

### What we know about successful principals in Mexico

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### Abstract

**Purpose.** This paper presents what is known from the school principals that participated in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) in Mexico. The paper reviews 14 publications (5 articles, 5 conference papers and 4 books) on successful school principals in Mexico that were published between 2009 and 2021 as part of the ISSPP. The papers were analysed using a conceptual framework consisting of: perceived qualities of the principal, school organization, suitability of teachers and principals, educational materials and methods, and educational infrastructure.

**Methodology.** A scoping study review methodology was used to explore publications and conference proceedings on ISSPP research on Mexican principals and schools, in order to answer the question: What do we know about successful school principals in the Mexican context? Conference papers, journal articles, book chapters and books formed the knowledge base for the review.

**Findings.** As a result of the analysis across the five analysis categories it was found that the principals emphasised improving the educational quality of their schools, and understood this as the basic criterion to judge their leadership success. Principals were central to school success and a nested model was produced to show how the successful school is built from the core of the principal, as a socioemotional skills role model, to a culture of continuous improvement. The model included principal socioemotional skills, school organisation, continuous improvement of teaching and principal practices, and having appropriate educational materials, methods and infrastructure.

**Originality.** The ISSPP has produced a large amount of research. This is the first review of the substantial contribution from ISSPP research in Mexico. The model produced from the review adds to the several models produced in the ISSPP.

**Keywords:** School principals, basic education, educational leadership, successful school leadership, school success.

**Paper type:** Bibliographic research

### Introduction

Since 2001, the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) has researched the characteristics and practices of successful school principals (Day and Gurr, 2018; Gurr, 2015). This research has been conducted in more than 24 countries, including Mexico, and utilises a common multi-perspective case study protocol across the project. The project website documents the extent of the project and many of the publications that have been generated (<https://www.uv.uio.no/ils/english/research/projects/isspp/>).

This paper describes a secondary study whose purpose is to compile and analyse the publications and presentations generated under the ISSPP protocol in Mexican schools. The reviewing process included journal articles, books, book chapters and conference papers. In order to structure the documentary review, the starting point was the four elements that define the concept of educational quality according to the highest authority in Mexico in the field of education: the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, as its acronym is in Spanish). An additional category was included in the analysis, in order to arrange additional information

collected that was not considered in the educational quality concept; it was the perceived qualities of the school principal.

In order to contextualise the results presented, the following is a general description of the educational system and some of the conditions of the school principal's post in Mexico.

### *Educational system and the principal post in Mexico*

Mexico is the third largest Latin American country (14th overall) with over 126 million inhabitants distributed in almost 2 million square kilometres, and half of the population is under 28 years old (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2020). The educational authority nationwide is SEP, which administrates the Mexican Educational System. In this regard, SEP is the governmental entity that pursues the objective of creating conditions that ensure access to quality education for all citizens. Quality education according to SEP refers to "that educational materials and methods, school organisation, educational infrastructure, and the suitability of teachers and principals ensure maximum learning achievement of learners" (SEP, 2017, p. 40).

Preschool, primary and secondary education are the basic education, and with high school, form the mandatory years of education. The basic education system, from grades K1 to K9, serves a population of over 25.4 million students, distributed in approximately 226,000 schools, attended by 1.2 million teachers (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación [INEE], 2018). As a result of the fact that three-quarters of the country's localities are between high and very high levels of marginalisation, it is estimated that more than half of the schools also operate in precarious situations (INEE, 2007). Only 76 per cent of the students complete secondary school within age expectations (SEB, 2014). Based on PISA results, Mexican students' academic performance is below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (OECD, 2021). Just a quarter of each generation completes a degree in higher education (INEE, 2007).

The role of Mexican principals is described by SEP in this way:

*"The principal organises the school and creates conditions for it to provide a quality educational service on a regular basis and in accordance with current regulations, in what corresponds to its field of competence, and is able to dialogue and combine the work of different actors so that this is carried out, in favour of the learning and well-being of the students"* (SEP, 2019, p. 22).

However, Torres-Arcadia *et al.* (2016) reported principals struggled to meet these expectations because of four main issues: (1) ambiguity in the definition of the position, (2) lack of professional training for the principal as an academic and administrative leader, (3) difficulties dealing with the workload, and (4) deficient relationships with teachers. These issues contrast with the principal job requirements.

### **Literature review**

To approach the analysis and explain the results, two main areas of knowledge are explored. The concept of successful educational leadership, because it is the focus of this research, and socioemotional skills, which is a construct that helps to explain qualities deployed by successful principals.

### *Successful educational leadership*

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3 In recent decades, the topic of school leadership has occupied an important place in  
4 research, practice and public policy discussion, due to the growing evidence that, for school-  
5 controlled factors, school leadership has the second largest impact on student learning after  
6 teachers (Angelle, 2017; Blase and Kirby, 2013; Carrasco and González, 2017; Day and  
7 Sammons, 2013; Day *et al.*, 2016; Glasserman-Morales *et al.*, 2016). This impact tends to be  
8 more relevant right where it is most needed, that is, in schools with conditions of vulnerability  
9 or disadvantage (Bolívar, 2009; Bolívar and Murillo, 2017).

