



## Teacher professional development and school leadership in Mexican Elementary schools

### Meksika İlköğretim Okullarında Öğretmenlerin Mesleki Gelişimleri ve Okul Liderliği

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**Abstract.** This paper presents a quantitative study aimed to inquire into professional conditions of school leaders and teachers in Mexico. Based on questionnaires for teachers and school principals, this study focused on teacher professional development and school leadership, considering indicators as teacher training, induction and mentoring, teacher appraisal, and school climate. Teachers and principals from 106 public elementary schools participated. Results highlight the need of attention at guidelines and policies indicated for Mexican educational system.

**Keywords:** Teacher development, school leadership, principal management

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**Öz.** Bu makale, Meksika'daki okul liderlerinin ve öğretmenlerinin mesleki koşullarını araştırmayı amaçlayan nicel bir çalışma sunmaktadır. Öğretmenler ve okul müdürleri için yapılan anketlere dayanan bu çalışma, öğretmen eğitimi, indüksiyon ve mentorluk, öğretmen değerlendirme ve okul iklimi gibi göstergeleri dikkate alarak öğretmenin mesleki gelişimi ve okul liderliği üzerine odaklanmıştır. Katılımcılar 106 devlet ilköğretim okulundan öğretmenler ve müdürleridir. Sonuçlar, Meksika eğitim sistemi için belirtilen rehber ilkelere ve politikalara olan ilgiyi güçlendirmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Öğretmen gelişimi, okul liderliği, müdür yönetimi

## INTRODUCTION

Several efforts have been done on educational assessment affairs for understanding the influence of factors involved in the school context and how these influence students' performance. In the last decade, through the application of national standardized tests as the National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Schools (ENLACE) has gathered relevant information about the context in which students and teachers live and interact, as well as the resources available to schools and some relevant school processes for learning, leading to the formation of a system of educational indicators (Santiago, McGregor, Nusche, Ravela, Toledo, 2012).

According to Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP), the results of any standardized assessment obeys a combination of factors that can even be school and out. For example, from 2010 and now in 2011, the results of ENLACE incorporate the degree of marginalization by locality according to indexes compiled by the National Population Council (CONAPO) (OECD, 2011).

Moreover, the OECD, which seeks to provide international indicators and relevant analysis to help countries to review and develop education policies, conducted research on teaching and learning where aspects as teacher training, teachers' evaluation and feedback, professional development of teachers and social participation, among others, were evaluated by the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2009).

TALIS, which is the first international survey that focuses on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools, provides an opportunity for teachers and school principals to contribute to the analysis of education and development of education policies (OECD, 2009).

### **Educational assessment in Mexico**

While in Mexico the external evaluation of teachers was almost nonexistent just 20 years ago, in recent years there has been progress in the evaluation through stimulus programs for teachers. In 1993, the SEP implemented the National Teaching Career Program and in 2008, the Incentives Program for Teaching Quality, in order to create an additional income to the salary of teachers and offering the possibility of advancing in the profession (OECD, 2011).

The SEP estimated that, in practice, almost 60% of all education personnel in basic education is not subject to an evaluation process (SEP-SNTE, 2011, cited by INEE, 2014). Therefore, universal screening of teachers and principals in Basic Education Service, which is in its early stages of implementation, has been a recent effort by the Mexican government to introduce the assessment to the entire teaching workforce (INEE, 2014).

The creation of the National Institute for Educational Assessment (INEE) responded to the growing social demand to have an independent body, with constitutional autonomy, to perform reliable assessments of the Mexican education system (SEP, 2013). The Law of the National Institute for Educational Assessment (INEE, 2013) indicates as main purposes: To contribute to the formulation of educational policies and the design and implementation of plans and programs derived therefrom; as well as to improve school management and educational processes.

Thus, the government recognizes the potential value of a technical, professional and independent evaluation as powerful to promote full implementation of the right to education tool; it conceives evaluation as a public activity that must be at the service of society, teachers, students and public space representing the classroom and school (INEE, 2013).

