



The Role of the School Principal in an Angolan School Organization

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Abstract

This paper results of an empirical study carried out in 2015, in a private school in Benguela. The purpose and objectives of the research were to analyze which competencies teachers considered essential to the position of a school principal, to identify essential competencies and inherent aspects to exercise this position and the development of knowledge about the competency profile of a school principal. The research methodology was predominantly qualitative, a questionnaire survey was applied to 42 teachers, and the simple statistical analysis was the data treatment technique. The main results showed that for the teachers who participated in the study: i) the school principal should be a teacher with School Management and Administration training; ii) the appointment of a school principal should result from peer election; iii) the ability to manage human resources, leadership, communication, teamwork and management knowledge are essential competencies of a school principal.

Keywords: School Organization, Competencies, School Principal

Introduction

As a result of globalization, school institutions have undergone intense transformations, resulting in the restructuring of educational processes and reassessment of traditional management models. For that matter, the increasing need of adaptability due to the constant changes proposed by organizations and the labour market are factors of survival in the educational context, and it is crucial that school principals identify themselves and act as transforming agents.

In this context, it is necessary to understand the influence of the attitudes of the school principal and the impact of personal, technical and emotional skills on the employees, since a good working environment tends to



generate motivation and to reflect positively in the productivity levels. As a matter of fact, it is up to the school principal to know human motivations and management tools, which can support him/her in making decisions about the appropriate use and valorization of the talents which integrate the work teams. In this line of thought, Bergamini (1994, p.88) points out:

"The main tool of people management is the continuous learning that directs the leader to organizational learning, that is, it is necessary for him to develop the capacity to promote education / development with high quality service and to open up to the transmission of information, in order to allow the participation of employees in taking decisions, acting as educator, negotiator, encourager and promoter on behalf of their performance."

In fact, school principals directly interfere with school performance. As leaders, they are culture shapers and leverages who maximize the performance of employees and the organization in general. As such, it is their responsibility to plan, organize, coordinate, evaluate and reformulate the activities they provide to employees and the conditions that contribute to their professional fulfillment and personal satisfaction.

Therefore, the choice of the present theme is justified by the fact that it intends to know the impact of the competencies of a principal on the performance of the employees, taking into account the function of motivating them, in a perspective of promoting the educational success of the students.

In this context, the research problem lies in the analysis and understanding of the role of a principal in the organization of a school in Angola, assuming the following statement when formulated as a framing question:

What skills do teachers consider essential to the position of school principal?

With the intention of producing knowledge on this subject in the Angolan educational context, the following research objectives were defined, namely:

- 1) *To identify essential competencies to perform the job of school principal, according to the perception of teachers;*
- 2) *To understand aspects inherent to the performance of the job of school principal, in the perspective of teachers;*
- 3) *To develop knowledge about the skills profile of a school principal, with reference to teacher perception.*

School as an organisation is the object of study by various authors, namely Nóvoa (1992), Hargreaves (1994), Lima (2001), Fullan (2003), Canário (2005), Hargreaves & Fink (2005), among others. In the perspective of Lima (2001), school is understood as a "complex and multifaceted educational organization" (p.10). The idea of organization refers to an ordered and structured way of planning an action and having conditions to achieve it. Thus, school as an educational organization has principles and procedures that are related to the action of coordinating all those involved in the educational process, in order to achieve the objectives and preferences that it proposes itself (Lima, 2001).

Lima (2001), supported by Ellströn (1983), relates four models of organization: the political model, the social system model, the rational / bureaucratic model and the anarchic model. In the political model, the diversity of ideological interests and objectives not shared by all stand out. The author highlights in this model "the importance of power, of struggle and conflict, and a type of rationality - political rationality" (Lima, 2001, p.17). Because of its characteristics, and because the public school is subordinated to the State, this form of organization lacks applicability conditions, although in historical moments the identifying elements of this model are important for the study of the school.



The social system model presents organizational processes more as spontaneous phenomena than the intention of organizational action. For the author, this model privileges "consensus, adaptation to the environment, stability" (Lima, 2001, p.19). Like the political model, this is also not dominant in studies about school organization.

