

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

**CONTRIBUIÇÃO DA FORMAÇÃO CONTINUADA PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE
UMA GESTÃO PARTICIPATIVA NA ESCOLA**

**LA CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LA EDUCACIÓN CONTINUA AL DESARROLLO DE LA GESTIÓN
PARTICIPATIVA EN LAS ESCUELAS**



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ABSTRACT: The role of the school principal goes far beyond resource management and compliance with rules and laws; it is a function that requires the articulation of administrative and pedagogical dimensions. Therefore, this study seeks to characterize how the continuing education of school principals occurs and what contribution this training makes to participatory management. A qualitative methodology was adopted, based on bibliographic and field research, conducted with 23 school principals. The results revealed an important convergence between people management and conflict mediation as the main challenge to consolidating participation in the school context. The research showed a consensus among the principals regarding the importance of continuing education for the performance of their duties. It is concluded that continuing education has contributed significantly, but still partially, given the numerous challenges and limitations to the development of participatory management.

KEYWORDS: Continuing education. Participatory management. School management. Decision making.

RESUMO: *O papel do diretor escolar vai muito além da administração de recursos e cumprimento da legislação; trata-se de uma função que exige a articulação das dimensões administrativas e pedagógicas. Assim, este estudo busca caracterizar como se dá a formação continuada do gestor e qual a contribuição dessa formação para uma gestão participativa. Adotou-se metodologia qualitativa, fundamentada em pesquisa bibliográfica e de campo, realizada com 23 diretores escolares. Os resultados revelaram uma importante convergência entre a gestão de pessoas e a mediação de conflitos como principal desafio para consolidar a participação no contexto escolar. A pesquisa evidenciou um consenso entre os diretores acerca da importância da formação continuada para o exercício de suas funções. Conclui-se que a formação continuada contribuiu de forma significativa, mas ainda parcial, visto haver inúmeros desafios e limitações para o desenvolvimento de uma gestão participativa.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Formação continuada. Gestão escolar. Gestão participativa. Tomada de decisão.*

RESUMEN: *El rol del director escolar va mucho más allá de la gestión de recursos y el cumplimiento de la legislación; es una función que requiere la articulación de las dimensiones administrativas y pedagógicas. Por lo tanto, este estudio busca caracterizar cómo se produce la formación continua de directores y qué contribución hace esta capacitación a la gestión participativa. Se adoptó una metodología cualitativa, basada en investigación bibliográfica y de campo, realizada con 23 directores escolares. Los resultados revelaron una importante convergencia entre la gestión de personas y la mediación de conflictos como el principal desafío para consolidar la participación en el contexto escolar. La investigación mostró un consenso entre los directores sobre la importancia de la formación continua para el desempeño de sus funciones. Se concluye que la formación continua ha contribuido significativamente, pero aún parcialmente, dados los numerosos desafíos y limitaciones para el desarrollo de la gestión participativa.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación continua. Gestión escolar. Gestión participativa. Toma de decisiones.*

INTRODUCTION

In a context where social, cultural, and educational demands are rapidly changing, understanding how school managers can keep up to date and improve their practices becomes essential. Thus, this study on the role of the school principal and the importance of continuing education can contribute to a better understanding of the process of participatory management.

The role of the school principal goes far beyond the administration of resources and compliance with regulations. It is a role that requires leadership capable of coordinating people and processes, integrating administrative and pedagogical dimensions to promote quality education. In this sense, understanding the importance of continuing education is essential, as it provides school principals with tools to address the challenges that arise daily and to build participatory management based on dialogue, shared responsibility, and the involvement of the school community.

In general, continuing professional development can expand the manager's technical and pedagogical repertoire and strengthen their ability to engage in dialogue with teachers, students, families, and other community members, creating a more collaborative environment open to the collective development of solutions for the demands of the educational setting.

The context of management democratization has been shaped by research on the development of competencies necessary for teams responsible for school management in general. To this end, educational systems have intensified discussions on school management, and similarly, federal programs and policies have aimed to improve the quality of education through training initiatives for managers.

