Portuguese Principals' Professional Development Needs and Preferred Learning Methods

Rosário Serrão Cunha [1],* **, Mireia Tintoré [2]** **, Ilídia Cabral [1] and José Matias Alves [1]**

[1] Faculty of Education and Psychology, Research Centre for Human Development,
    Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 4169-005 Porto, Portugal; icabral@porto.ucp.pt (I.C.);
    jalves@porto.ucp.pt (J.M.A.)
[2] Faculty of Education, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya-UIC, 08017 Barcelona, Spain; mtintore@uic.es
*   Correspondence: rscunha@porto.ucp.pt

Abstract: Due to the crucial role principals have on school outcomes, investing in their training is a cost-effective approach for schools' improvement. Research shows that principals attribute pertinence to their ongoing professional development. However, little research has been conducted on principals' training needs from their viewpoint, particularly in Portugal. Through individual interviews ($n = 19$) and a questionnaire ($n = 117$) to principals, we collected data that enable us to understand principals' perceptions on their training needs, focusing on learning areas, skills to be developed and learning methods. Results show considerable variability, reinforcing the relevance of tailored and contextualised approaches to professional development. Globally, principals request management skills and training opportunities that enable them to develop leadership skills (e.g., personal, interpersonal/socioemotional). Moreover, principals need training on instructional and distributed leadership practices. Collaborative and reflective methods are the ones principals prefer. Practical implications for the design of systematic professional development practices, in a lifelong perspective, are also discussed.

Keywords: professional training; learning methods; educational administration; leadership; school management

1. Introduction

Principals can have a crucial influence on school organisation, if they are well-equipped for the job they tackle [1]. Their expertise can be acquired, developed and supported through leadership programmes. The literature supports the relevance of educational leaders' training: training improves leadership practices, and consequently, has a direct influence on teachers' working conditions, motivation, commitment and teaching capacity, and an indirect influence on students' results [2,3].

Investing in the development of principals' skills is considered to be a cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning in schools [4], and it is strongly recommended by international institutions such as the OECD [5], or non-governmental organisations, such as The Wallace Foundation [4]. Most principals have been prepared for an industrial world that does not exist anymore, as nowadays they are facing new challenges—which reinforces the need to adapt and update leadership development programmes [5–7]. As Aas and Blom [8] recently pointed out, "the professional development of school leaders is lacking a robust research base and continues to be inadequate" (p. 63).

Furthermore, the design of training programmes should be based on the analysis of school leaders' needs for improvement and preferred learning methods [9]. However, little research has been conducted on the current training needs of school principals (from their viewpoint), particularly in Portugal.

The present article aims to explore Portuguese principals' perceptions on their training needs, focusing on learning areas, skills to be developed and learning methods. Ultimately, we aspire to use this information to support the future design of training programmes to be offered to Portuguese principals, in accordance with their current needs and expectations.

1.1. Educational Leadership Training Programmes' Features: A Literature Review

1.1.1. Learning Content Areas

Several countries around the world have been investing in the ongoing professional development of school leaders, along with the preparation of future ones [10,11]. Most of the current training programmes' content is based on specific national and state standards for educational leadership [1]. Examples of these standards are The Ontario Leadership Framework [12], the American Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [13] and the Chilean Marco para la Buena Direccíon y el Liderazgo escolar [14].

These existing standards are crucial for the development of efficient training programmes for school leaders in any country. As Poggi [15] wrote, "There is no practice without standards" (p. 57). We find the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) to be the most complete one, so we intend to give it particular attention in the present article.

According to OLF, school-level leadership practices are assessed and developed, considering five main categories of evidenced-based practices that contribute the most to the improvement of school and students' outcomes. These should integrate the contents of principals' professional development courses [16]: (i) setting directions, (ii) building relationships and developing people, (iii) developing the organisation to support desired practices, (iv) improving the instructional programme and (v) securing accountability.

In accordance with the OLF, research in the educational leadership field shows that there is an "international curriculum" [17] (p. 420) that should be present in every training for educational leaders [18], notwithstanding the necessary adaptation of this standard broad curriculum to specific contexts and needs [19]. This "international curriculum" includes modules related to management and instructional, distributed and transformational leadership, which are all present in the OLF.

1.1.2. Skills and Competencies to Develop

This international consensus on the content of leadership training programmes also includes a set of key skills for leadership practice, which should be developed [19,20]. These include personal, interpersonal and strategical capacities, which allow leaders to put the "international curriculum" into practice [18].

Hallinger [2] suggested classifying the competencies needed for the preparation of school leaders into two types that are required for the job: "management" and "leadership" skills. The management or technical skills have to do with functions as managing finances, managing the staff, policy and governance—more related to educational administration and management. On the other hand, leadership skills include personal and socioemotional skills such as communication, capacity building, creative thinking, innovative thinking, problem-solving expertise, capacity to perceive and manage emotions and to act accordingly and in adapted ways [2]. Leaders draw on all these competencies to enact effective leadership practices [21]. These can be developed through personal experiences and personal growth, but also by means of training and the promotion of specific opportunities to enhance such capabilities.

Moreover, as Wang and collaborators [22] mentioned: "The curricula in principal preparation programs do not emphasise leadership skills that have a demonstrated relationship with school and student success and that are most relevant to the work of today's principals. Instead, most programmes emphasise technical content." (p. 4).

1.1.3. Learning Methods

There are several approaches regarding the type of desirable learning methods: (a) cognitive and theoretical ways of learning (such as traditional lectures—which rarely produce lasting effects [23]—and self-study); (b) cooperative and communicative process-oriented approaches (such as group work); and (c) reflexive methods (such as coaching) [24]. Huber [24] (p. 529) also highlighted the relevance of promoting a "connection with concrete experiences" through simulation, observation and practice, which is mostly possible using approaches b and c, since these two put the participants in situations that are as close as possible to their real-life [25,26]. In this section, we mention and explain the most used learning methods in principals' professional development. All these combined are clear examples of the application of multiple approaches to learning [24], mixing cooperative and reflexive approaches.

The case method of instruction stands out, especially in Anglo-Saxon contexts [27]. In educational settings, this method consists of individual and group analysis of real school situations, so that principals improve their decision-making strategies and can use that capacity when dealing with the ambiguities of their daily work [27]. Similar to the case method is problem-based learning or PBL [28,29]. As suggested by Hallinger [2], PBL is an excellent strategy to engage learners around the difficulties faced by school leaders in their daily work. PBL focuses on developing skills that enable learners to apply knowledge to practice. It has been recommended both for preparation and continuous professional development courses [30].

