

Research reports

Competencies for the school principal: emphasis on moral, ethical, and religious dimensions

Competências para o diretor escolar: ênfase nas dimensões morais, éticas e religiosas

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Abstract

The work of the school principal is central to the quality of education; however, studies on the moral, ethical, and religious competencies required in this role are scarce. Based on the observation that the *Base Nacional Comum de Competências do Diretor Escolar* – Brazil's proposed national framework for school principal competencies – does not include such dimensions, this research aimed to investigate them by proposing a framework based on the KSA model (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes). The methodology combined an integrative review (PRISMA protocol), document analysis, and data from an applied survey with 117 principals from a faith-based school network. The study draws on the contributions of Georg Simmel and Edgar Morin, understanding religiosity as an expression of human complexity. The results indicate that moral, ethical, and religious dimensions are interdependent and fundamental to school leadership. The proposed conceptual framework can support training and evaluation policies in both faith-based and non-confessional schools, promoting school management that is more sensitive to the diversity of values in contemporary society.

Keywords: school principal; moral competencies; religious competencies; ethical leadership; school management.

Resumo

A atuação do diretor escolar é central para a qualidade da educação, entretanto, os estudos sobre as competências morais, éticas e religiosas requeridas nesse papel são escassos. A partir da constatação de que a BNCC-Diretor não contempla tais dimensões, esta pesquisa teve por objetivo investigar essas dimensões, propondo um *framework* baseado no modelo CHA (Conhecimentos, Habilidades e Atitudes). A metodologia combinou revisão integrativa (método PRISMA), análise documental e dados de uma pesquisa aplicada com 117 diretores de uma rede confessional. O estudo dialoga com os aportes de Georg Simmel e Edgar Morin, compreendendo a religiosidade como expressão da complexidade humana. Os resultados indicam que as dimensões morais, éticas e religiosas são interdependentes e fundamentais à liderança escolar. O *framework* conceitual proposto pode subsidiar políticas formativas e avaliativas em escolas confessionais e laicas, promovendo uma gestão mais sensível à diversidade de valores da sociedade contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: diretor escolar; competências morais; competências religiosas; liderança ética; gestão escolar.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies highlight the school principal as a central figure in educational quality (Mohajeran; Ghaleei, 2008; Ediger, 2014), but specific academic research remains scarce,

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especially in Brazil and Latin America (Henriques, 2016). Simielli (2022) found that, among 691 works published between 1989 and 2019 on school management, only 6% focused directly on the principal. Contin (2016) also pointed to shortcomings in the training and selection of these professionals, attributing them to the lack of practical preparation in universities. Although the attempt to create the *Base Nacional Comum de Competências do Diretor Escolar* (Brasil, 2021) sought to address this gap, it does not directly encompass moral, ethical, and religious dimensions, and it has never been officially approved. Nor does the federal legal framework specify such competencies, delegating the task to states and municipalities, which has resulted in fragmented or non-existent regulations (Souza; Oliveira; Carvalho, 2023; Fischer et al., 2017; Santos; Salgado Junior, 2018; see also Yavas, 2022; Al-Hadrami, 2022).

This gap is also evident in the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, LDB) (Brasil, 1996), in which Article 206 links democratic management to the inclusion of different views, including religious ones. Principals are therefore expected to develop competencies to address this diversity sensitively and inclusively, promoting learning and holistic development (Vianna; Follis, 2024), especially in the face of the challenges of a globalized and technologically dynamic world (Lück, 2009; Follis; Alencar, 2024, 2025). In light of this, this article proposes a conceptual framework that serves as a practical and reflective tool to guide the selection, training, and work of school principals in the ethical, moral, and religious domains. To achieve this objective, the study is organized into: (a) methodological procedures; (b) theoretical framework; and (c) analysis of the results that support the proposed framework.

It is important to clarify that, in addressing moral, ethical, and religious dimensions in the work of the school principal, this study does not advocate personal adherence to a specific ethical or religious belief as a requirement for holding the position. The religious dimension is understood here as a professional competency of a relational, institutional, and formative nature, associated with the manager's ability to recognize, respect, and mediate the diversity of beliefs, spiritualities, and philosophical convictions, including agnostic and atheist positions, present in the school community. This approach is consistent with the principle of state secularism in Brazil, understood not as the exclusion of the religious phenomenon from the public sphere, but as a guarantee of freedom of conscience, non-discrimination, and plural coexistence within the educational environment.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study is exploratory in nature, which is appropriate given the absence of consolidated models that integrate, in an articulated manner, the ethical, moral, and religious dimensions of the principal's work. As Oliveira and Freitas (2010) point out, this type of research is indicated for topics that have been little systematized, allowing the organization of dispersed information and supporting future studies. A qualitative approach was adopted, aimed at interpreting data from the literature and institutional documents, facilitating an understanding of the competencies associated with school leadership. This strategy enabled articulation among formal guidelines, institutional values, and theoretical contributions, resulting in a framework applicable to faith-based and non-confessional contexts.