In this vein of collective construction, within a vision of participatory management, this study aims to characterize how the continuing education of school managers takes place and what contribution this training makes to leadership focused on the development of participatory management. In order to conduct this research, a qualitative study was chosen, with a descriptive and exploratory nature, based on a literature review and field research to collect data from 23 school principals in a religious school system located in the central region of the state of São Paulo.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

The role of the school principal

The role of the school principal is receiving increasing attention, especially among authors who discuss their activities in the political, administrative, pedagogical, and/or social spheres. It is essential to highlight this role as one that encompasses various actions and processes carried out within the school.

In this regard, the role of the school manager has been widely discussed in the educational literature, particularly in relation to their leadership and management functions. As Lück (2010) argues, the principal plays a fundamental role in educational leadership, being primarily responsible for guiding the teaching staff and ensuring educational excellence. The author emphasizes that the manager needs to have a strategic vision, be capable of coordinating collective work, and foster a collaborative environment that supports learning.

Furthermore, the school principal's leadership must be grounded in dialogue and the involvement of school community members. Thus, we can see that the school administrator is, first and foremost, an educator, rather than merely a manager. Consequently, the idea that the principal should be an exemplary educator within the school may create a tension with their administrative duties.

Paro (2016) argues that the school manager should adopt a democratic stance, promoting the active participation of teachers, students, and families in the decision-making process. This role has undergone various changes due to transformations in society, making school organization and tasks much more complex.

Thus, the principal's stance and the way they conduct their actions directly reflect on the school's credibility within the school community. Therefore, participatory management establishes an environment of trust and cooperation, in which all members of the school community feel part of the educational process. The author emphasizes that participatory management also promotes greater transparency and shared responsibility (Paro, 2016).

The school principal also acts as a conflict mediator in the school environment, and Gadotti (2017) suggests that: "the manager must have effective communication skills ... Conflict mediation, when well conducted, can strengthen interpersonal relationships and improve the school climate" (p. 55).

Libâneo (2018) argues that, within the school environment, the administrator's role in promoting education must be inclusive. According to the author, the principal must ensure that

the school is welcoming to all students, regardless of their individual characteristics. School inclusion depends, to a large extent, on the policies implemented by the manager and their ability to raise awareness among the teaching staff regarding the importance of diversity.

Furthermore, the manager's role in promoting pedagogical innovation is very important, as it is up to them to encourage teachers to adopt new teaching practices and use educational technologies capable of enhancing student development and improving their daily practice.

Vasconcellos (2014) discusses the role of the manager in promoting sustainable practices within the school. He argues that the manager should implement policies that encourage the conscious use of resources and environmental education, preparing students to act as responsible citizens.

According to the aforementioned authors, the principal's role spans multiple fronts, and it is essential that the school principal cultivate characteristics such as empathy, communication skills, and the ability to inspire trust, traits that strengthen relationships with teachers, students, and parents, as well as leadership with the flexibility to adapt to different contexts and leadership styles, depending on the needs and challenges faced. And it is through the exercise of shaping the role of the school principal that the challenges of participatory management are formed.

Participatory management

Participatory Management emerges as a central model in administration, where the emphasis is on democratizing the decision-making process and enhancing outcomes in the educational context by seeking to involve the school community in building a more inclusive and effective governance structure.

From this perspective, school leadership moves away from authoritarian and centralized models and toward a participatory and democratic approach. Lück (2010) emphasizes that the school administrator plays a fundamental role in educational leadership, being responsible for fostering a collaborative environment in which teachers, staff, students, and families feel jointly responsible for decisions and the results achieved. This leadership requires technical, pedagogical, and, above all, relational skills, such as active listening, empathy, and the ability to negotiate.

In practice, various obstacles hinder this process, such as: lack of time for productive meetings, lack of interest or low community engagement, resistance from some professionals

to sharing decision-making power, and even the bureaucratization of internal processes, which make the implementation of participatory management a complex endeavor.

Lück (2009) significantly enriches the discussion by contextualizing school management as a central dimension of the educational process, as it allows for a comprehensive and integrated view of the school and its challenges. Its fundamental purpose is focused on meaningful student learning, understood as the most relevant outcome of school activities. In this context, the institution's daily routine should foster the development of essential competencies, among which creativity, the ability to critically analyze information, clarity in expressing ideas, mastery of logical-mathematical operations, evidence-based decision-making, and the ability to handle conflict situations stand out.