Peterson [31] alludes to "study groups" or "reading and discussion groups", related to peer-learning groups through the development of specific activities and group self-reflection. Following these suggestions, the creation of principals' networks [32], meaning groups of principals working together in learning groups [8,33], or knowledge management networks [34], is also recommended both online or face-to-face, to enhance peer support and collaboration [4]. In line with these cooperative and communicative methods, job shadowing/work shadowing [35] is especially suggested for novice principals; this means placing principals in a different school setting [36], visiting other schools [8] and applying projects [37] using highly experienced principals as role models [36], or doing internships in schools [38]. Similarly, to improve instruction in schools, City [39] recommended instructional rounds and Stephens [40] and Aas [41] added also learning walks or "school walks", which is about "visiting classes and having conversations with teachers afterwards" [41] (p. 445).

Academics also suggested processes such as mentoring, tutoring, coaching or consulting, which enable leaders and their organisations to achieve their full potential on a professional and/or personal basis. As Irby stated in [42], "the three concepts of mentoring, tutoring and coaching are definitely related, yet, there are differences as well" (p. 115): "Mentors build significant relationships with their mentees, and such relationships may be retained for a long time period and even for a lifetime. Coaches also develop a trusting relationship, but there is a targeted goal, and once the goal has been reached, the coach typically withdraws after repeating the assistive task with the coached individual. Tutors work on short-term goals and tasks for specific improvement" [42] (p.116). Leadership coaching in education is a recent phenomenon [43–47]. As Fusarelli and Militello [48] mentioned, "Coaching is based on a collaborative partnership between a coach and individuals willing and ready to engage in work to develop their skills to their full potential. As such, coaching is a vehicle for analysis, reflexion, and action." (p. 53). Consulting is a service provided by qualified people to support school leaders in identifying management problems, finding possible solutions and putting those solutions into practice. This can be external, provided by professionals from outside the school organisation, such as university faculty, or internal, when provided by the school staff [49]. It is also possible for this consulting process to be provided through an online platform.

Ultimately, all these methods are about including a variety of learning [8], resourcing to multiple learning approaches [24], "creating capacity through learning communities" [50] (p. 33) and "building larger communities and networks" [50] (p. 35).

1.2. Educational Leadership Training in Portugal

In Portugal, schools within the public education system have one principal, who is accountable for every dimension of the school's management: administrative, financial and pedagogical. Only teachers with "specialised training" in school administration and management can be principals, since "School leadership is understood as an extension of the professional responsibility of a teacher, rather than a separate professional pathway" [51] (p. 198).

According to Silva [52], there are core topics usually included in this kind of training, mostly provided by universities through Master and Doctoral courses: educational administration (general); the educational system and educational policies; decentralisation and educational territories; school legislation and administrative procedures; school autonomy; management projects, such as the educational project of the school; assessment of the quality of education; financial management; and business administration. Despite the existence of these core topics, institutions have some autonomy in what concerns the design of these courses, which contributes to the existence of some differences in the training courses that provide "specialised training" in school administration in Portugal [52].

Principals who are already exerting this role in schools can also undertake specialisation courses offered by Universities and/or other credited institutions. The General Administration for School Management, from the Ministry of Education, also offers ongoing training for school principals. Nonetheless, educational leadership training in Portugal, from a lifelong learning perspective, is still considered to be insufficient, as the above mentioned "specialised training" is only a starting point for the development of the abilities, skills and knowledge that are necessary to play the complex role of a school leader [53]. Simultaneously, Portuguese teachers are interested in their professional development and school management and administration as one of the main areas of interest [51].

According to the current law in Portugal (Decrew-Law number 75/2008), only teachers are allowed to be principals by developing a school project and proposing it to the general council of the school, which elects the principal. However, teachers must fulfil some criteria to be able to apply for the position: (i) as mentioned before, teachers need to have a certified "specialised training" in school administration and management; (ii) have a minimum experience of four years as a principal, sub-principal/principal assistant, president or vice-president of the executive/administrative council of the school; (iii) have a minimum experience of three years as a principal in a private school; or (iv) possess a relevant curriculum in management and school leadership and administration.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Questions

The present study aims to investigate principals' professional development needs in Portugal by collecting data from a broader range of Portuguese principals. More specifically, the research questions are:

RQ1: What are the main content areas Portuguese principals consider they need to learn about?

RQ2: What are the main management and leadership skills Portuguese principals acknowledge they need to develop?

RQ3: What are Portuguese principals' preferred learning methods for future professional development courses?

By answering these questions, we aspire to contribute to the development of training courses for the professional development of Portuguese principals.

2.2. Data Collection Procedures

2.2.1. First Phase

This study integrates a broader project (Life histories of Portuguese principals), which aimed, as a primary objective, to collect and analyse life stories of Portuguese principals, following a narrative inquiry approach within a qualitative methodology. Nineteen principals participated. We selected the participants based on evidence of their good reputation (e.g., request from the educational authorities to be the principal; evidence of awards or recognition). Data were collected through individual interviews using a semi-structured protocol of questions. Ethical concerns were present throughout the research, following the Ethical Regulation of the Portuguese Society of Educational Sciences. After being selected, principals were asked to sign a consent form which clearly explained the goals of the research, what was expected of the participants, who would access the data, how data would be treated and analysed and how results would be used to share with scientific and non-scientific audiences. Pseudonyms were created to identify the participants and their schools while preserving anonymity, which contributed to assuring confidentially. Moreover, the created *life stories* were sent to the participants, for their final approval, and when needed, changes were made (e.g., deletion of segments of text/information which participants felt compromised their anonymity).

For the present study, we only considered the answers to the question "what are your training needs at this moment?", and any other indirect mentions to this subject throughout the interviews. At the end of the analysis, we understood that the data collected were not enough to gather a proper interpretation of principals' needs, as answers were very spread along with different contents and skills (see Results section of this article). Henceforth, we follow the second phase of data collection and analysis for this study.