## **School leadership**

In Mexico, the school leadership is one of the educational areas where they have promoted important structural changes that affect the improvement of educational quality. Growing international evidence shows that the performance of this factor is crucial to improving school performance (Asuga, Eacott & Scevak, 2015; Gomez-Zermeño & Alemán, 2014; Miller, 2013; Soehner & Ryan, 2011).

Recent research shows school leadership as an influence process that runs the achievement of the intended purposes, and that successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their values. In an educational institution, the work of principals and supervisors have an indirect effect on academic results, they create a suitable environment to facilitate the teaching-learning process (Finnigan, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007; OCDE, 2010a; OCDE, 2010b).

Indeed, emphasis on school leadership can provide answers to improve educational quality, since strong school leadership is associated with effective schools (Hallinger, 2003; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). It is important to understand the influence generated by the school leadership, which focuses on the role of intermediary between education policies and achievement in teacher performance. Principals are the ones who assume the conditions set by higher administrative units, and then interpret and adapt these criteria to teaching.

The principal is the key figure of school leadership, because, on the one hand, they guide the teachers who are part of the school, and on the other hand, they are responsible for the school administration, which is often itself part of larger administration units. Thus, administration and leadership of the directors have a direct influence on the conditions of the working lives of teachers, and generally also it is assumed that the school leadership directly influences the effectiveness of teachers and results student achievement (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008).

## **Teacher professional development**

In these times of change in education systems around the world, many societies are committed to creating educational reforms. For these reforms to be successful, professional development of teachers is a key element (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Thus, requirements arising from the social and cultural changes have not been made only in the school leadership roles, but also on what is expected from teachers (Robinson & Bryce, 2013; Schleicher, 2009; Tschannen-Morana, & Barrb, 2004; Zhang & Ng, 2011).

According to Joyce and Showers (1980, cited by Day, 1999) professional development of teachers is all natural learning experiences and the activities planned in order to have a direct benefit to the individual, group or school, to contribute to the quality of education in the classroom. In this process, the teachers acquire and develop critical knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential for proper professionalism for thought, planning and practice with students and colleagues throughout each stage of their professional lives of teaching.

Consequently, teacher professional development is not an isolated series of events, such as day-long workshops, or individualistic "one-off" activities. Rather, this should be understood as a complex social practice, regarded as policy, as a research product and process, as an important part of teachers' work, and as an individual teacher's decision (Hardy, 2012; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

No matter how good the prior instructions are given to teachers, it is not possible to expect that preparing teachers for all the challenges they will face during their careers (OECD, 2009). Induction and mentoring programs are precious elements that support the professional

development of teachers. Also, those programs can face some of the problems in their training, providing systematic support in the early years of his career.

Induction and mentoring programs are very valuable elements that support the professional development of teachers and can address some of the problems presented in their training, providing systematic support in the early years of their career.

Hence, there is growing interest in developing schools as learning organizations, where teachers share their experiences and knowledge more systematically. This way, it will be achieved the school is a space where all stakeholders are involved in knowledge, and continuous improvement is generated in the process where teaching and learning are achieved for both students and teachers. Effective professional development is ongoing, includes training, practice, and feedback, and needs adequate time and track (OECD, 2004; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Evaluation and feedback to teachers are also important components for the development and careers of teachers. Its main purpose is to provide teachers with valuable information for better understanding and improving their educational practice. Also, evaluation and feedback can be used to identify opportunities for professional development of teachers (OECD, 2014a).

In turn, it is important to consider that these elements of school context, both the action of the director and the teachers, affect the working environment of the institution. A positive school climate is developed when teachers work with their students in a safe, respectful and supportive environment that facilitates motivation and learning (Brophy & Good, cited by OECD, 2014a).

