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Barriers and Facilitators to Lead an Inclusive School: The Case of Chile

Barreras y facilitadores para liderar una escuela inclusiva: el caso de Chile

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Abstract

Exercising inclusive leadership is a complex task in a school system where educational quality comes down primarily to the performance of schools on standardized tests. The objective of this article is to understand the barriers and facilitators that school directors, executive boards and management teams point out and face to advance in inclusion and attention to diversity. To respond to the objective, the results of seven case studies with an ethnographic approach carried out between 2016 and 2021 in Chilean schools with an inclusive seal were systematized. The main findings show that, from the perspective of school leaders, inclusion is a state affair and a specific concern on the part of the Ministry of Education. However, they highlight important barriers to advance as regards inclusion such as: lack of professional training in inclusion, low student participation and the pre-eminence of standardized tests that affect inclusive processes. Facilitators are also recognized, such as: openness to change, positive attitude towards difference and the importance of collaborative work. The results allow us to discuss the contrasts between inclusion and standardization and to propose a set of recommendations for schools and educational policies.

Keywords: leadership; access to education; neoliberalism; Chile.

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Resumen

Ejercer un liderazgo inclusivo es una tarea compleja en un sistema escolar donde la calidad educativa se reduce principalmente a las actuaciones de las escuelas en pruebas estandarizadas. El objetivo de este artículo es comprender las barreras y facilitadores que señalan y enfrentan las personas directoras de escuelas, equipos directivos y equipos de gestión para avanzar en inclusión y en atención de la diversidad. Para dar respuesta al objetivo se sistematizaron los resultados de siete estudios de casos con enfoque etnográfico realizados entre los años 2016 y 2021 en escuelas chilenas con sello inclusivo. Los principales hallazgos muestran que, desde la perspectiva de los líderes escolares, la inclusión es un asunto de Estado y una preocupación concreta por parte del Ministerio de Educación. Sin embargo, destacan barreras importantes para avanzar en inclusión como: falta de formación profesional en inclusión, baja participación estudiantil y la preeminencia de pruebas estandarizadas que afectan los procesos inclusivos. También se reconocen facilitadores como: apertura al cambio, actitud positiva frente a la diferencia y la importancia del trabajo colaborativo. Los resultados permiten discutir las contraposiciones entre inclusión y estandarización y proponer un conjunto de recomendaciones para las escuelas y la política educativa.

Palabras clave: liderazgo; acceso a la educación; neoliberalismo; Chile..

Introduction and objectives

The commitment to inclusive education is a cross-cutting issue in Western states. This means that school communities —leaders, teachers and non-teaching professionals— must ensure access, participation and learning for all learners and demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusive education (Booth and Ainscow, 2015).

The area of school leadership is particularly relevant. The literature on inclusive education recognises the importance of school leaders in leading and consolidating inclusive schools (Valdés and Fardella, 2022). This is known as inclusive leadership style (Ryan, 2016) and implies the following: (a) responsibility does not lie solely with the person who exercises the role of principal, but other leadership is recognised (such as management team, middle leadership or informal leadership); (b) that all leaders advocate inclusion as a model and are committed to its approaches; (c) they seek to minimise social injustice situations, whether among adults or students; (d) leaders develop an inclusive, democratic and participatory school culture and; (e) there is a direct involvement in the management and attention to diversity (López-López et al., 2021; López-López et al., 2022; Morrisey, 2021).

The conception of inclusive leadership presented here is aligned with the conclusions of the few theoretical and systematic reviews of the existing literature on this topic (Améstica, 2024; Thompson and Matkin, 2020; Valdés, 2022). Moreover, it evidences a significant theoretical advance. Although the Salamanca Statement (Unesco, 1994) already highlighted the importance of principals diversifying educational options to support students facing difficulties, the current

literature has focused on the cultural and ideological dimension of schools, with notable changes and transformations driven by school leadership (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2023; Valdés, 2023).