10  
11 Complementarily, Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019), state that successful  
12 leaders draw on a repertoire of leadership practices that can be grouped into four domains:  
13 1) set directions; 2) build relationships and develop people; 3) develop the organization to  
14 support desired practices; and 4) improve the instructional program. Other studies, such as  
15 those of Day and Sammons (2016) and Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), make a strong  
16 emphasis on enhancing teaching and learning, enriching the curriculum, and promoting  
17 teacher professional development, through the construction of internal and external  
18 collaboration networks.

19  
20 Furthermore, Hernández-Castilla, *et al.* (2017) point out that successful principals are  
21 "those who set common goals, develop people and successfully manage their relationship  
22 with the community" (p. 501). After a review of different perspectives on leadership, Brito,  
23 *et al.* (2016) and Leithwood, *et al.* (2019) concluded that successful school leadership is the  
24 process by which the person who holds the management function in a school uses the power  
25 granted by their position as an opportunity to use the available resources and carry out the  
26 necessary tasks, meeting the needs and enhancing the capabilities of their collaborators,  
27 ensuring that educational results are socially valued and provide well-being and equity.  
28 Additionally, as Torres-Arcadia, *et al.* (2014) point out, successful principals are those whose  
29 educational agendas are not limited to meeting the demands of the educational system, but  
30 who foster the development of learning communities, facilitate the construction of a culture  
31 of collaboration and mutual support, and an ethic of collective service. Furthermore, as Day  
32 (2007) states, success includes effectiveness, but goes beyond: effectiveness is associated  
33 with observable behaviours and quantifiable results in academic achievement tests, while  
34 success is associated with these achievements but also with personal and social achievements,  
35 inclusion, and equity. In this same sense, Day (2006) argues that schools need leaders with  
36 moral purposes, who put at the centre of their agendas the teaching and learning of all  
37 students, with a sense of equity and justice.

#### 41 42 *Socioemotional skills at schools*

43 The exercise of school leadership is subject to the cognitive, social and emotional  
44 skills of staff in school leadership roles (Zembylas, 2007), even though they often have little  
45 or no formal training about this (Lenskaya and Brun, 2016). Socioemotional skills are "tools  
46 through which people can: understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive goals,  
47 feel and show empathy towards others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and  
48 make responsible decisions" (SEP, 2017, p. 879). Additionally, such socioemotional skills  
49 are considered relevant as they are determinants for people's health, behaviour and social  
50 achievements (Torres-Arcadia and Nava-Lara, 2019), and are usually perceived as emotional  
51 maturity and stability (Torres-Arcadia *et al.*, 2014). Socioemotional skills are becoming more  
52 important, especially as nowadays principals are described as "emotionally exhausted leaders  
53 that are less satisfied with their work and they are more likely to resign from the profession  
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3 or retire." (Rodriguez-Uribe, 2019, p- 25). Nava-Lara *et al.* (2019) suggested a typology to  
4 study school leaders' socioemotional skills:

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- 6 • Intrapersonal: composed of two general skills, self-awareness and self-regulation  
7 (Bisquerra, 2003).
  - 8 • Interpersonal: composed of two general skills, social awareness and relating to others  
9 (Bermúdez *et al.*, 2011).
  - 10 • Cognitive: developed through the general skill of responsible decision making, which is  
11 the set of action choices that are made consciously and autonomously with ethical and  
12 responsible references (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2000).
- 13  
14

### 15 **Research methodology**

16 A scoping review method (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005) was used to explore the  
17 Mexican ISSPP literature. The steps followed included identifying the research question,  
18 searching for relevant studies on the topic, selecting them, organising the data, and  
19 summarising and reporting the results. In this sense, the question guiding the present research  
20 is: What do we know about successful school principals in the Mexican context?  
21

22 The analysis presented can be considered as a secondary study (Glasserman-Morales  
23 *et al.*, 2019; Kitchenham *et al.* 2010) as it analyses studies referred to as primary, which have  
24 been identified through a systematic search process in different academic databases and  
25 repositories. The documents analysed included articles, papers, books, book chapters and  
26 conferences proceedings that considered the results of the ISSPP Mexican research. These  
27 were grouped into three categories with 5 articles, 5 conference papers and 4 books included  
28 – see Table 1. The inclusion criteria were considered to be those documents from 2009, the  
29 year in which the first case of the project in Mexico was documented, until March 2021, the  
30 date in which this article was developed.  
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33 Table 1.

34 *Documents selected by type*  
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Year	Article	Conference	Book
2011	-	C1* Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011**	-
2013	P1 Méndez-Salcido, 2013	C2 Bertrand-Marrufo and González-Mendoza, 2013 C3 Méndez-Salcido and Torres- Arcadia, 2013	-
2014	P2 Carrillo-Vargas, et al. 2014	C4 Torres-Arcadia et al., 2014	-
2015	P3 Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015	C5 Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015b	B1 Carrillo-Vargas, 2015 B2 Torres-Arcadia Pesqueira- Bustamante, 2015
2018	P4 Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018	-	-
2019	-	-	B3 Rodríguez Uribe, 2019 B4 Torres-Arcadia et al., 2019
2020	P5 Rodríguez-Uribe, et al., 2020	-	-
Total	5	5	4

\*Document identifier, \*\*Reference

In order to answer the question that guides this study, the initial approach was to analyse the documents based on the concept of quality education, in the sense that it is, according to SEP, the main responsibility with respect to the principal post as described earlier (SEP, 2019). Following this approach, quality education refers to “that educational materials and methods, school organisation, educational infrastructure and the suitability of teachers and principals ensure maximum learning achievement of learners” (SEP, 2017, p. 40). As a complement to this approach, we considered one of the most relevant aspects of the studies as carried out within the ISSPP protocol, which is the perception of the members of the school community (teachers, students, parents, among others) on the qualities, skills and behaviours that are key to success (Day and Gurr, 2018). Based on this framework, five categories were defined for review: 1. *Perceived qualities of the principal*. 2. *School organisation*, 3. *Suitability of teachers and principals*, 4. *Educational materials and methods*, and 5. *Educational infrastructure*.