Research stages

The research was developed in four complementary stages. The first consisted of an integrative review of the literature on competencies of school managers, focusing on ethical, moral, and religious aspects, following the PRISMA protocol. This stage, already published previously (Follis et al., 2024), identified key concepts and challenges that informed the construction of the framework. The second involved document analysis of official guidelines from a faith-based school network - school bylaws, pedagogical proposal, and accreditation model - based on Bardin's (1977) content analysis, mapping competencies aligned with school management. The network was selected because it is explicitly grounded in moral and religious values, with potential application also in non-confessional contexts, especially in the ethical training of principals. In the third stage, data from an applied survey conducted in 2024 with 117 principals in this network were analyzed; these data supported the development of a guide

for the principal role and revealed levels of adherence and competencies effectively exercised. Finally, the data from the stages were triangulated and organized into a taxonomic framework based on the KSA model (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes). The integration of multiple sources ensured consistency, cross-validation, and robustness of the final proposal.

Data analysis

In the first stage, the literature review began with 13 international studies, which emphasized ethical and moral competencies in educational leadership, although without directly addressing religious competencies. The national scenario proved fragmented, with ideological divergences regarding competency matrices, reflecting the country's sociopolitical complexities. In the next phase, national databases and criteria were expanded, totaling 33 studies analyzed, from which 17 competencies were identified or inferred, while the gap in the religious field remained. In the second stage, the document analysis involved the Pedagogical Project, School Bylaws, and the accreditation document of a faith-based school network. Gaps were identified in the explicit statement of principal competencies, and an analysis of the statements and structures of the documents was conducted to infer the competencies required for the described functions. Cross-referencing with the literature confirmed and complemented competencies across the three domains investigated.

The third stage consisted of the analysis of a closed-ended, functional categorical questionnaire, administered in 2024 to 117 principals in the network. The instrument mapped 161 duties linked to the principal role. By cross-referencing these data with the competencies identified in the previous stages, 72 duties related to ethical, moral, and religious dimensions were isolated and classified according to the KSA model. The results allowed reflection on the degree of integration between these competencies and the network's values. In the final stage, the data were synthesized into a conceptual framework of moral, ethical, and religious competencies, based on the KSA model. The competencies were refined, terminologically reorganized, and grouped into three categories: moral and ethical, religious, and a mixed dimension integrating aspects of both.

Given this reality, we can state that the charts and tables presented constitute an essential part of the analytical procedure and not a mere appendix: they are synthesis artifacts resulting from the coding, terminological refinement, and categorization (KSA) of evidence triangulated across the review, documents, and survey, ensuring transparency, robustness, and applicability of the framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main concepts that support this research are competency, morality, ethics, and religiosity. Clear definitions are essential for understanding how these concepts are articulated in the context of school management. The concept of competency, from an organizational perspective, gained prominence following McClelland's (1973) proposal, which defined it as the articulation among knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) required for effective performance of roles, aimed at institutional objectives (McClelland, 1973; Brasil, 2019b). In this context, competencies are understood as the capacity to apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills in real situations, combined with attitudes that foster appropriate behaviors (Behar, 2013; Brandão; Bahry, 2005; Brasil, 1997, 2019a, 2019b).

Ethical, moral, and religious values in education

Ethical, moral, and religious values ground human relationships and guide individual and collective practices oriented toward the common good (MacIntyre, 2021). Ethics involves principles such as honesty and respect, requiring conscious reflection on actions (Kristjánsson, 2020). Morality refers to cultural norms about right and wrong, promoting social cohesion (Narvaez; Bock, 2014). Religiosity adds a spiritual and transcendental dimension to human values (Esperandio; Corrêa, 2017). In non-confessional environments, some argue that only secular morality should prevail (Beatty, 2014; Pacheco; Derisso, 2018), but this exclusion is illusory, since all thought carries presuppositions (Clouser, 2022). State secularism, as Machado (2013) clarifies, entails welcoming all beliefs, or the absence of them, without favoritism.

