observed that the current regulations do not make mandatory or give more points to those participants who have specific preparation in leadership. According to them, preparation in leadership and management is not rewarded with higher scores than preparation in

other areas of education. Even though the administrators acknowledge that making leadership preparation compulsory would favour the preparation for the post, they indicate that they do not have the power to implement these changes given that regulations and guidelines for promotion are applied at national level.

> "It would be interesting that candidates to lead schools had compulsory preparation in leadership. The problem is that the current regulations do not consider it, and we cannot make compulsory a change like that here in Chihuahua; the change has to be done in Mexico City" (ADM3)

> "It is neither mandatory to have preparation in educational leadership, nor it is given a higher value in points to the courses or master's in management in comparison to the masters of other areas of education" (ADM2)

Expressed need in leadership preparation before promotion

Preparation in leadership and management before promotion was unanimously claimed by the 21 participants in the study as needed in the current system of appointment in order to promote more competent heads. Eight incumbent heads regarded the job that headteachers must carry out as demanding, complex and different from the job classroom teachers have to perform so that they consider it is needed preparation in leadership.

> "Headship is difficult and hard, why? Because you are caught in the middle, you have people in charge: teachers and parents, and also people that you report to: educational authorities. I am totally convinced that teachers need preparation for the post" (HT2)

> "My first months were very difficult just tackling problems and this was not what I expected to be sometimes I asked myself what am I doing here?" (HT1)

Another participant was concerned for the lack of preparation in this area specifically for classroom teachers and newly appointed deputy heads who are promoted to temporary headships for few months or even the whole school year; a practice that seemingly happens very often in primary schools:

> "There are deputies who last very little time as deputies and suddenly are promoted […] I ask myself how do they lead?" (HT6)

However, some participants (n= 4) also acknowledged that there have been some efforts to train and prepare school leaders in leadership in the form of in-service training carried out with incumbent heads at school zone level by the zone supervisors.

> "Our supervisor has given us workshops in school leadership; he makes us reflect on the things we need to strengthen as school leaders" (HT8)

Nonetheless, this practice seems not to be extended in all school zones given that participants in the present study were from six different school zones, and only in two school zones seem that headteachers are trained in school leadership in the form of short courses and workshops by their supervisors.

In relation to the need for preparation for leadership and management prior to being promoted by the *Escalafon*, all participants in the study considered this practice should be implemented. Typical responses on this matter were the following:

> "When we start as headteachers we find out that we do not know how to manage people, how to lead them, yes, I believe it is needed preparation before promotion" (HT1)

> "We are suddenly in a world where we say wow!, what are they talking about? Guidelines, regulations, rights and obligations, am I doing my job as I have to? Then, I think there is a need for preparation before teachers win a competition in the *Escalafon*" (HT5, See Appendix F)

From the responses of participants it could be inferred that they are demanding preparation in aspects related to both leadership and management. In the case of areas related to leadership participants pointed out that the topics that should be addressed in a preparation programme before appointment should include work with other people, assertive communication and conflict management. In the case of management there should be addressed training in paperwork, especially reports for the school's

supervisor, legal aspects, and responsibilities of school's heads, teaching staff, and administrative staff.

c) Interview Question 6: What do you think about leadership learning, does the current system enable leadership learning, and how school leaders in Mexican compulsory education learn to lead?

4.5.4 Findings Interview Question 6

All participants in the study were asked the interview question, and unanimously they responded leadership learning in Mexican primary schools occurs mainly in the post. Hence, the theme that emerged is that learning to lead and manage is in the post.

Learning to lead and manage occurs in the post

Most participants in the study (n= 19) considered that the current system of promotion does not favour leadership learning. They considered that leadership learning promoted by the system is indirect and modest in the form of academic preparation and training since this preparation is mainly in the areas of teaching and learning because preparation in leadership is not compulsory. The majority of incumbent heads (n= 10) that participated in the study considered that they had learned how to lead a school basically when they were in the post:

> "My leadership learning was in the post, and I am still learning. Sometimes I make mistakes because I do not know many things" (HT10)

> "I learned to lead in the post by trial and error, in this position you interact with students, parents, teachers, you need to know how to treat each of them and how to persuade them" (HT6)

Only the two incumbent heads who had completed a master's degree in school management regarded their preparation as important in their learning how to lead:

“My master’s in management has enabled me to learn how to lead educational institutions” (HT5)

Incumbent heads considered meaningful in their leadership learning the observation of other headteachers when they were classroom teachers, temporary leadership positions, other positions within the educational system, and successful deputy headship experiences, as it has been addressed deeper in previous questions.

4.5.5 Summary

This research question was focused on finding out how the established system for appointing school leaders allows the identification of potential leaders, the training in leadership, and leadership learning. All the 21 participants offered their view on the topics addressed in this question by answering three specific interview questions which correspond to questions 4, 5, and 6 in the interview guide. In the case of the fourth interview question, three themes were identified: there is an informal process of talent identification, temporary leadership posts enable the identification of leaders, and teaching headships favours leadership identification. In the case of the fifth interview question, three themes also emerged: there is available preparation and professional training in leadership and management, preparation in leadership and management is not mandatory, and participants manifested a need in leadership and management preparation before promotion. And, for the sixth interview question, a theme was identified which discussed that leadership learning in Mexican primary schools occurs in the post.

4.6 Research Question 5: Overall, how could the process to appoint school leaders could be improved?

4.6.1 Introduction

This research question was formulated to gain feedback from the participants on how the current process of nominating school leaders could be improved, and also in general what they perceived could be implemented in Mexico to strengthen the appointment of better prepared school leaders. This question was formulated as part of the approach to reflect on the positive and no so positive aspects of the current system of promotion has, and also with the intention to generate ideas of how it could be improved. To gain a more complete understanding of the perceptions of participants on this matter there were designed two interview questions.

Interview Question 7: How could the point-based system could be improved?

Interview Question 8: What should be done in Mexican compulsory education to appoint better prepared school leaders?

a) Interview Question 7: How could the point-based system be improved?

4.6.2 Findings Interview Question 7

The interview question was asked to all participants and most of them (n= 14) mentioned again the need to upgrade the regulations and the need to make more credible the assessment of teaching. Both aspects have been discussed in a deeper level in previous research questions. It was also mentioned by some participants (n=9), and hence emerged as a theme, the need to implement a panel to conduct interviews and check real evidence of the previous professional performance of participants.

Panel to interview candidates for leadership posts

Some participants (n=9) mentioned that along the point-based system there could be interviews with a panel composed by parents, teaching staff, and educational authorities. Common views were shared by these participants. This is exemplified with an extract of the interview of a teacher seeking headship:

> "Participants in a competition should be interviewed by a panel. This will enable to detect their skills as leaders and to know how they will improve the schools they want to lead" (TSH1)

Another participant suggested that the panel could not only interview the persons interested in a leadership post, but also check how was their real performance in previous posts either as classroom teacher or deputy head. According to this participant, this could be done at least with the finalists of the competition by going to talk directly to parents and colleagues.

> "It must be checked the professional performance of participants in real contexts. The committee responsible for the interviews could visit the schools where the participants have worked to talk to the parents and co-workers to see at first hand the professional performance of participants" (TSH5)

b) Interview Question 8: What could be done in Mexican compulsory education to appoint better prepared school leaders?

4.6.3 Findings Interview Question 8

The 21 participants expressed their opinion on the topic that addresses this question. After a thorough analysis of the participants' responses, the following themes emerged as relevant: to strengthen the preparation of school leaders, the need to implement a certification programme, and the need to rotate incumbent heads among schools after some years of service. The themes are analysed and illustrated with relevant quotations from the respondents.

Strengthen the preparation of school leaders

The majority of participants (n= 18) indicated that the way to favour the appointment of good school leaders is through strengthening the preparation of school leaders. Most of the participants in favour of strengthening preparation (n= 10) considered that there must be compulsory preparation in school leadership and management for aspiring school leaders, and also professional development for incumbent heads. Some participants (n= 4) advocated that an institution or department within the Ministry of Education could be created whose job is the preparation and training of aspiring and incumbent school leaders. Other participants (n= 2) specified that the current infrastructure of Normal Schools and institutions responsible for continuous training of in-service teachers could offer preparation before promotion, and training for incumbent heads. The majority of participants (n= 12) suggested that preparation must be a mix between theory and practice in which were involved current exemplary school leaders.

Responses as the following were common among participants:

> "There should be better prepared school leaders. A compulsory previous preparation is needed for those seeking headship. Likewise, there should be professional training for incumbent heads" (HT9)

> "It should be created an institution to prepare school leaders, or it should be offered a course for aspiring heads in Normal Schools" (HT5)

A certification programme

Some participants (n= 9) considered that in order to have better school leaders a certification programme could be implemented. In addition, participants suggested that it must be considered that the post of headteacher could not be permanent until retirement as it is now. It was pointed out that the appointment could last for a period of

some years, and at the end of the period it could be assessed whether or not the appointment is renewed. Participants expressed that renewal of the post could be under a certification programme in which incumbent heads must accumulate a number of points in several aspects such as continuous training and exams in order to be accountable during the period they hold the post. Typical responses on this matter were the following:

> "It would be much better if posts were not for life, there should be a certification programme, in which I do not know... after 5 years school heads have to be certified and prove they are competent to continue in the post" (ADM2)

> "A certification programme could enable professional development since headteachers could accumulate a number of points in several factors to keep their posts" (HT10)

Post rotation

According to the participants (n= 4) another aspect that could influence positively in the appointment of heads to schools is the rotation of current incumbent heads after a period of years. Participants mentioned that mobility of incumbent heads within a school zone could influence positively the performance of heads and schools since new heads bring with them new ideas and experiences.

From the responses of participants, it is implied that the challenge to lead and manage a new school could enable a professionally refreshment and to move out of their comfort zone and routine in which some heads may get stuck due to the nature of a permanent appointment that is usually spent in one school. The following were responses shared by participants:

> "We school leaders could be moved of schools from time to time, we may stay in a school for 3 or 4 years and then be moved to another one because sometimes motivation is lost and also sometimes bad practices take root" (HT8)

> "It is needed 'movernos el tapete' (Mexican slang meaning 'give us a wake-up call'), we should not be left to fall into a comfort zone. If we are in the same school for many years, it is possible that our job becomes just routine" (HT12).

4.6.4 Summary

The research question was formulated to address from the viewpoint of the participants on how in particular could be improved the current system for appointing school leaders in Mexico, and in general what could be done to appoint better prepared school leaders. All 21 participants offered their views on the interview questions which correspond to questions 7 and 8 of the interview guide, and which encompass the topic addressed by the proposed research question. In the case of interview question 7 emerged as a theme the need to complement the point-based system with the implementation of an interview panel to know more the candidates, and also to check their previous performance. In the case of research question 8, emerged as themes the need to strengthen the preparation of school leaders before and after promotion, the need to implement a certification programme for school leaders, and the convenience of school leaders' rotation after some years in a school.

4.7 Overall Summary

Overall, the 21 participants reflected on the positive aspects of the current system to appoint school leaders in Mexico, its shortcomings, on how it enables talent identification, training and development, and leadership learning; furthermore, they expressed their opinion on how the current system could be improved to appoint better school leaders. The findings of the research questions are summarised in tables 1 to 5 (see Appendix E). There are some positive aspects that could enable the consolidation of the promotion system. However, there are also other aspects that seemingly are hindering the appointment of prepared school leaders. It could be inferred from the

findings that Mexico still needs to do more in relation of talent management, leadership preparation and development in comparison of what is being currently done at international level. The following chapter will enable a deeper reflection on these topics by comparing and contrasting the findings with pertinent literature.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed. The discussion will be presented by addressing each research question in turn. The findings derived from the study related to each research question will be addressed against the background set by the literature review.

5.2 Research Question 1: What are the strengths of the Mexican point-based system to appoint school leaders?

This question intended to gather information on the strengths of the point-based system implemented in Mexico to appoint school leaders. All the 21 participants in this study were interviewed in this regard and the responses received from the interviewees generated five emergent themes: increased trust in the system, equal opportunities for all teachers to aspire for leadership posts, the system promotes academic preparation of teachers during accession, the system promotes engagement in continuous training, and that there is an holistic evaluation of candidates seeking headship. These themes will be discussed in turn in the ensuing part of this section.

Increased trust in the system

The majority of respondents (n= 17) reported that the competitions to appoint school leaders are carried out following the established procedures in fair and legal processes. They asserted that the commission on promotion is a trustful institution which assigns posts in accordance with the law and established procedures. This perceptions contrast with the negative stigma reported in the literature of how Mexican school leaders in the past seemed to be appointed without following the established

norms, and with influence of the teachers union. Raimers (2006) reports that the Mexican teachers union plays a very large role in hiring, retaining and promoting teachers. This influence is seemingly favoured by current educational policy which gives the union the power to make decisions beyond the functions of a union (Hevia et al. 2010). For instance in the Federal Act on State Employees, it is regulated that the union is entitled to decide who is appointed in 50% of new teaching posts. This situation has generated that the entrance to the educational system is based on political affiliation to the union and favouritism in an informal market in which occurs the selling, buying and inheriting of posts (Guevara and Gonzalez, 2004; Barrera, 2009; Aguayo, 2010).

It is acknowledged in Mexico that the teachers union used to have a direct influence in manipulating the appointment of headteachers based on loyalty and active work for the union political interests. The *Escalafon* was formed in the 1930's, and it is reported by Ramos (1976) that in the 30's the union had achieved an extraordinary power, sometimes even more influential than authorities of the ministry of education in the appointment of school leaders. Leadership posts and higher positions within the educational system had become prizes and incentives for those being loyal to the union and politically involved. In this scenario in which leadership posts were incentives was beneficial for the union and the government since the union had more control over its members and the government had a large and organised political backing to remain in power. This is confirmed by Arnaut (1998) who points out that the union has always aimed at a large representation in the positions of leadership as a mean of political control of schools' staff. In this context, the commission on promotion seemed to exist just on paper. For instance, in the State of Chihuahua, Munoz (2005) asserts, based on

an interview with the first governor of opposition in 1992, that there had not been a notification of competition for a promotion to a headship in schools in 14 years. It means that perhaps previous to 1992 headships were assigned by the union and government as previously described. However, it seems that the situation has changed and currently positions are assigned following the procedures established in the joint commission. Even the commission was upgraded in the early 70's, it started functioning in the 90's, so still now the officials are trying to consolidate the trust that the competitions are carried out following the established procedures. This was confirmed by the majority of participants in this study whom most of them pointed out that they have trust that competitions are fair and legal.

This situation has strengthened educational leadership in Mexico because now teachers who pursue leadership posts are persons with the desire to be headteachers contributing to the formation of pupils and improving the conditions of schools they want to lead. This seems has strengthened the perception that now headteachers are persons who by their own merits have reached the post following the established criteria for promotion. Bryan (2008) points out that countries appoint school leaders either by following criteria related to the role of school leaders or by following criteria not related to the post such as kinship, filiations, and favouritism. It seems that Mexico is moving towards the selection of school leaders based on the role and functions of the post at least being congruent and following the established system.

Equal opportunities for all teachers to pursue leadership posts

The study also found a strength with the point-based system in that it promotes equal opportunities for all teachers to pursue a leadership post. This perception should

be understood in the context that preceded the previous non-transparent practices in which regulations and procedures used not to be followed. Most teachers in the country know that a promotion system exists, and that they are entitled to participate if they want to do so. That is probably why it emerged the theme that there are equal opportunities for all teachers given that most participants in this study, incumbent heads and teachers participating in competitions, experienced and are experiencing respectively that any teacher could be promoted. However, it seems that the promotion system has not been completely established state-wide as one participant transferred from another city of the state described that in the educational sector (equivalent to a district) in which she was assigned as the supervisor's assistant none of the 29 school heads were appointed by the *Escalafon*. She considered the *Escalafon* a myth because she knew it existed and she was entitled to compete but in her experience in another city heads are not appointed by the *Escalafon*. This still confirms the negative stigma pointed out by recent literature in relation to how school leaders are appointed in some parts of Mexico. In this regard, Hevia et al. (2010) points out that the appointment of heads in Mexico is based on the relationship that those seeking a leadership post have with the teachers union more than their pedagogical, managerial, and leadership skills. Therefore, the perceptions that this system offers equal opportunities for all teachers to seek headship comes from the experiences that many of the participants in this study have had. However, a participant mentioned that in the city where she was working, heads are not appointed by the promotion system which seems to be also confirmed by recent literature.