The rational/bureaucratic model places emphasis on the consensus and clarity of organizational objectives and admits the existence of transparent processes and technologies. Action comes from well-defined decisions, meaning that choice is a rational analysis action. In this model, decision must be intentional and directed to the purposes of the proposals, having as support the technical and knowledge means (Lima, 2001). School as an organization becomes bureaucratic due to the rigidity of laws and regulations in the hierarchy, in the organization, in the form, in the specialization, and other elements that are common to large organizations considered bureaucratic. Lima (2001) highlights the disconnection between what the school presents as a model of organization and what actually occurs in its routine. In a bureaucratic model, the school presents well-defined roles, rigidity, hierarchy of ranks, and expertise.

In a universe, which the author calls "unofficial", "organizational conflicts, problematic definition of objectives, difficulties imposed by ambiguous technology and informal structures" appear (Lima, 2001, p. 28), thus emerging the anarchic model of organization. The anarchic model contrasts with the rational model because it presents unclear, conflicting objectives and dubious and uncertain technologies. For Lima (2001), the anarchic model presents three fundamental indicators: i) inconsistency and insufficient definition of the objectives and of the intentionality of the organization; ii) lack of clarity of the organization's members regarding processes and technologies; iii) levels of participation of its members varying from one time to another.

In the Angolan educational context, the school principal is the main responsible for articulating the pedagogical management and ensuring the educational success of the students. As a leader, the school principal must articulate his/her action with the intermediate leaderships and promote collaboration, in a perspective of sharing authority and strengthening its legitimacy. In fact, the principal's performance and pedagogical coordination condition the implementation of school organization and management practices (Libâneo, 2001). Therefore, the competencies of the school principal are diverse and can be grouped according to two types: administrative or pedagogical. Nevertheless, due to the nature of the position, the school principal has competencies associated to both types, since he/she is responsible for ensuring the functioning of the school in these two fields of action.

At school, the principal plays the role of general manager of the institution, in particular with administrative functions (human, physical and financial resources, supervision of obligations, relations with the community), and pedagogical coordinators are responsible for pedagogical functions. According to Libâneo (2001), the principal coordinates, organizes and manages all activities at the school, assisted by a body of experts and technicians/administratives, taking into account the legal norms emanating from the Ministry of Education and the decisions taken by the school and the community together. As such, the operationalization of any collective decision-making requires adequate coordination and administration. In this context, Prado & Prado (2001) argue that the performance of the principal implies involvement with the community and the participation of all those involved in school work. Thus, democratic management requires the principal to have intrinsic and hierarchically organized competencies, namely of a technical, political and pedagogical nature.

Method

This study focuses on the study of a specific reality (essential competencies necessary for the performance of the position of school principal) and in a particular context (a private school of the lower and upper secondary education in the Municipality of Benguela), as such, we chose the qualitative research paradigm. Regarding qualitative research, Stake (1995) states that it directs the research aspects to cases or phenomena where the contextual conditions are unknown or that, presumably, may not be controlled.



Therefore, the present study favors a primarily qualitative approach, since it assumes a predominantly descriptive rather than evaluative feature (Freixo, 2011). Effectively, it is a study that refers to teachers' perceptions of the competencies that they consider necessary for the performance as principal of a school organization.

Although the main data collection technique was the survey by questionnaire (associated with the quantitative paradigm), the study adopts a qualitative nature, since it essentially privileges the understanding of behaviors from the perspectives of the research subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994), being one of the main objectives of the researcher to understand, in detail, what the teachers inserted in the context think about the object of study.

The empirical study was carried out during the school year of 2015, in a private school of the lower and upper Secondary School of Benguela, whose teaching staff consisted of sixty-two (62) teachers, of which twenty-one (21) were female and forty-one (41) male.

The selection of the school where the study was developed was not random, and the weighting factors were various, with emphasis on:

- i)* accessibility issues since the proximity to our area of residence allowed easier and more frequent access;
- ii)* personal awareness of the school in question, as well as of the majority of the teachers, namely the management body, were aspects that allowed easier access to certain data;
- iii)* availability and interest revealed by the school's management, with whom we initially established informal contact and later a formal one.