Thus, thinking about participatory management in schools means recognizing not only its potential benefits but, above all, the obstacles that must be overcome so that the institution can fulfill its role as a pluralistic, collaborative space that shapes critical citizens.

Daily practices constitute the concrete path toward bridging the gap between the ideal of participatory management and the reality of its implementation. Thus, reflecting on the practices of participatory management means recognizing the school as a living space, in which decision-making takes shape through school assemblies, the collective construction of the political-pedagogical project, conflict mediation, family participation, and the encouragement of student autonomy—practices that translate, in daily life, the principles of democracy and cooperation. Participatory management thus emerges as a model that seeks to democratize decision-making processes and strengthen the involvement of the school community. Paro (2016) argues that the democratization of school management is not limited to the creation of formal instances of participation, but requires a shift in the conception of power within the school, breaking with hierarchical practices and promoting shared responsibility in decision-making. For the author, effective participation only materializes when individuals understand their role in the educational process and are recognized as a legitimate part of management.

Corroborating this perspective, Libâneo (2018) emphasizes that school management must be intrinsically linked to the institution's pedagogical project, so that administrative decisions serve the educational process. For the author, the school community's participation in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP) is a fundamental condition for the realization of democratic management, as it strengthens the collective commitment to educational objectives and enhances the sense of belonging among those involved.

Given that the implementation of participatory management requires not only effective communication but also a range of considerations regarding the manager's role, the manager's ongoing professional development is essential for developing practices aligned with the contemporary demands of the educational environment. According to authors such as Lück (2000), Rodrigues et al. (2016), and Saraiva (2022), promoting quality education requires specialized management, with comprehensive training supported by the practical experiences of principals in their workplace; therefore, in-service training enables the development of the skills necessary to perform the role.

Continuing education

In today's educational setting, where there is a push for more innovative and effective education, professional development directly contributes to the development of leadership, instructional management, and conflict mediation skills, while also providing school managers with a broader and more strategic perspective.

Heloísa Lück (2014) argues that continuing education is a permanent and dynamic process that allows school managers not only to improve their technical skills but also to develop the emotional and relational competencies necessary for democratic and participatory school management. For the author, continuing education should focus on aspects involving pedagogical leadership and people management, in order to strengthen team cohesion and the engagement of the school community, which can be achieved through in-service training. In addition to in-service training, individual training also provides an important benefit to the manager's performance; however, this localized action has a smaller impact than in-service training.

Continuing education programs for school principals should follow a systematic approach, consistent with the current situation of the school context, seeking to solve problems that arise there, such as the physical and human infrastructure that meets the needs of a given school system. Continuing in-service training enables education professionals to update and build new knowledge, making it essential for teaching work, as educators integrate diverse fields of knowledge across many sociocultural contexts.

In-service training is a complex process of balancing the interests and professional development needs of teachers who wish to become managers, primarily in the role of principal, alongside the demands of balancing time to handle daily activities, along with new requirements

for participation, individual and group study, and other training activities, such as practical tasks, research, and planning, among others. Added to this situation are the financing difficulties for such training, the cost of which generally falls on the professionals themselves.

Imbernón (2010) advocates for continuing education as a tool for transforming the school environment. According to the author, this encompasses any action capable of promoting changes in the behavior, information acquisition, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes of practicing teachers, thereby reinforcing their essential role in strengthening teaching practice and improving educational quality.

Continuing education, whether self-initiated or in-service, provided by the sponsoring institution, is an important process for the professional development of school managers, allowing them to update their knowledge and skills in response to changes in the educational and administrative fields and equipping them with the necessary skills to effectively implement participatory management practices.