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study of teacher development and school leadership has proven importance to know the context in which students are learning as they involve the teacher and the principal, who are presented as determining factors for the improvement of students' academic performance (Pont, Nuschey Moorman, 2008; Schleicher, 2009; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

This research aims to investigate the school context factors about the conditions of professional development, according to the perceptions of teachers and principals in public primary schools. This is settled under the project 'TALIS-ENLACE: School Leadership, teacher development and its relationship to the educational achievement of elementary school students', by means of Sectorial CONACyT / INEE Research Fund for the Evaluation of Education.

To do this, the general objective of this research is to make a study to improve understanding of the variables in the school context related to teacher development and school leadership, through the analysis of the results obtained by applying an instrument based on TALIS to a representative sample that have been generated for the state of Colima.

The specific objectives derived from the above general objective are:

- To measure the context variables related to school leadership and teacher development.
- To generate knowledge that will improve the understanding of the conditions for professional development of teachers and principals in Mexico.

In order to meet the objectives, we defined the following research question: What are the professional development' conditions of Basic Education' principals and teachers in Mexico?

Some conditions that are also related to teacher professional development and school leadership are the profile and training, induction and counseling teachers and teacher evaluation and school climate in which both teachers and the director interact. Thus, indicators that can describe the professional conditions of teachers and principals will be obtained. The study of these conditions will contribute to a greater understanding of everyday living situations from both teachers and principals, also to understand the educational and institutional context in which they work.

## METHOD

### Research design

In order to answer the research question, a quantitative approach was adopted. We opted for an ex-post-facto descriptive design for presenting a measurement of variables previously collected. It is based on a controlled, objective and results-oriented measurement, through reliable and replicable data (Reichardt, 1979, cited by Alvira, 1983).

### Data collection tools

For this study, two research instruments were applied: The questionnaire for directors and questionnaire for teachers, both 30 questions, whose sources were TALIS 2013 questionnaires designed and validated by the OECD (OECD, 2014a; OECD, 2014b). These survey instruments were refined for obtaining the variables of this research study. Questions that were not applicable according to the characteristics of the Mexican educational system were eliminated, also those that were distantly related to professional development and school leadership. Tables 1 and 2 describe the topics included in teachers and principals' questionnaires.

Table 1. *TALIS questionnaire for teachers adapted to Mexico study*

Items	Topic	Example
Items 1-5	Demographics	School Municipality Gender Age
Items 6-10	Teacher status & Background	Years of experience Academic level Do you work in also another school?
Items 11-25	Professional development	Which types of professional activities do you participate? How much do you pay for professional development activities? Have you been supported to participate in professional development activities? Topics included in your professional development
Items 26-30	Teacher assessment and school climate	How does your practice is evaluated? Level of agreement with school activities

Table 2. *TALIS questionnaire for principals adapted to Mexico study*

Items	Topic	Example
Items 1-4	Demographics	School Municipality Gender Age

Items 5-7	Principal status & Background	Years of experience Academic level Employment status
Items 8-10	Professional development	Activities included in your professional development How many days did you participate in professional development activities during the last year?
Items 11-21	School management	Which school figures do participate in your school management team? Who makes the following decisions at your school? Which factors limits your efficacy as principal?
Items 22-25	Teacher assessment	How often do you evaluate teachers work? Who does the following assessment activities?
Items 26-30	Induction and mentoring' activities	Do teachers participate in induction activities? Do teachers participate in mentoring activities?

### Research sample

Research instruments were applied to a total of 106 principals and 842 teachers who serve in primary schools that are located in the 10 municipalities that make up the state of Colima. This state was selected for the fieldwork research due the distribution of municipalities and the total population of schools gives the opportunity to include schools of all municipalities in the study sample. A total of 405 public elementary schools comprise the state.

### Data collection

In a first phase, the questionnaires to teachers and principals were applied online by software specialized in the design and implementation of surveys. We contacted region authorities and principals to apply the survey in their respective computer room at school. In a second phase, the instruments were applied in print at schools that did not have the conditions to apply online. We went to every school under this condition and interview the teachers in order to fill the entire survey.