In the school environment, these values influence decisions and interpersonal relationships, requiring the principal to exercise sensitive and inclusive leadership. Despite this, religiosity remains marginalized and is treated as a “field of estrangement” (Ferreira; Placco, 2024), even though it is a culturally rooted expression (Viana; Guimarães, 2022). Its exclusion denies identity elements of students and educators and creates gaps in the training of managers, especially regarding religious competencies.

The contemporary distancing between school and religion has roots in secularization processes that shifted religion exclusively to the private sphere. However, the expectation of religious decline was not confirmed: religion remains a matrix of meaning and orientation in broad social segments, assuming institutional and post-institutional forms (Morais Netto, 2019; Façanha; Stephanini, 2021; Ferreira; Placco, 2024; Follis, 2019; Tamada; Cunha, 2022).

Religion, religiosity, and complex thinking: recent studies

In dialogue with Simmel and Morin, religiosity is treated as a possible dimension of human experience, prior to institutional forms, through which individuals develop meaning, values, and belonging (Simmel, 2005, 2006). In complex thinking, this dimension integrates reason, culture, and ethics, and its exclusion tends to impoverish our understanding of the human condition (Morin, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2011, 2015; Stigar, 2018). In the educational context, the implication is not to require belief on the part of the manager, but to recognize religious and philosophical plurality as a social fact that calls for ethical and institutional mediation.

Recent studies in areas such as health, psychology, and the social sciences reinforce this integrative view of religiosity as an essential dimension of human existence and underscore its importance for mental health, resilience, meaning-making, and overall well-being (Meira, 2021; Ferreira; Placco, 2024). The literature also indicates that religiosity is not restricted to institutional practices; it is also expressed in organized, non-organized, and intrinsic forms (Koenig; McCullough; Larson, 2001), which confirms its complexity and plasticity.

PROPOSAL OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After the integrative review was conducted, the religious dimension was divided into two subcategories: the first, “Religious Competencies for All Contexts”, applies to non-confessional and faith-based schools; the second, “Religious Competencies for Faith-Based Contexts”, is intended for institutions with an explicit religious identity. The construction of the first subcategory was grounded in the concepts developed in the theoretical discussion, ensuring internal coherence with the study’s methodological procedures. The second was developed from institutional documents and empirical data from a Christian faith-based school network, preserving its specific vocabulary. This distinction was maintained to value the richness of the data collected and to enable the use of the framework in diverse contexts. Thus, the framework aligns with the assumptions of non-confessional education and management sensitive to the plurality of values, without disregarding the identity-specific practices of faith-based schools.

The resulting conceptual framework organizes the school principal’s competencies into four interdependent axes: (i) ethical and moral competencies, which constitute the transversal foundation of the principal’s work in any educational context; (ii) mixed competencies, in which ethical, moral, and religious dimensions are articulated in practices oriented toward the common good and social responsibility; (iii) religious competencies applicable to all contexts, relational and mediating in nature, oriented toward recognizing and ethically managing religious and philosophical diversity; and (iv) religious competencies specific to faith-based contexts, linked to institutional identity and to the educational mission of schools with an explicit confessional character. The charts and tables throughout the text organize these competencies according to the KSA model (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes), highlighting their integration and complementarity. To deepen this proposal, Table 1 details the ethical and moral competencies of the school principal, offering a practical overview for training and ethical practice in educational management.

Table 1. Axis 1: Ethical and moral competencies of the school principal.