In the case of Chile the situation is complex. While the Chilean education system has an explicit commitment to inclusion (Law 20.845, de Inclusión Escolar, 2015), evidence warns that Chile is an experiment in neoliberalism (Slachevsky, 2015) and a representative case of new public management [NPM]; which is a philosophical body of management ideas that are transmitted from the private sphere to the public world with the purpose of making it more competitive and efficient (Sisto, 2019) with the presence of a marked narrative about school performance (Ramírez-Casas del Valle et al., 2021). Chilean schools undergo annual standardised assessments with high consequences that mainly evaluate curricular coverage (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018). Schools are ranked in categories and receive economic incentives and levels of autonomy according to their performance (Bellei, 2020).

In daily practice, this translates into a tension in exercising leadership: on the one hand, school leaders must oversee the achievement of educational goals based on student achievement (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018) and, on the other hand, they must be involved in addressing diversity, commit to inclusive processes and create the conditions for inclusion to be meaningful for all school staff (Mineduc, 2015). While the scarce national evidence on leadership and inclusion shows that management teams try to install practices that enable a school culture that values diversity with a focus on collaboration among educational staff and a strong link with families and the community (Améstica, 2023); at the same time there is an explicit recognition of a lack of systemic training and the evident conflict of leading inclusive processes in standardised contexts (Rojas et al., 2021; Rodríguez and Rojas, 2021). This double militancy entails conflicts in leading an inclusive school, especially because in the context of the NGP the performance narrative affects pedagogical purposes, consumes the efforts of curricular flexibilisation and the purposes of inclusion (Lerena and Trejos, 2015; Sisto, 2018). For this reason, this study sought to report concrete findings to understand the barriers and facilitators that school principals, management teams and management teams point out and face in order to advance inclusion and attention to diversity.

Contextualisation

Some of the focuses of inclusion policies in Chile have been on students with learning difficulties, socio-economic disadvantages, processes of welcoming foreign students, addressing sexual diversity, among other focuses based on minority groups and inclusion initiatives (Mineduc, 2021). The main school inclusion policies in Chile are summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1

Main public action on school inclusion and attention to diversity in Chile

Year	Source	Document
2008	Law	Law No. 20248 on the law on preferential school subsidy (sep)
2009	Decree	Decree No. 170: Sets standards for determining pupils with special educational needs.
2015	Law	School Inclusion Law No. 20.845
2015	Decree	Decree No. 83: Diversification of Education.
2017	Ministerial document	Technical guidelines for the educational inclusion of foreign students.
2018	Ministerial document	National Policy on Foreign Students 2018-2022.
2018	Decree	Decree No. 67 approving national minimum standards on assessment, grading and promotion.
2019	Ministerial document	Guidelines for the implementation of decree 67/2018 on evaluation, grading and promotion at school
2020	Ministerial document	First National Public Education Strategy

Note: own elaboration

As it is not possible to review each document and go into each initiative in depth, it is necessary to point out how inclusion is understood in Chile and how it affects and challenges management teams. In our country, schools must promote inclusion through educational practices that ensure access, permanence, learning and participation of all students, recognising their diversity and favouring pedagogical work that is more relevant to their real identities, aptitudes, needs and motivations (Mineduc, 2016). This is related to the specialised literature on inclusion, which understands it as a set of socio-educational processes (presence, participation and learning) for all students without exclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2015). Furthermore, with the enactment of Law 20.845 on School Inclusion (2015), principals and their teams must lead collaborative work with the whole community, engage in principles such as inclusion and equality, work with the family and prepare diversity-oriented pedagogical work (Benavides-Moreno et al., 2023).

In this context, school leadership teams are expected to be key actors. The evidence in Chile on school leadership is prominent and shows the principal and his/her team as a differentiating factor in student learning progress, school climate and school improvement processes (Galdames and González, 2019;

Rivera, 2022; Weinstein and Muñoz, 2012). However, this has implied a large number of tasks, responsibilities and demands on school leaders and their teams (Campos et al., 2019), many of which relate to the area of inclusion. For example, according to the Guidelines on diversified teaching strategies for basic education in the framework of Decree 83 in Chile (Mineduc, 2015) it is stated that "the role of leadership and the effective participation and involvement of the principal and/or the management team are necessary conditions to ensure the success of the inclusion process" (p. 39). This excerpt is just a sample of how those in this role and management teams have explicit responsibilities in the development of an inclusive school in Chile (Alarcón-Leiva et al., 2020; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Quiroga and Aravena, 2018; Valdés and Fardella, 2022).