### Data analysis

It is important to consider TALIS measures the beliefs, attitudes and practices that teachers and principals report themselves. The development of these beliefs, attitudes and practices is influenced by personal characteristics and by cultural background and the school system (Van de Vijver and Leung, 1997, quoted by OECD, 2014a). These influences can produce different levels of approval or frequency questionnaire responses, this may limit the comparison of results.

For analyzing the results, it was suggested a descriptive phase from the questionnaires of teachers and principals of Colima. Though this is a descriptive analysis, some results were analyzed along with TALIS 2013 for primary level teachers in Mexico, not for being compared but to describe similar results. Thus, descriptive statistics of the variables leadership, school management, recognition, teacher evaluation and educational practices of teachers were analyzed.

## RESULTS

Descriptive analysis obtained from principals and teachers questionnaires is presented. At the same time, some results are supported by those obtained by TALIS 2013 for the primary level in Mexico. In this way, we can get from most significant categories of study findings: Professional profile, Professional training, consulting and teacher induction, professional development, teacher evaluation, educational leadership and school climate.

### **Professional profile**

Concerning principals professional profile, results show that in Colima 77.4% of principals work full time, while 9.5% have teaching responsibilities. Otherwise, TALIS 2013 for Mexico showed that 73.1% of principals work full time while 55.6% have responsibilities of teachers.

### **Teacher professional training**

The results of Colima show that 94.4% of principals studied at normal school, college or superior, while in TALIS 2013 Mexico 85.7% of the principals indicated that they studied at this level. Also, while 91.9% of Colima teachers surveyed said they studied at Normal, college or superior, TALIS 2013 for Mexico showed that 80.7% of teachers have this level of education. It is relevant to mention that until 1983 Normal was considered as a high school.

### **Teacher induction and mentoring**

By comparing the results obtained by the principals and teachers of Colima, it shows that while 34% of principals said in their school have an induction program for newly hired teachers, 36.8% of teachers received induction. Also, while 16% of principals indicated that informal activities include induction, 25.8% of teachers said they received this type of induction. Also, while 22.6% of principals said that they have general or administrative induction for teachers, 29.8% of teachers did so.

### **Teacher professional development**

On the professional development teachers, it is evident that the two subjects that teacher indicate they need more training are teaching in a multicultural and multilingual cultural environment (36.8% of teachers say have high need) and teaching students with special educational needs (39.4% have high need). These results are similar to those presented by the OECD, where teachers have 39.3% and 41.6% of high need in both subjects, respectively.

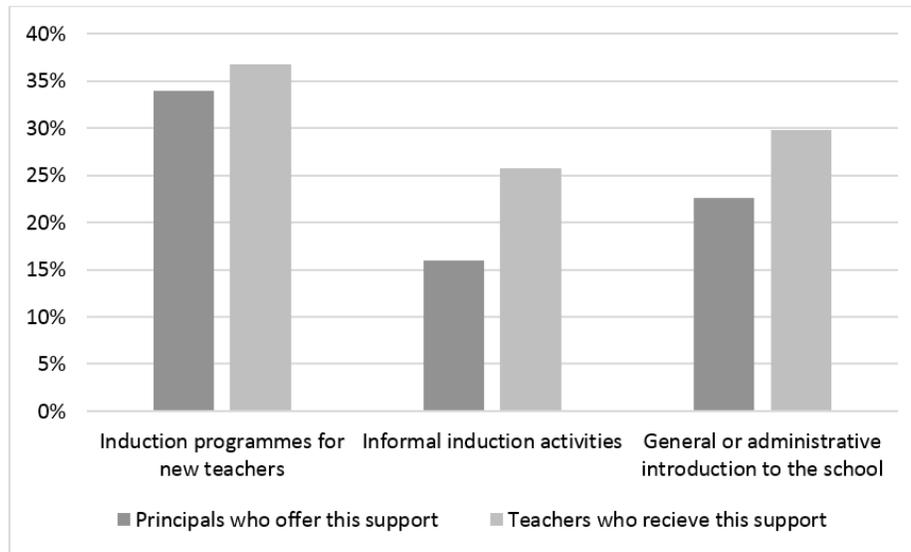


Figure 1. Principals and teachers who participate in induction activities.