Competency	Description	KSA
Ethical Leadership and Moral Decisions	Demonstrate the capacity to lead based on ethical principles, make fair decisions under pressure, and face dilemmas with moral responsibility, ensuring integrity and justice in the school environment.	Knowledge: In-depth understanding of moral and ethical foundations, codes of ethics, institutional values, and decision-making mechanisms in challenging contexts. Skills: Ability to make decisions consistent with principles of justice and equality, even in high-pressure situations, protecting the institution's integrity and promoting equity. Attitudes: Commitment to moral uprightness, ethical courage, responsibility toward the school community, and commitment to justice and collective well-being.
Servant Leadership	Lead altruistically, prioritizing the needs, growth, and well-being of team members.	Knowledge: Understanding of the model and principles of servant leadership. Skills: Ability to articulate servant-leadership practices with administrative and pedagogical aspects, promoting transformative impact in the school community. Attitudes: Proactive and humble posture, making service to the community a priority.
Leading with Compassion and Empathy	Demonstrate sensitivity to others' needs, offering genuine support, valuing everyone, and promoting a fair, welcoming, and equitable school environment.	Knowledge: Understanding of the principles of compassion and empathy applied to leadership, as well as practices that foster care, active listening, and inclusion in school management. Skills: Ability to put oneself in another's place, listen attentively, and respond sensitively and supportively to the needs of the team and the school community, creating relationships based on respect, mutual support, and justice. Attitudes: Commitment to empathic listening, valuing people in their uniqueness, promoting collective well-being, and building an environment of care, dignity, and trust.
Shared Leadership	Distribute authority and promote a collaborative environment.	Knowledge: Knowledge of shared leadership practices and collaborative team dynamics. Skills: Ability to delegate responsibilities and empower other team members. Attitudes: Valuing collaboration, respect for others' contributions, and willingness to share power.
Transparent Communication	Recognize the importance of clear and frequent communication to maintain a positive school climate.	Knowledge: Knowledge of assertive communication strategies, feedback channels, and awareness of clarity and honesty. Skills: Ability to convey information openly, accurately, and sensitively, addressing difficult issues with empathy. Attitudes: Valuing honesty and transparency, commitment to building trust, and sensitivity to the community's needs for understanding.
Integrity in Relationships and Organizational Conduct	Maintain an ethical and fair stance, demonstrating equity, consistency, and self-control in interactions and in resolving organizational problems, avoiding any form of harsh treatment and ensuring high standards of conduct.	Knowledge: In-depth understanding of the principles of integrity, organizational ethics, self-control, and justice, as well as their practical application in school management and interpersonal relationships in the educational environment. Skills: Ability to apply ethical practices and act with integrity consistently in decisions and day-to-day school interactions, facing organizational dilemmas with honesty and maintaining high standards of justice and equity. Attitudes: Commitment to honesty, self-control, responsibility, valuing justice, and transparency in all actions and decisions, promoting an upright and ethical school environment.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Table 1. Continued...

Competency	Description	KSA
Integrity in Educational Management	Ensure ethical and transparent management of administrative and pedagogical processes, ensuring institutional credibility.	Knowledge: Ethical and legal principles applied to school administration. Skills: Apply management processes transparently and lead with honesty. Attitudes: Act consistently between personal and professional values, reflecting confessional principles.
Building a Culture of Ethics and Integrity	Promote ethical behaviors, develop a culture of collective responsibility, and positively influence the moral life of the school community through leading by example.	Knowledge: Understanding of the concepts of self-efficacy, applied ethics, conflict resolution, and building a values-based organizational culture. Skills: Ability to inspire ethical behaviors, implement practices that strengthen trust and integrity, and resolve conflicts based on moral values. Attitudes: Willingness to lead by example, commitment to personal and collective ethical growth, and valuing integrity as the foundation of school coexistence.
Conflict Management	Identify, address, and resolve disputes fairly and efficiently.	Knowledge: Knowledge of mediation techniques and conflict resolution in educational contexts. Skills: Ability to handle conflicts fairly and objectively, promoting peaceful resolution. Attitudes: Commitment to justice, impartiality, and willingness to mediate conflicts ethically.
Decision and Courage	Confront corruption, make unpopular decisions, and make personal sacrifices in the best interest of the school.	Knowledge: Knowledge of ethical decision-making processes and risk analysis in challenging situations. Skills: Ability to make courageous and well-founded decisions, even under pressure or opposition. Attitudes: Courage to defend what is right, commitment to integrity, and resilience to face external pressures.
Justice and Equity	Make fair and equitable decisions.	Knowledge: Knowledge of principles of justice, equality, and equitable practices in school management. Skills: Ability to assess situations and make fair, impartial, and equitable decisions. Attitudes: Commitment to equity, sensitivity to the need for justice, and willingness to act impartially.
Respect for Diversity, Inclusion, and Unity	Promote valuing everyone, demonstrating sensitivity and respect in interactions, protecting minorities, and cultivating a welcoming, inclusive, plural school environment marked by a sense of belonging and unity.	Knowledge: Understanding of principles of diversity, mutual respect, inclusion, and welcoming practices, both in interpersonal relationships and in school culture. Skills: Ability to interact sensitively and respectfully with different cultures and perspectives, as well as to implement policies and practices that promote inclusion, belonging, and cohesion in the school community. Attitudes: Commitment to unconditional respect for differences, valuing diversity, inclusion, and building a plural, fair, and unified school culture.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Table 1. Continued...