The previous theme, ‘increased trust in the system’, is closely related to the perception that the system promotes equal opportunities to pursue headship. The improper implementation of the promotion system in the 80’s and 90’s generated a perception that remained for several years. This situation generated the perception amongst teachers seemingly from the mid 90’s that headship was only for those teachers involved in the union's affairs even though the promotion system existed. This also favoured the neglect of finding ways to strengthening the appointment of better prepared heads. In Mexico, still now, headteachers have basically managerial roles within schools in which central tasks are to control teaching staff following the established norms (Barrientos and Terracena, 2008). It is also important to acknowledge that things have been gradually changing. It seems that the joint commission adheres to follow the established procedures in the appointment of leaders making true the right that all teachers holding a tenure post have to pursue a leadership post.

School leadership in Mexico has struggled with the credibility of how school leaders have been appointed to their post. Teachers used to question the credibility of their school leaders and to wonder if their school heads were really competent for the post. The main effect in these schools was that sometimes teachers were not fully committed in their professional job. A school not led by credible leaders is probably that experience a decrease in their performance. Credibility betters the relationships between leaders and followers, and as a result the improvement of the school. Therefore, if newly appointed heads arrive to the post with a questionable credibility of how they accessed their post or if the commission on promotion do not give real

opportunities to all teachers to access leadership posts in legal and transparent processes there may be a difficulty in their early incumbency since leadership to be effective implies open and trusting collaboration and cooperation with others. School leaders influence others in the accomplishment of goals so that an environment of trust and credibility must be present for a more effective influence. In the case of Mexico it does not mean school heads that are not assigned by the promotion system do not build the schools' staff trust and engage them in improvement processes. They face in some cases resistance of the staff since those headteachers who are assigned by the vertical Escalafon are perceived to have more merit because they got promoted by their own effort. Thus, credibility of school leaders seems to be an important element of leadership enactment in the Mexican case. It seems to matter in large part how they accessed to the post.

The system promotes academic preparation

This study also found that the current system to appoint school leaders promotes academic preparation of candidates seeking headship. Some of the respondents (n= 8) viewed this as a strength. Academic preparation in combination with continuous training accounts for 45% of the final score under this system. It seems that the assumption guiding the value given to preparation is that the more academically prepared newly appointed heads arrive to the post the better headteachers they could be. This seems to be aligned to the common agreement that aspiring school leaders should receive preparation and formation in order to generate peak performance in their roles (Matters, 2005), and that effective educational leadership emanates from school leaders demonstration of knowledge (Thomas and Bainbridge, 2002). It was described in the

findings that some aspiring heads hold two bachelor's degrees plus two masters. This situation was perceived by the participants as strength in the sense that newly appointed heads arrive to the post with a theoretical background to make more informed decisions. This concurs with the claim made by Marzano et al. (2005) that schools must have leaders who make well-informed decisions on the type of work that could have the greatest impact on student achievement. However, an important aspect to consider under the preparation that this system favours is the connection that theoretical knowledge acquired in their preparation has with their practice as school leaders. It could be considered a weak connection given that there is limited available preparation in school leadership as masters' degrees and professional development. Available opportunities are mainly theoretical without opportunities to make meaningful links of theory with practice. The academic preparation that the system promotes should also be seen with a critical perspective in the sense that it should be understood that aspiring heads pursuing one graduate degree after another may be doing so not with the intention of truly acquiring new knowledge and skills which will enhance their professional performance, but they may be doing so with the intention to accumulate more points and get promoted. Another thing to consider is how focused preparation under this system is on educational leadership. In this regard, it seems that preparation promoted in is not focused on strengthening educational leadership given that a small number of participants (n= 5) pursued a master's degree in school management, the preparation available more closely related to educational leadership.

A potentially positive aspect is the emphasis that the system gives to academic qualifications. Since preparation in leadership is not compulsory under the current

system, this opens the possibility to strengthen the appointment of better prepared school leaders by supporting their development and learning during their accession phase. Practical implications would perhaps include making mandatory preparation in leadership for teachers seeking headship. At the same time, another implication for the ministry of education would be to offer preparation in leadership during accession. Therefore, a positive aspect of the current system is the importance given to academic preparation which opens many possibilities in preparation and training of aspiring school leaders.

Wilson (2008) suggests a quadripartite model for academic preparation using two axes relating to an emphasis on practical skills (low to high) and theoretical knowledge (low to high). There are four possible categories emanating from the model: low skills and low theoretical knowledge, high theoretical knowledge and low skills, high skills and low theoretical knowledge, and high skills and high theoretical knowledge. The current system could favour the promotion of prepared school heads. Newly appointees access to the post at least with a master's degree, and in some cases with two masters plus two bachelor's degrees. However, applicants for leadership posts usually hold preparation in different areas of the broad field of education mostly related to teaching and learning. Under the current system of promotion, a master's degree in any other area of education has the same value in points as a master's in educational management. In these circumstances, taking the model of Wilson to analyse the preparation of teachers aspiring headship, it could be located in the quadrant with high theoretical knowledge mainly related to teaching and learning and low skills in leadership. As classroom teachers in which their main role is pedagogical, qualifications

focused on teaching and learning could be located in any of the quadrants depending on the quality of preparation received because it was reported that there are some low quality master's programmes available since the ministry of education does not have a strict control over them.

The system promotes the engaging in professional development

Almost half of the respondents (n= 10) raised the theme 'continuous training' as another strength of the career ladder system. They asserted that this system enables the appointment of trained school leaders mainly in teaching and learning. It is considered that this aspect favours that teachers pursuing a headship post enrol in workshops and courses which give them points for promotion, and also gives them new knowledge and skills. These findings seem to concur with the claim made by Desimone (2009) who points out that professional development increases teachers' knowledge, skills and/or changes their attitudes and beliefs. Professional development was reported to have potential to impact on the quality of teaching and student learning (Howley and Valli, 1999). However, it was also pointed out by some participants (n=4) that the attendance to short courses and workshops seems to be done in some cases with the aim to gather as many points as possible in order to be promoted. If teachers attend courses with the idea of just getting the points, courses probably will not be as meaningful as they could be and probably have a limited impact in their professional performance. This situation raises the debate that probably there is a need to reorient the focus of the assessment of continuous development in order to make it more meaningful and related to educational leadership. Continuing professional development and academic qualifications receive the value of 45% of a participant's application, 25%

and 20%, respectively. This enables the possibility to appoint prepared and trained heads. However, in the case of professional development, the courses and workshops available in leadership seem to be limited. Cordero et al. (2008) point out that aspiring heads in Mexico have accumulated throughout their career a long list of courses and workshops little related with the role of school leaders. It makes us acknowledge that even if professional development was considered a strength, it is still a limited strength since there are not available courses for aspiring heads. There are two courses, The National Course for Headteachers I and II, but only for incumbent heads and they are voluntary and autodidactic without interaction amongst participants. It cannot be denied that the point based system enables professional development in areas of education mainly related to teaching and learning. However, as Bush (2008) points out that headship is a specialist occupation that requires specific preparation; then, there could be offered courses in leadership that prepare aspiring heads during their path to headship being academic preparation and continuing development highly valued under the current system.

Holistic evaluation of candidates pursuing a headship

This study also found that the current system of promotion has as a strength in the holistic evaluation of candidates seeking headship. Some participants (n=7) acknowledged that the evaluation of several aspects could enable the appointment of good headteachers. The *Escalafon* evaluates the following aspects: knowledge (45%), aptitude (25%) from which 20% represents initiative, assessed in the teaching performance report, and 5% other activities, years of service (20%), discipline and punctuality (10%) also assessed in the performance report. All factors and sub factors

are accumulated in a general score expressed in points. The existing system is regarded as positive and may enable the promotion of good school leaders in some aspects. Hart (1992) reported high reliability in the promotion of teachers to other posts when they were evaluated in several aspects in the Utah Teacher Career Ladder Program. This seems to concur with the perceptions of participants in the current study that evaluation of several aspects could enable the appointment of good heads. Peterson el al. (1985) point out that several studies reported significantly greater learning from students whose teachers had a high score in The Florida Performance Measurement System, a system used by school districts for performance appraisal of teachers. Barret (1986) pointed out that the most important characteristic for any successful evaluation system is the validity to measure what it purports measure. An important aspect to consider is how valid the current system is to select the best candidate for headship from a group of applicants. And, also how the current evaluation criteria could predict, if not guarantee, a good professional performance of headteachers once they are nominated to the post based solely on a numeric score. An improvement in the evaluation process could be to focus on the evaluation of leadership potential of applicants. For instance, it could be used a 360-degree feedback model to assess their leadership potential. A positive aspect perceived of the current system is that the assessment of several aspects could enable the promotion of good teachers to headship. However, a change in the mechanism of assessment could favour the appointment of perceived potential leaders.

Summary

The *Escalafon* was created as an initiative to appoint school leaders, and it was created with the assumption that under this model is enabled the appointment of good heads. Overall, in relation to the first research question, it was aimed to explore the strengths from the perspective of the participants of current system. The answer for the research question, the strengths of the system, is presented by highlighting the strengths that emerged in this study. The first positive aspect expressed by the participants is that the trust in its proper implementation has increased following the established regulations and procedures. Also, teachers in Mexico are entitled to participate for a leadership post under the *Escalafon* which was perceived as a positive aspect mainly due to the improper implementation of this system in previous decades. Favouring the academic preparation by giving to them high scores enables participants seeking a promotion to strengthen their theoretical knowledge and skills. Participants also consider that another positive aspect of this system is that teachers seeking a leadership post are continuously engaged in professional development which favours the acquisition of up to date knowledge and new skills. Holistic assessment of participants in competitions favours a comprehensive evaluation in several aspects which could favour the appointment of good heads.

5.3 Research Question 2: What are the shortcomings of the current system to appoint school leaders?

The second research question was designed to explore from the perspective of participants the shortcomings of the *Escalafon*. The interviews conducted with all the 21

respondents raised 8 themes which pointed out towards the particular shortcomings of the system.

The system promotes credentialism

A theme raised by respondents (n=8) was the credentialism that the system promotes given that aspiring heads pursue courses, diplomas and graduate programmes sometimes just with the intention to accumulate points and get promoted. This system gives a strong emphasis on the factor knowledge which accounts for 45% of the total score a participant could get. It seems that there is a high reliance on credentials in determining promotion. According to Jonasson (2006) individuals seek to earn credentials in order to enhance their competitive position in the job market. In this particular case, the market is leadership positions advertised by the commission on promotion. Under this system of promotion, a positive side of credentialism is that applicants are engaged in a continuous preparation process. The not so positive side of credentialism is that participants could enrol in academic programmes just to get a degree and submit it to the commission on promotion and not focusing on getting preparation for their role as future headteachers. This seems to concur with Jonasson (2006) who points out that under credentialism people focus on seeking credentials rather than specific professional knowledge or skills. The reliance on credentials also has enabled the proliferation of low quality graduate programmes, as it was mentioned by an administrator of the *Escalafon*, which are taken into account during competitions since the ministry of education does not have a strict control over these programmes. Some graduate programmes seemingly do not meet the quality requirements for graduate preparation being usually and faster to obtain. Each workshop, course, or

academic degree has a value in points. It was mentioned that sometimes headships have been won by one point difference so that participants try to accumulate as many points as possible relying constantly on academic preparation and professional development to gain points. Therefore, what emerged as a strength in previous research question, the high value that the system promotes in preparation and professional learning, seems to be perceived as a shortcoming especially when qualifications as masters' degrees are from low quality programmes. Moreover, it could be also added, that usually qualifications obtained do not prepare aspirants in educational leadership.

There is lack of previous preparation for the post

Some participants (n= 14) in this study perceived that even with the strong emphasis on academic preparation and continuous training newly appointed heads do not have adequate preparation for the post of headteacher. It was acknowledged that headship is an occupation that requires specific preparation. Participants described they entered into a new role in which they had little experience and knowledge. It is relevant at this point to note that Daresh and Male (2000) comparative study of first year school heads in Britain and the United States in which is pointed out the culture of shock of moving into headship for the first time facing new heads with new tasks and challenges. In this part participants addressed the need to train aspiring heads as a probably mean to favour better performance once appointed to headship. This was also stressed by Sammons et al. (2005) who point out that research on school effectiveness shows that excellent leadership is invariably one of the main factors in high performing schools. Mexico should acknowledge that it is not presently prioritising the strengthening of

school leaders as it happens at international level. The NCSLCS (2009) in England reports that the strengthening of school leadership is a key policy priority for governments worldwide. Since the mid-1990's, training and development of school leaders has been strengthened in many countries either as preparation for entry to the post or to further develop the skills of active heads (Huber, 2008). In a study conducted by Pont et al. (2008) in 22 countries the majority have pre-service training as a pre-requisite for the job. Moorosi and Bush (2011) based on a study exploring leadership preparation and development in Commonwealth countries pointed out that give preparation no attention means that there is a chance that schools are placed in the hands of unqualified personnel.

In Mexico the lack of requirement of leadership preparation probably comes from the assumption that good classroom teachers could be good headteachers. However, it seems that there is a tendency to change gradually the conceptualisation of the role of school heads in Mexico. In 2001 the Mexican government launched a school based management pilot programme in more than two thousand schools and now more than forty thousand, the Quality School Programme. Each school in the programme has to develop a plan to improve teaching, and schools receive a five-year grant to implement the plan. A key element in this programme is the participative approach to lead and manage these schools involving parents, students, teachers, and heads. Under this approach, school heads have the opportunity to experience, act as leaders, and direct change in the direction they considered could improve student attainment. It seems that the programme has been enabling a shift in the conceptualisation of what it implies to be a headteacher in Mexico; a shift from manageralism to leadership. However, only

few schools are participating in this programme. Most schools operate in the traditional model. A precursor that propitiated the change in the conceptualisation and enactment of leadership in these schools was the training and mentoring of incumbent heads. Therefore, prepared heads could become change agents in schools. They could enact the position better equipped to generate improvement if they reach the post trained and prepared.

Headship is not attractive at early stages of teaching

A small number of respondents (n=4) raised another theme in this study with regards to the shortcomings of the Mexican promotion system. The respondents perceived that headship is not attractive at early stages of teachers' careers. This perceived lack of interest of Mexican teachers to pursue a headship post seems to show agreement with the shortages of school leaders reported by Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) who point out that there are shortages in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, and the USA. In the literature it is reported that several factors affect the attractiveness of headship. Draper and McMichael (1998) reported disincentives to apply for a head's post were bureaucracy, paperwork, stress, a degree of isolation in the role, and impact on the quality of life. However, in the present study participants addressed the lack of economic incentives could influence in the decision of not applying for a leadership post. In Mexico the current economic situation seems to affect all professions and teaching seems not to be the exception. There is a horizontal programme of economic incentives called *Carrera Magisterial* composed of different levels that has much more impact on teachers' salary than a headship, and in which it is easier to advance as a classroom teacher than it is as a head. According to participants

in the study, classroom teachers prefer to reach a high level in *Carrera Magisterial* before seeking headship. The programme is composed by four levels in which it is mandatory that teachers stay a number of years before being promoted for the following level (A= 3 years, B= 3, C= 4, and D= 4), so ideally it will take 14 years for a teacher to complete all levels and then think about promotion. However, according to Venegas (2006) just a minority of teachers complete the four levels. This translates with a waiting for at least 6 years if teachers for instance complete two levels before a teacher could think of the possibility to advance for a leadership post hindering early talent identification. Nevertheless, it should not be implied that all teachers want to lead or pursue a leadership post. There are probably those who want to stay in the classroom. But, there are probably those who want to pursue the leadership path but need to wait for several years if they want to increase their income. That raises the debate for the need to probably restructure the programme of incentives as a way to make leadership posts more attractive. This limitation hinders the possibility to establish mechanisms to identify teachers in their first years of teaching who could be developed and promoted as heads early in their careers. Mechanisms should be found to give some opportunities to advance in *Carrera Magisterial* to headteacher posts. This would enable that those teachers who want to pursue a headship position do not wait several years until they had reached a high level in *Carrera Magisterial*.