2.2.2. Second Phase

The second phase of this study follows a qualitative–quantitative research approach and design, which enabled us to reach a high number of principals and access their needs and preferences concerning training. For this purpose, we constructed a simple questionnaire on Google Forms, which can be seen in Table 1. In question 1, we separate "technical skills" from "other skills", since we are aware that sometimes it is easier for principals to think about the technical skills only, and we wanted them to reflect on management and leadership skills. The designation "leadership skills" was not used because it is not common in Portugal and could lead to a certain confusion among principals; hence, we opted for "Other skills". In order to answer the first question, participants could write their responses (open-ended questions) with no space limitation, and all the participants wrote a few words to represent their opinions. Question 2 presents different learning methods for the participants to choose the ones they consider to be the most effective (up to five), with an open-ended option to add another method, if needed. We considered that a more structured approach to questioning would facilitate principals' answers but still wanted to give them the opportunity of adding a different answer (which no participant used). The learning methods included in the questionnaire were vast and considered the literature review presented in this article (Introduction section), meaning that all the learning methods found in the literature review were presented in the questionnaire as options for principals to choose, and we also considered the context of training for principals in Portugal also explained in this article (Introduction section); for instance, although the literature does not mention workshops in educational leadership training, in Portugal, this is a commonly used strategy, usually appreciated by principals. Workshops are short, involve peer-learning and combine both theory and practice, aiming to promote self-reflection or group-reflection on a given topic. During workshops, several learning methods mentioned in the literature review can be used, such as PBL, case-studies, reading and group discussion and even a lecture. The person conducting the workshop is an expert (usually an academic) on the topics being discussed. Another example of the contextualisation made is

the introduction of "consulting with university faculty", since this approach is also quite common in Portugal.

The form was sent, alongside with an explanation of the study and a set of questions to collect sociodemographic data, to an internal database from the Portuguese university with the contacts of principals from public schools from the whole country, who attended the university's conferences and/or training sessions at least once (*n* = 218). Complete anonymity of data was assured (participants' name or their schools was not asked at any moment, and the information asked about their schools did not compromise anonymity), and participation was voluntary. At the beginning of the questionnaire, an explanation appeared on the goal of the study, the research team and other relevant information, and participants had the choice to move forward to the questionnaire or not participate. The form, sent by e-mail in October 2019, was available for the recipients to answer for two weeks, and a total of 117 responses were collected (53.69% of response rate).

Table 1. Questions used to collect principals' opinions on training.

Question 1: Considering Your Professional Practice as a Principal, Please Identify, for Each of the Following Lines, Three Topics of Response:	
(a) Contents you would like to deepen	
(b) Technical skills you would like to develop	Type of response: open-ended questions.
(c) Other skills and competencies you would like to develop	
Question 2: How Would You Like to Learn/Develop the Topics Mentioned above (Please Choose the Five Methods that You Consider to be More Effective for Your Learning):	
Individual learning/autonomous learning Workshops Write a thesis or a project for a post-graduation Case method Traditional lectures Online educational consulting Online social networks Internships in a school context Field trips Consulting with university faculty Job shadowing Peer-learning Coaching Action-research Problem-based learning Other option, please specify	Type of response: close-ended; mark the most important options (up to five) with no specific order.

2.3. Participants

During the first phase of this study (principals' individual interviews), a total of 19 principals participated, all from public schools (see Table 2 for further information on participants and the schools they lead).

Table 2. Participants' demographic description and characteristics of the schools they lead.

	Phase One (Interviews)	Phase Two (Questionnaire)	Total
	n = 19	*n* = 117	*n* = 136
Participants' demographic description			
Gender (n)			
Female	13	50	63
Male	6	67	73
Age	Range: 48–65 Average: 58	Range: 39–69 Average: 53	Range: 39–69 Average: 54
Years of experience as principal	Range: 5–30 Average: 17	Range: 0–33 Average: 10	Range: 0–33 Average: 12

Table 2. *Cont.*

	Phase One (Interviews)	Phase Two (Questionnaire)	Total
School's characteristics			
Type of schools (n)			
School clusters with more than 5 schools	10	37	47
School clusters with 5 schools or less	7	67	74
Non-clustered Secondary Schools	2	13	15
Geographic location (n)			
North of Portugal	12	43	55
Center of Portugal	3	54	57
South of Portugal	4	20	24

During the second phase of this study (questionnaire), according to data provided by the Portuguese General Administration for School Management, our sample corresponds to 14.41% of the total universe of principals in the Portuguese public education system (see Table 2 for further information on participants and the schools they lead).

2.4. Data Analysis

We analysed the interviews' and the questionnaire's responses separately.

First phase: All interviews were transcribed. Analysis of data resorted to the software Nvivo12 and followed four main steps [54]: creating codes, organising and re-organising the codes in groups or sub-themes; organising and re-organising the themes and the codes, and interpreting the findings. Two of us undertook this analysis, and after, the other two authors verified and discussed it.

Second phase: Data from the Google forms was exported directly from the online questionnaire to a Microsoft Excel file and then imported into the Nvivo12 for analysis. For question one, principals wrote down their answers for each point without length limitations. All the responses were very direct, consisting of a few words with no explanation. The participants responded incisively to the questions as we asked them to. We coded all the answers into codes, as ex-novo codes; subsequently, we organised and re-organised the codes in groups and themes, following the four steps from Miles and collaborators [54]: creating codes, organising and re-organising the codes in groups or sub-themes; organising and re-organising the themes and the codes, and interpreting the findings. As for the second question, we performed a frequency analysis with Nvivo 12 for each of the methods indicated by the participants.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are presented together. We begin by presenting all combined relevant results which came out of the first phase of this study (interviews). After, we present results for the second phase considering each research questions. At the end of this section, an overview discussion of the three questions is provided, considering the results of both phases of data collection.

3.1. First Phase

All principals value their professional development, although some of the eldest principals, who are closer to retirement age, did not want more training in educational administration and leadership per se (e.g., "Training for principals I don't want! I already know, my practice is enough"—Celeste; "I recognise I am not motivated for that anymore (...) At this moment, I am not available to do training in leadership"—Marta). Another principal mentioned "The essential is the profile of the person. A person that has the profile to be leading a school will always be the most decisive and important factor for that school to work as an organisation" (Mariana). Moreover, all principals mentioned that the "specialised training" mandatory in Portugal to become a principal is not enough to adequately prepare teachers for the principal job (e.g., "If I had become a principal just by doing a Bachelor or even after doing a Master in School Administration, and then straight away become a principal, I would be

doomed, lost, I wouldn't be able to do absolutely nothing of my daily tasks with what I learned at the University"—Francisco).