The framework of the analysis is justified in the sense that SEP is the highest authority on educational matters in Mexico, so it is a valid source to explain what successful educational leadership means in Mexico. In addition, the ISSPP initiative is the most sustained research project on successful school principals ever undertaken and has a trustworthy methodology (Day and Gurr, 2018). This analysis provides an alignment between the results generated through the ISSPP protocol and the official definition in Mexico of what it means to exercise successful school leadership.

## Findings

Table 2 provides a frequency count across the documents for the five main categories that emerged from the review. The main topic addressed in the literature review is *Perceived qualities of the principal* (157 mentions); that is to be expected as it is precisely one of the main features of the ISSPP protocol. The second most common topic is *School organisation* (123 mentions), followed by suitability of teachers and principals (38), educational materials and methods (33) and educational infrastructure (22).

Table 2  
*Category mentions according to revised document*

Document id	Perceived qualities of the principal	School organisation	Suitability of teachers and principals	Educational materials and methods	Educational infrastructure
P1	3	3	-	-	-
P2	16	11	5	2	2
P3	16	3	-	1	-
P4	11	15	2	2	-
P5	8	7	1	3	-
C1	9	9	1	2	-
C2	7	1	1	1	2
C3	29	4	-	1	2
C4	10	1	-	-	-
C5	16	7	1	2	-
B1	5	10	4	3	2
B2	10	18	9	6	6
B3	6	13	5	4	1
B4	11	21	9	6	7
Total	157	123	38	33	22

Each of the categories is explained and characterized below with the information from the reviewed literature.

### 1. *Perceived qualities of the principal*

The main topic addressed in the literature review was *Perceived qualities of the principal* (157 mentions). In order to facilitate the understanding of this category further, analysis was applied using a socioemotional skills typology proposal by Nava-Lara *et al.* (2019) to describe the profile of school principals; this construct facilitates the organisation of the qualities, skills and behaviours deployed by the successful principals in the Mexican cases.

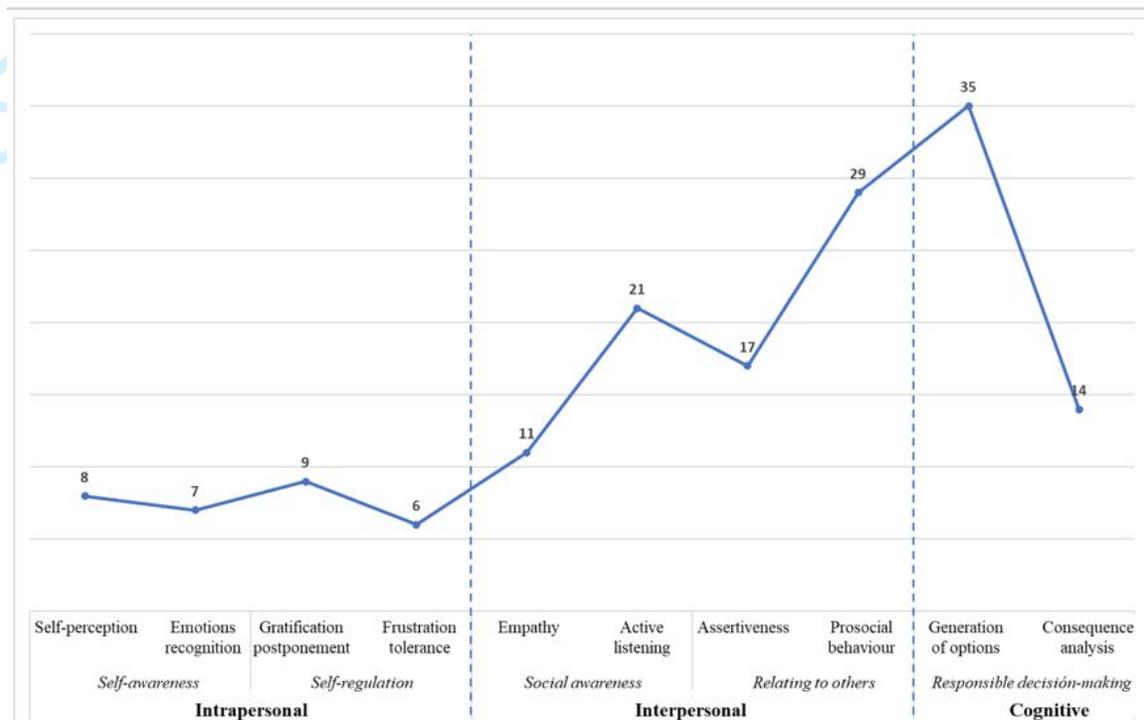


Figure 1: Frequency of mentions of particular socioemotional skills in the analysed documents.