The assessment of teaching performance seems not to be real

Another theme in this section on the perceived shortcomings by some (n=9) participants is that the assessment of teaching performance of candidates seeking a leadership post seems not to be real. Teaching performance is assessed at the end of

every school year. It is carried out in every school by the headteacher who assesses the teaching staff. Teachers get an annual evaluation report that grants a maximum of 720 points. In this study, it was mentioned that the evaluation of teaching performance is usually not carried out properly. A common practice is to give all teachers the 720 points to avoid unfairness since some schools assess teachers with strictness and follow the procedures, while other schools just give the 720 points to all teachers. This has generated the practice to give all teachers in many schools 720 points making the accurate assessment of teaching practice in many cases unreal. For the evaluation of teaching performance the instrument of assessment considers three general elements: *aptitude, discipline, and punctuality*.

A problem with this assessment is the seemingly lack of collection of comprehensive evidence, the confusion it could cause, and its subjectivity. In the case of the factor aptitude which evaluates teaching practice, the regulations do not mention how often, and from an operational perspective, how the assessment of teaching practice should be carried out. It was reported that teaching is usually evaluated in a subjective way without real observation of practice and without specific guidelines and parameters leaving it to the criteria of school heads. In reality the evaluation of teaching seems to be problematic because good teaching means different things to different people. If teacher assessment is overly subjective, then is likely that dissonance in standards will occur between individual schools. The current promotion system implemented in Mexico seems to match the problems that school districts in several states in the USA had in the 1980's with their career ladder systems when evaluating teaching performance. Brandt (1995) points out that evaluation of teaching practice was

limited and unsystematic in which headteachers typically rated teachers on a number of teaching dimensions after only a few, and, in some cases no classroom visits. It is worth remembering in this part that the Mexican ladder system was established in the 1970's and still is functioning with the same rules and procedures; therefore, the part of evaluating teaching performance seems to need an upgrading.

The assumption leading the evaluation of teaching practice under the ladder system perhaps is that good classroom teachers could be also good school leaders so that good teachers should be rewarded with high scores. Under this implication a logical belief is that excellent teachers as pedagogical leaders could be natural leaders of schools. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) in one of the findings of her study conducted with aspiring heads engaged in a programme of preparation for headship, emerged identity transformation as an important facet of the journey to leadership. In Mexico, since there is not preparation for the role of headteachers, and by taking into consideration for promotion their performance as classroom teachers, it seems that identity transformation in aspiring heads is geared towards becoming a pedagogical leader rather than the contribution of an identity related to school leadership. It may be true that this pedagogical leader could also be a school leader by being knowledgeable and skilled in the practices that are at the heart of schools, teaching and learning. Good teachers may also experiment with an identity transformation towards leadership. Battey and Franke (2008) point out that identity is shaped by the knowledge and skills we acquire and shape the knowledge and skills we seek to develop. Thus, good teachers could develop their identity as leaders by the pedagogical knowledge and the teaching skills they develop during their career. They may vary their responsibilities; work

collaboratively with other teachers, and influence teaching beyond their own classroom. A motivation to pursue a leadership post could arise from the successful teaching practices and from the inner leadership self-conception they developed as teacher's leaders. In this sense, a key element for the role identity transformation from a classroom teacher to the role of a school leader could be positively influenced by the confidence gained as a good teacher. However, direct preparation for the role of headteacher is still very limited in this context.

Ethical and attitudinal performance is not assessed

The study also found that respondents believe that a shortcoming of the current system is the lack of ethical performance evaluation of participants in competitions. Participants in the study seem to acknowledge the importance to evaluate more comprehensively the professional ethical performance of teachers pursuing a leadership post. This seems to be agreeing with the claim made by Campbell (2000) who points out that increased awareness of the ethical dimensions of teaching is essential for enhanced professionalism and improving teaching practice. In this sense, Lovat (1998) recommends the need for the development of professional ethics on the basis that public accountability is necessary for the teaching profession. The evaluation of ethical performance could be considered superficial in the Escalafon given that in the assessment of teaching, the factors discipline and punctuality account together for 10% of the final score and a maximum of 240 points, half of the points each factor. However, the assessment seems general because the factor discipline is assessed following an estimative scale which grants 48 points if teachers observe proper and professional

behaviour a few times, 72 if it is shown with some frequency, 96 very often, and almost always 120.

Proper and professional behaviour seem to be subjective and a very general parameter to assess the performance of a teacher in the aspect of professional ethics. This aspect is judged by the individual interpretations and beliefs of evaluators, in this case school heads. Campbell (2000) argues that whenever we are faced with the need to express a position on issues of moral ethical significance as our held values are really relative and subjective opinions. That is why the *Escalafon* would potentially benefit from a more comprehensive mechanism to assess participants in competitions in their ethical performance. Sparks (2000) proposed the development of a code of ethics in schools in order to be the guidelines for teachers' evaluation since they could give a succinct, clear direction to professional behaviour. It was also described that the current regulations enable the participation in competitions of any teacher regardless that they have had problems in their role as teaching professionals. It could be considered by the commission on promotion the upgrading of regulations to enable the appointment of teachers who have had an acceptable professional and ethical behaviour along with a more comprehensive mechanism to evaluate these aspects.

Ethical professional performance seems to be well regarded for the participants in the current study, and also seems to be a characteristic that good school leaders must have. Teachers seem to be seen as role models for children and young people from their position of influence. The same seems to be true for school leaders who are also seen as role models by pupils and the school's staff. Lumkin (2008) asserts that teachers should display behaviours reflective of moral values such as fairness and

honesty, and adhere to professional codes of conduct due to the influential role they have in the lives of young people. This also could be extended to school leaders in the form of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is thought to be important because of the outcomes it could influence. Brown and Trevino (2006) consider that ethical leaders could be models of appropriate behaviour. De Hartog et al. (1999) cited by Brown and Trevino (2006) point out that survey research has linked perceived leadership effectiveness with perceptions of the leader's honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. Thus, the perceptions of the importance of proper assessment of aspiring heads in the ethical professional performance seem to be shared and considered important by research.

The system needs more transparency

The study also found that some respondents (n= 8) believe that the system needs more transparency. Some participants mentioned they have witnessed other unhappy applicants with the score they get. These findings seem to be contradictory in the sense that one of the strengths is attributed to the increased trust in the system. However, this theme closely related to trust, also emerged as one of the shortcomings of the programme. As much as it could seem a contradiction, this situation is understandable because the commission on promotion still carries the negative stigma inherited by non-transparent practices of the past. Similar findings were reported by Slater et al. (2006) in a comparative study carried out in the state of Texas in the USA and Sonora in Mexico in which they compared the processes to appoint school leaders in both states. In relation to the *Escalafon*, it is reported that there is little trust in the *Escalafon* because no one really knows if the people appointed really have the greatest

number of points. They further assert that the applicants for headship do not trust the system and suspect favouritism. Trust and transparency could be achieved if the commission on promotion establishes mechanisms that enable applicants to know how their files and those of other participants are evaluated. One participant proposed the creation of a website in which is shown in detail how the participants are assessed without revealing their identity. It seems that to consolidate the trust that has been gradually gained, more transparent mechanisms are needed in order to guarantee that competitions are perceived as fair and impartial.

Information of vacant posts is not available on time

It also was perceived by some participants (n=4) that the information of vacant posts do not arrive on time to all schools and to teachers. In Mexico all teachers holding a tenure post are entitled to participate for a leadership post, or if they do not want to participate at least they should be informed of the posts that are available. Teachers in Mexico are aware of this right that is why respondents in this study considered it a shortcoming that the information about vacant posts does not arrive on time especially for those interested to participate in competitions. According to one administrator of the programme, the traditional way to advertise posts is via an official document which is written by the joint commission, then, the document is sent to the offices of the educational sector in which the post is available, after that the document is given to the school supervisors who take it to each school. Finally the school head takes the document to each teacher. It seems that the traditional way to advertise posts is bureaucratic and time consuming. It was also mentioned by a headteacher that there have been occasions that the advertising documents arrive one or two days before

competitions giving little time for applicants to gather all the documents they need. An administrator mentioned that a website has been created to upload the current vacant posts. One thing with the website is that seemingly favours teachers in urban contexts in which there are more possibilities for internet connection compared to the rural areas in which teachers still rely on the traditional way.

The system is ruled by an obsolete set of regulations

Many of the respondents (n=17) raised another theme in the shortcomings of the *Escalafon*, they considered the regulations guiding promotions to be obsolete. The regulations were published in 1973 in the Official Gazette of the Federation and still are the same that are used for the promotion to leadership posts. Participants in the study did not make any reference to specific articles or part of the regulations. However, they mentioned the situations that, according to their perceptions, could change. The majority of the perceptions pointed out by the participants belong to Part 5, factors of promotion. In this part are described the values in percentages and the limit in points of the factors considered for promotion: knowledge (45%) with a limit of 1080 points, aptitude (25%) with 600 points, years of service (20%) with 480, and discipline and punctuality (10%) and 240 points. The articles in this part specify how the points must be assigned in all the factors and subfactors considered for promotion.

A concern raised by the participants is in relation to the limit of points that are awarded in the factor knowledge. This factor is composed by two subfactors: preparation with 20% and professional development with 25%. Taking into consideration both subfactors, the factor knowledge could award 1080 points as maximum score. Some participants in the study (n=3) mentioned that due to the

emphasis that the promotion system gives to qualifications and professional development many applicants could pass the 1080 points. Participants considered it a contradiction in the sense that having a limit in preparation and professional development sends the message that learning has a limit. This situation could discourage them to be continuously engaged in professional development because once they have reached the limit in points other courses are not taken into account.

The upgrading of the current regulations could focus on the promotion to leadership posts to those teachers who show readiness for leadership. Readiness could refer to the degree to which aspiring heads have the necessary knowledge and skills for undertaking a leadership responsibility. This implies that the educational system provides opportunities for aspiring heads in preparation, training and development, and also in the implementation of new mechanisms and standards to assess leadership potential of aspiring heads by the commission on promotion. Regulations and mechanisms to appoint school heads could be aligned to new approaches and practices that have proved to be effective at international level. However, for the upgrading of the rules guiding the promotions, officials at state or local level are unable to do it since the promotion system is established at national level and the regulations, procedures, and organisational structures are the same in the 32 states of the country. This centralised structure enables the modification of the rules only at central level. Officials at local levels could only voice their opinions but modifications can only come from the central offices in Mexico City. It could be promoted a decentralisation of the commission on promotion and give more autonomy to the commissions at local levels.

Summary

In relation to the research question it was intended to explore the shortcomings in order to generate a critical discussion. The research question is answered by addressing the shortcomings of the system expressed by the participants of the study. The responses from the respondents in this section seem to address the need to restructure the system implemented in Mexico to appoint school leaders if it is intended to promote better prepared leaders. As the system gives high value to academic preparation and professional development, it was perceived that this high emphasis promotes credentialism in which aspiring school leaders pursue courses, diplomas and graduate programmes sometimes just with the intention to accumulate points. The lack of preparation for the post emerged as an important shortcoming even with the strong emphasis on academic preparation and continuous training. The difficulty to access the economic incentives available from their position as heads seems to be a factor that does not favour that some teachers pursue leadership posts in their early stages of their career. The evaluation of teaching performance was perceived of not being real. This factor is assessed in every school, and a common practice is to give the highest score to most teachers because there are not mechanisms to know if other schools evaluate teachers with the required rigour. There is also a concern regarding the evaluation of ethical performance of candidates pursuing headship. The current procedures seem to be superficial and subjective. Participants also considered that the system still needs more transparency because some of them mentioned that have witnessed some unhappy applicants for the score they get. In this aspect, participants consider that there could be implemented mechanisms to guarantee that applicants know how their files

and those of other participants are evaluated. Another shortcoming expressed is that sometimes the information of vacant posts does not arrive timely to schools giving little time to apply. Finally, it emerged that there is a need to upgrade some of the regulations. This could offer new venues in the criteria for appointment and the development of aspiring heads.

5.4 Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of the participants in the study of how the current system to appoint school heads enables or does not enable the promotion of prepared school leaders?

The third research question was formulated to acquire the perceptions of the 21 interviewees in this study of how the system enables or does not enable the promotion of prepared heads. The research question was divided in two different categories –the system enables or does not enable the appointment of well-prepared school heads. Departing from the assumption that a prepared headteacher could be a person equipped with the knowledge, skills and identity to create a shared vision in the school to foster student learning. These themes will be discussed in turn in the ensuing part of this section.

1. The system enables the appointment of prepared school heads

a) Some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* may be good

Some respondents (n=6) in this study considered that some headteachers promoted through the *Escalafon* may be considered good. This was based on the perceptions of the four administrators and two incumbent heads who regarded the leaders appointed by the *Escalafon* as good. A thing to be considered is in relation to the concept of a 'good headteacher' since participants did not mention excellent,

exemplary, competent or well-prepared. A good headteacher could be considered a person who has an acceptable performance, just stabilises institutions, or just follows the established norms, but not someone who promotes excellence in teaching and learning. This seems to concur with the claim made by Barrientos and Taracena (2008) who acknowledges that Mexican headteachers have basically managerial roles within schools in which a central task is to control the teaching staff and ensure they follow the established norms. And, also with the claim made by Canales and Benzies (2009) who point out that the main roles of Mexican heads are managerial. This could be supported with national and international evaluations of student outcomes. For instance, in 2009 Mexico ranked 49 in reading, math and science respectively out of the 66 countries that took the PISA test (OECD, 2009). These modest results have been continuously confirmed by national standard exam as well. This situation of modest results is not to blame school leaders since student learning is influenced by a complex interaction of factors. However, PricewaterhouseCooper (2007), a UK study, pointed out that it has been demonstrated that after the classroom teacher, school leaders are the next most influential factor in improving student outcomes.