Based on the proposed research objectives and the nature of the object of study, the data collection techniques were defined, adopting the survey by questionnaire as the main data collection technique and document analysis as a complementary means. The survey by questionnaire was administered to a group of forty-two (42) teachers who were teaching at the above-mentioned school who were available and interested in participating in the study.

The questionnaire survey was organized into two sections, respectively: *a)* Personal and Professional Characterization of the Respondent; *b)* A Principal's Competencies Profile. Its application intended to collect information for the following objectives:

- a)* characterize the respondent personally and professionally;
- b)* to find out essential competencies to perform the job of school principal, according to the perception of the responding teachers;
- c)* understand aspects inherent to the performance of the job of school principal, from the perspective of the responding teachers.

When constructing the questionnaire survey, we sought to draft the questions in a clear, concise and unambiguous manner in order to avoid ambiguity in their interpretation. Since this questionnaire was adapted from one applied in Portugal by Pires (2011), internally validated by experts in the field, it was necessary to validate it externally in the Angolan educational context. Therefore, six teachers, who were teaching at another school, were asked to make a critical appraisal of the questionnaire as to the appropriateness, relevance, clarity and rigor of the questions posed. This way, the external validation process of the questionnaire was ensured in a different context from the one in which it was originally applied. In short, "its rigor, clarity and adequacy to the research objectives and the target population" were verified (Pardal & Correia, 1995 referred to by Abelha, 2005, p. 88).



Since the teachers who were asked to validate externally have not suggested any changes or improvements to the content (just correcting the sequence of questions), they were then administered to the group of forty-two (42) teachers who agreed to collaborate in this study.

The main purpose of document analysis was to complement and enrich data obtained from the questionnaire survey, while also allowing useful information to be collected for the object of study (Morgado, 2013). Therefore, in the present study the structuring documents of the participating school were consulted and analyzed, namely the Educational Project and the Rules of Procedure, allowing to obtain data on the characterization of the socioeconomic environment in which it is inserted, its pedagogical and administrative organization, the physical structure and physical and human resources.

Simple statistical analysis was the technique of processing the data collected through the questionnaire survey, allowing its interpretation and attribution of meaning in order to find answers to the research problem (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994).

Findings

The school where the empirical study took place

The school activities at the school where the empirical study took place began on March 7 of the school year 2011, including only the Lower Secondary School, 28 teachers and 60 students enrolled and divided in the morning and evening shifts.

The publication of Joint Executive Decree No. 178/15, of April 10, determines the creation of the current private school of the Lower and Upper Secondary Education, located in the Municipality of Benguela, with 8 classrooms, 24 classes, working in 3 shifts (morning, afternoon, evening), with capacity for 36 students per class, that is, a total of 864 students.

The majority of the local resident population is characterized by war-displaced persons, due to the armed conflict that occurred in the country, that is, people from different parts of the country. Although located in a coastal area of Benguela, this is a poor neighborhood, it has no electricity or clean drinking water accessible to the entire population, which is mostly illiterate and survives from fishing and informal economic activity. In terms of infrastructures, we can highlight 2 schools in the neighborhood, a primary school and a lower and upper secondary education school, a health post for basic services, with poor conditions, and small structures that help the community to subsist.

This school is a co-financed private institution that, in fidelity to the guidance of the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, educates according to the principles of the Gospel and the pedagogy of the Catholic Church.

In the year of the empirical study, the institution operated on a three-period basis: the morning (from 7:10 am to 12:45 pm), the afternoon (from 1:00 pm to 5:45 pm) and the evening (from 18:10 to 23:15).

The teaching staff of the institution consisted of 62 teachers, of which 21 were female. Within the non-teaching staff, the school had an administrative staff of 13 employees, 9 of whom were female. In the school year of 2015, 543 students were enrolled, distributed by class and gender, according to the data in Table 1.

Table 1. Students per classroom and gender

Variables	Registered students		Total
	Female	Male	



7th Grade	31	35	66
8th Grade	17	21	38
9th Grade	35	28	63
10th Grade	78	102	180
11th Grade	46	67	113
12th Grade	38	45	83
Total	245	298	543

The school had an organization chart that served as an instrument for the implementation of the activities and where the functions and roles of each body and each member were stated. Being an institution of a private nature and co-financed, it was not covered by the State Budget, so it survived with the monthly contributions of parents. The hiring of staff, in some situations, was promoted through a tender, by the Provincial Direction of Education and, in others, by the selection of curriculum vitae, with reference to the required competencies, and the staff was placed according to their expertise by the municipal government or the governing board of the institution.