Method

In order to respond to the objective of this study, a qualitative research design and the case study method with an ethnographic approach were chosen (Díaz de la Rada, 2013). For this purpose, we report the confluent results of three research studies with seven Chilean schools. The first research (2016-2018) aimed to explore teachers' and principals' discourses on inclusion in education. The second research (2017-2018) aimed to analyse leadership practices in schools with inclusive cultures. The third research (2020-2021) aimed to understand the leadership practices of management teams in inclusive schools.

Population and sample

Purposive sampling was used to select the cases (Flick, 2015). This allows us to deliberately identify cases that allow us to build a corpus of empirical examples in order to study in an instructive way a specific phenomenon of study which, in the case of this paper, are inclusive schools. The schools were invited to participate because they meet a set of specific criteria: they are free, do not have arbitrary selection processes for students, have inclusion as a hallmark and objective of their institutional educational project, have various programmes and initiatives to address diversity, have high school vulnerability, have foreign students and have participated in studies on good practices of inclusion in Chile (Valdés, 2023; Valdés, 2020; Valdés et al., 2019). Four schools are located in the Metropolitan Region, which are municipal, basic education and urban: one in the commune of Providencia, two in the commune of Estación Central and one in the commune of Quilicura. The other schools are in the Antofagasta Region (commune of Antofagasta), another in the Tarapacá Region (Alto Hospicio) and one in the

Valparaíso Region (Quilpué). These schools have secondary education, are private subsidised and are also urban.

Fieldwork

For the production of data, participant observations were carried out in formal and informal spaces, individual interviews with members of the management team (headmasters and headmistresses, heads of the Technical Pedagogical Unit [UTP] and general inspectors), focus groups with teachers, management teams and middle leaders (pedagogical leaders, PIE coordinators (school integration programme), people in charge of school coexistence, heads of department, among others) and a review of key documents such as the school's institutional educational project, PIE (School Integration Programme) coordinators, people in charge of school coexistence, heads of department, among others) and reviewed their key documents —such as the institutional education project (PIE), school regulations, coexistence manual, the Educational Improvement Plan (PME), protocols, among others— (see table 2). In the case of schools 1, 2, 3 and 4 the data were produced in the period 2016-2018; in the case of school 5 in the period 2017-2018; while schools 6 and 7 were in the period 2020-2021, therefore, the development of the techniques was mostly developed online due to health restrictions. Formal authorisations were requested and endorsed by the bioethics committee of the sponsoring university, and all invitees decided to participate in the research.

Table 2

Techniques used in the fieldwork

Ethnographic techniques	**Schools**						
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Individual interviews	6	6	7	4	4	4	11
Focus groups	3	3	2	3	5	5	3
Remarks Participants	4	4	4	4	7	7	2
Document review	5	5	5	6	7	6	7

Note: own elaboration

Data analysis

In order to identify barriers and facilitators, the technique of thematic content analysis (Flick, 2015) was favoured. Thus, in order to make cogent interpretations, categories were constructed by grouping textual data extracted from the techniques used (Krippendorff, 2004). The process was carried out as follows:

- Organisation of the material. Audio data and field notes were transcribed and read to identify the first useful data and reject initial interpretative hypotheses.
- Open coding. Using the mediation software Atlas.ti, the texts were segmented into small units of meaning about barriers and facilitators and a codebook was created. Barriers were understood as those practices, objects and discourses that hinder the implementation of inclusion (e.g. lack of training to work with a certain group of students); the opposite was the case for facilitators, which were understood as elements that promote inclusive education (e.g. positive attitudes of teachers towards school diversity). Then, following the suggestions of Atkinson and Coffey (2003), common patterns were sought in order to order the codes and refine the hermeneutic basis.
- Categorisation. The processing of the codes allowed them to be grouped into functional working categories by considering fragments referring to barriers and facilitators. All barriers and facilitators were classified into semantic fields of meaning (e.g. all quotes about lack of material and/or human resources to make teaching more flexible were grouped into a single barrier category about 'lack of resources'). For this, the categories with the highest fragment density were prioritised and those with few associated codes were discarded. Therefore, the four barriers and the four facilitators presented in the results not only comprise a larger number of grouped quotations, but they are stated by the diversity of actors involved in the study.
- Finally, to ensure validity and plausibility, a triangulation of techniques was carried out (Flick, 2015), i.e. to confirm that the categories selected have associated quotations from the four techniques used in the fieldwork. Finally, the results of this study were shared with the seven schools in a joint data delivery and analysis session through a participatory analysis workshop methodology on the premises of the schools themselves, where the main barriers and facilitators were approved and validated by the educational community.