In the case of the good headteachers that the system may promote it could be possible that other factors not related to the system of promotion have an influence in their promotion, for instance the appointment of experienced teachers, successful deputy headships experiences, and temporary leadership posts. The experience of being involved in leadership roles, or being valued as pedagogical leaders during their period as classroom teachers could have an influence in their perceptions of their own leadership capacity. Teachers who perceive themselves as leaders can adapt their

teaching performance, improve student learning, and help transform their school (Jantzi and Leithwood, 1996). Robertson and Stranchan (2001) point out that teachers' efficacy beliefs developed by their experiences in their path towards leadership seem to be influential in the appointment of competent heads. Another thing to be considered is the indirect experiences that could favour the promotion of good heads in Mexico are not experienced by all the teachers promoted to a leadership post.

b) Promotion of experienced teachers

This study also found that the *Escalafon* enables the appointment of experienced school leaders. Many respondents (n=8) reported that having taught in several schools, and in different contexts expanded and deepened their understanding of teaching, learning, and in some cases managing schools. The majority of teachers in Mexico start their teaching service in rural areas; then, usually, after few years, they are transferred to more accessible places or to the urban context. In the case of participants in the present study, all incumbent heads had worked in at least 3 different schools before being promoted. Some of them have held other positions in the educational system e.g. pedagogical advisers or union officials. It seems that some teachers that pursue a leadership post could develop a positive identity of themselves as a result of experiences acquired in different contexts throughout their career. This may be aligned to the role-identity transformation as forwarded by Browne-Ferrigno (2006) where professional growth is indicated by the mindset shift of classroom teachers to that of an educational leader. Lieberman and Friedrich (2008) found that many teachers grow into leadership roles by developing their own teaching expertise. They further assert that such teachers are motivated, hard-working; and become models for others who seek

their advice. Werner's (1998) points out that the development of leadership identity is an ongoing process of lived experiences in specific contexts. It seems that the experiences teachers have acquired while teaching in different contexts and schools and holding different posts in the educational system perhaps enables that gradually develop a self-belief of a potential leader. However, in these experiences they may have needed to change, adapt, or adopt a new identity as they moved between contexts especially when they held making decision positions some probably could do it, but it may be problematic for others. Respondents also commented on how the opportunities they had to teach in several schools enabled them to observe several incumbent headteachers. This could favour leadership learning from direct observation and interaction with incumbent heads. This perception seems to resonate the findings by Browne-Ferrigno (2003) in which, aspiring heads interaction with serving heads was judged to positively influence role-conceptualisation, initial socialisation and role transformation. Also in England, Rhodes et al. (2009) have identified that participants undertaking the NPQH as precursor to their transition to headship highly rated meetings with experienced heads.

c) Successful deputy headships

The study also found that the current system could enable the promotion of good heads by successful deputy headship experiences of applicants. In the promotion system, a classroom teacher gets promoted to a deputyship and a deputy headteacher to a headship. Sometimes classroom teachers could be promoted to headship posts when in competitions there are no deputy heads participating. However, this situation could limit experience in leadership and hence preparation for those who pursue

headship. From some participants (n=8) point of view, a successful deputy headship facilitated them to strengthen their learning on their journey to headship. This seems to concur with the claim made by Harris et al. (2003) who point out that the time spent as a deputy head offers a preparation and entry point to headship. Some participants mentioned that in their deputy headship post they had a gradual approximation to the post of headteacher. Their experiences as deputies in some cases were chances to work and interact with parents and teaching staff, and also they were given the freedom and support of their headteachers to coordinate and implement projects in schools. Pellicer et al. (1990) reported that deputy heads who had a stronger leadership role demonstrated higher levels of motivation, self-efficacy and the desire to pursue a headship post. Deputyships seem to favour the pursuing to headship when deputies are given a degree of freedom and autonomy to implement and coordinate projects geared to school improvement as it was described by some participants. In this instance, leadership development seems to be favoured when deputy heads have the opportunity to work closely with headteachers that promote distributed and shared leadership. Research findings have shown that effective leadership needs no be located in the person of one leader but can be distributed within the school (Harris and Muijs, 2002). Thereafter, these schools could improve with redistribution of power among school staff, and also contribute to the development of emergent leaders. In these schools deputy heads are emergent leaders who share responsibility for leadership with the headteacher and other teachers (Muijs and Harris, 2003). However, there were also other participants who did not consider their experience in a deputy position meaningful for their preparation to headship. They described that they did not make decisions and

were totally uninvolved in the managing of the school, and sometimes they were not even clear which their functions as deputy heads were. This could lead to an inadequate mastery a limited self-efficacy, limited preparation, and hence limited belonging to the leadership profession. This seems to concur with the findings in the study conducted by Ribbins (1997) who demonstrated that a large number of headteachers found their experience as a deputy frustrating or disappointing because of the lack of leadership influence they felt had within the school. Therefore, a source of good heads in Mexico could come from a successful experience in a deputy headship in which they have the opportunity to interact meaningfuly with parents, teaching staff and students in environments of distributed leadership rather than the simple accumulation of points.

2. The system does not enable the appointment of prepared school heads

a) Headteachers are only appointed based on a high score in points

The study found that some participants (n=14) considered that the current system does not enable the appointment of well-prepared heads given that promotion is just based on the accumulation of points. Even though applicants are assessed on different factors, participants in the study considered that basing a promotion only on the accumulation of points is a narrow criterion if it is expected that schools are to be led and managed by good heads. The *Escalafon* evaluates applicants in four factors: preparation (45%), years of service (20%), aptitude (25%), and discipline and punctuality (10%), the last two factors are evaluated in the teaching evaluation report by the headteacher in the school that applicants teach. It seems that under the current system, the factors that have the highest influence for a promotion are preparation and

years of service. However, out of the four factors evaluated only preparation and professional development seem to be relevant and the only applicants could really influence if they want to get a promotion. For instance, the factors aptitude, and discipline and punctuality evaluated in the teaching performance report seem not to have a determinant effect for a promotion since applicants perhaps usually get the highest score (720 points). In the case of the factor years of service, applicants do not have any control over it given that applicants get 16 points for every year of service. It seems that high scores are based on the effort that applicants exert to strengthen their preparation and in a distinct way from the points applicants get for the years of service. Although even with the strong emphasis on preparation, it seems that preparation for leadership is not prioritised in the current system that is why high scores in points are not a guarantee that newly appointed heads will be competent heads. Other practices could be implemented to complement the current system, especially those geared towards the strengthening the preparation for leadership. In relation to the factor preparation, Vallejo (2006) comments that the *Escalafon* has generated an economy of points in which several institutions, public and private, offer many courses and degrees in order that applicants for a promotion could get as many points as possible at the lowest cost, time and effort. In the current system it seems that high scores that applicants get are mainly based on the factor preparation which seems to need to be reoriented to preparation on leadership.

b) Deficiency in preparedness in leadership, management, and human relationships

Another theme that emerged under the category that the system does not enable the appointment of well-prepared heads was that some respondents (n=12) considered

that newly appointed heads reach the post deficiently prepared in leadership, management and people skills. According to participants, they considered that at the beginning of their post as headteachers they lacked preparation in the aforementioned areas which had an effect in their early headship incumbency. Some participants commented that they did not know how to engage and motivate the teaching staff. They considered they lacked those skills at the beginning of their incumbency, which later after few years in the post, were able to develop those skills as consequence of their experiences. Some of them mentioned that in their early headship they used to be criticised by the staff as leaders that lacked leadership, and now after some years have passed, and after trial and error, they have mastered those skills and feel more competent as heads. They also mentioned that when they were appointed as new heads they felt as if they had entered a totally new job. For instance, they mentioned that they had to do paperwork and fill many new forms without training. Another aspect in which incumbents felt unprepared was in the application of regulations, rights and obligations for the school staff. Incumbent heads also felt unprepared in conflict management and in the dealing with difficult situations where adults such as parents and the school staff were involved.

Reynolds (1991) points out that research on school effectiveness shows that excellent leadership is invariably one of the main factors in high performing schools. It has been demonstrated that after the classroom teacher, school leaders are the most influential factor in improving students' outcomes (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2007). Even with the high scores applicants get for their qualifications and professional development, participants considered that newly appointed heads arrive to the post ill-prepared. The

activities that are at the heart of educational endeavours, teaching and learning, seem to be influenced by the presence of a well-prepared head. In a study conducted by Rourke and Hartzman (2009) competent heads had an effect on the improvement of teaching practices in which teaching became more meaningful for students. The participants in the study described how in their early headship they faced many challenges and problems derived of their new role. That is why the current system of promotion in Mexico could strengthen the preparation of applicants pursuing leadership posts. The participants in the study described how in their early headship they faced many challenges and problems derived of their new role. This raises the debate to look for mechanisms under the current system to include preparation in leadership in the evaluation of applicants for leadership posts.

c) Lack of practical meaningful experiences in leading and managing

Some participants (n=8) expressed their concern that in general newly promoted heads arrive to the post with insufficient practical experiences in leadership and management. In research question 3 emerged the themes ‘successful deputy headships’ and ‘experienced teachers’, and also in research question 4 the theme ‘temporary leadership posts’ as indirect ways to enable the appointment of well-prepared heads. It could be inferred that through those experiences applicants seeking headship had the opportunity to engage in real situations to develop and practice their leadership. Although some of the incumbent heads participants in the study had the benefit of having practical experiences through those indirect ways, in general newly appointed heads usually arrive to the post with little or patchy preparation and practical experiences in leadership and management. In relation to practical experiences, Kolb

and Boyatzis (1999) point out that exposure to concrete elements of real-world practice increase a leader's ability to contemplate, analyse and plan strategies for action. In this sense, in Mexico preparation for headship in educational leadership is not required and mandatory before taking up the position, there is no induction either for those who recently have taken up the position, and in the case of practising school heads, there are just two short courses which are voluntary. In countries in which there is a pre-service compulsory training candidates seeking headship have the opportunity to have real experiences in leading and managing through the preparation programmes offered. Usually in these programmes participants have the opportunity to engage in real situations to practice and develop their leadership through internships or similar processes. In this regard, Davies et al. (2005) point out that most adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge and problem solving strategies within authentic settings. Therefore, practical experiences for applicants seeking headship in Mexico could be obtained with the adding to the current system a mandatory preparation programme for applicants in which in a combination with the theoretical part could be a practical part in the form of internships or some similar mechanisms.

Summary

This research question was explored on a balanced perspective trying to identify how the current system of promotion enables or does not enable the promotion of prepared school heads. In relation to the aspects that enable the appointment of prepared heads, it was emerged that some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* could be considered good in which other experiences as successful deputyships or

temporary leadership posts perhaps have an influence in the promotion of good heads. The term "good heads' needs to be taken with reserve given that in the literature good heads in Mexico are considered those who follow the established norms within a managerial administrative approach of leadership. The promotion of experienced teachers was also considered a positive aspect of this system given that teaching in several schools and in different contexts enables that applicants bring to the position a wide repertoire of experiences. Successful deputyships in environments of distributed leadership were also a source of promotion of good heads. On the other hand, in relation to the aspects that does not enable the appointment of well-prepared heads, it emerged that basing the promotion on just the accumulation of points is a narrow criterion if it is expected that schools are to be led and managed by competent heads. In the same vein, it emerged that newly appointed heads usually reach the post deficiently prepared in leadership, management and people skills even with the strong emphasis on preparation. And, also closely related to the previous theme, it emerged that new heads in general arrive to the post with likely insufficient practical experiences in leadership and management.

5.5 Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of participants in the study regarding how the current system to appoint school leaders enables leadership talent identification, training and development for leadership, and leadership learning?

1. Leadership talent identification

This study also sought the perceptions of the respondents as to how the current system to appoint school leaders in Mexico enables leadership talent identification,

training and development in leadership, and leadership learning. Hence the fourth research question was directed to this end. As a matter of fact, this research question generated enough responses to raise 7 themes, some of them related to the findings of other research questions pertaining the need in preparation and training in leadership before promotion.

a) Informal talent identification

Talent identification is a part of leadership development that has been given the necessary importance at international level that is why this study also sought the perceptions on how the identification of future leaders is carried out in Mexico. The four administrators of the commission on promotion mentioned that there is no talent identification programme either in the commission or in the educational system. It was pointed out that potential leaders are identified informally by the supervisors of schools. Rothwell (2005) acknowledges that the adoption of a laissez faire attitude towards the identification of future school leaders is irresponsible. In this regard, Barber et al. (2010) mention that high performing educational systems identify potential leaders early and have mechanisms for developing their talents over time. For instance, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) observed that some countries and educational systems are now identifying leadership potential in the first years of teaching; that is the case of England's Accelerate to Headship Tomorrow's Heads and the Singapore Talent Identification Programme. Both programmes aim to enable those with the highest potential to move rapidly to headship. In the case of Mexico there is no programme to identify potential leaders; however, the identification is carried out by the school supervisor when there are temporary headships available and need to be fulfilled

usually by a member of the teaching staff. This approach to identifiying leaders seem to be reactive just to fill temporary vacant posts rather than being proactive. This could also lead to a homophilic approach to identify potential leaders in which the supervisors could choose heads beacase they share similar beliefs, perceptions, ideological and educational positions. This homophilic approach needs to be taken with reserve because heads are seemingly expected to enact managerial rather than leadership roles. The identification of candidates to lead the school for a short period of time in extraordinary circumstances enables that some of them after their experiences in temporary posts decide to pursue a permanent leadership post. Fink (2005) states that once potential leaders have been identified there should be found ways to attend their development. In Mexico this seem not happen they are only identified to solve an immediate problem of vacant posts for a period of time, but not as potential leaders that could be developed for future permanent positions. It is important to point out that probably not all potential leaders want to be leaders, but there could be mechanisms that enable the development of those identified and with the desire to pursue a leadership post.

b) Temporary leadership posts

This study found that in Mexican primary school potential leaders are identified indirectly through temporary leadership posts. Seven of the incumbent heads out of the twelve that took part in the study identified that they emerged from an informal process of talent identification in which temporary leadership posts were determinant in their pursual of headship. Four of the participants in the study were promoted as temporary headteachers due to extraordinary circumstances in the school they were teaching, two

other were invited from the schools' supervisors as their assistants, and one of the participants was promoted as a temporary deputy head. Draper and McMichael (1998) assert that experience in a temporary leadership post has been found to be influential in subsequent career decision-making encouraging some to seek further promotion. This seems to have been the case of some participants in the present study which could have developed their self-belief and confidence in their leadership capacity because they were given opportunities to engage in the practice of leadership.

New incumbents in temporary leadership posts are likely to find opportunities for new experiences and leadership learning. For instance, in a small study of ten secondary headteachers conducted by Draper and McMichael (1998) the three participants who had occupied an acting position before becoming heads mentioned that the opportunity in a temporary leadership post seem to have provided a period of protected responsibility and brought to light some of the pleasures of the job. In another study conducted by Draper and McMichael (2003) with 63 acting heads nearly all felt that temporary headships offered a chance to formalise themselves with headship and to take on new responsibilities. However, on the other hand, Gardner (1988) described his experience in an acting primary headship and suggested that it was narrow and limited. Gardner described his experiences as 'keeping the show on the road'. He commented that he was not expected to initiate serious change and had to keep the organisation running smoothly, since the 'real' headteacher was due to return. West's (1987) study of seven acting headteachers also found acting posts offered a caretaking rather than full headship role. In the present study, it seems that the experiences in a temporary leadership post enabled that most incumbent headteachers participants in

this study decided to pursue headship after temporary posts. This informal way of talent identification in Mexico could be strengthened by the reorientation of the assignment to temporary leadership posts in which there could be created a pool of potential acting heads who receive development and support before being appointed.

c) Headship in small schools

Headship in small schools is another finding of the present study in relation to how the identification of future school leaders happens. Some of the participants (n=7) considered that teaching headships enable the identification of future leaders because many teaching heads later in their career show interest in seeking a headship post in larger schools, and they enrol in masters' degrees to later compete for a leadership post. In Mexico many of the teachers who start their teaching career are commonly assigned to teach in rural areas in small schools. These schools are composed usually by a staff of no more than three teachers and less than 120 pupils. Under these circumstances, it is very common that many new teachers assume the role of teaching headteacher. The process to assign these positions is informal, as it occurs with the assignment of temporary headships in larger schools, the school's supervisor chooses among the staff the person who could act as the teaching head. Usually the persons proposed by the supervisor seem to be teachers who show commitment, responsibility, and hard work and are accepted by their co-workers. Bell and Morrison (1988) recognised that teaching heads express a clear commitment to teaching, a strength in interpersonal relationships, and an ability to operate a collegial style. Being appointed as teaching heads raises their self-belief, and they have the opportunity to develop their

leadership skills and probably make the decision as to whether or not pursue headship at a larger school.

However, teaching heads in small schools in Mexico seem to be inadequately trained and prepared for the post as it seems to be the case at international level. For instance, in the findings reported by Wilson and McPake (1999) many of the 22 headteachers interviewed in their study in Scotland reported inadequate preparation and training to help them to resolve the conflicting demands that teaching and managing a school brings. Some of the research addressing this (e.g Galton, 1993; Wallace, 1988; Way, 1989) suggests that both managing and teaching in smaller schools are different from that undertaken in larger schools. Leading a school and teaching at the same time require the specific knowledge of each activity and the development of skills needed to keep an adequate balance. Dunning (1993) summed up this 'double load' as the conflict between teaching, and the demands of leadership. Some countries seem to be addressing the need for preparation and training for teaching heads e.g. England (NCSL, 2006), Australia (Clarke, 2002), Finland (Kalaoja and Pietarinen, 2001), and Norway (Kvalsund, 2001). In Mexico has been identified that some teaching heads may pursue headship at a larger school after their experience as teaching heads. There could be implemented preparation for these heads in order to support them in their dual role as teachers and heads, and also to strengthen their preparation in their path to leadership in a larger school. Moorosi and Bush (2011) suggest that preparation is an important step in the right direction toward an improved leadership learning experience.