These same subjects agree to be the least included in the professional development activities of teachers. 24.2% of teachers said that teaching was included in a multicultural and multilingual environment in professional development activities that participated, and 48.6% of teachers participated in activities where teaching students with special educational needs are included. These results reaffirm the opinion of teachers regarding barriers to participation in professional development activities, where 44.2% of teachers indicates agree or strongly agree that no relevant professional development is offered.

Another result that is evident in this study is that 64.6% of teachers had to pay at least part of their professional development activities (48.8% some and 15.8% all), while in TALIS 33.9% say this (24.4% some, 9.5% all). This may be related to the fact that 363.91 pesos (around 24 USD) are allocated to the professional development for every teacher. In 2013, 366.12 million pesos were entered into the National System of Continuing Education (Tépach, 2014, quoted by INEE, 2015) serving 1,006,078 public school teachers in basic education.

In turn, teachers indicated that the main aspect that hinders their professional development is the lack of incentives to participate in these activities (59.5% pointed to agree or strongly agree with this statement). This is complemented by the results reported by Tenti and Steinberg (2011, cited by INEE, 2015) that shows "the opinion of teachers in the sense that the most effective incentives or incentives to ensure the success of a development program are those from wage character". Added to this is, the assumption that in Mexico the high percentage of attendance at professional development activities was related to the impact on programs for teacher promotion.

Moreover, the results show that 87.6% of teachers participate in courses and workshops and 26.4% participate in conferences or seminars. This corresponds largely to the activities offered in the National Catalogue of Continuing Education and Professional Advancement 2011-2012 (SEP, 2012, quoted by INEE, 2015).

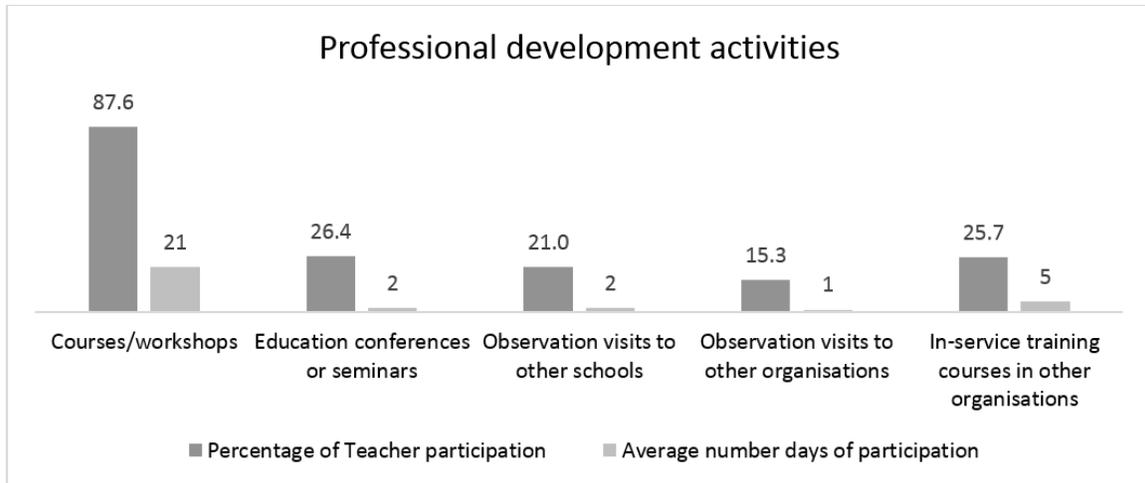


Figure 2. Percentage of Colima teachers' participation in professional development activities and average of days that teachers participate per year.