Results

Barriers to progress on inclusion and diversity according to school leaders

Administrative focus of the State

This category brings together a set of excerpts that address school leaders' perceptions of inclusion as a state issue. The interviewees point out that inclusion is recognised as a matter of public policy and as a concrete concern of the Chilean State, however, they point out that schools still require fundamental support in terms of diversity management and evaluation and that a welfare-based approach prevails on the part of the Ministry of Education (Mineduc). Let us review some quotes:

> (in relation to guidance from the Ministry of Education) "*we have not received invitations about strategies to deal with diversity. Although they have emphasised some changes, everything has been administrative, and the ministry has focused there, on talks about how to follow administrative processes*. (PIE coordinator, school 3, 2016).
>
> *Although we have made progress in inclusion, the big problem we have in Chile is that nobody measures the impact of public policies [on inclusion], so basically it seems that we have done well, but nobody applies measurements*. (Principal, school 2, 2017).
>
> *The state asks us for inclusion, gives us resources and a set of programmes, but then we cannot mobilise these programmes, we have to comply with them to the letter, this takes away our context, it is a welfare-based approach, we do not have control over our own processes.* (Head of UTP, school 1, 2017)

In the above excerpts, inclusion is recognised as an advance and as a state concern. However, the leaders point out that in recent times administrative processes have been strengthened, but not pedagogical and cultural ones. They ask for greater levels of autonomy to manage the processes according to each school's reality and more evidence of educational policies . The questioning aims to ensure that the orientations of the state and the Ministry of Education are less general and more localised.

Lack of training on inclusion and diversity

This category groups together quotes referring to a lack of specific training on inclusion and diversity reported by school leaders and participating schools. Management teams report that approach inclusion primarily from a value-based and personal perspective, i.e. with full respect for individual differences. However, they comment that they often do not

have the tools to address the complexities involved in managing diversity in the context of inclusion processes. Let us review some excerpts:

> *Teachers go to raise awareness and nothing is done, this is wasted time, this happens to us a lot or with trainings that one leaves the training and says "I didn't learn anything", that is, I spent 3 days glued to the computer and I didn't learn anything because it's nothing new, you know?*[2] *so those instances are not meaningful*. (Focus group of teachers, school 5, 2018).

> *As we lack training and the Ministry of Education provides little training, the PIE leader provides training, he taught them [the teachers], he gave them the tools to work person to person, to observe the diagnoses of the students, because in the third and fourth grades we receive our children, who have done the whole trajectory with us. With their Asperger's, with their mild or moderate intellectual deficit, with all of them* (Principal, school 7, 2021).

> *We have self-taught ourselves how to work with migrant students, we have few, but we have learned as we go along how to make an inclusive class, to speak without idioms, without jokes, we do not have concrete guidelines* (head of UTP, school 4, 2018).

The above quotes show, firstly, that school leaders demand significant training to deal with diversity and, secondly, that they have had to undertake training on inclusion in a self-taught way, either from the PIE team or from self-training. However, it should be noted that, in the fragments, diversity is reduced to migrant pupils or pupils with some kind of diagnosis. This element can be understood as a concomitant variable of the barrier: a limited conception of diversity also affects inclusive processes and is related to vocational training.

Peripheral student participation

Limited, untransformative and sometimes instrumentalised participation was a barrier that was transversally evident throughout the fieldwork with the schools. This category groups together fragments that illustrate a tutelary participation, with no major impact on the part of students in the organisational and normative structures of the three schools. The school leaders point out that the students have a student centre and that they have a say in class, but that they cannot demand changes related to the organisational logic. Let us review some exemplary excerpts:

> *It's that these instances [the school council with students], so, formal, most of them are not very formal (...) But, as a school council with schematic meetings where we talk about topics that can benefit the school and the students, so formal? no, we don't do that much* (Head of UTP, school 6, 2021).