Personal and professional characterization of the participating teachers

The analysis of the results referring to the first section of the questionnaire allows us to verify an equitable gender distribution of the teachers answering the questionnaire, with 21 teachers from each gender. Most teachers (28) stated being between 36 and 50 years old, and the remaining (14) were between 26 and 35 years old. Most of the teachers (30) were in a stable employment situation, that is, with a permanent working relationship, and 12 were non-permanent employees of the institution. Degree and baccalaureate were the most common academic qualifications, distributed according to Table 2.

Table 2. Academic qualifications

Variables	Frequency
PHD	--
Master	--
Postgraduation	2
Graduation	21
Bachelors degree	17
High School	2

Most of the respondent teachers (40) taught students of the Upper Secondary School and the number of years of teaching service (accounted until December 31, 2015) is systematised in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of years of teaching service

Variables	Frequency
Up to 4 years	24
From 5 to 10 years	12
From 11 to 20 years	4
Over 20 years	2

Key competences for the performance of school principal (first objective)

Analyzing the relevance of competences to be privileged by a principal in his / her position, 33 of the respondent teachers considered "Ability to work in a team" as "very important", 31 teachers considered "Communication skills", 26 teachers considered "Ability to manage human resources "and" Intellectual Capacity "and 25



teachers“ Leadership Capacity ”. It is important to highlight that the “Knowledge at management level” was considered “Very important” by 16 of the respondent teachers, but “Important” by 21 of them.

These results allow us to infer that the responding teachers do not privilege, in the performance of the job of principal, competencies inherent only to management and administration functions. This situation leads to a perception of the principal as someone who, in addition to issues related to management/administration, privileges the pedagogical functions and of mobilizing school actors in search of articulation with the social and cultural reality that surrounds them (Nogueira, 2013). From another perspective, these results indicate that the responding teachers value the ability of the leader to adjust the leadership style to the context and needs of employees (teamwork, communication), thereby ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the school organization (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves & Fink 2005; Fullan 2003).

Aspects inherent to the performance of school principal (second objective)

Knowledge of the curriculum of subjects and courses was considered by 30 of the responding teachers to be a “Very important” aspect to the role of principal. In turn, the awareness associated with projects developed in the school environment and the Activities Plan were prioritized over those related to guiding documents, namely the Rules of Procedure and the Educational Project, despite their relevance.

The pedagogical management of learning, the building of consensus and the promotion of learning success were the three functions that the responding teachers highlighted as assuming a “Very important” level of relevance in the role of a school principal, respectively 30, 27 and 25 teachers. In addition, supervising teaching performance, supervising Ministry guidelines and enforcing powers provided by law were the three next functions immediately highlighted by the responding teachers. In turn, the management of material resources was the function where the respondent teachers revealed a greater dispersion of relevance in the performance of the school principal’s role.

Motivating teachers, valuing teaching work and managing and negotiating conflicts were the three interpersonal skills that the responding teachers highlighted as those that should be privileged by the principal in his / her role, with “Very important” relevance levels, marked by 30, 26 and 21 teachers, respectively.

Given these results we infer that the perception of the responding teachers may point to an emergence of the principal's perspective as an organizational architect (Murphy, 1990), that is, one that acts on people, structures and processes, facilitating the educational work with the students (Gaspar & Diogo, 2014). On the other hand, supervising Ministry guidelines and enforcing powers provided by law may indicate a school principal perspective that bridges the regulatory intentions, the exercise of control, the needs of professional development and the expectations of the school community, in terms of the quality of service provided by the school organization (Gaspar & Diogo, 2014).

It is also important to note that the actions of directing and coordinating presuppose the mobilization of people's collective effort to achieve established goals and objectives (Libiliar, 2001). In this sense, it is assumed that the school principal brings together all elements of the organizational process (planning, organisation, evaluation), involving mobilization, motivation, communication and coordination activities, in order to ensure the functioning of the school, enhancing the teaching action and the success of student learning.