The results indicate, as shown in Figure 1, that the socioemotional skills perceived as most appreciated by the school community are those that correspond to the cognitive sphere, followed by those of an interpersonal nature, and ending with intrapersonal skills. This suggests that the most highly-valued perceived socioemotional skills are those that are observable, whether from decision-making or relational elements, with those that do not have an explicit manifestation being less appreciated, as they are ascribed to the individual sphere. Figure 1 shows that the most perceived qualities are *generation of options* (cognitive skill) and *prosocial behaviour* (interpersonal skill), while there are few references related to intrapersonal skills.

The *generation of options* refers to the principal proposing alternatives, not initially considered, which may have a social benefit. Torres-Arcadia *et al.* (2014) listed the characteristics of the personal and professional profile of the successful school principal in Mexico, five of which are directly related to the generation of options as a particular skill (persevering, binding, managerial, leadership, creative). The options proposed by the school principal that are considered most successful are organising parent-child academic activities, extra-curricular activities that complement the curriculum, and linking the school with external entities (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014; Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011; Villela-Treviño and Torres-Arcadia, 2015). The *generation of options* would be difficult without an organisation based on the context and the resources available, because a customised organisation provides structure and systematisation to offer options and support their implementation (Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018; Rodríguez-Uribe *et al.*, 2020).

The second particular skill most referred to is *prosocial behaviour*, which is ascribed to the *interpersonal* skill and refers to those behaviours that generate social benefits. This can be explained by understanding that "the principal is an actor who has an influence on the

practices generated within the educational institution, and that this influence eventually leads to a set of new social practices that lead to a substantial improvement" (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014: 76). In order to develop this influence, the successful school principal must agree on the course the school is expected to follow and guide the educational community in that direction, as this generates commitment to achieving the shared vision (Villela-Treviño and Torres-Arcadia, 2015b). This socioemotional skill is useful to accomplish school infrastructure improvements and adaptations, because it requires positive interaction with parents and/or links with external agents such as educational authorities, companies and organisations (Carrillo-Vargas, 2015).

The third particular skill most referred to is *active listening*, which is of an interpersonal nature and is framed within social awareness. Active listening is understood as the willingness to understand the interlocutor, both explicitly (discourse) and implicitly (feelings, ideas). The profile of successful school principals has at least seven characteristics that can be ascribed to active listening: inclusive, respectful, accessible, facilitating, knowledgeable, listening, and observant (Villela-Treviño and Flores-Fahara, 2015).

Assertiveness is positioned as the fourth specific socioemotional skill with the most mentions. Assertiveness is understood as the ability to express and defend one's own rights while respecting those of others. This is directly related to always keeping parents informed, which is possible by clearly communicating what is expected of people (Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018) and personally attending to the needs of the school while making achievements known, giving the same information several times in clear, concise language, using the same form of communication with parents, students, and teachers (Méndez-Salcido, 2013).

## 2. School organisation

School organisation is the element that, according to the documents reviewed, is the most influential in promoting educational quality according to school leaders in Mexico. This is based on the recognition that the majority of the strategies and activities indicated to improve schools refer to some kind of adjustment or agreement that arises from an organisational process among the members of the school community, since success depends on a whole process of planning, execution and evaluation of each of the activities carried out (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014).

Mexican school principals improve school organization through concrete day-to-day actions. With regard to these actions, it is possible to categorized as follows:

- Actions related to shaping school culture. Clear and constant communication with teachers and parents, the promotion of discipline, the strengthening of relations with the wider community, ongoing relationships with authorities at all levels, recognition of the work of all those who collaborate (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014; Méndez-Salcido, 2013; Méndez-Salcido and Torres-Arcadia, 2013). Development and maintenance of a collaborative school culture, openness to new ideas, inclusion in school decision-making, understanding and modification of conditions derived from the context surrounding the school (Bertrand-Marrufo and González-Mendoza, 2013; Villela-Treviño and Torres-Arcadia, 2015). Managing from the perspective of inclusion and social justice (Rodríguez-Uribe *et al.*, 2020; Torres-Arcadia *et al.*, 2014). Recycling sports uniforms of graduating students in joint organisation with the Parents' Association, reinforcing the use of uniforms to reduce social gaps among students (Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011). Dedicating time, specifically determined in the School Technical Councils, to reflect on and analyse staff attitudes and practices, managing in-kind support

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3 such as school breakfasts or tuition subsidies, channelling students with specific learning  
4 needs to specialists in the field, offering the school as a community meeting place rather  
5 than just a school (Rodríguez-Urbe, 2018).

- 6  
7 • Actions related to managing workload. Providing structure and systematisation to all  
8 school processes, ensuring student progress by providing teachers and students with clear  
9 guidance and orientations to generate and interpret evaluative and diagnostic information,  
10 establishing positive relationships, transforming structures to promote cooperation  
11 (Rodríguez-Urbe, 2018). Promotion of knowledge of the roles of all members of the  
12 school community, adaptations that favour the respect and application of the country's  
13 educational norms in the school (Bertrand-Marrufo and González-Mendoza, 2013;  
14 Villela-Treviño and Torres-Arcadia, 2015). Organising parents to participate in safety  
15 brigades at the entrance and exit shifts and in the vicinity of the school, participating in  
16 the Safe School Programme (addictions, operation backpack), study groups focused on  
17 students with behavioural and/or learning problems (Flores-Márquez and Morales-  
18 Cervantes, 2011).