Eleven out of 19 principals expressed interest in developing leadership skills, especially in what concerns leadership for learning or distributed leadership (e.g., "At this moment I am focused in trying to understand how one can organise a school to allow moments and practices of curricular flexibility and to learn these curricular flexibility practices . . . without clichés . . . how can a teacher do this"—Alberto; "All training related to pedagogical leadership, to learning, the quality of learning, the relation teacher-student, related to how to create a school climate where students and teachers feel happy and where they can develop, this is the training that captivates me" (Catarina). Technical expertise is requested by six participants: strategic leadership, juridical knowledge, finances, administrative processes, management of human resources and focusing their speech on efficient and concrete tasks that they need to deal with (e.g., "I want to learn things related to a technical skill, not necessarily for me to do them, but another person within the board of the school, such as data protection, management of informatics networks."—Alberto; "I need training that helps me to respond to the challenges I face and to make decisions (. . .) how to use several platforms such as financial, purchases, etc"—Alice).

Training on new methodologies for teaching-learning improvement is mentioned by five participants (e.g., "What I want is new methodologies, for instance, Design Thinking, Mindfulness, things that help us help the students better—Celeste).

Interpersonal, socioemotional and personal skills are all mentioned, such as improving their emotional intelligence, developing their "humanity" toward people, cultivating team spirit, improving their communicative skills or developing the ability to listen; or better time management, and how to acquire patience and flexibility (e.g., "I want to develop skills which help me to motivate others for change, to contribute for organisational metamorphosis"—Rita; "I am always interested in training related to interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence, and how to practice better solutions in managing relations with students"—Mariana).

As for which methods would be preferred, active learning is the only requested one, and more specifically, job shadowing and self-reflection are the most demanded, followed by the necessity of receiving feedback and of having personalised training specific to the challenges they face (e.g., "I think we need training which allows for customisation, individual monitoring, almost like coaching, like a sports' coach it's almost that (. . .) training focused on the practical exercise of leadership, real cases, critical friend, and making real decisions. A training that is reflection-action."—Ricardo; "We [a group of principals] created a network to share good practices, to reflect, to help one another (. . .) we also call each other regularly, and we try to organise training, that is very important, to organise training for principals in the areas that we, the principals, feel we need"—Isaura; "(. . .) learn through practice and watching others in practice. She [a teacher aiming to be principal] see how I speak with teachers, it is the practice, the observation"—Celeste).

3.2. Second Phase

3.2.1. Research Question One: What Are the Main Content Areas Portuguese Principals Consider They Need to Learn About?

Several different learning content areas for professional development were mentioned by principals (see Figure 1). All the contents are related to the function of a leader within the Portuguese educational system. First, within public administration (62; 53%), some participants referred to this category in general terms; others specified needs for training related to public contracts, public purchases and, most of all, public accountability. These needs are related to management skills, and according to Silva [52], these topics are present in the curriculum of most specialised training courses in Portugal. Hallinger [2] also mentions that educational administration and management skills are the most common in the professional development of principals. However, a large percentage of our sample requests training on these skills. Further related to management skills, participants requested training in juridical knowledge and legislation (21; 18%)—pedagogical legislation related to teachers' working

schedules, staff absence, accountability and disciplinary law and Human Resources Management (18; 15%), which appeared mostly as general content, but some principals specified it: distribution of service; management of all staff's working schedule and preparation of guiding documents for staff. Both topics concern management knowledge for educational administration activities, but also a proper allocation of resources.
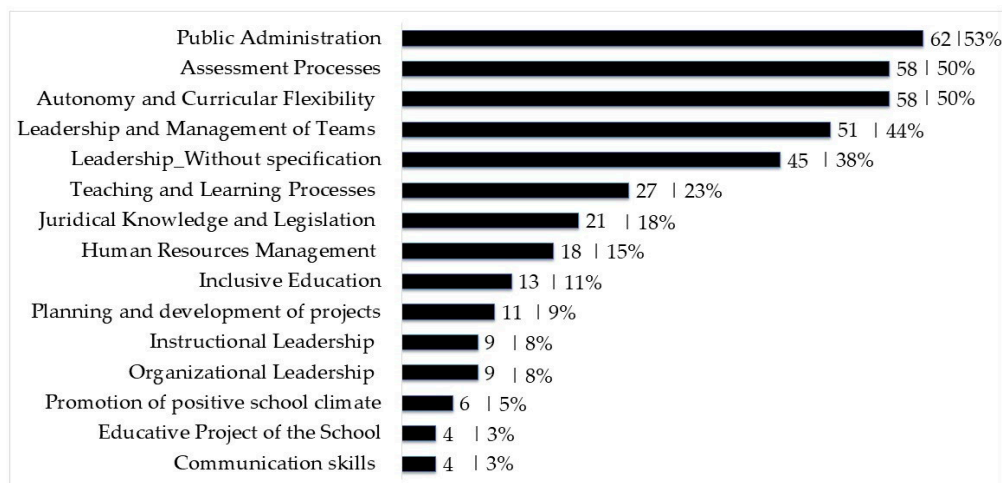
Figure 1. Learning content main categories|number of references|percentage (%).

Another content related to management skills is planning and development of projects (11; 9%) (strategic planning, data analysis, conception and design of project proposals). Similarly, the educational project of the school (4; 3%) is a specific concern for participants. Specialised training in Portugal already includes this topic, which relates to management and strategical skills [52].

Training in autonomy and curricular flexibility (58; 50%) is another need pointed out by the participants. This is specific to the Portuguese context and to the particular time this study took place since it is related to the recent Decree-Law no. 55/2018 (from 2018) and principals require knowledge on how to operationalise this Decree (that aims to improve students' learning by granting schools more autonomy and flexibility in what concerns curriculum management). In this specific context, this need is also related to instructional leadership and being able to provide instructional support to teachers. Moreover, principals requested inclusive education (13; 11%) content, a category which also follows a recent normative requirement for schools in Portugal (Decree-Law no. 54/2018). The promotion of a positive school climate (6; 5%) appears mostly related to indiscipline in school, and it is related to the inclusive education law.

Related to leadership skills, leadership without specification (45; 38%) was mentioned as general content. Yet some participants specified and asked for training contents related to leadership and management of teams (51; 44%), enhancing motivation and teamwork, promotion of interpersonal relationships and conflict management amongst teams—building relationships and developing people. Organisational leadership (9; 8%) was also specified, with evident concern with the learning and development of the school organisation appearing in the responses, and this is also an important topic considering OLF standards (developing the organisation to support desired practices). Pedagogical and instructional management and leadership without specification were as well mentioned by participants (9; 8%).

Associated with instructional leadership, the category assessment processes (58; 50%) includes several different types of assessment: (a) students' assessment; (b) school's assessment/self-assessment; (c) teachers' assessment, and (d) non-teaching staff assessment. This category is mostly related to improving the instructional programme in what concerns monitoring the progress of the students and the school, but it can also be related to creating internal responsibility among the staff, through proper assessment mechanisms. Moreover, and also related to instructional/pedagogical leadership,

participants requested training on the topic teaching and learning processes (27; 23%), mainly showing interest in new teaching techniques and models for 21st-century students (instructional support).