In contrast, Saraiva (2022) highlights that continuing education, in many cases, aligns more closely with the profile expected by the managerialist model of management than with the actual demands of schools. According to the author, these proposals tend to prioritize the demands of educational systems, relegating the unique challenges of each institution to the background. In light of this, she emphasizes the importance of valuing innovation as essential knowledge for educational practice. Lück (2014) also highlights the importance of continuing education for the effectiveness of school management. The author argues that managers should always be in the process of updating their knowledge, seeking new practices and insights that help them overcome the daily challenges of the school environment. Lück (2014) suggests that training programs focused on school management are essential for the development of leadership and administrative competencies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted based on a review of the literature and field research, with data collected from principals of a religious school network with schools located in the central region of the state of São Paulo. Data were collected through a questionnaire sent via email, along with an Informed Consent Form, which guaranteed the confidentiality of the participants' identities, as approved by the Ethics Committee (CAAE No. 79179224200005377).

The literature review was conducted using works by authors relevant to the topic and databases such as Capes Journals, Scielo, and Google Scholar, using search terms such as *gestor escolar*, *formação continuada* and *gestão participativa*, with the following inclusion criteria: studies that include search articles, peer-reviewed, and published between 2014 and 2024. Regarding exclusion, studies that deviated from the intended theme, texts not openly available, duplicate articles in the databases, and articles specific to other countries were disregarded.

Data collection was conducted following approval by the Research Ethics Committee (Opinion 6.966.734), via a questionnaire sent by email to 39 school principals, of whom 23 agreed to participate. In this study, the administrators were designated G1 through G23.

The questions addressed the following key areas: (a) managers' conception of participatory management; (b) the main challenges faced in implementing it; (c) the practices adopted in decision-making; and (d) the perceived results of this management approach.

The managers' statements were organized into thematic categories that emerged from the data itself: challenges, practices, results, and professional profile, analyzed using the webQDA³ software. Using the software, it was possible to conduct a content analysis of the data comprising the corpus of this study. The principals' responses to the questionnaire were categorized with accuracy and authenticity..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After a thorough reading, analysis, comparison, and cross-referencing of the responses from the 23 managers, it became clear that while their experiences varied widely, there were also a significant number of points on which the principals' explanations converged. They frequently articulate concepts such as: participatory management, strategic planning, strengthening the involvement of the school community, taking responsibility for the whole, and the importance of being a more relational manager open to exploring new possibilities. Their statements suggest a systemic vision, where participation is not merely a set of tasks but an integral element of organizational culture and leadership. Although they still mention active listening and delegation, these actions are often framed within a framework of more complex values, such as respect, empathy, resilience, and the pursuit of collective solutions to institutional challenges. These considerations are echoed in Libâneo (2018), when discussing

³ Cf. www.webQDA.net.

democratic management, which is consolidated in the collective construction of the Pedagogical Political Project, a guiding document for actions planned in and for the school.

The relationship between continuing education and participatory management was the focus of the research question: How does the continuing education of school managers help strengthen participatory management? This question reflects a concrete challenge in the educational landscape, as daily school life reveals that the quality of decisions depends not only on the authority of the position but on the manager's ability to engage in dialogue, coordinate, and involve the various members of the school community. In this sense, the continuing education presented in this study was found to be an ongoing process of critical reflection on one's own practices, allowing the manager to reframe their role and align their actions with the emerging demands of a democratic school, as evidenced in the accounts of G4, G2, and G11. G4: *"Practicing in processes such as: involvement and interventions when necessary."* G2: *"Conducting individual and collective 'feedback' to align expectations, a sense of responsibility, and alignment of objectives."* G11: *"making the group feel part of the whole, taking responsibility for the whole, always validating employees' ideas, empathy, resilience."*

The challenges of participatory management, from the perspective of the surveyed managers, fall into three main categories: administrative and service pressures; people management as the core of democratic practice; and the integration of the school community, especially families. These perspectives reveal the complexity of the process and reaffirm the need for strategies that strengthen both dialogue and collective co-responsibility in the school environment.

An analysis of the concrete actions and methodologies employed by managers to promote the participation of various school stakeholders can be observed in the set of responses. Despite differences in approach, the practices reported by participants relate to essential dimensions of participatory management: whether through the direct sharing of decisions, the use of data and evidence to support collective reflection, or the anchoring in official documents that structure school action. In this regard, Lück (2014) emphasizes that school managers must possess a strategic vision and the ability to lead a pedagogical team, in addition to serving as a coordinator of educational and administrative practices, capable of mobilizing resources and people in support of quality education.