2. Training and development for leadership

a) Limited available preparation in leadership

In relation of how the current system enables the preparation and training in leadership, a finding was that there is available preparation and professional training in school management. There is a master's programme in school management offered at a local university in the state of Chihuahua, and also short courses offered as professional development to incumbent heads by the ministry of education. Of the 12 incumbent heads that participated in the study, 3 have completed the aforementioned master's programme and 1 is currently enrolled. In the case of teachers seeking headship, 2 have completed the master's programme and 2 are currently enrolled in it. The participants who completed the programme regarded it as good in their preparation. There are also two non-compulsory short courses in the form of professional development, The National Course for Headteachers part I and II only for incumbent heads. It seems that in Mexico exists the possibility to appoint better prepared school leaders given that there are academic programmes focused on the preparation and training of heads if not in leadership at least in management. Therefore, there could be a reorientation in the *Escalafon's* regulations to make the training and preparation in school leadership mandatory. It seems that in preparation of school leaders Mexico is being left behind by countries that offer preparation at all stages of a headteacher career e.g. preservice, induction, and inservice. Pont et al. (2008) reported that some countries have all types of training running in parallel e.g. England, Finland, Northern Ireland, Israel and Slovenia, while others provide at least one or two.

b) Preparation in leadership is not mandatory

The study also found that under the *Escalafon*, preparation for leadership and management is not mandatory. The administrators of the programme observed that the

current regulations do not make mandatory or give more points to those participants who have specific preparation in school management the preparation available most closely related to leadership. Preparation in school management is not rewarded with higher scores than preparation in other areas of education. Even though the administrators in the study acknowledge that making leadership preparation compulsory would favour the appointment of more competent heads, they indicate that they do not have the power to implement these changes since regulations and guidelines for promotion are applied at national level. This situation supports a theme that emerged in research question no. 2 in which indicated the need to upgrade the current regulations to contemplate preparation in leadership as requirement for promotion. Internationally the training of aspiring heads recognise a concern to prepare and equip them with the theoretical, methodological and technical knowledge and skills to better accomplish their job (Brundrett and Crawford, 2008; Bush, 2008; Brundrett et al. 2006). In Mexico, Zorrilla and Peres (2006) report that aspiring heads do not receive training during their accession in order to face the complex challenges to lead and manage a schools. Slater et al. (2006) reported that there are several programmes in higher institutions in Mexico that focus on educational management. However, it seems that the existence of these programmes may not have an impact on the preparation of aspiring heads because it is not mandatory to have previous training specific for the post under the current system. In this regard, in the current version of the *Escalafon*, a master's degree in school management has the same value in points that a master's in other areas of education. This situation has generated as reported by Cordero et al. (2008) that aspiring and also

incumbent heads in Mexico have accumulated throughout their professional career a long list of courses, workshops and qualifications little related to the role of school head.

c) Expressed need in leadership preparation before promotion

A core finding in the present study is the expressed need to enable preparation in leadership before promotion. It also emerged in other research questions e.g. R.Q 2 and R.Q 3 themes closely related to the need for preparation and training in leadership. This need was unanimously claimed by the 21 participants in the study as needed in the current system of promotion. There is evidence from research that school leaders influence the activities that are at the heart of educational endeavours such as teaching and learning. Owings et al. (2005) reported that it has been demonstrated that after the classroom teacher, school leaders are the next most influential factor in improving student outcomes. Beteille et al. (2009) verified how in schools with effective school leaders, teachers improve their practices at a greater pace than those with less effective leadership. In this regard, Rourke and Hartzman, (2009) noted that competent heads have had an effect on the improvement of teaching practices. The empirical evidence, then, suggests the need to prepare and train candidates pursuing headship and also those who are already in the post in order to equip them with the theoretical, methodological, and technical knowledge and skills to better accomplish their job. The NCLSCS (2009) in England asserts that good leaders are pivotal to school improvement and make a difference to behaviour, engagement and outcomes.

The participants in the current study regarded the job of a headteacher as demanding, complex, and different from the job that classroom teachers have to perform. All participants in the study considered the need to implement preparation in

leadership and management prior to being promoted by the Escalafon. In this regard at international level, Leithwood and Day (2007) point out that governments around the world are devoting unparalleled resources to develop aspiring school leaders, as well as those who are already in the role. Concerning this, Huber (2008) recognised that since the mid-1990's training and development for school leaders have been introduced or strengthened in countries committed in the improvement of school leadership. In this sense, Mexico does not provide training and preparation to headteachers neither before taking up the position nor during incumbency. This situation suggests a need to implement preparation programmes for aspiring and incumbent heads and reorient the requirements for promotion in which preparation in educational leadership could be a central aspect.

3. Leadership learning

a) Learning to lead occurs in the post

The findings of this study with regard to how Mexican heads learn to lead indicated that learning to lead and manage a school occurs mainly in the post. The majority of participants in the study (n=19) considered that the real learning to lead and manage a school occurs basically on the job. As it has been previously addressed, the lack of specific training and preparation in leadership means that newly appointed heads need to develop their skills and acquire the technical and methodological knowledge of what it implies to lead and manage a school in their job. This seems to concur with the claim made by Leithwood et al. (1992) who reported that on-the-job experience could be a primary source of school leaders learning. This type of learning could to be meaningful since learning occurs while headteachers engage in their daily

work by doing and reflecting on their experiences. In this regard, Lieberman (2004) suggests that the concept of leaning-in-practice is viewed as a foundation to the development of leadership skills and knowledge. This type of learning could be also defined as informal learning in which leadership learning occurs from the everyday encounters and experiences of a given context. In the Mexican case, the issue is that leadership learning relies mainly on the experiences and knowledge that headteachers acquire during their career as classroom teachers and in their post as incumbent heads. This supports the need for offering preparation before new heads are promoted in order to make easier and more meaningful the integration of the new knowledge and experiences they acquire once in the post, and make a faster progression from the professional identity of classroom teacher to that of a school head.

Summary

This research question intended to explore how the current system of promotion enables talent identification, training and development for leadership, and leadership learning. The answer to this research question is summarised in this paragraph. It is evident from the findings of this question that in relation to talent identification there is not a specific programme to identify potential leaders. The identification of future headteachers in Mexico happens indirectly when classroom teachers are assigned to temporary leadership posts or are assigned to teaching headships. In some cases these experiences as acting heads enable that teachers continue their academic preparation in order to compete for a headship post through the *Escalafon*. In relation to preparation and training for leadership, the emergent themes were that there is limited available preparation in school management. However, even though there is training available, it

also emerged that under the current system preparation in leadership and management is not mandatory. Finally, for training and preparation for leadership, a core finding was the unanimous concern of the 21 participants that teachers pursing headship need to receive training and preparation in leadership before promotion. With regards to leadership learning, it emerged that Mexican primary heads learn to lead and manage schools basically in the post.

5.6 Research Question 5: How could the process to appoint school leaders be improved?

The 21 respondents were asked how they would like to see the process to appoint school leaders by the joint commission to be improved. The aim of this research question was to gather the perceptions from the participants so as to provide some insight to the administrators towards improving the promotion system. The responses to the interview questions related to this question generated two categories: improvement of the point based system, and how could be made possible the appointment of better prepared school leaders. In the case of the first category the responses were mainly related to the answers for R.Q 2, the weaknesses of the system, the only theme that raised as unique in this regard was the need to implement a panel to interview candidates for leadership posts. In relation to how better prepared school leaders could be appointed for the Mexican context, three themes emerged in this regard: a certification programme, strengthen the preparation of school leaders, and post rotation.

1. Improvement of the point-based system

Panel to interview candidates for leadership posts

The themes raised by some of the respondents (n=9) was a need to implement a panel to conduct interviews and check evidence of previous performance of applicants.

The way school leaders are appointed under the current system is through a public competition in which applicants are assessed in different aspects. Applicants accumulate points in every factor and then are added up in a final score. The person with the highest score is the one who gets the post. Through this way of appointment, there is no interaction of applicants neither with the staff of the commission on promotion nor with any member of the school where the post is vacant, and only the files of the applicants are assessed for promotion. This way of appointment does not enable a deep interaction with the applicants in order to know them better with regards to how they could face the challenges to lead the school and which could be the plan to be implemented if they are appointed as heads. It was considered that a complement to the current system could be the assessment of applicants by a panel composed of parents, teaching staff, and educational authorities. In an international study about the recruitment and selection of heads Huber and Pashiards (2008) researched countries in which the approach to school leader selection responsibilities lying with the schools and others where the ministry of education is in charge. In all countries that participated there is a selection body that assesses candidates. The assessment criteria vary from country to country; however, a common practice is to interview applicants for a leadership post by the selection body. Interviews give information relating to the work history of candidates, education and training, motivations, and the type of projects they could implement in the school they want to lead. The findings in this study seem to consider the need to include interviews as part of the selecting procedures to appoint heads in Mexico. Huber and Pashiard's (2008) also suggest that selection processes should use a wide range of diagnostic means for example tests instruments for

attributes and traits, and also for cognitive competences, simulation exercises and observations in real situations for skills and abilities, biographical documents and references for past performance.

The administrators of the programme acknowledged that heads in Mexico will continue being appointed by a career merit system given that it is ruled that public servants are to be promoted to higher posts by these systems and teachers are considered public servants. It was acknowledged that the current system needs to be improved. It is likely that the current system is inappropriate since it does not enable interaction with applicants to assess their leadership potential, and to appoint the most suitable applicant for the position. It was suggested the implementation of a panel to conduct interviews and the assessment of professional performance. It was proposed that professional performance could be done by the observation of teaching, assessment by students, parents, coworkers, and school leaders of the school in which the applicants are currently teaching. The assessment of leadership potential by means of interviews complemented with observations of professional performance could be another factor that could be added to the system of promotion with value in points. This suggestion along with a change of the current regulations for promotion in which preparation and training in leadership could be mandatory would likely favour the appointment of better prepared heads.

2. The appointment of better prepared school leaders in Mexican compulsory education

a) A certification programme

Another finding pertaining to what could be done in Mexico to appoint better prepared heads raised by some participants (n=9) was the need to establish a

certification programme for headteachers. Currently, a curriculum reform in primary education in Mexico places the demands mostly on classroom teachers. The current reform contemplates the implementation of a competency based learning curricula across the country in primary schools. As classroom teachers are trained to teach based on competencies, the same could be true for school leaders, they should be trained to lead based on competencies. The reform could also have considered the strengthening of the appointment of better prepared school leaders by requiring preparation in leadership for new heads. It makes sense the suggestion to establish a certification programme for school heads. A certification programme implies improvement. Better prepared school leaders drive, facilitate, and monitor the teaching and learning processes. A certified headteacher may enable the improvement of teaching and learning. Probably a first step towards certification could be done through training and preparation in leadership complemented with other mechanisms raised by few participants for instance headship could not be for life, and incumbent heads could be assessed rigorously in their performance.

b) Strengthen preparation of school leaders

A key finding in this study was the need to strengthen the preparation in leadership for those seeking headship. This research question aimed to explore how the Mexican career ladder merit system could be improved to appoint better prepared headteachers. It was raised by the majority of respondents (n=18) the need to offer preparation and development in leadership as something that could be done in order to appoint more prepared heads. Participants considered that there must be compulsory preparation for aspiring heads. This claim seems to concur with the claim made by

Crow (2006) who states that the growing evidence of the importance of leadership might make a difference in school improvement and student learning. In England, the National College for School Leadership was established (Southworth, 2002). This introduced the National Qualification for Headship (NPQH) for prospective heads. In the United States, a master's degree in educational administration remains a common requirement in most states in applying for a leadership position (Hillman, 1992). In Ontario Canada, prospective heads have to follow the Principal Qualification Program offered by ten universities in Ontario (Huber and West, 2002). Therefore, what participants in the current study are proposing seems to be aligned with practices carried out at international level. Participants also pointed out that preparation and development in leadership could be offered by the Normal Schools, state funded schools to train future teachers, and also by the Teachers Centres, places for in-service teacher professional development. Local universities could also offer preparation and development in leadership. Therefore, it seems that in Mexico there is the infrastructure to offer preparation and development for aspiring leaders and development for those who are already in in the post. A first step may be the modification of promotion procedures by the *Escalafon* making compulsory the preparation and development in leadership.

c) Post rotation

Another theme raised by some participants (n=4) in relation to how better prepared school heads could be appointed was post rotation after a period of incumbency. Participants mentioned that mobility of incumbent heads could influence positively the performance of heads and schools given that new heads bring with them new ideas and experiences. Post rotation could give the opportunity to broaden

headteachers experiences in order to increase their leadership knowledge and skills. Aquila (1989) investigating systematic rotation of headteacher's experiences advocates rotation policy as a way to encourage headteachers to tackle new challenges. Boesse (1991), in a study in Manitoba Canada suggests that rotation rejuvenates headteachers. Rotation could benefit both school and headteachers, for instance, a school in turmoil could be settled down by a wise head, a change agent could move a school out of its complacency, a toxic culture could be healed by a collaborative and caring head, or a school in failure could be improved by a tireless and persistent head. In the case of the individual, Aquila (1989) points out that rotation could create opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge through the new experiences and challenges. However, the suggestion to rotate school heads in Mexico should be taken with care because there should be considered many factors from the perspective of schools and also individuals. For instance, a low performing school probably will not benefit if a headteacher close to retirement is assigned, teaching staff may become disillusioned with frequent headteacher rotation, or leadership style and change agenda of a head may contradict those of a predecessor causing tension. On the other hand, at individual level, personal factors such as family and place of residence must also be considered. The suggestion to rotate school heads could be implemented as a pilot in few schools located in the same geographical area.

Summary

This research question aimed to explore how the current process to appoint school leaders in Mexico could be improved. The answer to this research question is summarised in this paragraph. Respondents suggested that a possible way to improve

the system of promotion could be through the implementation of a panel composed by parents and teaching staff of the school where the vacant position exist, and educational authorities in order to interact with applicants and know how they could improve the school they want to lead. A certification programme was also proposed by the participants in the current study. This suggestion seems to be more comprehensive since it implies preparation and continuous certification in leadership knowledge and skills. Rotation during incumbency after some years was another suggestion that participants considered could improve the appointment of better heads; however, this recommendation should be taken with care analysing both positive and negative aspects for headteachers and schools.

5.7 An emergent model of the current state of leadership preparation in Mexican primary schools

The discussion of the findings enabled a theoretical reflection to identify the type of school leaders appointed by the promotion system along with the contextual conditions of Mexican educational system represented by a quadripartite model (See Figure 2, p. 183). Wilson's (2008) model of academic preparation was influential in the construction of a model with the type of school heads appointed in Mexico. The model is based on two axes, relating respectively to an emphasis on developed managerial skills (low to high) and theoretical managerial knowledge (low to high) of newly appointed heads by the *Escalafon*. There are four possible categories emanating from the model of the types of heads appointed in Mexico: a developed manager, a pedagogical and practical manager, a theoretical manager, and a pedagogical manager. This typology oversimplifies undoubtedly a complex reality; nevertheless it intends to serve as a point

of departure to reflect on the types of heads appointed in Mexico. The types of school heads were defined as managers instead of leaders, based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, since seemingly the conception of a competent head in Mexico must be a person who focuses mainly on managerial and administrative functions. Seemingly they do not progress further than their roles as managers. It seems that the first type of head, the developed manager, could be better than the other types. However, from a developmental perspective without training, proper talent management, and identity changes probably none of them could be considered appropriate for leadership because their roles, skills and knowledge and are likely to remain at managerial levels.