Finally, communication skills (4; 3%) also appear particularly communication with the pedagogical structures of the school, and strategies for effective communication (building relationships).

3.2.2. Research Question Two: What Are the Main Management and Leadership Skills Portuguese Principals Acknowledge They Need to Develop?

There are many similarities between principals' responses about learning areas (RQ1) and their responses on the technical skills they need to develop. For instance, autonomy and curricular flexibility (7; 6%) and educative school project (2; 2%) appear with the same requests that were already mentioned in the contents/curriculum. Learning processes appear in this section as new technology in the service of learning (13; 11%), referring not only to students' learning but also to the organisation and its development (e.g., digital marketing)—this relates to inclusive education. Furthermore, concerns with indiscipline and disciplinary processes for students, teachers and non-teaching staff appear (promotion of positive school climate—11; 9%), such as some concerns with assessment processes (9; 8%), focused on students' assessment and teachers' assessment are also present.

Technical/management skills related to public administration were widely mentioned (96; 82%): public accountability appears as the most frequent concern, followed by how to use administrative platforms (some participants specified in which platforms they would like to deepen their skills), public contracts and public purchases. Leadership and management of teams is another frequent request (27; 23%), and here, participants expressed management of teams without any further specification, development of middle leaderships and shared leadership, mentoring and coaching of groups and some particular technical skills: negotiation within a team's work, how to distribute tasks and how to conduct meetings effectively. Other technical skills related to planning and development of projects appear (26; 22%): how to apply to community funding, how to manage ERASMUS projects, how to create and develop strategic plans for schools' improvement, how to develop tools to monitor projects' efficacy, data analysis and decision-making skills. Additionally, content on Human Resources Management (17; 15%) and juridical knowledge (16; 14%) skills was mentioned again in this section.

Participants requested for competencies related to partnerships management, development of shared goals within the organisation, organisational strategy and promotion of multi- and transdisciplinary work (organisational leadership—13; 11%). Related to all the above, principals mentioned the need to enhance skills to promote interpersonal relationships (53; 45%): team motivation, team involvement, management and mediation of conflicts and promotion of positive and healthy work relationships. Instructional leadership (7; 6%) is another concern, with a focus on teachers' training, pedagogical supervision and instructional management.

Again, several socioemotional and personal development competencies (74; 63%) were requested which are helpful to achieve all the above content (74; 63%): management of stress and anxiety, time management, conflict management, behaviour management, empathy, emotional self-awareness, emotional control, control of impulsivity, personal worn-out management and emotional self-regulation. Similarly, communication skills appear quite a lot again (38; 32%): assertive communication, communication for big audiences, techniques for effective communication with different groups and communication with the school community. Likewise, other personal resources (personal development skills) are frequently mentioned (69; 59%): optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, patience, internal motivation, active listening and tolerance to others. Participants also highlighted decision-making skills.

Using Nvivo tools, we performed a Wordcloud considering the 1000 most frequent words, including synonyms, to understand, amongst all the participants' answers to the open-ended questions, what were the most frequently mentioned words (see Figure 2). To sum up, principals show a significant concern with their professional improvement in administrative and technical areas, leadership, pedagogy (to improve the school and students' results) and with the development of competencies, mostly emotional skills.

Figure 2. Wordcloud of most frequent words to the open-ended questions.

3.2.3. Research Question Three: What Are Portuguese Principals Preferred Learning Methods for Future Professional Development Courses?

Figure 3 displays the number of principals who ticked each of the learning methods. First, we can see a clear preference for cooperative and communicative process-oriented approaches (peer learning comes in second place) and reflexive methods, corroborating the literature that points to these methods as the most effective ones (in contrast to more theoretical ways of learning). Further, the high demand for workshops is possibly related to principals wanting personalised training specific to the challenges they are facing. This is because workshops allow for short and focused training for a group of people interested in the same content; enable principals to choose what they need from the offers available, investing only in topics that are relevant for them; and to have short, but more frequent training throughout the time.
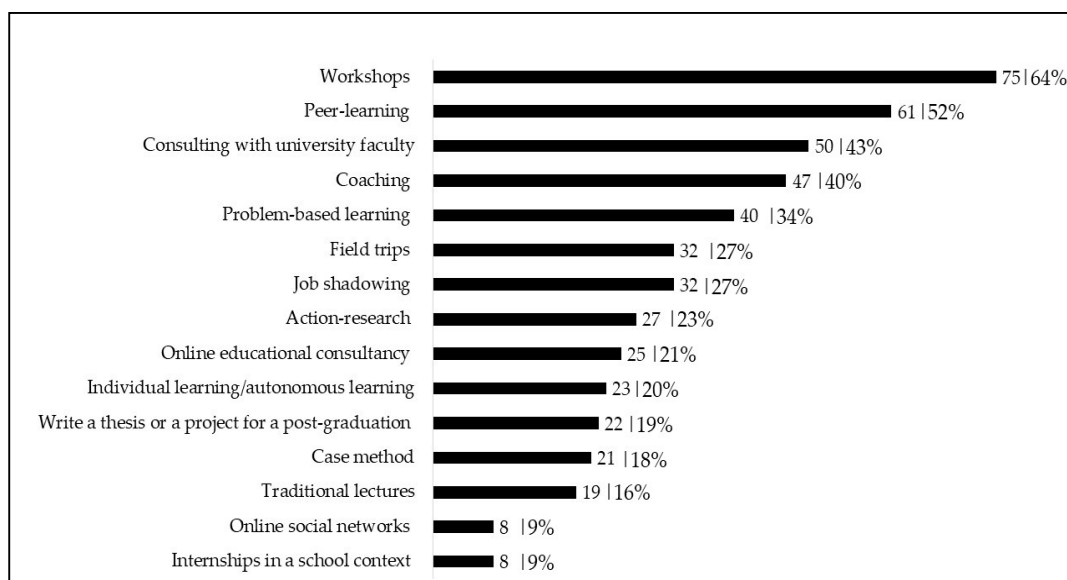

Figure 3. Number of principals who selected each learning method|percentage (%).

Principals seem to prefer PBL to the case-study method, and they are available for consulting processes and coaching, which once again shows their preference for tailored and personalised professional development strategies. Observation in real scenarios is more frequent, especially by means of field trips and job shadowing than internships in a school context. This is possibly because internships tend to be more related to induction in practice during pre-service training [55] and our

sample was exclusively made up of only principals who are already in practice. Finally, participants seem to prefer face-to-face training opportunities to online options (the highest number of references is for the online consulting option). Notwithstanding the results shown, there are also principals who prefer individual learning, research and lectures.