19  
20 The above actions exemplify how the successful principal engages members of the school  
21 community to expand their agenda beyond what is dictated by educational authorities,  
22 through nurturing learning communities to address the specific needs of the school, allowing  
23 the construction of a culture of collaboration and mutual support, as pointed out by Torres-  
24 Arcadia, *et al.* (2014).

### 25 26 27 3. Suitability of teachers and principals

28 Maximising learning achievement among students is directly related to the suitability  
29 of the teaching and management staff that serve them. This premise is well understood by  
30 the leaders reported in the cases reviewed, who are committed to the diversification of tasks  
31 among their staff in order to achieve objectives, including the shortage of positions and/or  
32 professional profiles in schools (Flores-Márquez and Morales Cervantes-Cervantes, 2011).

33  
34 In the case of school principals, their suitability is enhanced by taking specialisation  
35 courses and postgraduate studies. School principals consider them as means to acquire the  
36 necessary tools to transcend in their activities. Also, they generate social prestige that is an  
37 added value for the schools in which they work (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014). The  
38 preparation of principals, therefore, impacts on their reflections, philosophies, qualities and  
39 personal and interprofessional skills that characterise them, where collaborative work with  
40 the school community is crucial for the development of the institution's functions (Flores-  
41 Marquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011).

42  
43 Regarding the suitability of teachers, different strategies can be identified aimed at  
44 updating them in order to prepare them for the complexity of the diverse needs of students  
45 (Rodríguez-Urbe, 2018), either through the development of skills inherent to leadership  
46 (Rodríguez-Urbe *et al.*, 2020) or by participating in consultancies to learn how to use new  
47 equipment, even when these are outside working hours (Bertrand-Marrufo and González-  
48 Mendoza, 2013). It is worth mentioning that, in this sense, in order to attend to preparation  
49 times outside working hours, one of the teachers declares:

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53 *...attention to students with low performance...involves meetings outside school*  
54 *hours and even working on Saturdays and Sundays...determined to work in this*  
55 *space, not just to do a job but to give all their effort to build human beings.*  
56 (Rodríguez-Urbe, 2018, p. 84).  
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Moreover, Rodríguez-Uribe (2018) suggests promoting formal training processes to achieve teacher's suitability along two lines: a) topics of general interest to achieve identity cohesion as a school and b) topics for the immediate work in the classroom, for example inclusive education, discipline, collaborative work, learning assessment, among others. Hence, there is implied that teachers are in constant need of a permanent training in both leadership and professional activities in order to be suitable for their jobs.

#### 4. Educational materials and methods

The academic improvement implicit in the promotion of quality education among school leaders in Mexico refers to making decisions and implementing strategies aimed at raising achievement levels among students.

The concern of principals to implement strategies aimed at attending to students at risk is notable, as suggested by Rodríguez *et al.* (2020, p. 13):

*In the schools where the study has been carried out, it is notable in all cases to investigate the situation of students in different performances, in order to properly diagnose students who are at risk, due to different situations.*

Actions such as additional time dedicated to these students, visiting them at home (Torres-Arcadia, *et al.*, 2019), and teacher-student and student-student tutoring (Alfaro, 2019; Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011) stand out.

Different programmes focused on safety and healthy coexistence reinforce the construction of an environment of trust and collaboration, conducive to learning, principals "assume the necessary measures to maintain the academic level and the vision of success that has given prestige to the school, as well as the pleasant climate of coexistence and learning" (Torres-Arcadia, *et al.*, 2019, p. 72). In addition to this, work is being done on strategies aimed at developing socioemotional competencies for healthy coexistence and the experience of civic and democratic values (Mora and Rodríguez, 2019).

Among the strategies and activities identified in the cases reviewed are participating in as many cultural sports events as possible (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014), making curricular adaptations according to the needs of the students, following a diagnosis (Rodríguez-Uribe *et al.*, 2020), and defining a fixed time for simultaneous reading for all members of the educational community and for students to adopt the role of tutor before their peers (Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011). In addition, emphasis is placed on making the most of school time, establishing supplementary strategies in the absence of teachers, such as "Attention to students, zero free hours" (Mora and Rodríguez, 2019, p. 26), through which interesting materials are designed to reinforce the curriculum and are used by substitute teachers (Lara, 2019; Mora and Rodríguez, 2019).

The strategies described denote the interest of school principals to improve teaching, and exercise leadership for the improvement of learning. Through this way of leading, the "principal defines the teaching-learning process, promotes learning and takes care of the way classes are taught" (Villela-Treviño and Torres-Arcadia, 2015, p. 52), which can only be possible based on the evaluation and feedback of performance, as well as accountability and guidance in the assigned responsibilities (Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018; Rodríguez-Uribe *et al.*, 2020).