Developed Manager

The first type of head promoted by the system is a developed manager. These types of heads by the time they are appointed could have developed throughout their career their managerial skills by being exposed to real world settings, and also they have had academic preparation in school management. These leaders did not follow identical path towards headship however there are some similarities amongst them. They may have started to develop their leadership skills in practice. They were exposed to situations in which they were appointed to different leadership positions while holding a classroom teacher post. There are many possible scenarios in which they assumed leadership positions. For instance, it is typical that new teachers start their career in rural areas, and many are appointed as teaching heads. Another scenario in urban schools could be a good teacher is invited by the school's supervisor to assist with managerial and training functions. It is common that classroom teachers are invited by

the supervisors. Other possibilities could be temporary leadership or union posts. The possible scenarios are multiple. There are also teachers who could have had multiple leading positions during their accession phase.

A common thing for those teachers is that they held a decision-making position which gave them practical experiences and the development of managerial skills. After or during these experiences, they enrol in master's programmes focused on school management. It is in this part where they complete the other part of the quadrant; they engage in a formal learning process by enrolling in a master's programme in management which complement with theoretical knowledge the already gained practical experiences and developed managerial skills. However the route of being a developed manager could not be taken by any teacher aspiring headship because the practical experiences to lead a school for some months, to be a union official, or to be a supervisor's assistant do not depend on them. These positions are circumstantial and limited; something that an aspiring head cannot control or influence. This means that only few newly appointed headteachers could be placed in the quadrant of developed managers. This seems to favour their identity transformation from that of a classroom teacher to that of an educational manager.

Pedagogical and Practical Manager

This type newly appointed head has developed high managerial skills and low theoretical knowledge. This leader has focused his/her preparation on other areas of education. These heads during their accession phase focused their preparation and enrolled in master's degrees in teaching and learning, curriculum development, special education or other areas of the broad field of education. These heads share a similarity

with the previous head, the developed manager; in having held leadership positions within the educational system and schools; nevertheless, they did not enroll in preparation in school management.

It is implied in Mexico that a good classroom teacher could be a good school leader. Moreover, the system of promotion does not make preparation in leadership or management compulsory or is rewarded higher than preparation in other areas of the field of education. This enables that many teachers pursuing a headship do not seek preparation in areas related to educational leadership and management as a way to strengthen their preparation for the post. These new heads do not pursue preparation in management even though they have had practical experiences in managing. Examples of these types of leaders could be teachers whom before having the intention to aspire for leadership posts are enrolled in master's programmes to strengthen their preparation in areas related to teaching and learning, and are invited to collaborate in decision-making posts. Then, later in their career they may decide to pursue a headship probably with confidence that they could be a good headteacher based on their previous experiences as teachers and the decision-making positions they held. These experiences seem to influence their identity transformation from classroom teacher to that of a pedagogical and practical manager.

Theoretical Manager

This type of leader when appointed to the post would have theoretical knowledge in management as a result of having academic preparation in educational management, but low developed managerial skills. Academic programmes in educational management available in Mexico are theoretically focused. They do not offer

opportunities for participants to engage in real world experiences and active learning to develop managerial or leadership skills. In other parts of the world leadership preparation programmes offer a mix of theoretical and practical knowledge supported by processes of coaching and mentoring. It is intended that participants strengthen both theoretical and practical knowledge. In the case of Mexico, participants who enrol in master's programmes with an emphasis in school management only strengthen their theoretical knowledge. Newly appointed heads that fit into this category did not have meaningful practical experiences in leading so that there probably was an identity transformation from classroom teacher to that of potential manager who knows about educational management only from a theoretical perspective.

Pedagogical Manager

This head when newly appointed is likely to have low theoretical management knowledge and low developed managerial skills. These types of newly appointed heads are similar to the pedagogical skilled manager however they did not have opportunities during their accession phase to engage in practical managerial experiences so that they did not develop these skills. However, for their profile it does not mean that they will have a modest professional performance. This type of heads during their accession phase may have been good or regular classroom teachers who concentrated their preparation on strengthening their knowledge mainly in teaching and learning whom at certain point in their career felt that they could make a broader contribution from the position of headteacher. Then, they decided to compete for a leadership post through the *Escalafon*. This type of head along with the pedagogical skilled manager could be the most common appointed in Mexico since the promotion system does not make

mandatory preparation for the post. And, in particular for the pedagogical manager, they arrive to the post with low managerial skills developed due to the limited opportunities to engage in practical experiences and develop these skills. These types of leaders have to develop their skills once in the post.

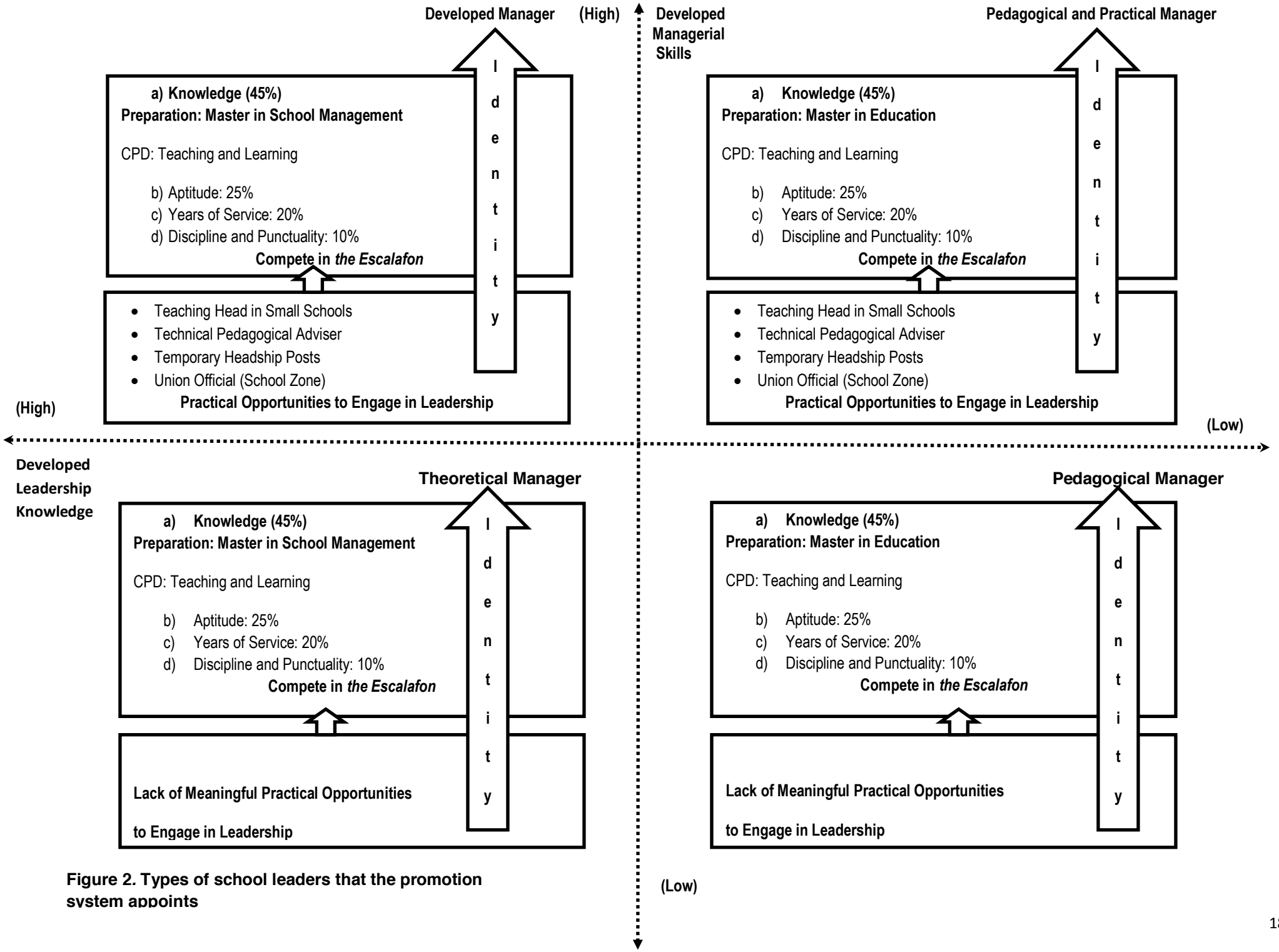

Figure 2. Types of school leaders that the promotion system appoints

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the strengths and shortcomings of the system to appoint school leaders in Mexico and additionally, it explored key aspects of educational leadership, such as talent identification, training and development, and leadership learning, which are all being addressed at international level. The data collected from the interviews gave an insight into the participants' experiences and made it possible to answer the research questions that guided this study, in relation to the system's strengths, shortcomings, the perceptions on how the system favours or does not favour the appointment of prepared leaders, the perceptions on how on how the system enables or does not enable leadership talent identification, training and development for leadership, and leadership learning. Overall, the study suggests that current leadership literature can be updated so as to further inform the current system to appoint school leaders in Mexico, resulting in potential improvement and the appointment of better school leaders. The research questions have been addressed and answered in the previous chapter. In this chapter the conclusions of the present study will be presented in relation to the contribution to knowledge, implications of this contribution and, recommendations. Each aspect will be addressed in turn.

6.2 Contribution to the knowledge

a) Contribution to theoretical knowledge

This study was highly influenced by the context in which it was carried out; however, it is needed that its contributions could address a broader audience and add to the knowledge and understanding of the field of educational leadership. The contribution of this study relates to areas pertinent to talent management. The assumption behind talent management is to have the right person in the right job with the right skills at the right time (see Rhodes, 2012). The process of talent management implies to identify, recruit, develop, retain high performing individuals. Once in the post, their leadership development is also important. The contribution of this study from a theoretical perspective is geared towards a deeper understanding of some elements related to talent management of newly appointed school heads by the Mexican system of promotion as leadership professional identity, talent identification, and leadership learning in the post.

a.1) Hierarchy of professional identities of incumbent heads

A first conclusion and contribution to the theoretical knowledge of leadership is that there seems to exist a hierarchy of professional identities in incumbent heads. These types of identities could be identified implicitly in the findings of this study. The identities identified in this study for incumbent heads seem to be more prevalent and embedded according to their level of progression in their leadership learning as they assume headship. They are not identities that are enacted interchangeably, chosen consciously, or that emerge according to the situation in which school heads need to perform in a specific way. These identities are more general and predominant in relation to the level of leadership development of newly appointed heads. At the first level there seems to exist an extended classroom teacher identity for those newly appointed heads who arrive to the post without

preparation and induction. This was the case of some of the newly appointed heads in the present study whom by merit of the accumulation of points were promoted immediately to the post. These types of heads at the beginning of their incumbency arrive to the post with the knowledge, skills and preparation of classroom teacher and without meaningful experiences in positions of leadership.

Another level in the hierarchy is the identity of a school manager. At this stage incumbent heads are able to keep the school just operating on a day to day basis without promoting any change or improvement. At this level heads have the knowledge of teaching and learning plus the knowledge of how to manage a school. Under the system of promotion implemented in Mexico, it seems that there is a natural progression from the identity of an extended classroom teacher at the beginning of their incumbency to that of a school manager as time passes. However there seems to be few cases of newly appointed heads that arrive to the post with the identity of a school manager already developed as it is the case of those individuals who have opportunities to be in making decision positions such as temporary or teaching headships during their accessing phase. And, a third level in the hierarchy of leadership identity development is precisely the development of a true leadership identity in which they as school heads see themselves as leaders and act accordingly. At this level school heads have the knowledge and expertise accumulated from their experiences as classroom teachers, the knowledge and expertise of the operational processes to manage a school, and also the knowledge and skills required to promote improvement and high performance because they have developed a positive leadership identity. In the Mexican case in only few cases this stage of identity development seem to be

reached because only few of newly appointed heads have meaningful opportunities to engage in the practice of leadership during their accession phase, along with preparation in school management. In others without these opportunities during their accession the time, experiences, and preparation they have in their incumbency as heads may enable them to reach that leadership identity although at a slow pace. There are also others who may never reach a leadership identity and advance no further than a school manager identity because the way the system of promotion is designed seems to contribute in the wasting of time to properly develop schools leaders because many of them start the learning and developing of their leadership identity once they are in the post.

In the present study it could be inferred that the promotion system itself may to raise their self-belief as leaders because they won a competition. They simply potentially may think they have the capacity for leadership but perhaps that identity is created by the system of promotion. In some cases that identity seems to be that of an extended classroom teacher. At the beginning of their post they will need to do the best they can with the knowledge, preparation and experiences of a classroom teacher. In other cases, they have been gradually developing a leadership identity for the practical opportunities to engage in leadership they had during their accession phase, for instance in temporary headships. In these cases it is probable that newly appointed heads arrive to the post with their identity as school managers. It seems that under the system of promotion implemented in Mexico many newly appointed heads may be limited in their identity development to that of a school manager in order to keep school just operating on a daily basis without promoting change and improvement. In the findings of this study it is

implied that to develop a true leadership identity, school heads need to develop first the identity of a school manager because participants needed to keep the school running on a daily basis. At this level, they keep the school just operating in day-to-day. They begin to understand the different programmes implemented in schools by the ministry of education but still keeping their role as school managers unlikely to promote any change to avoid destabilising the school. Once incumbent heads are comfortable with the position the following stage in their professional identity development is the development of a true leadership identity. At this stage school heads seemingly feel freer to propose improvement projects and get involved in those projects, feel more comfortable with the position, and seemingly they are able to perform professionally at the best of their potential and find ways in which other stakeholders especially teachers perform the best they can as well. In many cases the progression between the identity of a school manager and the identity of a school leader takes some time as incumbent in the post. A possible way to support a faster transition between school managers to true school leaders could be through pertinent development in the post because without any preparation still at this level, as it seems to happen with some heads in Mexico, the transition from manager to leader could take more time or in some cases never take place. Therefore, in the Mexican case it seems that reaching a true leadership identity is hampered for many headteachers because they are appointed by a system that does not promote preparation in leadership during accession. As it has been pointed out, some of the newly appointed heads could have an identity of extended classroom teachers whom with time in the post progress to a school manager's identity. Others by the practical experiences of leadership in their

accession phase seem to be appointed with a school manager's identity already developed. However, in both cases it is given the impression that some heads may never reach a real leadership identity because in the Mexican educational system the educational policy seems to suggest that a good head is someone who is just a good school manager.

Therefore, in educational systems such as the Mexican in which there is the assumption that good classroom teachers could be promoted to headship without specific preparation and development for the post there seems to be the possibility for different professional identities during the incumbency: an extended classroom teacher identity, a school manager identity, and finally a true leadership identity. From the experiences shared by the incumbent heads who participated in the study apparently the progression from one identity to the other is gradual. A risk with the approach to appoint headteachers under this assumption and lacking preparation for the post is that some probably never develop a true leadership identity and stay stuck in a manager's identity. This could happen because they start to develop their leadership identity once they are promoted to the post due to the wasted time under this approach to appoint school leaders.

a. 2) Talent self-identification

This study could also add in small extent to the notion of talent identification since apparently there exists also the element of self-identification, self-persuasion, and self-nomination as future potential leaders in the absence of talent identification programmes. The traditional approach of talent identification relies on an identification of potential talented individuals by other individuals. However in the absence of systematic external talent identification as in the Mexican case, this

fosters self-identification and self-persuasion to pursue the leadership pathway. Some incumbent heads in the present study pursued leadership by this self-nomination to compete for a leadership post without determinant external persuasion. Some may have had encouragement from their co-workers to compete for a post because they were perceived as good teachers, but this external persuasion seems not to be determinant as talent identification. Therefore their self-belief in their potential as future leaders is likely to have played a big role for some in the decision to compete for a leadership position. However, this approach could also have possible shortcomings. This may lead to some false of identity claims because they could believe that they have the potential for leadership because they won a competition or were able to accumulate a large amount of points. The system of promotion seems to favour the possibility for false identity claims because the person with the highest number of points is appointed to a leadership post without effective confirmation of their potential. However, it would not be fair to assert that all newly appointed heads could have a false leadership identity, but the way promotions are designed is possible that some of the newly appointed heads believe that they have the potential to be school leaders when in reality they do not. This could especially happen with those newly appointed heads who did not have leadership responsibilities during their accession phase.