Competency	Description	KSA
Protection of Childhood and Adolescence	Ensure the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, ensuring a safe, welcoming school environment free of any form of neglect, abuse, or discrimination.	Knowledge: Understand the rights of children and adolescents provided for in legislation. Skills: Identify and report situations of vulnerability or risk involving students. Attitudes: Demonstrate care and commitment to students' safety and protection.
Coexistence and a Positive School Climate	Create and maintain a healthy and harmonious coexistence environment, promoting mutual respect and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.	Knowledge: Theories and practices regarding citizenship and coexistence in light of biblical and ethical values. Skills: Facilitate dialogue and conflict resolution, promoting harmony among different school actors. Attitudes: Cultivate an environment of respect, inclusion, and welcoming.
Strengthening Institutional Trust	Base trust on the identity and mission of the school.	Knowledge: Understanding of the institutional mission and strategies to build relationships of trust. Skills: Ability to build and sustain trust-based relationships aligned with the school's mission and identity. Attitudes: Commitment to authenticity and transparency, valuing the institutional mission and vision.
Strengthening Democracy	Create and maintain a healthy and harmonious school environment, based on mutual respect, dialogue, and the promotion of constructive interpersonal relationships that foster the well-being and learning of all members of the educational community.	Knowledge: Know the principles of democratic and collegial management. Skills: Lead participatively, promoting dialogue and transparency. Attitudes: Value the opinion and active participation of all members of the school community.
Effective Management	Base trust on the identity and mission of the school.	Knowledge: Familiarity with educational management methodologies and quality standards, and the interconnection between ethics and organizational excellence. Skills: Ability to manage resources and teams fairly and efficiently, promoting high standards of quality. Attitudes: Responsibility to achieve and maintain quality, commitment to justice, and dedication to continuous improvement of the educational environment.
Stewardship of School Assets	Ensure responsible management of the school's assets and resources, promoting ethical, sustainable, and conscientious use of physical and financial assets, with a view to preserving and valuing the educational environment.	Knowledge: Know the legislation and practices for responsible management of school assets and resources. Skills: Manage material and financial resources ethically and sustainably. Attitudes: Demonstrate responsibility in caring for and preserving common assets.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Table 1. Continued...

Competency	Description	KSA
Respect for Labor Rights	Ensure compliance with labor standards and fair treatment of staff, promoting an ethical and respectful work environment aligned with current legislation.	Knowledge: Know labor standards and legislation applicable to the school environment. Skills: Resolve conflicts and apply administrative sanctions fairly and ethically. Attitudes: Respect and ensure the rights of all school staff.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

After presenting the ethical and moral competencies, which constitute the foundation of conduct and relationships in the school environment, Table 2 broadens the scope by addressing mixed competencies. These competencies bring together moral, ethical, and religious dimensions, reflecting shared values related to citizenship, the common good, and spiritual responsibility. This transition marks an important step in integrating ethical foundations with transcendent motivations in school management.

Table 2. Axis 2: Mixed competencies (moral, ethical, and religious).

Competency	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
Social Responsibility	Understand the social and cultural demands of the school community.	Implement school practices that contribute to community development.	Demonstrate commitment to the positive impact of school actions on society.
Environmental Stewardship	Understand principles of sustainability and environmental conservation.	Promote actions and projects focused on environmental preservation.	Lead by example in environmental care and encourage sustainable practices.
Promoting Health and Well-Being	Know basic principles of health and healthy habits.	Promote healthy habits as part of the educational process, integrating them into the school curriculum.	Model, encourage, and value practices that foster the community's physical and mental well-being.
Peace Education	Understand principles of harmonious coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution.	Implement pedagogical actions that promote mutual respect and empathy.	Act with empathy, fostering positive and inclusive interpersonal relationships.

Source: Prepared based on the research results

Mixed competencies pave the way for a more direct reflection on the role of spirituality in school. Chart 1, below, presents religious competencies applicable to all contexts, including non-confessional and faith-based institutions. It reinforces the recognition of spirituality as a legitimate dimension of human experience and its value for coexistence and holistic development, while respecting the religious plurality of society.

Finally, recognizing the specificity of faith-based institutions, Chart 2 systematizes religious competencies oriented toward educational contexts with an explicit Christian confessional identity. These competencies deepen the integration between faith and educational practice, strengthening coherence among the Christian worldview, spiritual leadership, and institutional mission.

Chart 1. Axis 3: Religious competencies applicable to all contexts.