### 5. Educational infrastructure

As far as educational infrastructure is concerned as an element of promoting quality in education, it is notable that it is the least mentioned item in the literature reviewed, with direct references to it in only three of the 14 documents, despite the fact that "school infrastructure is the second most important action carried out by principals in the last five years" (Méndez-Salcido and Torres-Arcadia, 2013, p. 6).

In the cases documented by Carrillo-Vargas *et al.* (2014), school leaders seek to improve school infrastructure, not only classrooms, but also administrative offices and sports facilities, leisure and recreation spaces. This is usually achieved by joining forces with state and municipal authorities, as well as private companies, in the search for adequate equipment to support the teaching and learning process.

In the case presented by Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes (2011), it is notable that the school leader established the improvement of the educational infrastructure as a priority from the moment he took office in the school. The school's image was the first thing that caught his attention in a negative way, so it was decided to remodel the administrative, teaching, sports and classroom spaces, as well as to offer adaptations for people with disabilities and safer access through the car park.

In the documented cases, it is observed that Mexican principals have a special interest in maintaining and improving school infrastructure. A worthy educational infrastructure, in its buildings and educational materials, is palpable evidence of the school's success, which motivates the school community to continue to do its best (Méndez-Salcido and Torres-Arcadia, 2013), although it is not a key factor to express the nature of successful principal leadership in the international cases documented by the ISSPP (Gurr, 2015).

### Successful Mexican School Principalship Model

As a result of the analysis carried out, a model is proposed to describe the successful Mexican school principalship. The model is represented in a nested design to show how the successful school is built from the core of the principal, as a socioemotional skills role model, to a culture of continuous improvement (see Figure 2). The socioemotional skills deployed by the principal (*generation of options, prosocial behaviour and active listening*, to mention some of the most appreciated skills by the school community) allow her/him to adapt to the school organisation, which could lead to both the teachers and the principal herself/himself being continually prepared to address students' needs supported by the school organisation. Because teachers are better prepared, they are more to be disposed to adapt materials and methods to help their students overcome possible disadvantages or deficiencies generated by the environment. Providing adequate school infrastructure is outside the principal's responsibility in Mexico, but some evidence indicates that it has a positive effect in the academic results in Mexican schools (Carrillo-Vargas *et al.*, 2014). Thus, successful principals in Mexico achieve a worthy educational infrastructure by promoting co-responsibility and commitment from the school community, including educational authorities as well as organisations and companies, that give their support especially when positive results are shown. Worthy educational infrastructure can be considered a visible sign of the school's success and reinforces the sense of achievement that builds a culture of continuous improvement that is required for further adaptation of the school organisation, teaching practices, and educational materials and methods.

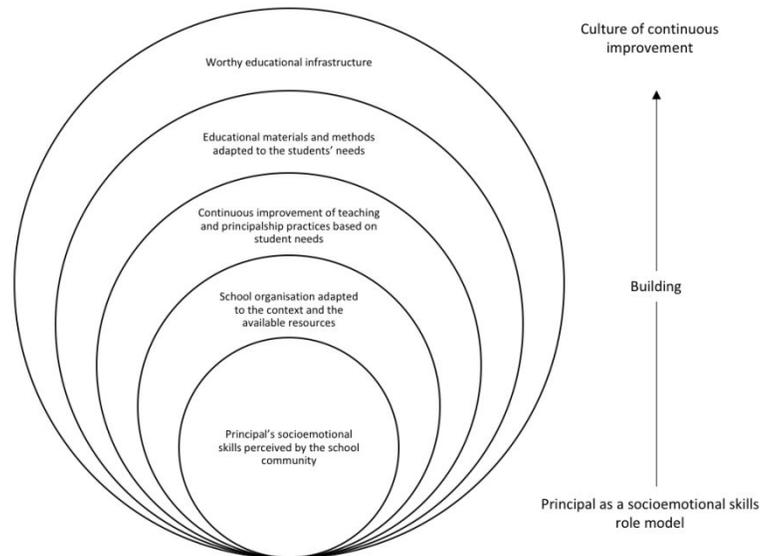


Figure 2  
*Successful Mexican school principalship model.*

The school principal who exhibits socioemotional skills could act as a role model, and subsequently members of the school community in turn could develop these skills too, so that the benefits ("understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy towards others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (SEP, 2017, p. 879), among others) can be added to the school culture of continuous improvement.

### Conclusions

Based on the question: What do we know about successful school principals in the Mexican context? It was found that after analysing the 14 documents that reported on the ISSPP Project in Mexico, school principals always look to improve the educational quality of their schools, understanding this as the basic criterion of their leadership. It is through the talents found in the principal that the achievement of other aspects of educational quality can be identified.

Although the socioemotional skills of school principals are not explicitly stated in the concept of educational quality, they could be considered a key factor to explain the optimal development of their work (OECD, 2015) and an essential characteristic as leaders who influence and promote better results among students (Crawford, 2017; Day and Sammons, 2011). It could be the qualities perceived by the community that help to explain the way in which these principals achieve in an organised way the necessary conditions to offer a quality educational service.