### Teacher assessment

In the analysis of this category are two types of feedback that are most commonly used in teacher assessment: 85.7% of teachers said they receive feedback from observation and 93.1% of teachers said they receive feedback from results analysis. Otherwise, 100% of the principals states they apply both types of feedback.

Moreover, while 67.9% of principals stated that deal with teacher feedback received from parents and 21.7% say that anyone involved in this activity; 43.5% of teachers said that the director performs this activity, and 42.2% said they have never received this kind of feedback.

### School leadership

The results from principals show that although contractual and wage type decisions are taken by regional or federal authorities, there are some activities where they can take decisions collectively. For example, the establishment of disciplinary policies and procedures, where 30.2% of principals stated that they are responsible for this activity and 56.6% say that the Technical School Board is responsible.

Another activity that shows give opportunity to make collegiate decisions are to approve the admission of students to school (56.6% of directors take this decision, and 26.4% say that the Technical School Board is in charge) and select learning materials (20.8% of school's principals make this decision and 54.2%, Technical school Board).

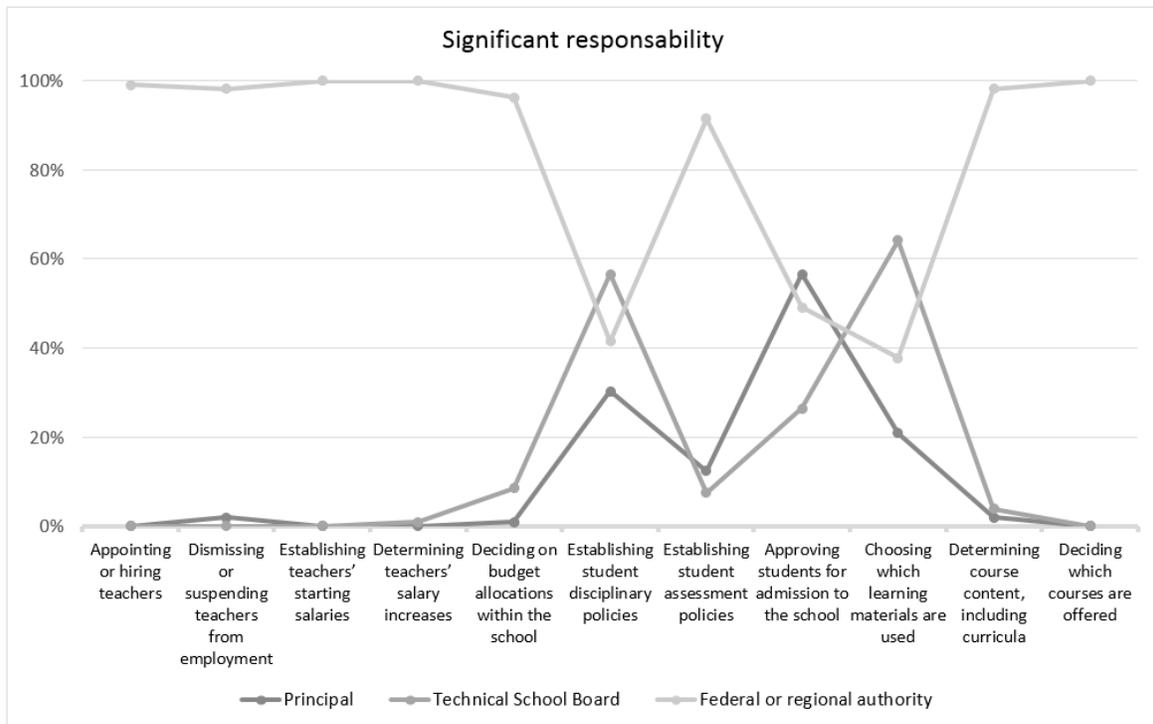


Figure 3. Decision making from principals, Technical School Board, and regional or federal authority.