The reports from G7, G8, G12, G14, and G19 demonstrated that participatory management is strengthened when there is technical expertise, social awareness, and a willingness to share responsibilities, exactly as Lück (2014) points out; for this author,

continuing education goes beyond technical skills and enables the development of relational competencies that are important for the practice of participatory management.

In this vein, the response to the guiding question pointed to a two-way street: continuing education provides the conditions for more conscious and qualified action, while participatory management creates the environment in which this learning is transformed into effective practice. The result of this integration is the consolidation of a more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative school environment, in which each decision becomes not only an administrative solution but an opportunity for democratic exercise and the strengthening of citizenship

The purpose of this study was to analyze how the continuing education of school principals contributes to the development of participatory management, examining the intersections between professional development, leadership practices, and democratic processes in the context of elementary schools. This purpose unfolds into an investigation of how continuing education occurs beyond initial training, an analysis of practices that exemplify participatory management, and the identification of transformations manifesting in the school environment based on managers' perceptions of their educational trajectory. The study thus sought to deepen reflection on the importance of a continuous educational process and its influence on the construction of participatory management.

The analysis revealed that, for decisions of significant impact or of a pedagogical nature, the tendency is to seek maximum participation and collective deliberation, according to the perceptions of the participating managers. Thus, it was possible to identify that the continuing professional development of school managers is an indispensable pillar for the professional growth and development of those involved in the educational process, and that it fosters not only the updating of knowledge but also critical reflection on pedagogical practices, allowing educators to redefine their actions and align them with the emerging demands of contemporary society. This analysis is echoed by Imbernón (2010), who considers continuing education essential in the educational environment. Following this author's line of thought, training is not limited to a one-time process but takes on a continuous and transformative character, contributing to the construction of a more conscious, innovative, and contextualized pedagogical practice.

According to the comments of the participants, participatory management proved to be essential in building a democratic and collaborative school environment. As an example, we cite the statement by G20: "*Listening, asking questions, providing opportunities for input, allowing team members to carry out projects, holding debates, and having the ability to bring*

out the best in each team member,” which emphasizes the value of dialogue, shared responsibility, and active listening in order to promote greater engagement within the school community; in this way, the school environment becomes, as Paro (2016) puts it, a welcoming school where each team member fulfills their role and participates in management, sharing responsibility for decisions in the educational process.

The integration of continuing education and participatory management is considered a promising path for advancing educational quality, ensuring more consistent practices, a more democratic institutional culture, and the strengthening of an education committed to social transformation.

Following are the statements from participants G1 to G23, recorded based on two central questions for this discussion: “Thinking about continuing education courses, would you say they contributed to your development of participatory management?” and “Did you notice changes in your work style after taking continuing education courses? Could you give examples?” These responses allow us to understand how training processes have impacted managers’ performance and how they contribute to consolidating participatory leadership practices in everyday school life, thereby generating results described as changes within their expectations (Table 1).

Table 1.
Managers’ contributions to participatory management and continuing education

Managers	Participatory Management	Continuing Education	Changes
G1	<i>As for participatory management, I do not practice it in its entirety. I work with participatory management involving the internal community [...].</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in School Administration.	<i>The main change was in the perception and resolution of conflicts.</i>
G2	<i>The courses help improve our skills, leading to greater personal and professional development..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Psychopedagogy and School Management.	<i>We can implement improvements in a timely manner. Without continuing education, some data is more difficult to extract..</i>
G3	<i>Continuing education is essential for professional growth and for improving the quality of work..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Master’s degree in Education.	<i>Development of new skills, improvement in the quality of teaching and management, and opportunities for professional growth.</i>
G4	<i>All knowledge enriches professional practice.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Inclusion; Administration and Marketing; School Management.	<i>I was able to take a more inclusive view of all aspects of the school [...].</i>