The traditional approach of talent identification or at least the semantic implication of this terminology is that someone external to the individual decides that he or she has the potential to be a leader. This approach could be also problematic because here applies the concept of homophily that recognises we as individuals tend to like, associate, or favour people similar to our ideas,

perceptions, and what we considered high performance. Therefore, talent identification under this approach will be influenced by the perceptions, criteria and beliefs of external individuals who have the right to decide that someone has the potential to lead disqualifying others that may have the potential but they have not had the conditions and opportunities to lead or to develop their leadership potential. In this study appeared the two types of extremes. There is a small group of individuals who are identified by the schools' supervisors and are given opportunities to engage in the practice of leadership during accession. And, also there is the other extreme of talent identification in which participants in competitions for leadership decided to participate because they consider that they have the skills and knowledge needed to be a headteacher. In order to advance in the improvement of talent identification it may help to propose an alternative approach that could be placed in the middle of both extremes. This could be a hybrid system of talent identification in which there are external eyes identifying potential leaders and therefore not losing the opportunities to develop those potential leaders, and also give meaningful opportunities to engage, practice and develop for those who are not spotted by the external eyes and whom by themselves could confirm, develop or even disclaim their leadership potential. It is suggested that this proposed hybrid approach probably needs further attention.

a. 3) Leadership learning in the post seems to have levels of learning

Another contribution to leadership theoretical knowledge is that leadership learning could also have levels of learning. Leadership learning could go from superficial to deeper levels in the comprehension of what it means to be a school head and in the development of skills needed to enact properly the position. The

type of learning is related with the stage of leadership identity development mentioned above. In Mexico some newly appointed heads give the impression that they arrive to the post with a shallow perception of what it means to be a school head. It seems that the assumption in some school systems in which it is expected that good classroom teachers are promoted to leadership posts enables the appointment of some new heads with an extended classroom teacher identity. In this case the knowledge, conceptualisations, and skills that newly appointed heads have under these conditions are those basically of a classroom teacher. Therefore, apparently there are school leaders who enact their headship basically with the vision and understanding of a classroom teacher. It seems that the foundational knowledge required to advancing the comprehension and understanding of higher levels of leadership learning is the knowledge related to teaching and learning since teaching and learning are the core activities in schools. Therefore, leadership learning at its most elemental level appears to be the knowledge, conceptualisations, and skills of a classroom teacher. This type of leadership knowledge seems to be favoured by system of promotions implemented in Mexico in which it is assumed that good classroom teachers could enact the position of headteachers with the developed knowledge and expertise of a teacher. This type of knowledge could limit newly appointed heads because the roles they need to carry out are different from their previous roles as classroom teachers although it must be recognised that knowledgeable and expert headteachers in teaching and learning are also important. However a school head's role there is a need to broaden their knowledge and skills.

There is a progression in the comprehension of headteachers' role and mastery in the development of required skills to perform better the job as time passes and in combination with on the job learning. From an extended classroom teacher level of understanding there is a progression to another level, the level of understanding of a school manager. School managers have been able to incorporate the understanding, knowledge and skills of a manager in addition to the already possessed knowledge in teaching and learning. In general in Mexico, leadership learning for some may progress only slowly to the learning of managerial and controlling functions. Learning to operate school in a stable way on a day to day basis without promoting any change and improvement and just doing what has been traditionally done could clearly limit any leadership actions traditionally associated with school improvement.

The last desirable stage of leadership learning is the learning to be a real leader. Leadership has implications for improvement, top performance, and continuous development. In a school it implies high quality teaching and learning. Ideally school heads could be developed as leaders with the knowledge skills and mastery to perform at their best enabling others to do the same. It seems that advancement to a higher level of leadership learning is needed as an important part of the Mexican system. An important aspect is that incumbents do not get caught in the managerial operational day to day and develop no further their knowledge and skills.

Leadership learning at a higher level implies the knowledge and skills of managerial functions but also the knowledge and skills to engage, persuade, and motivate others to achieve high performance. This implies that a school leader with

a real leadership identity has developed the knowledge to understand, relate, and support effective teaching practices taking place at classroom level, are able to perform managerial functions that are needed to keep the school functioning on a day to day basis, and are able to work with and through others to promote high achievement in teaching and learning. In the Mexican case, the administrators of the promotion system regarded some heads appointed by the point-based system as good. In the Mexican literature is also described that a good headteacher is someone who focuses on managerial and controlling functions. It seems that there is a need to go further in the leadership learning of Mexican school heads by means of leadership preparation before promotion and during their incumbency. Leadership learning could enable incumbent heads reach higher levels of leadership skills and knowledge, and a true leadership identity.

b) Contribution to understanding the state of leadership in Mexico

This research has contributed to a critique and understanding of school leadership in Mexico and the appointment of school leaders. Previous research on the appointment of school leaders by the current system of promotion is very limited. This study even being a small scale study constitutes the largest empirical work carried out to explore the system of promotion in the country. In relation to other aspects addressed in this research such as leadership talent identification, training and development, and leadership learning there are no reported studies in Mexico pertaining to these topics. By extensive discussion and comparison of the findings with pertinent literature, it was possible identify key contributory elements useful in the Mexican context of and these are outlined as follows:

This study focused on analysing the appropriateness of the system of promotion to appoint prepared school leaders. In this part, it could be asserted that the current system of promotion does not enable the appointment of prepared school leaders. Several aspects that hinder the promotion of good heads were identified i.e. the obsolescence of the system of promotion alongside with the lack of adequate preparation for the post.

The study offers insights into themes associated with talent management. In this research it was pointed out the identification of potential leaders is done indirectly and it was identified that those teachers who were given the opportunity to assume leadership posts as temporary headships, teaching headships, union positions within schools developed their leadership skills and were able to identify in which aspects they needed further development. It is suggested that if teachers with leadership potential are identified early in their career and are given opportunities to lead it will further enable their development as educational leaders. However, in regards to talent management it could be asserted that centralised educational systems as the Mexican in which school heads do not have the autonomy in the hiring, retaining, and developing talented new teachers there is a limitation the identification and development of talented individuals. This is an omission with respect to international understanding of talent management.

On the other hand, it emerged that the lack of economic incentives in some cases has an effect upon the decision to pursue headship, hampering the early identification of talented individuals. This may restrict talented teachers to consider a promotion after several years of service wasting time for their development. This could remove their initial creativity and impetus. This leaves talented teachers in

uncertain positions in relation to the development of their talent since they may encounter opportunities that enhance talent development or for others their development may be hindered.

This study found that there is an emphasis on preparation in the areas of teaching and learning in the current system of promotion and lack of preparation in school leadership. There may be a serious disconnection in what they know theoretically and in what happens practically at classroom levels in many schools. The study revealed the possibility for the emergence of several types of school managers but most of them seem to be only theoretically developed by their preparation and their teaching experiences. However, even with strong preparation and accumulated expertise, student outcomes are modest in most schools. There may be a disconnection between their knowledge and expertise and the teaching and learning taking place at schools that they lead. In this sense, school leaders who have a strong preparation, professional development and expertise in teaching and learning seem to be limited in spreading that knowledge throughout the school if they do not have the adequate preparation to do so as school leaders. The gap of disconnection between what they know theoretically and practically in relation to effective teaching and learning increases if they do not know how they could influence the teaching and learning taking place at individual classroom from their position as school heads. This meaningful link between theory and practice probably could be improved if newly appointed heads were trained during their accession and continue that development as incumbent heads. This study found that newly appointed heads with knowledge in teaching and learning are not a

guarantee of improvement of student outcomes if they do not know how to make this connection.

6.3 Implications of the study and recommendations

a) Recommendations for theoretical development and further research

The study focused on a critique of the system of promotion and was exploratory in nature. It was a first approximation to the system of promotion trying to understand its positive aspects as well as its shortcomings, how it enables or does not enable the appointment of prepared school leaders, and also, if pertinent, how it could be improved. Additionally studies in the specific aspects addressed in this research regarding the promotion system should now take place. This study claims a need to upgrade or change the system of promotion. An implication of this study will be to advance the understanding of how the system is implemented in different regions of the country. It is important to know from an empirical viewpoint how the current system of promotion enables or does not enable the appointment of the required school leaders for the different educational contexts and regions of the country. This exploratory study also addressed the topics of talent identification, preparation and training in leadership, leadership learning in the Mexican context and it is intended that these important aspects of talent management should now be placed on the Mexican educational research agenda.

It is needed to explore in deeper detail the development of leadership identities within the Mexican educational context. For some it seems that the journey to a true leadership identity in reality starts once they are in the post of headteacher. Even though the system of promotion may raises new appointees' self-belief as leaders, probably in some cases this leadership self-belief may drop

when they face the reality of what implies to be a school head without full preparation for the post. Further exploration of how the current system of promotion may contribute with a wasted time in the construction of a leadership identity would be beneficial. In the same regard, it is also needed to deepen the study of identity change of the four of types of school managers likely to be appointed by the promotion system. It could be explored how the practical opportunities to engage in leadership practice during accession in some cases, or the lack in others, in combination with the graduate preparation that is pursued, enables the appointment of a school leader with a particular profile.

The concept of self-identification as a component of talent identification in the absence of proper talent identification mechanisms emerged in this research. It also addressed the limitation that this approach has in the possible claiming of a false leadership identity. However, the concept could be explored more to know under which circumstances and conditions this approach could work in practical settings. In order to avoid basing talent identification solely on external individuals who decide who has the potential to lead, or whilst avoiding the other extreme that an individual claims leadership potential when in reality he or she does not have a potential, it was proposed an intermediate approach. Research in this regard could be conducted in order to offer mechanisms to allow processes of self-identification monitored by the external eyes in which those individuals who are interested to follow the pathway of leadership engage in a variety of experiences, formal or informal leadership roles which could help them to gradually confirm, develop or even disclaim their potential to become a school head. It emerged in this study that leadership learning in Mexico can be seen in terms of levels of learning. This

opens the door to explore more deeply what favours that newly appointed heads by the system of promotion arrive to the post with a particular level of knowledge i.e. mainly the knowledge of an extended classroom teacher and the knowledge and skills of a manager. It is important to explore what favours or hinders on the progression to a true leadership level that has transcended the managerial role of leadership. It seems that some of headteachers in Mexico may learn by habit what works and what does not on a daily basis. It seems that this type of learning may be wasteful. Whilst gaining experience is important, the time taken to assume a true leadership identity may be at the expense of individual schools and the learners with them. It is necessary to advance in the understanding of how school leaders learn to lead once they are in the post given the likelihood of limited preparation within the current system in Mexico.

b) Practical implications and recommendations

From the literature and the findings of this study, it is evident that policy in educational leadership in Mexico could be upgraded in order to enable improvement in talent management, leadership learning, leadership preparation and training, and the system to appoint school leaders. The research focused on the appropriateness of the system of promotion and how it enables or does not enable the appointment of well-prepared and competent school leaders and the strengthening of other aspects as the afore mentioned closely related to meaningful leadership development.

According to the findings of the present study and the literature reviewed, there is a need to conduct a deep review of the current system to appoint school leaders in Mexico. The regulations governing the system and the procedures of

promotion were promulgated almost 40 years ago. In the country there have been several reforms, nevertheless, these reforms mainly focus on what happens in the classroom, teaching and learning, and that is absolutely appropriate because teaching seems the most influential factor in student achievement. However, as it has been pointed out, supported by empirical research, the quality of leadership has also influence in student achievement, although it seems mainly indirectly. It is also known that learning is influenced by the interaction of many different parameters; however, a common facet in highly achieving countries in student outcomes is the importance given to leadership development. It seems that under the current conditions the appointment of fully developed headteachers has been neglected along with a lack of meaningful strengthening once they are in the post. The study emphasises a need to upgrade the current educational policy pertaining to educational leadership development in Mexico.

Another implication from the findings of this study is the need to consolidate the process of transparency in the appointment of school leaders in Mexico. The appointment of school leaders in Mexico has historically struggled in some cases with the lack of certainty that school leaders were appointed following the established procedures. These practices seem to be more concurrent in the past previous decades. As result, the system of promotion inherited a negative stigma that has been gradually disappearing. However, transparency emerged in the present study both in the strengths and shortcomings of the system. In the first case it was acknowledged that there has been improvement in these aspects since most of the participants in this study considered that competitions for leadership posts are transparent. Nevertheless, in the shortcomings, it emerged that this

improvement has been gradual and that there are still things to do to consolidate the transparency to make sure that school leaders are appointed in transparent and fair competitions. It is also suggested that the need to incorporate a panel in which parents, teachers and educational authorities are included to interview candidates for leadership posts as another factor of assessment in the promotion system could be beneficial in this respect. This could also raise credibility. The consolidation probably could be possible until all headteachers are assigned in transparent and impartial processes. Even in small schools and temporary leadership posts in which school leaders are not assigned by the system of promotion the element of discretionality should disappear and clear mechanisms to appoint school leaders in these schools should be established.

In the present study it was acknowledged that most competent heads nominated by the current system of promotion are those who have enhanced their leadership learning with practical leadership experiences in addition to theoretical preparation in school management. These school heads had the opportunity before promotion to be engaged in leadership positions such as temporary headships, teaching headships, union posts, or district posts, and also they strengthened their preparation by pursuing their graduate degrees in school management. These findings, along with international research in leadership development, support the need to offer leadership training and preparation for aspiring school leaders in order to arrive to their post more trained and equipped with the knowledge and skills required to do a better job as school leaders. This would facilitate a faster professional identity change from a classroom teacher to that of a school leader. There is a need to develop an understanding of the

potential benefits of talent management (Rhodes, 2012) and how shortcomings in the present system could be avoided. The right person in the job at the right time, developed, committed and able to perform at a level that will facilitate school improvement as far as possible within and possibly beyond current expectations of heads in Mexican schools. Therefore, the system of promotion should be upgraded in order to require those aspiring leadership posts to have preparation in leadership. However, research also claims the need to continue the development of school leaders once they are in the post in the form of continuous training and development.

School leaders in Mexico have been appointed to their posts by a vertical point-based system from the 1930's although there have been several upgrading along the decades. It seems that school leaders will continue being appointed by a point-based system in the immediate future since it is mandated by a constitutional law that all public servants get promoted by a vertical ladder system. Teachers in public schools are considered public servants. Under these circumstances it seems that there are two possibilities to require preparation in educational leadership for aspiring leaders. The first option would be making mandatory preparation and training in leadership for applicants to leadership posts. The second one would be to give more value in points to preparation which is focused on school leadership and management. For instance, a master's degree in leadership could have more value in points than a master's degree in other areas of education. Requiring preparation in leadership and giving it more value in competitions implies also the need to offer opportunities for leadership preparation. Therefore, an implication for the strengthening of leadership will be to offer leadership training opportunities

either by programmes developed by the ministry of education and also by universities and higher education institutions.

This study also explored how the identification and development of talented and potential school leaders is favoured in Mexican primary schools under the current system of promotion. At international level high importance has been given to the early identification of talented individuals due to shortfalls of aspirant school leaders along with the need that every school is led by a competent and well-prepared head. In this research it was identified that the identification of potential leaders is done unsystematically when unexpected positions arise as temporary leadership posts or teaching headships in small schools. Another finding in this study is that the educational system hinders a quick appointment to leadership positions for those teachers who show talent early in their teaching career. On the one hand, an applicant for promotion will have the same opportunities that other applicants after five years of teaching service, and on the other, in the programme for economic incentives is easier to advance financially as a classroom teacher than it is as school leader. Both situations favour the appointment of mature individuals who have been socialised and habituated into the educational system, and who perhaps in this process may have also lost their initial enthusiasm and motivation. An implication of this study in regards to talented and potential leaders is the implementation of a talent management programme. Talent identification and development could also be present as a way to strengthen educational policy in school leadership. This also implies removing the conditions that do not favour that talented potential leaders make a fast transition to leadership posts such as the lack of incentives and the waiting after five years of teaching practice to have the

same conditions as more experienced teachers. This will also imply their development once they were identified as potential leaders.