Regarding the factors that limit the effectiveness of the principal, principals noted aspects that severely limit their effectiveness are the lack of budget resources (34.9%), regulation and government policy (24.5%) and lack of participation and parental support (23.6%). In turn, it highlights that 57.5% of principals said that they very frequently collaborate with teachers to solve discipline problems.

### School climate

In this section, the result displayed as most significant is that 74.8% of teachers disagree or strongly disagree that teaching profession is valued in society, also 59.9% of teachers surveyed in TALIS 2013 Mexico says this. Nevertheless 92.4% said they enjoy working at the school, and 98% are satisfied with their teaching.

Furthermore, it is highlighted that the principals indicate a high percentage of opportunity for parents to participate in school: They provide courses or workshops (93.4% of principals said that this activity takes place in their school), they bring support to the association of parents (99.1%) and parent meetings are performed (100%). Although a lower percentage of principals (67%) say that services are provided to assist the participation of parents in their school.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the descriptive analysis for principals and teachers allow to contribute and generate a broader description of teachers' analysis in Mexico. For instance, those should be revised according on the Teachers in Mexico report and the Second Teaching and Learning

International Survey Mexico Results (TALIS 2013), both released by the INEE (National Institute for Educational Assessment) in 2015.

On the role of director at the school, it is concluded that the process towards school autonomy, rather than an increase in the principals' decisions has led to an increase in the collegial decision-making. This can be observed in the shared leadership from principal with the School Technical Broad and the school management team for taking school decisions (Wilhem, 2013).

The results on conditions of principals and teachers might be compared with the policy guidelines on the processes of teacher training and development, induction and counseling, and teacher evaluation. From the research results, considering the perception of principals and teachers, opportunities for improvement in professional development activities were evident, since it is identified that the training needs of teachers correspond to the themes least offered in professional development activities. They also show that do not yet there are defined processes of induction and teacher counseling, at least not formally, being that these processes are performed by different authorities and with different frequencies in each school (Hudson, 2013).

The efforts of government to achieve teacher professionalisation should consider some factors founded in this study, as a high percentage of teachers who believe their profession is not valued in society and a high percentage of teachers who only work for a part time. It is expected that in this process, which is also included the evaluation culture, greater appreciation of this profession will be achieved by improving conditions allowing teachers to perform such activity as a qualified professional.

Furthermore, due the current demand for teachers, along with results that shows a high percentage of teachers close to retirement. An important policy taken for INEE was the extent of labor supply to graduates from universities and institutions of higher education, since formerly, it was only able for normal school graduates (INEE, 2015). Thus, it is given the opportunity for more institutions forming future teachers to public service.

From this work, as well as performed in TALIS by the OECD, interesting results are found that should be investigated and analyzed in more detail to a better understanding of their causes. Due the nature of the research, which is based on the perception of teachers and principals, it allows to show an important approach previously not considered to generate a more complete picture of the education system evaluation and those participants involved.

Therefore, this research and TALIS 2013 for Mexico provide the basis for restructuring and redefining a deeper inquiry into the conditions of principals and teachers in this country. For instance, future research is considered relevant to achieve knowledge of teacher perception as self-managed professional for their development and to recognize specific training needs and professional development principal needs facing the current demands of the system and educational context. Also, it should be considered more specific aspects of the principal leadership, for identifying resources and skills that they have to exercise its authority and shared leadership in the institution.

Furthermore, to compare the results from TALIS research with academic achievement tests as ENLACE, in the case of Mexico, as OECD is preparing a TALIS-PISA link report, will enable to know the degree of relationship between TALIS' evaluated conditions and the results of students' performance. That is, it could contribute to making evident the extent that certain conditions of teachers and principals promote the academic performance of students.

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