G5	<i>It certainly contributed a lot to my engagement in day-to-day work.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree em Educational Administration and Marketing.	<i>I gained a better understanding and became more assertive in problem-solving [...].</i>
G6	<i>It contributed a lot. (No justification for the answer)</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Human Resources Management in School Settings.	<i>I noticed changes in my work style after the continuing education. The courses broadened my perspective on school management [...]. The knowledge I gained has directly impacted how I act and make decisions, making my management more strategic and human-centered.</i>
G7	<i>More information and technical knowledge broaden one's horizons.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Marketing Strategy; Theology and Adventist Philosophy.	<i>Relacionamento interpessoal, desenvolvimento de resiliência.</i>
G8	<i>Training is important for keeping pace with rapid social and educational changes and the challenges of modernity.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>Interpersonal relationships, development of resilience.</i>
G9	<i>The course did not contribute to continuing education, as it was on a different subject.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Inclusive Education.	<i>Taking action with greater confidence and a stronger foundation in decision-making..</i>
G10	<i>All the training programs I participated in taught me to manage in a more conscious and democratic way..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>The way I interact with staff through feedback, always with the aim of helping them grow.</i>
G11	<i>It gave me a broader perspective and different points of view.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>Improvements in planning, time management, focus, feedback, and decision-making, among others.</i>
G12	<i>Continuing education courses equip us managers with new methodologies and strategies that, when put into practice, foster a more collaborative school environment.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Inclusive Education.	<i>In my approach to work, especially when supporting students with special educational needs [...].</i>
G13	<i>(Did not participate in any continuing education courses)</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>(No answers)</i>
G14	<i>For participatory management, to align pedagogical practices, it provided practical tools to encourage open communication and collective decision-making.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Management; Currently pursuing a Master's degree.	<i>I gained knowledge in people management, data organization, and the application of Bloom's taxonomy. [...].</i>
G15	<i>During our meetings, there are times when we are asked what topics were missing from the presentation. I view this as a positive thing because it helps me recall everyday situations.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Theology.	<i>Confidence in preparing/requesting documents and interacting with families.</i>
G16	<i>The institution where I work has been committed to training me, and this has helped me gain a deeper</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>I began to act and make decisions in a more intentional and planned manner.</i>

	<i>understanding of the different areas I am responsible for managing.</i>		
G17	<i>It helps me think differently and opens up possibilities</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>Customer service strategies, marketing strategies, and planning initiatives.</i>
G18	<i>Participating in training and discussions with colleagues from other school units helps us refine our vision and actions as managers. We need to pay close attention to the details involving students, parents, staff, teachers, and employees.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in Neuropsychopedagogy.	<i>There is always an increase in participation in continuing education courses.</i>
G19	<i>I have improved my administrative skills and developed techniques to engage parents and students in integrating faith and education, as well as teachers and classroom instruction. This has strengthened the sense of belonging and responsibility, fostering a more participatory and democratic culture.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in School Management; Leadership.	<i>Improved internal communication, enhanced conflict resolution, and the implementation of a culture of participation, decision-making, innovation, and competitiveness. With an up-to-date view of the educational market [...].</i>
G20	<i>More people involved in the process with a focus on growth and process improvements..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in School Management.	<i>Knowledge fosters confidence and a work approach more focused on positive results.</i>
G21	<i>It always adds value, as it fosters further growth..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in School Management and pursuing a Master's degree in Education.	<i>Relationship with leadership, pedagogical experience, team improvement.</i>
G22	<i>The courses helped me better understand the importance of listening to different opinions, working as a team, and involving everyone in decision-making. This has strengthened my practice of a more open, collaborative, and respectful management style toward everyone involved.</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy.	<i>I noticed some changes in my work style after the courses. I started listening more to the team, involving teachers and staff in decisions. [...] I also began thinking more about students' well-being, seeking ways to support those with learning difficulties. Another example was improving communication with families, creating a closer and more welcoming relationship.</i>
G23	<i>Each course has provided me with new perspectives and ways to improve my management skills, contributing to the overall development of the school as well as my own personal growth..</i>	Licentiate degree in Pedagogy; Postgraduate degree in School Management.	<i>The main change was in the perception and resolution of conflicts.</i>

Note. Research data (2025).