Competency: Recognition of Spirituality as a Dimension of the Human Being Description: Value spirituality as a legitimate aspect of human experience, recognizing its contribution to holistic development and to respectful and sensitive school coexistence. Knowledge: Understand spirituality as part of human experience and its contribution to well-being and holistic development. Skills: Create spaces for listening and reflection that welcome expressions of spirituality from different members of the school community. Attitudes: Demonstrate openness, respect, and sensitivity toward the diverse manifestations of spirituality and religiosity present in the educational community.
Competency: Promoting Universal Values with an Ethical-Spiritual Foundation Description: Promote the lived experience of universal values such as justice, love, compassion, and integrity, strengthening ethical culture and character formation in the school environment. Knowledge: Identify universal principles such as love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and integrity present in religious and philosophical traditions. Skills: Integrate these principles into interpersonal relationships, school decisions, and leadership actions. Attitudes: Act with equity, empathy, and responsibility, recognizing spiritual values as elements that strengthen a culture of peace and mutual respect.
Competency: Interreligious Dialogue and Respect for Diversity of Beliefs Description: Respect the diversity of beliefs and convictions, promoting interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence in the school environment. Knowledge: Know the legal and pedagogical foundations for respecting religious and philosophical diversity in the school environment. Skills: Mediate situations involving differences in beliefs, promoting peaceful coexistence and a culture of dialogue. Attitudes: Demonstrate an inclusive, non-discriminatory stance that promotes freedom of conscience.
Competency: Leadership with Meaning and Purpose Description: Lead in an inspiring and coherent manner, integrating personal values, a sense of mission, and collective purpose in school management. Knowledge: Understand the ethical and philosophical foundations that give meaning and purpose to educational leadership practice. Skills: Inspire and engage the school team through leadership that attends to existential and vocational dimensions. Attitudes: Demonstrate coherence between personal principles and practical actions, fostering upright and inspiring leadership.
Competency: Integrating the Spiritual Dimension into Education Description: Recognize and value the search for transcendence present in different cultures, traditions, and personal trajectories as part of holistic development. Knowledge: Understand the relationship between the search for transcendence and the formation of values in personal trajectories. Skills: Value symbolic experiences, rituals, and expressions of faith as part of students' cultural and formative repertoire.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Chart 1. Continued...

Competency: Recognition of Spirituality as a Dimension of the Human Being
Attitudes: Welcome, with respect, the presence of the sacred in people's lives, without imposing views, while recognizing its relevance.
Competency: Formation with a Sense of Transcendence
Description: Encourage practices of care and well-being associated with spirituality, promoting a more sensitive, welcoming, and humanized school environment.
Knowledge: Know the connections among spirituality, mental health, coexistence, and well-being in school.
Skills: Develop actions that integrate spirituality and care, such as devotional moments and periods of silence, active listening, or practices of inward reflection.
Attitudes: Cultivate sensitive leadership, promoting school environments that are more compassionate, upright, and humanized.
Competency: Pedagogical Appreciation of Religious Education
Description: Recognize Religious Education as a curricular component of holistic development, promoting its implementation in a manner consistent with the principles of the <i>Base Nacional Comum Curricular</i> (Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum, BNCC) and rights related to religious diversity.
Knowledge: Understand the legal and pedagogical foundations of Religious Education as defined by the BNCC, including its non-confessional and plural character, oriented toward understanding the religious phenomenon.
Skills: Ensure, together with the pedagogical team, the provision of high-quality Religious Education, respecting students' rights and established curricular guidelines.
Attitudes: Demonstrate commitment to valuing cultural and religious diversity, promoting school management that welcomes different expressions of faith with respect, institutional neutrality, and equity.
Competency: Sensitive Management of Religious Diversity in School
Description: Manage, ethically and democratically, the diversity of beliefs present in the school community, ensuring religious freedom and peaceful coexistence among different convictions.
Knowledge: Know constitutional and educational norms regarding religious freedom, the principle of state secularism, and inclusive management principles in plural contexts.
Skills: Mediate conflicts related to religious diversity based on dialogue and applicable legislation, promoting mutual respect in the school environment.
Attitudes: Act with sensitivity, impartiality, and empathy in situations involving religious expressions or the absence of belief, ensuring the dignity of all community members.
Competency: Promoting Service to the Community
Description: Foster school engagement in social and charitable actions, promoting ethical, spiritual, and civic development through service to others as a concrete expression of humanitarian and religious values.
Knowledge: Understand ethical-spiritual foundations of service to others present in diverse religious traditions and their relevance to holistic education.
Skills: Develop projects that encourage school-community participation in service actions and social-impact initiatives, promoting empathy, justice, and solidarity.
Attitudes: Demonstrate compassion and social responsibility, encouraging the school's active involvement in initiatives that contribute to the common good.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Chart 2. Axis 4: Religious competencies for faith-based contexts.