3.3. Research Questions' Overview

The present article tried to respond to the question "*what kind of training do principals want?*", in the case of Portugal. The answer, according to the interviews and the questionnaire, is not completely clear, although we can extract some trends.

Participants in the study, responding to main learning areas for future training, choose to delve into issues related to management and administration, especially in the most administrative aspects. Secondly, the interest in leadership stands out, especially in the most inclusive, pedagogical and instructional perspectives. The need for principals to know about pedagogy and the latest advances in this area manifested as very important. Finally, participants demand skills training: socio-emotional, communicative, self-development and self-management skills.

There are coincidences between the responses of the principals interviewed and the answers to the questionnaire. However, there is no such coincidence regarding the methodologies that should be used in the training courses, or the characteristics that courses should have. Indeed, the interviewed principals opted for job shadowing, self-reflection and feedback. In contrast, the principals who answered the questionnaire (a more massive and therefore more significant sample) preferred a more collaborative and cooperative learning approach: with their peers, through workshops or the resolution of cases/problems. There is a scarce significance given to traditional and expository methodologies, or individual learning, which is common in many training courses provided in several countries, including Portugal, and is worth noting.

A previous study on Portuguese school leaders' practices showed that principals seem to adopt practices keeping up with OLF standard, mostly "Setting Directions", "Building Relationships and Developing People" and "Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices " [56]. Indeed, instructional leadership, mostly in what concerns supervising the instructional programme, monitoring student learning and monitoring the school improvement were found to be gaps in Portuguese principals' practices, and here there are a lot of requests from principals for these contents to be offered in training.

Moreover, another study conducted found that Portuguese principals face challenges concerning the distribution of leadership and technical problems of the function, such as financial management with low resources and managing time between administrative and management tasks, and instructional leadership for learning tasks [57]. However, in this study, the distribution of leadership is not very expressive, and the management skills are quite expressive.

In contrast to the literature review in this article, and the training needs of participants, the design of Portuguese training programmes for specialised training does not seem to have a central focus on the development of leadership skills (personal, interpersonal and emotional competencies)—there is a privilege given to knowledge of the management skills and educational administration. Moreover, the methods used in universities are mostly traditional lectures, autonomous learning, research, and collaborative strategies (e.g., discussion in groups); even case methods and PBL might be used in some context, but the contact with real scenarios, observation, internship opportunities and modelling opportunities are not used. This is a call for attention and a probable cause to re-structure the training opportunities demanded to be a principal in a Portuguese school. Both from literature evidence and empirical evidence, there is a need for improvement.

The variability of answers gathered in this study reinforces the importance of approaches to training and professional development based on a systematic assessment of leaders, and their specific challenges and needs for improvement [2]. Tailored approaches to training, as opposed to standardised ones, are quite relevant (consulting and coaching, for instance).

4. Conclusions

Apart from answering the research questions, the primary motivation for this study was to contribute to the improvement of leaders' professional development in Portugal. Several conclusions for practice can be drawn. First, continuous learning is crucial and is required by Portuguese principals, as Reviriego [58] mentioned referring to Spanish school leaders' training. Therefore, there should be a systematic approach to lifelong learning for principals on the job [53].

Second, the international curriculum, evidenced in the literature, should be included in the specialised training, mostly the development of leadership skills [21], and practices of leadership for learning [59]. Participants in this study reinforce that more instructional, pedagogical and distributed leadership contents are required. Similarly, they claim that methods should evolve from passive to active learning, such as the observation of real scenarios, peer learning and support and engagement of participants in discussions and problem-solving. The implementation of all this new knowledge and skills "requires a flexible combination of on-site coaching and networks of support in the schools that function as and within learning organisations" [2] (p. 1006). As Huber [24] pointed out, after characterising several training programmes, there are multiple ways and formats of learning, and we need to use them all with an increased focus on providing practical experiences during training.

Third, most of the current training programmes' content around the world is based on specific national and state standards for educational leadership, and Portugal should have Portuguese standards which would help to understand the principals' role in this context. There is already work moving in this direction [60].

Although the sample is entirely Portuguese, the requests seem to coincide with those expressed in the academic literature, which allows venturing that these results could also be used in other contexts. The questionnaire and interviews can be replicated in more countries for the same purpose and provide data to prepare training programmes appropriate to each situation. Therefore, this research can open the way for many other studies corresponding to different countries and to the comparison between countries, continents or geographical areas to obtain a map of the training needs in the different contexts and the co-occurrences between them.

There are limitations to this study: the fact that only 18% of Portuguese principals participated in the second phase, not allowing for a generalisation of the results; the disproportion of principals in terms of years of experience; the questionnaire itself could be expanded and allow for clearer responses, both using open-ended and closed questions, since the open-ended questions brought immense variability to the data, and most importantly no information concerning participants' previous training was collected. An idea to continue developing knowledge about Portuguese principals training is to develop a specific assessment questionnaire based on the future Portuguese standards for educational leadership and use this as a tool to identify principals' needs for professional development. As a research team, we also aim to continue analysing our results considering sociodemographic data collected (participants' gender, age, number of years as principals and geographic location of the school).

Finally, this study shows that experienced principals provide important contributions concerning current challenges to the development and continuous change of a specialised training curriculum, and inform, for instance, the general administration for school management about training opportunities that need to be constructed to respond to principals' continuous professional learning.

References

1. Gates, S.M.; Baird, M.D.; Master, B.K.; Chavez-Herrerias, E.R. Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools. RAND Corporation. 2019. Available online: https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Principal-Pipelines-A-Feasible-Affordable-and-Effective-Way-for-Districts-to-Improve-Schools.pdf (accessed on 2 August 2020).

2. Hallinger, P. School leadership development in the Asia Pacific region: Trends and directions for future research and development. In *International Handbook of Educational Research in the Asia-Pacific Region*; Keeves, J.P., Watanabe, R., Eds.; Kluwer Academic Publishers: New York, NY, USA, 2003; pp. 997–1009.

3. Leithwood, K.; Harris, A.; Hopkins, D. Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *Sch. Leadersh. Manag.* **2020**, *40*, 5–22. [CrossRef]

4. The Wallace Foundation. Research Findings to Support Effective Educational Policies: A Guide for Policymakers (2nd edition). 2011. Available online: http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/findings-to-support-effective-educational-policy-making.aspx (accessed on 2 August 2020).