6.4 Summary

This study has provided a critique of the current system to appoint school leaders in Mexico, both the positives aspects and the aspects that still need improvement. It has added on to the body of knowledge the understanding of the current state of school leadership in Mexico in the areas addressed by this research particularly in the appointment of school leaders. The study suggests a need to upgrade the current system of appointment of school leaders and to include leadership preparation as ways to strengthen the appointment of better prepared school heads in Mexican primary schools. In the case of the findings of this study, the recommendations and implications could be forwarded to the Joint Commission on Teacher Promotion so that necessary improvements could be considered to improve the process to appoint school leaders in Mexico. Overall, the study found a need to upgrade the current system of promotion since school leaders in Mexico are appointed by a system in which its regulations and procedures were promulgated almost 40 years ago, and also it is also needed preparation in leadership as a prerequisite for participants in competitions of leadership positions. This research explored the Mexican system to appoint school leaders in regards to the appropriateness for the appointment of prepared leaders. An important finding that emerged was the expressed need in preparation for the post. This lack of attention given to leaders preparation in Mexico seems to align with recent studies such as Moorosi and Bush's (2011) who studied leadership

preparation and development in Commonwealth countries. They concluded that "less focus on [leadership] preparation means that there is a chance that schools are placed in the hands of unqualified personnel" (p. 71). This approach adopted by some countries to appoint leaders without previous preparation seems to be problematic. The reason perhaps is a waste of time in the readiness to enact headship effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pilot of semistructured interview guide for incumbent school heads, teachers pursuing a headship, administrators of the commission on promotion.

School Heads

1. What do you think of the current process to appoint deputy heads and headteachers? From your viewpoint which are its strengths and possible areas of improvement of the current system?
2. How prepared for headship you felt in your early stage as headteacher?
3. From your own experience, do you think this system to appoint school leaders enables sufficient preparation for a headship post? Does it help to appoint effective school leaders?
4. Were any shortfalls of preparation noticeable in early headship?
5. How did you learn to lead? How this could be improved?
6. How do you know if your leadership is successful/unsuccessful?
7. Once in the post as headteacher, what new skills you had to acquire? How were they acquired?
8. What do you think are the perceptions of other heads, teachers seeking headship or teachers in general of the current system to appoint school leaders?
9. What do you wish you had known or had been trained before being promoted to headship?
10. What do you think needs to be done in Mexico to strengthen the appointment of effective school leaders? What do you think must change

(and not change) in relation to the appointment process of school leaders in Mexico in order to select the best candidates for headship?

Teachers Seeking Headship

1. What do you think of the current process to appoint deputy heads and headteachers? From your viewpoint which are its strengths and possible areas of improvement of the current system?

2. How prepared for headship you think you are? Do you feel that you are ready for a headship post? What do you think are your shortfalls/strengths?

3. From your own experience, do you think this system to appoint school leaders enables sufficient preparation for a headship post? Does it help to appoint effective school leaders?

4. Do you anticipate any shortfalls/strengths in early headship?

5. What opportunities have you had to lead? Sufficient? Insufficient?

6. How are you preparing yourself for headship?

7. What training and learning opportunities should be available for teachers seeking headship in order to be better prepared for headship?

8. In which areas would you like to be trained before being promoted to headship?

9. What do you think are the perceptions of other heads, teachers seeking headship or teachers in general of the current system to appoint school leaders?

10. What do you think needs to be done in Mexico to strengthen the appointment of effective school leaders? What do you think must change (and not change) in relation to the appointment process of school leaders in Mexico in order to select the best candidates for headship?

Administrators of the System

1. What do you think of the current process to appoint deputy heads and headteachers? From your viewpoint which are its strengths and possible areas of improvement of the current system?

2. How prepared for headship do you think newly appointed heads feel in early stage as headteachers?

3. From your own experience, do you think this system to appoint school leaders enables sufficient preparation for a headship post? Does it help to appoint effective school leaders?

4. Have you noticed any shortfalls of preparation noticeable in newly appointed heads?

5. How did newly appointed heads learn to lead? How this could be improved?

6. How do you know if your leadership of headteachers appointed by the current system is successful/unsuccessful?

7. Once in the post as headteacher, what new skills incumbent heads have to acquire? How are they acquired?

8. What do you think are the perceptions of other heads, teachers seeking headship or teachers in general of the current system to appoint school leaders?

9. What do you think newly appointed heads should had known and had been trained before being promoted to headship?

10. What do you think needs to be done in Mexico to strengthen the appointment of effective school leaders? What do you think must change (and not change) in relation to the appointment process of school leaders in Mexico in order to select

the best candidates for headship?

Appendix B

Final Version of Interview Questions

1. What do you think of the current process to appoint school leaders? From your viewpoint which are its strengths?
2. From your viewpoint which are the weaknesses of the current system to appoint school leaders?
3. From your perspective do you consider that the point-based system enables the appointment of effective school heads?
4. What do you think about leadership talent identification, does the system enable leadership talent identification, how potential leaders are identified?
5. Does the current system enable the training and development for leadership?
6. What do you think about leadership learning, does the system enables leadership learning, how do school leaders learn to lead in Mexican compulsory education?
7. How the point-based system to appoint school leaders could be improved?
8. In general, what should be done in Mexican compulsory education to appoint better prepared school leaders?

Appendix C

Letter for participants explaining the research project

Chihuahua, Chih., Mexico

Dear Participant

The present research project Climbing up the ladder to leadership in Mexican basic education: Perceptions of *Escalafon*, the point-based system used in elementary schools is a research that will be carried out as part of my doctoral programme Leaders and Leadership in Education in the University of Birmingham. Since educational research is rooted within the social sciences, and social sciences are usually approached by the qualitative interpretivist paradigm, this research will be framed as an exploratory case study. This design will enable to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of aspirant headteachers, incumbent heads, government officials and union officials in relation to the process implemented in Mexico to appoint school leaders by the vertical system of *Escalafon*. The aim of the research is to explore the strengths and possible areas of improvement of the Mexican system to appoint school leaders, preparation for leadership, and opportunities to engage in leadership, and how could the programme be improved with regards to appointing better prepare school leaders.

The exploratory case study will be carried out only in the state of Chihuahua to gain a deeper understanding of the current process to appoint school leaders in the country. The data collection method will be semi-structured interviews. There will be interviewed three officials of the Joint Commission on Teacher Promotion who are responsible for the appointment of headteachers in elementary schools state wide, an official who represents the government, another official from the Teachers Union, and the person in charge of the programme in the state. There will be interviewed 10 heads working in elementary school settings who were appointed through the system and 10 teachers seeking a headship via this system from the same educational level. The total of participants to be interviewed will be 23. It is intended that teachers seeking headship and heads represent the geographical and socioeconomic regions of the state 5 of them from the Mexico-US border area in Ciudad Juarez, 5 of the urban area of the capital of the state in Ciudad Chihuahua, 5 of them in the rural and mountain area of the state in the Tarahumara Region, 5 of them in the south region of the state in Ciudad Parral. Due to the knowledge and experience you have of being seeking headship through Escalafon or have been appointed as head by this system, you are invited to participate in the project.

If you have any questions or need more information of this research project, please contact Manuel Lopez Delgado at [redacted]

Sincerely,

_____

Manuel Lopez Delgado

Appendix D

Letter of consent

Chihuahua, Chih., Mexico

Dear _____

My name is Manuel Lopez Delgado and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The working title of my thesis is " Climbing up the ladder to headship in Mexican basic education: Perceptions of the *Escalafon*, the point based system, an exploration in elementary schools". The outcome of this research is to hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers in transition to headship, incumbent heads and administrators of the programme regarding the Mexican system implemented to appoint school leaders.My research involves interviewing teachers in transition to headship, incumbent heads appointed via Escalafon and administrators of the programme to explore the strengths and possible areas of improvement of this form to appoint school leaders, preparation for leadership, and opportunities to engage in leadership, and how could the programme be improved with regards to appointing better prepare school leaders. As teacher seeking headship / incumbent head / administrator of the programme, I would like very much to interview you. The interview would last approximately one hour and would be a semi structured interview. I should be adhering to the BERA (2004) ethical guidelines for research and therefore, although your contribution would be invaluable to my research, it would remain anonymous.

Your participation involves tape recording during the interviews for research purposes.

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do it without any explanation to the researcher.

Recorded interviews will be used only for research purposes. The tapes will be erased or destroyed after the research project is completed.

Sincerely,

_____

Manuel Lopez Delgado

Thank you for your consideration. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you. If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign below:

Signature_____ Date _____

Appendix E

Tables of Emergent Themes

Table 1. Emergent themes of Research Question 1: Strengths

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1.Increased trust in the system	17
2. Equal opportunities for all teachers to aspire for a headship	14
3. The system promotes academic preparation	8
4. The system promotes the engaging in continuous training	10
5. . Holistic evaluation of candidates pursuing a headship	7

Table 2. Emergent themes of Research Question 2: Shortcomings

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. The system is ruled by an obsolete set of regulations	17
2. The system promotes credentialism	8
3. There is a lack of previous preparation for the post	14
4. Headship is not attractive at early stages of service	4
5. The system needs more transparency	8
6. Ethical and attitudinal performance is not assessed	6
7. The assessment of teaching performance is not real	9
8. Information of vacant posts sometimes do not	4

arrive on time	

Table 3. Emergent themes of Research Question 3

a) The system could enable the appointment of effective school heads

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Some heads appointed through the *Escalafon* are regarded as good	12
2. Promotion of experienced teachers	8
3. Successful deputy headships of competent heads	8

b) The system could not enable the appointment of effective school heads

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Headteachers are only appointed based on a high score in points	14
2. Deficiency in preparedness in leadership, management, and human relationships	12
3. Lack of practical meaningful experiences in leading and managing	8

Table 4. Emergent themes of Research Question 4

a) Talent identification

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Informal talent identification	18
2. Temporary leadership posts	16
3. Headships in small schools	7

b) Preparation and training for leadership

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Limited available preparation in school management	10
2. Preparation in leadership and management is not mandatory	3
3. Expressed need in leadership and management preparation before promotion	21

c) Leadership learning

Emergent theme	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Learning to lead and manage occurs in the post	19

Table 5. Emergent themes of Research Question 5

a) Improvement of the point-based system

Emergent theme	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Panel to interview candidates for leadership posts	9

b) The appointment of better prepared school leaders in Mexican compulsory education

Emergent themes	Respondents (N= 21)
1. Strengthen the preparation of school leaders	18
2. A certification programme	9
3. Post rotation	3

Appendix F

Interview Transcript – Headteacher 5

What do you think of the current process to appoint headteachers? From your viewpoints what are its strengths?

I think is a good opportunity the existence of the vertical *Escalafon* because it gives opportunities to those teachers with the intention to be promoted to leadership positions either in schools or in the educational system. Decision making positions need to be in charge of people with the knowledge to make the best decisions and implement policy that benefits schools. What positive things I see in the promotion system? I see that any teacher could be promoted to leadership positions based on their own merit without have been helped by anyone. A school leader who was promoted by the *Escalafon* will not owe his/her post to anyone; therefore, he or she will be more free to make decisions to benefit pupils in his/her care based on educational criteria. The vertical system is good because enables that teachers could be promoted by their own merits leaving outside favouritism in the appointment of school leaders. Well, a factor assessed for the appointment of school leaders is preparation. This favours that teachers could arrive to the post better prepared.

From your viewpoint, what are the shortcomings of the system to appoint school leaders?

Well, teachers in general do not know much about the *Escalafon*, they do not use it. I think this has to do with the little publicity given to it within the educational system. In the lack of publicity is probably because leadership positions sometimes used to be given without following the procedures established in the vertical *Escalafon*. Teachers sometimes do not know how school leaders or supervisors are appointed. There will be little participation if there is little knowledge. As a system to appoint school leaders it has its limitations. The main would be the impersonal mechanisms to select school leaders because for appointment they only need to accumulate points in few general aspects that do not guarantee that the best candidate will be chosen between a group of applicants. Selection mechanisms do not allow a deeper knowledge of candidates applying for a leadership post. Just to give an example, in private institutions when a director is appointed usually the selection team implemented a process to make sure that they hire the best candidate or the person who meet the requirements for the post. For instance, the selection team asks for reference of previous professional performance, and also requires preparation for the post especially if they are going to be appointed to a post that requires specialised knowledge and skills although sometimes having the preparation required does not guarantee to be given the position. I think in the system that we have to appoint school leaders selection criteria and procedures are not the best. I think that the person that gets the highest score and is appointed sometimes is not the best. Moreover, it is not taken into account the specific conditions of every school since due to the conditions, strengths, problems and needs every school needs a specific type of

leader. This is why I think that the system we have to appoint school leaders has limitations.

3. From your perspective do you consider that the point-based system enables the promotion of good school heads? In which areas it does? In which areas it does not?

Well, In general I think that the system we have to appoint school leaders has strengths and shortcomings. But, in general I think that newly appointed heads arrive to the post a bit limited and then as time passes they learn and improve their performance. In the case of those who could be considered good they had previous experiences, for instance, there are teachers who have had the opportunity to teach in different schools and contexts and that helps once they heads because they have had experiences that could relate to once they face similar situations in the school they are leading. In the case of those that do not enable in the appointment of prepared heads I think that the lack of preparation for the post along with the lack of practical experiences in leadership limit their performance because there are appointed heads without meaningful experiences to lead and coordinate team works.

4. What do you think about talent identification, how potential leaders are identified?

I do not know that such a thing exists in the educational system, no, there is not an official identification of future leaders. Well, it could be said that this happens more in the rural areas where the school's supervisors appoints the

person he or she considers the best for the position. Only there in the rural areas could be said that there is an identification of leaders, in urban areas this does not happen.

5. How does the current system enable preparation and training in leadership?

I think we have already talked a bit about it. I think that take into consideration academic preparation in competitions for headship enables that newly appointed heads arrive to the post more prepared. However, there is not preparation itself for the post. It would be convenient to have preparation before promotion because newly appointed heads could have the knowledge of what will imply their new position. Once you are in the position you know that there are many things that you did not know and you have to learn them in the post. We are suddenly in a world where we say wow! What are they talking about? Guidelines, regulations, rights and obligations, am I doing my job as I have to? Then, I think there is a need for preparation before teachers win a competition in the *Escalafon*.

6. What do you think about leadership learning, does the system enable leadership learning, and how do school leaders in Mexican compulsory education learn to lead?

We learn to lead a school once we are in the post and sometimes we learn by trail and error. At the beginning as in everything is a new stage in your professional life, and you are not a classroom teacher or deputy head anymore. You are now the headteacher, the one who makes the main decisions in the

school. At the beginning there is an adaptation period in which you learn to be confident, to meet students' needs, and how to interact with parents and teaching staff. All this is learned in the practice. When few years have passed and you reflect on your firsts experiences as head, you realise that you have learned. Generally you arrive to the post with a very limited idea of what means to be a school head, and as time passes you learn, sometimes by trial and error.

7. How could the point-based system be improved?

As I had said before, the appointment of school leaders by the vertical *Escalafon* has many things that could be improved. I believe that there should be implemented mechanisms in which people who win competitions for leadership posts are the most adequate for the posts. Yes, it is good that preparation is taken into account along with years of service as the main factors that determine that a teacher wins a competition, but it is also needed to know better the applicants in their performance and which their proposal are to improve the conditions of the schools in which there are the vacancies. A high score does not guarantee that newly appointed head will be successful. I think it is needed to know better the candidates applying for a promotion.

8. What could be done in Mexican compulsory education to appoint better prepared school leaders?

Well, offer preparation, preparation is very important. There is initial training for aspiring teachers, but not for aspiring heads. The roles we have are not the same as the roles of a classroom teacher. Many times we notice that problems in

schools stay for long time because there is not knowledge to solve them. I think that aspiring school leaders could be trained and prepared much better. I think there is a need to focus the preparation of aspiring heads on leadership. However, meaningful development is needed also for those who are already appointed. Preparation and training could be the most important change that could enable the appointment of better heads.