Competency: Recognizing God as the Source of Wisdom
Description: Value, within the educational context, divine revelation as the foundation of knowledge and character formation, recognizing God's sovereignty in the teaching-learning process. Knowledge: Understand biblical foundations that present God as the source of all knowledge. Skills: Promote the study and application of biblical principles as a reference for conduct in school. Attitudes: Recognize and value God's presence in educational practices and in the school community.
Competency: Promoting Christian Character
Description: Reflect the school management's commitment to students' moral and ethical formation by integrating Christian values into the educational project and community life, based on the principle that education is also a process of character formation. Knowledge: Understand the moral foundations of Scripture, especially the Decalogue, as a reference for ethical formation and for just and respectful coexistence. Skills: Integrate Christian principles into pedagogical practices, interpersonal relationships, and school educational policies in a contextualized and respectful manner. Attitudes: Act with coherence, justice, and integrity, serving as an example of leadership committed to Gospel values in decisions and in day-to-day school relationships.
Competency: Valuing Spirituality in the School Community
Description: Cultivate spirituality as a formative element, creating opportunities for all members of the school community to express and develop their faith in a respectful and meaningful environment. Knowledge: Understand the role of spirituality in holistic human development. Skills: Promote moments of devotion, biblical reflection, and prayer in school contexts. Attitudes: Encourage the lived experience of spirituality among students, teachers, and families.
Competency: The Golden Rule as a Foundation for Coexistence
Description: Incorporate, in practice, Jesus' teachings on love for neighbor as a guiding principle for school coexistence, professional relationships, and institutional culture. Knowledge: Know the biblical principles of "loving your neighbor as yourself." Skills: Encourage mutual respect and the practice of love for neighbor in school relationships. Attitudes: Act with empathy and justice, reflecting the principles of the Golden Rule in all actions.
Competency: Education with Redemptive Purpose
Description: Understand the school as a space of spiritual mediation, whose purpose transcends academic formation by guiding students toward knowing God and fulfilling their life purpose. Knowledge: Understand the mission of bringing students closer to God as the ultimate goal of Christian education. Skills: Integrate pedagogical practices that guide students to establish a relationship with God. Attitudes: Demonstrate dedication to the mission of guiding students in their spiritual development.
Competency: Inspiring Spiritual Leadership
Description: Mobilize and influence the school community through spiritual leadership that motivates, welcomes, and promotes values such as service, humility, and purpose. This leadership is guided by example, and especially by the ability to inspire shared spiritual meanings and commitments.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Chart 2. Continued...

Competency: Recognizing God as the Source of Wisdom
Knowledge: Understand biblical and educational principles of servant, inspiring, and motivational leadership as applied to the school context. Skills: Engage the school team and students in practices and attitudes that reflect spiritual values, cultivating an educational environment with purpose, welcome, and a sense of mission. Attitudes: Demonstrate enthusiasm, spiritual sensitivity, willingness to serve, and the ability to inspire others through presence and positive influence.
Competency: Witness of Faith in Management
Description: Demonstrate coherence between faith and practice in the principal's work, expressed in how the principal manages, decides, and relates. This competency is centered on the manager's character and integrity as someone who lives spiritual values authentically, becoming an ethical and moral reference for the school community. Knowledge: Understand the relevance of personal witness of faith in everyday school management and its impacts on institutional culture. Skills: Make decisions, conduct processes, and relate to the school community in ways aligned with the spiritual values assumed by the institution. Attitudes: Be coherent, upright, trustworthy, and exemplary, revealing spirituality as the foundation of administrative and relational actions.
Competency: Fostering Christian Stewardship
Description: Encompass responsible resource management and the biblical view of stewardship. Knowledge: Understand principles of Christian stewardship related to time, resources, and talents. Skills: Guide the school community to manage, responsibly and ethically, the gifts and resources received from God. Attitudes: Demonstrate gratitude and care through conscientious use of assets and abilities for the common good.
Competency: Encouraging Missional Awareness
Description: Strengthen the school's missional identity as an agent of evangelization and spiritual transformation. Knowledge: Understand the school's missional role as an agent of evangelization and spiritual transformation. Skills: Plan and carry out activities that awaken in students and staff an awareness of the Christian mission. Attitudes: Demonstrate enthusiasm and dedication to involving the school community in evangelistic actions.
Competency: Strengthening Devotional Life
Description: Foster spiritual growth through the cultivation of personal and communal devotional practices in school life. Knowledge: Understand the importance of devotional life in individual and communal spiritual growth. Skills: Facilitate moments of prayer, Bible study, and spiritual reflection in everyday school life. Attitudes: Encourage regular personal and collective devotional practice among students and staff.
Competency: Education for Eternity

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

Chart 2. Continued...