5. Pont, B.; Nusche, D.; Hopkins, D. Improving School Leadership. In *Case Studies on System Leadership*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2008; Volume 2.

6. Gajardo, M. Formación de liderazgo escolar: Programas pioneros en EEUU. *Formas Y Reformas Educ.* **2011**, *13*, 37.

7. Pont, B.; Nusche, D.; Moorman, H. Mejorar el liderazgo escolar. In *Política y Práctica*; OCDE Publishing: Paris, France, 2009; Volume 1.

8. Aas, M.; Blom, T. Benchlearning as professional development of school leaders in Norway and Sweden. *Prof. Dev. Educ.* **2018**, *44*, 62–75. [CrossRef]

9. Weinstein, J.; Azar, A.; Flessa, J. An ineffective preparation? The scarce effect in primary school principals' practices of school leadership preparation and training in seven countries in Latin America. *Educ. Manag. Adm. Leadersh.* **2018**, *46*, 226–257. [CrossRef]

10. Darling-Hammond, L.; La Pointe, M.; Meyerson, D.; Orr, M. Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Program. 2007. Available online: http://seli.stanford.edu (accessed on 2 August 2020).

11. Huber, S.G. New approaches in preparing school leaders. In *International Encyclopaedia of Education*; Peterson, P., Baker, E., McGaw, B., Eds.; Elsevier: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2010; Volume 4, pp. 752–761.

12. The Institute for Educational Leadership Ontario. The Ontario Leadership Framework: A School and System Leader's Guide to Putting Ontario's Leadership Framework into Action. 2013. Available online: https://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/en/resources/ontario-leadership-framework-olf (accessed on 2 August 2020).

13. National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders: National Policy Board for Educational Administration. National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). 2015. Available online: https://ccsso.org/resource-library/professional-standards-educational-leaders (accessed on 2 August 2020).

14. Ministerio de la Educacíon República de Chile. Marco Para la Buena Direccíon y el Liderazgo Escolar. 2015. Available online: https://liderazgoescolar.mineduc.cl/wp-content/uploads/sites/55/2016/04/MBDLE_2015.pdf (accessed on 2 August 2020).

15. Poggi, M. La formación de directivos de instituciones educativas. In *Algunos Aportes Para el Diseño de Estrategias*; Unesco: London, UK, 2001.

16. Day, C.; Sammons, P.; Leithwood, P.; Hopkins, D.; Gu, Q.; Brown, W.; Ahtaridou, E. *Successful School Leadership: Linking with Learning and Achievement*; Open University Press: London, UK, 2011.

17. Bush, T.; Jackson, D. A Preparation for School Leadership. *Educ. Manag. Adm.* **2002**, *30*, 417–429. [CrossRef]

18. Tintoré, M. Revisión de estándares de buenas prácticas para un liderazgo educativo democrático y distribuido. In *Avances en Democracia y Liderazgo Distribuido en Educación: Actas del II Congreso Internacional sobre Liderazgo y Mejora en Educación*; Murillo, F., Ed.; RILME: Madrid, Spain, 2018; pp. 345–348.

19. Ng, S.-W.; Szeto, E. Preparing school leaders. *Educ. Manag. Adm. Leadersh.* **2016**, *44*, 540–557. [CrossRef]

20. Cawelti, G. Training for effective school administrators. In *Oral presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrator*; AASA: Vail, CO, USA, 1981; pp. 16–21.

21. Leithwood, K. Exploring the "Cognitive" Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs). Ontario Leadership Strategy Bulletin, 9. 2017. Available online: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/ideas_into_action_bulleti9.pdf (accessed on 2 August 2020).

22. Wang, E.L.; Gates, S.M.; Herman, R.; Mean, M.; Perera, R.; Tsai, T.; Whipkey, K.; Andrew, M. Launching a redesign of University Principal Preparation Programmes Partners Collaborate for Change, RAND Principal Preparation Series (Volume 1). RAND Corporation. 2018. Available online: https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/launching-redesign-university-principal-preparation-programs.aspx (accessed on 2 August 2020).

23. López-Yáñez, J.; Sánchez-Moreno, M.; Altopiedi, M.; Oliva-Rodríguez, N. Formación de directivos escolares mediante un programa basado en el coaching grupal, la retroalimentación y análisis de la práctica. *Profr. Rev. Currículum Y Form. Profr.* **2018**, *22*, 481–500.

24. Huber, S.G. Multiple Learning Approaches in the Professional Development of School Leaders—Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Findings on Self-assessment and Feedback. *Educ. Manag. Adm. Leadersh.* **2013**, *41*, 527–540. [CrossRef]

25. Dexter, S.; Clement, D.; Moraguez, D.; Watson, G.S. (Inter) Active Learning Tools and Pedagogical Strategies in Educational Leadership Preparation. *J. Res. Leadersh. Educ.* **2020**, 1–19. [CrossRef]

26. Salisbury, J.D.; Irby, D.J. Leveraging Active Learning Pedagogy in a Scaffolded Approach: Reconceptualizing Instructional Leadership Learning. *J. Res. Leadersh. Educ.* **2020**, *15*, 210–226. [CrossRef]

27. Merseth, K. *Confronting Challenges: Case Studies for School Principals: A Casebook on School Leadership*; Ministry of Education: Santiago, Chile, 2015.

28. Byrne-Jiménez, M.; Gooden, M.A.; Tucker, P.D. Facilitating learning in leadership preparation: Limited research but promising practices. In *Handbook of Research on the Education of School Leaders*; Young, M.D., Crow, G.M., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames, UK, 2016; pp. 187–215.

29. Davis, S.H.; Darling-Hammond, L. Innovative principal preparation programs: What works and how we know. *Plan. Chang.* **2012**, *43*, 25–45.

30. Brazer, S.D.; Bauer, S.C. Preparing Instructional Leaders. *Educ. Adm. Q.* **2013**, *49*, 645–684. [CrossRef]

31. Peterson, K. The Professional Development of Principals: Innovations and Opportunities. *Educ. Adm. Q.* **2002**, *38*, 213–232. [CrossRef]

32. Rincón-Gallardo, S.; Villagra, C.; Mellado, M.E.; Aravena, O. Construir culturas de colaboración eficaz en redes de escuelas chilenas: Una teoría de acción. *Rev. Latinoam. Estud. Educ.* **2019**, *49*, 241–271. Available online: https://search.proquest.com/docview/2224319942 (accessed on 2 August 2020).