Developing knowledge about a school principal's competences profile (third objective)

Respondent teachers pointed out that for the role of principal teamwork, communication, human resources management, intellectual ability and leadership skills were relevant. In turn, the interpersonal skills privileged by



the responding teachers for the role of principal were in the field of teacher motivation, valuing teaching work and conflict management and negotiation.

On the other hand, the functions to be privileged in the role of principal, highlighted by the responding teachers, were the pedagogical management of learning, consensus building and the promotion of learning success, indicating agreement with the current legal norms, namely the Law 17/2016, of October 7, the Teacher Training School Regulations of December 5, 2014, and the “Proposal for a Unified Regulation for Teacher Training and Primary Teachers in the Province of Benguela”.

The current legal norms are exhaustive in the list of competencies attributed to the performance of the role of principal, which privilege aspects of management and administration of resources over leadership competencies. However, the responding teachers attributed greater relevance to teachers’ motivation, communication and leadership skills, which are not clearly stated in the legal norms, referring to a perspective of managing / administrative / executing school principal, in line with the appointment by higher bodies (Minister of Education, on proposal of the corresponding Provincial Governor). Thus, due to exhaustive guidelines embodied in the legal regulations, we question the way the Ministry of Education views and values the role of the school principal, i.e., to give more importance to the role of executor or the role of leader?

Ultimately, we point out that the results of this study indicate that the role of the principal tends to assume greater relevance in the perspective of the responding teachers. It should be noted that the data refer to the context of a private and co-financed school, a fact that may allow some autonomy from some guidelines of the legal norms.

Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

The obtained results allow us to conclude that, for the majority of the responding teachers, the role of school principal should be performed by a teacher, with specific training in school management and administration areas, with more than 20 years of service, and elected by peers or the school community. Except for the election mode, the remaining assumptions regarding the personal and professional profile of the school principal are laid down in current legal regulations and attachments to the Angolan education system.

Thus, we ask from a reflective recommendation perspective:

- i)* To what extent, in the context of Angolan public education, the appointment by the Ministry of Education (upon the proposal of the Provincial Governor) does not give the role of school principal a political dimension, being professional merit, appreciation and the recognition of specific training pushed into the background?
- ii)* To what extent, in the context of Angolan private education, a possible election of the school principal by peers, by the school community or the employer may conceal some kind of favouritism, rather than professional merit, appreciation and recognition of specific training from other candidates?
- iii)* To what extent, in the context of Angolan private education, does the hiring of teachers via curriculum vitae analysis ensure a selection of candidates based on criteria of professional merit, appreciation and recognition of specific training, when the recruitment may not be in the public domain?

The teachers participating in the study emphasized that for the role of principal, teamwork, communication, human resources management, intellectual capacity and leadership skills were relevant. As interpersonal competences were highlighted the teaching motivation, the valorization of the teaching work and conflicts management and negotiation. Given the nature of these competencies, we can infer that the responding teachers attributed relevance to the position of principal as a leader, when it is the role of manager/administrator/executor that is most evident in the legal rules.



Given the legal regulations, we question from a perspective of reflective recommendation:

- i) Can the detailed specification of the school principal's competencies and duties direct his/her role to that of an administrator/manager/executor, limiting his or her role as leader?
- ii) To what extent do the employers (patrons) of a private school and the Ministry of Education condition the principal in the role of leader?

Presumably, the answer to each of these questions could be the object of studies to be developed with teachers and principals of public and private schools, in order to broaden the understanding of the role of the school principal and the inherent competences in the Angolan educational context.

The context and nature of this investigation are specific and, therefore, the results obtained can not be generalized. Thus, focusing on the object of study of this research, we recommend the accomplishment of possible studies, whose contribution may deepen the theme in a perspective of complementarity, namely:

- i) of a similar nature (private school) and different Angolan educational contexts, other municipalities and/or provinces;
- ii) of a similar and comparative nature (public school and private school) in the same municipality and school and the same level of education;
- iii) with the application of surveys by interview to the directors, to listen to their perception about the competencies inherent to their role;
- iv) focused on the students' perspective on the role of principal and the competencies that are inherent;
- v) on how principals perceive the training needs for their role;
- vi) on gender issues in the leadership of Angolan schools.

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