Competency: Recognizing God as the Source of Wisdom
Description: Connect educational formation to preparation for eternal life, consistent with confessional principles.
Knowledge: Understand confessional principles that connect education to preparation for eternal life.
Skills: Plan curricula and activities that help students develop a future-oriented outlook centered on the values of the Kingdom of God.
Attitudes: Demonstrate ongoing commitment to guiding students toward choices that reflect eternal principles.

Source: Prepared based on the research results.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to propose a conceptual framework of ethical, moral, and religious-dimension-related competencies for school principals, grounded in the KSA model. Based on triangulation among an integrative literature review, document analysis, and an applied survey, 72 attributes were identified and organized to support the proposed framework. The results indicate that ethical and moral competencies constitute the structuring core of principals' practice in any educational context and are indispensable for promoting justice, equity, democratic management, and a positive school climate. In this sense, these competencies not only cut across different institutional models but also prove essential to school leadership in public and private systems, whether non-confessional or faith-based.

The religious dimension, in turn, is understood in this study in a broad, non-confessional, and relational manner. It need not be interpreted as a requirement for personal adherence to specific beliefs on the part of the principal; rather, it refers to the professional competency to recognize, respect, and mediate the diversity of beliefs, spiritualities, and philosophical convictions, including agnostic and atheist positions, present in the school community. From this perspective, the relevance of this dimension is justified by the centrality of the religious phenomenon in the culture and identity of broad segments of Brazilian society, which requires ethical sensitivity, dialogue, and institutional knowledge from school leaders.

At the same time, the study recognizes that this dimension becomes more explicit and structurally central in faith-based contexts, in which religious identity is integrated into the pedagogical project, institutional culture, and educational mission. In these settings, competencies related to the religious dimension take on a specific character, guiding coherence among worldview, leadership, and pedagogical practices, without undermining respect for freedom of conscience and human dignity.

As a theoretical contribution, the framework expands the KSA model by showing that certain competencies traditionally considered subjective or peripheral can be systematized, analyzed, and developed within educational management, provided they are treated contextually and aligned with legal frameworks of state secularism and human rights. The distinction proposed between competencies applicable to all contexts and competencies specific to faith-based institutions reinforces the model's conceptual consistency and responds to contemporary tensions among pluralism, institutional identity, and school management.

From a practical standpoint, the framework presented in the tables and charts of this article can inform initial and continuing training programs for school principals, as well as evaluation processes, while respecting institutional specificities. In non-confessional schools, its application centers on competencies of mediation, dialogue, and recognition of religious and philosophical diversity; in faith-based schools, it deepens the preparation of leaders aligned with institutional identity and the educational project.

Among the study's limitations, the empirical concentration of the survey in a single faith-based network stands out, which restricts the generalization of some of the results. Future research may expand the application of the framework in non-confessional public schools, incorporate qualitative approaches, and empirically investigate the impacts of these competencies on everyday school leadership practice. By articulating ethical, moral, and spirituality-related dimensions in a differentiated and contextualized manner, this study contributes to contemporary debates on educational leadership, human development, and democratic management, offering an analytical reference sensitive to the complexity of plural societies and to the specificities of educational institutions.

In summary, the findings indicate that discussions of principal competencies cannot dispense with ethical and moral dimensions, widely recognized in the literature, nor ignore the religious dimension as a cultural, identity-based, and relational phenomenon present in Brazilian society. By addressing this dimension in a non-confessional, mediating, and contextualized manner, the proposed framework avoids both the imposition of beliefs and the denial of the religious phenomenon in the school environment, aligning with the principles of state secularism, freedom of conscience, and democratic management. Thus, rather than prescribing personal attributes for principals, the study contributes to understanding the professional competencies required for the ethical leadership of educational institutions in plural contexts, while legitimately and clearly recognizing the specific formative demands of schools with an explicit confessional identity.

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