33. Oliva-Rodríguez, N.; Yáñez, J.L. Autoaprendizaje en Pequeños Grupos para la Formación de Directores Escolares. Análisis de un Programa Piloto. *REICE. Rev. Iberoam. Sobre Calid. Efic. Y Cambio Educ.* **2019**, *17*, 55–71. [CrossRef]

34. Gairín, J.; Castro, D.; Navarro, M.; Rodríguez, D. La formación permanente de los directivos escolares a través de redes de creación y gestión del conocimiento. In *La dirección de Centros Educativos en Iberoamérica. Reflexiones y Experiencias*; Gairín, E.J., Ed.; Santillana: Madrid, Spain, 2011; pp. 241–262.

35. Simkins, T.; Close, P.; Smith, R. Work-shadowing as a process for facilitating leadership succession in primary schools. *Sch. Leadersh. Manag.* **2009**, *29*, 239–251. [CrossRef]

36. Moynihan, D. A new blueprint for leadership training. *Acad. Mag.* **2016**, *6*, 16–17.

37. Cosner, S.; De Voto, C.; Andry Rah'man, A. Drawing in the school context as a learning resource in school leader development: Application-oriented projects in active learning designs. *J. Res. Leadersh. Educ.* **2018**, *13*, 238–255. [CrossRef]

38. Campanotta, L.; Simpson, P.; Newton, J. Program quality in leadership preparation programmes: An assessment tool. *Education* **2018**, *138*, 219–228.

39. City, E.A. Learning from instructional rounds. *Educ. Leadersh.* **2011**, *69*, 36.

40. Stephens, M. Ensuring Instruction Changes: Evidence Based Teaching—How Can Lesson Study Inform Coaching, Instructional Rounds and Learning Walks? *J. Sci. Math. Educ. Southeast Asia* **2011**, *34*, 111–133.

41. Aas, M. Leaders as learners: Developing new leadership practices. *Prof. Dev. Educ.* **2017**, *43*, 439–453. [CrossRef]

42. Irby, B.J. Editor's Overview: Differences and Similarities with Mentoring, Tutoring, and Coaching. *Mentor. Tutoring Partnersh. Learn.* **2018**, *26*, 1–7. [CrossRef]

43. Aas, M.; Fluckiger, B. The role of a group coach in the professional learning of school leaders. *Coach. Int. J. Theory Res. Pr.* **2016**, *9*, 38–52. [CrossRef]

44. Archer, S.; Yates, J. Understanding potential career changers' experience of career confidence following a positive psychology based coaching programme. *Coach. Int. J. Theory Res. Pr.* **2017**, *10*, 1–19. [CrossRef]

45. Goff, P.; Guthrie, J.E.; Goldring, E.; Bickman, L. Changing principals' leadership through feedback and coaching. *J. Educ. Adm.* **2014**, *52*, 682–704. [CrossRef]

46. Lackritz, A.D.; Cseh, M.; Wise, D. Leadership coaching: A multiple-case study of urban public charter school principals' experiences. *Mentor. Tutoring Partnersh. Learn.* **2019**, *27*, 5–25. [CrossRef]

47. Wise, D.; Cavazos, B. Leadership coaching for principals: A national study. *Mentor. Tutoring Partnersh. Learn.* **2017**, *25*, 223–245. [CrossRef]

48. Fusarelli, B.C.; Militello, M. Racing to the top with leaders in rural, high poverty schools. *Plan. Chang.* **2012**, *43*, 46–56.

49. Machado, J. Modos de intervir nas escolas: Potencialidades e desafios da consultoria externa. In *Escolas e Consultorias: Percursos de desenvolvimento*; Alves, J.M., Roldão, M.C., Eds.; Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Centro Regional do Porto: Lisbon, Portugal, 2015; pp. 33–49.

50. OECD. Leadership for 21st Century Learning. In *Educational Research and Innovation*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2013; Available online: http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/leadershipfor21stcenturylearning.htm (accessed on 2 August 2020).

51. Liebowitz, D.; González, P.; Hooge, E.; Lima, G. *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Portugal 2018, Reviews of School Resources*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2018. [CrossRef]

52. Silva, G.R. Formação em administração educacional em Portugal na última década: Análise de alguns indicadores. *Rev. Fórum Port. Adm. Educ.* **2004**, *4*, 99–116.

53. Machado, J.; Formosinho, J. Formação especializada e administração e gestão escolar em Portugal. In *Do Institucional ao Pedagógico: Pesquisas e práticas em Administração Educacional*; Cardona, M.J., Ed.; UI_IPS Santarém/Escola superior de Educação: Santarém, Portugal, 2019; pp. 110–132. ISBN 978-972-95259-4-0. Available online: http://uiips.ipsantarem.pt/publicacoes-2/ (accessed on 2 August 2020).

54. Miles, M.B.; Huberman, A.M.; Saldaña, J. Qualitative data analysis. In *A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed.; SAGE: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014.

55. Shoho, A.R.; Barnett, B.G.; Martinez, P. Enhancing "OJT" internships with interactive coaching. *Plan. Chang.* **2012**, *43*, 161–182.

56. Cabral, I.; Alves, J.M.; Tintoré, M.; Cunha, R.S. Leaders and leadership practice: All unique, all the same? In *Proceedings of ICERI 12th annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*; IATED: Seville, Spain, 2019; pp. 10618–10626.

57. Tintoré, M.; Cunha, R.S.; Cabral, I.; Alves, J.M. Giving voice to problems faced by school leaders in Portugal. *Sch. Leadersh. Manag.* **2020**, 1–21. [CrossRef]

58. Reviriego, M. Necesidades Formativas de los Directores Escolares. In *Re-Conceptualizing the Professional Identity of the European Teacher: Sharing Experiences*; Ríes, F., Ballesteros-Moscosio, M.A., Eds.; Editorial Copiarte: Sevilla, Spain, 2013; ISBN 978-84-939704-5-1.

59. García-Garnica, M.; Caballero, K. La formación de los equipos directivos es suficiente para desempeñar prácticas eficaces de liderazgo pedagógico? [Is the training of school leaders enough to perform successful practices of educational leadership?]. *Rev. Currículum Y Form. Profr.* **2019**, *23*, 83–106. [CrossRef]

60. Cabral, I.; Alves, J.M.; Cunha, R.S.; Bolívar, A. Bases for the construction of standards for the improvement of school leadership and management practices. In *Gestão Escolar e Melhoria das Escolas: O Que Nos Diz a Investigação (School Management and School Improvement: What Does the Research Tell Us)*; Fundação Manuel Leão: Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal, 2020; pp. 163–180.