Table 1 shows that 13 (56.52%) of the managers have completed postgraduate-level continuing education, which is the case for G1, G2, G5, G6, G7, G15, G18, and G23, who

highlighted improvements in “*conflict resolution*,” “*time management*,” and “*strengthening strategic leadership*,” indicating that the theoretical and practical knowledge gained in specialization courses has fostered more informed decision-making. Similarly, administrators such as G4, G9, and G12, who had training focused on “*educational inclusion*,” reported a “*greater attention to the needs of students with disabilities*,” reinforcing the importance of continuing education for building an inclusive and diversity-sensitive school administration. Meanwhile, G19 and G20, who have specializations in school management and leadership, highlighted changes related to “*communication, innovation, and participatory culture*,” emphasizing the “*pursuit of consistent and competitive results*” in the educational setting.

Among the administrators who held only a Licentiate degree in Education, 7 (30.43%) reported that continuing education has been essential for filling gaps and ensuring they stay up to date in the face of social and educational changes. Examples such as those of G8, G10, G11, G16, G17, and G22 demonstrated progress in “*interpersonal relationships, active listening to the team, strategic planning, and attention to the needs of students and families*,” aspects that strengthen participatory management practices. Nevertheless, one can observe that the absence of graduate-level education may limit the acquisition of more specific management tools, as in the case of G13, who did not participate in continuing education courses and, therefore, did not report significant changes in their performance..

On the other hand, 3 (13.04%) of the managers with *stricto sensu* degrees reported more profound and significant changes in their professional practice. G3, who holds a master’s degree in Education, highlighted the role of continuing education in “*skill development, work quality, and professional growth*.” Meanwhile, G14 and G21, who are currently pursuing their master’s degrees, reported gains in “*data organization, people management, and the application of pedagogical tools*,” as well as “*strengthening autonomy and leadership experience*.” Such evidence indicates that graduate-level education broadens the manager’s critical perspective, integrating theory and practice, and fostering the development of competencies geared toward participatory management.

These findings are supported by the studies of Paro (2016) and Imbernón (2010), which highlight the importance of ongoing professional development for school administrators as essential for the adoption of innovative practices and the transformation of the school environment. And, as Lück (2000) points out, by continuously investing in their development, administrators not only improve their own performance but establish themselves as true agents of transformation, with the potential to raise the standard of education, create a vibrant school

environment, and prepare new generations for the challenges of a constantly evolving world. This perspective humanizes the management process, aligning it with the broader goals of education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The objective of this study was to analyze how continuing education for school principals can foster the development of participatory management practices, thereby strengthening the role of educational leadership as a driving force for participatory management.

For this study, we sought to investigate how continuing education for school managers occurs beyond their initial training in the Pedagogy course. To meet this objective, participating managers were asked about their training, and according to the analysis of the categorized results, it became evident that the managers attributed great importance to continuing education throughout their careers, recognizing it as a means of ongoing professional development, the acquisition of new technical and interpersonal skills, and the strengthening of participatory practices that contribute to the improvement of school management.

The identification of changes in the school environment, based on the participating managers' perceptions of their continuing education, was carried out through a categorical analysis, which revealed significant changes across multiple dimensions of management. Among the advances observed, the following stood out: the improvement of technical competencies related to the planning and organization of school activities; the strengthening of relational skills, such as active listening, conflict mediation, and fostering collaboration; and the adoption of more participatory and inclusive pedagogical practices. However, challenges and limitations were also evident, manifested in structural barriers, cultural resistance, and insufficient access to training programs—factors that can hinder the effective consolidation of participatory management. Although these challenges persist, the findings revealed that continuing education plays an essential role in redefining the manager's practices to strengthen school practices guided by communication, collective cooperation, and the participatory involvement of the community in decision-making processes.

From this perspective, it became evident that professional development helps strengthen the principal's ability to coordinate the participation of all members of the school community,

encourage dialogue and active listening, and foster collective decision-making. Thus, such training processes contributed significantly to the development of leadership focused on collective participation and grounded in the shared responsibility that guides school management practices.

The reflections presented throughout this study are not exhaustive, but serve as a starting point for broadening the debate on continuing education and school management. In this sense, we recognize the importance of structuring future research within different contexts and management modalities, in order to deepen our understanding of the identified potentialities and limitations, thereby enabling new perspectives for the improvement of educational practices and participatory leadership in the school setting.

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