The results obtained are important because they allow us to know what has been documented in the last decade in relation to the characteristics of successful principals in Mexico. Understanding the phenomenon in a country like Mexico, which has great challenges for the achievement of educational quality, is crucial to be able to determine the assets of these successful principals, which allow them to be adopted and replicated in all contexts. The proposed model, which synthesizes this body of knowledge, represent what

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3 Leithwood, *et al.* (2019) concluded about successful school leadership: it is a process  
4 performance by the person who has the post and who has decided to use the available  
5 resources and carry out the necessary tasks, meeting the needs and enhancing the capabilities  
6 of their collaborators.

7  
8 The process to achieve a successful principalship, displayed in the proposed model,  
9 is founded in the principal's socioemotional skills perceived by the school community, so it  
10 is worth emphasizing that this finding is supported in the voices of students, teachers and  
11 parents, that originally were recovered through the ISSPP protocol and they were re-  
12 considered through this secondary study. Based on the analysis of the perceived qualities of  
13 the principal, the *generation of options* represents the most frequently mentioned quality, but  
14 this quality could represent "the tip of the iceberg", sustained in the least visible interpersonal  
15 and intrapersonal skills of the principal. In contrast, principal profiles and job descriptions  
16 are more focused on the visible part of principal responsibilities than on the factors that  
17 enable its execution. According to this, consideration of principal socioemotional skills  
18 should be mandatory in both the selection and training for school principals; this is a subject  
19 to be addressed by the educational policy.

20  
21 As part of the limitations of the information reviewed, it is important to consider that  
22 the documents analysed were limited to a certain time frame (2009-2021) and to a certain  
23 type of academic production (articles, books, book chapters and conference proceedings). It  
24 is possible that, as a result, some real voices of successful principals have not yet been  
25 recovered in their entirety in order to better exemplify their qualities across the varied  
26 contexts of the 32 states of Mexico.

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28 As part of future studies, it is proposed to uncover the importance of the  
29 socioemotional skills of Mexican school principals, considering that this construct could  
30 generate a greater understanding of the leadership role of successful schools observed in the  
31 Mexican success stories.

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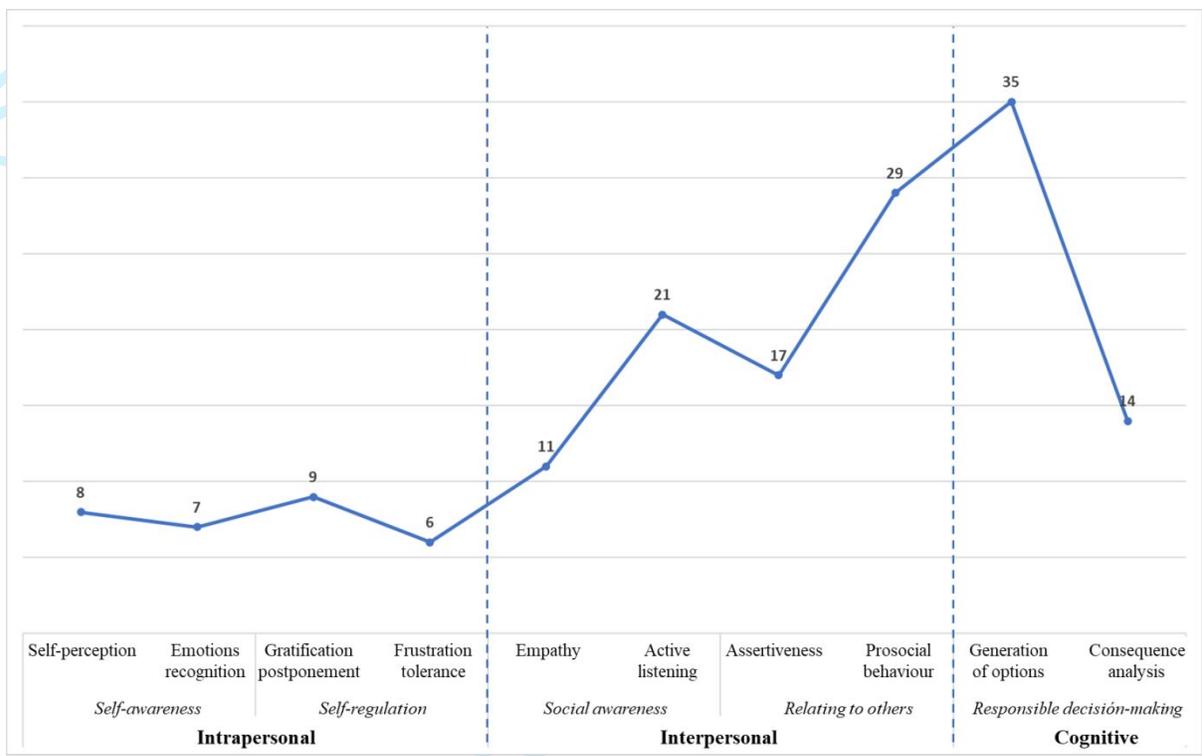
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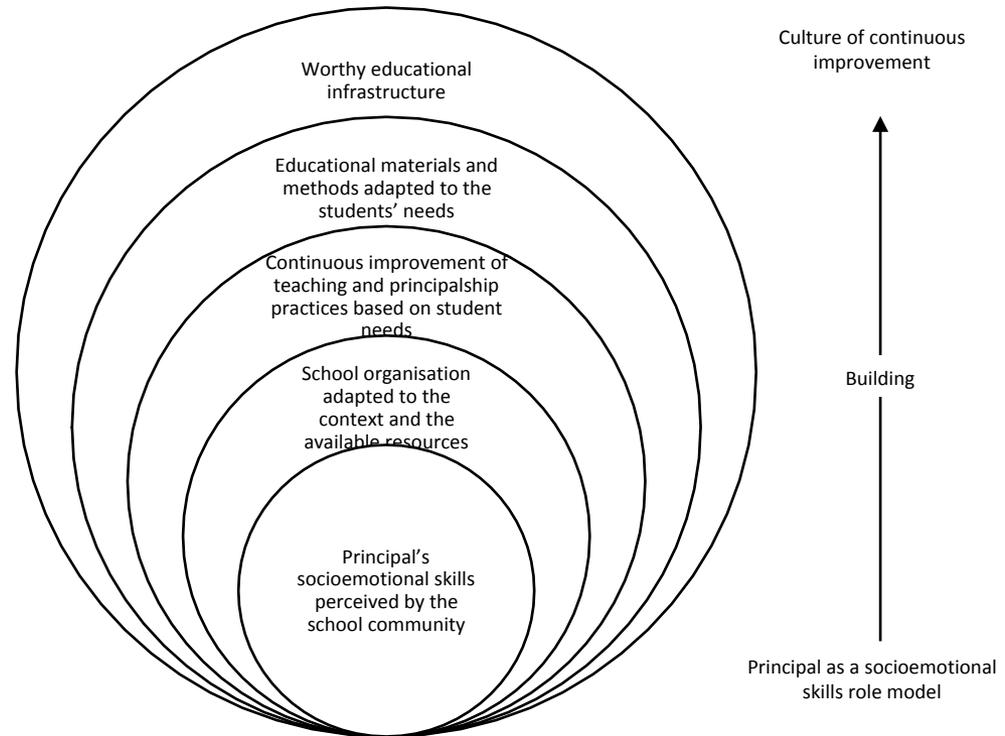
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Year	Article	Conference	Book
2011	-	<i>C1*</i> Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011**	-
2013	<i>P1</i> Méndez-Salcido, 2013	<i>C2</i> Bertrand-Marrufo and González-Mendoza, 2013 <i>C3</i> Méndez-Salcido and Torres- Arcadia, 2013	-
2014	<i>P2</i> Carrillo-Vargas, et al. 2014	<i>C4</i> Torres-Arcadia et al., 2014	
2015	<i>P3</i> Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015	<i>C5</i> Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015b	<i>B1</i> Carrillo-Vargas, 2015 <i>B2</i> Torres-Arcadia Pesqueira- Bustamante, 2015
2018	<i>P4</i> Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018	-	-
2019	-	-	<i>B3</i> Rodríguez Uribe, 2019 <i>B4</i> Torres-Arcadia et al., 2019
2020	<i>P5</i> Rodríguez-Uribe, et al., 2020	-	-
Total	5	5	4

\*Document identifier, \*\*Reference

Year	Article	Conference	Book
2011	-	<i>C1*</i> Flores-Márquez and Morales-Cervantes, 2011**	-
2013	<i>P1</i> Méndez-Salcido, 2013	<i>C2</i> Bertrand-Marrufo and González-Mendoza, 2013 <i>C3</i> Méndez-Salcido and Torres- Arcadia, 2013	-
2014	<i>P2</i> Carrillo-Vargas, et al. 2014	<i>C4</i> Torres-Arcadia et al., 2014	
2015	<i>P3</i> Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015	<i>C5</i> Villela-Treviño and Torres- Arcadia, 2015b	<i>B1</i> Carrillo-Vargas, 2015 <i>B2</i> Torres-Arcadia Pesqueira- Bustamante, 2015
2018	<i>P4</i> Rodríguez-Uribe, 2018	-	-
2019	-	-	<i>B3</i> Rodríguez Uribe, 2019 <i>B4</i> Torres-Arcadia et al., 2019
2020	<i>P5</i> Rodríguez-Uribe, et al., 2020	-	-
Total	5	5	4

\*Document identifier, \*\*Reference

Document id	Perceived qualities of the principal	School organisation	Suitability of teachers and principals	Educational materials and methods	Educational infrastructure
P1	3	3	-	-	-
P2	16	11	5	2	2
P3	16	3	-	1	-
P4	11	15	2	2	-
P5	8	7	1	3	-
C1	9	9	1	2	-
C2	7	1	1	1	2
C3	29	4	-	1	2
C4	10	1	-	-	-
C5	16	7	1	2	-
B1	5	10	4	3	2
B2	10	18	9	6	6
B3	6	13	5	4	1
B4	11	21	9	6	7
Total	157	123	38	33	22

Document id	Perceived qualities of the principal	School organisation	Suitability of teachers and principals	Educational materials and methods	Educational infrastructure
P1	3	3	-	-	-
P2	16	11	5	2	2
P3	16	3	-	1	-
P4	11	15	2	2	-
P5	8	7	1	3	-
C1	9	9	1	2	-
C2	7	1	1	1	2
C3	29	4	-	1	2
C4	10	1	-	-	-
C5	16	7	1	2	-
B1	5	10	4	3	2
B2	10	18	9	6	6
B3	6	13	5	4	1
B4	11	21	9	6	7
Total	157	123	38	33	22