[2] Chilenismo meaning "to understand".

> *Look, the council is supposed to be consultative, the school council, but according to my participation it is more informative than consultative, it has taken some features of consultative in a specific project, but the students are only informed about the school decisions.* (Focus group, school 2, 2017)

> *We have a student centre in elementary and middle school, they can participate, but we still have the challenge to integrate them more strongly in school decisions* (Focus group, school 3, 2016).

The above extracts —although they do not show a complete disregard for the voice of the student body— show attempts to manage spaces for student participation, but in a passive way, without spaces for dynamic presence on the part of the students. The school council, which is an instance that brings students together with other adults in the school, is held to inform decisions already taken, but not to consult or work together.

The pre-eminence of SIMCE

This barrier groups together excerpts on the standardised SIMCE (Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación) test and its consequences for schools. This test is applied annually to schools and establishes four categories of classification and performance: Insufficient, Low Medium, Medium and High. Schools that are four years in a row in an insufficient category can be deprived of official recognition. In addition, this test is associated with rankings, funding and public recognition.

The first thing to note is that the participating leaders understand this test as a functional, practical instrument that assesses curricular coverage and provides information on performance levels. However, they recognise that it is a constant pressure, that it affects cultural processes of inclusion and that it does not take into account local social and geographical realities. Let us review some excerpts:

> *I'm not going to fight against the SIMCE, I think we can find a use for it (...) So first of all I agree with the evaluations. But to me [the SIMCE] is only useful to know how I am in terms of what the Ministry wants us to be, but not for inclusion, nor to improve attention to diversity*. (Principal, school 2, 2016)

> *The SIMCE is a drag, it involves preparation, and well, you have to comply, but I find it boring, it is exhausting, I think we should teach children to learn, not to have a good result in a test that, as I said, does not have much to do with the reality of schools and even less with inclusion*. (Head of 1st cycle, school 3, 2017).

> *It is difficult to achieve academic success in a system that is very competitive, and in this case I am talking about the famous SIMCE. I think that this tool of pigeonholing schools is very unequal to the realities we live in, in other words, we are always going to be at a*

clear disadvantage because of the context in which we work. (UTP manager, school 4, 2018).

The above quotes, from the perspective of the interviewees, illustrate a contrast between inclusion and SIMCE. Leaders perceive SIMCE as a functional test. However, they note that it affects diversity management processes due to its lack of context. Participants comment that standardisation distances itself from the reality of educational communities and this hinders the development of inclusive, cultural and pedagogical processes.

Enablers for advancing inclusion and diversity according to school leaders

The supremacy of the SEP Act, Decree 83 and the PIE

This category gathers a set of fragments that refer to the policies on inclusion and diversity most valued by the leaders interviewed. They were asked about a set of laws and decrees enacted in recent years, of which three are most valued by the participating schools: the Preferential School Subsidy Law (SEP) that provides additional subsidies to students in contexts of poverty; the School Integration Programme (PIE) that specifically addresses students with Special Educational Needs (SEN); and Decree N°83 on diversification of teaching and curricular flexibilisation. The main arguments revolve around their practical scope, the possibility of managing resources and the impact they have in the classroom to respond to diversity. Let us review some quotes:

It is obvious that SEP and PIE help, if in the end there are many things that are paid for with PIE, and not only human resources, but also, I imagine, technological resources, so it all adds up. The SEP issue, it is always important to have resources, so it is appreciated all the time, it plays in our favour (Teacher focus group, school 3, 2017).

At the beginning we had three data...the teachers had to take turns to ask for them and there were 44 classes...So, we didn't have the resources to say "now, one data for each class", but with the SEP law (...) first we bought technology, we put data in all the classes and it was good at the time to buy a lot of didactic material [...]....] look at how we have used them in favour of our children, it has been fabulous, because we have managed to train our people, to equip our school, to dream that we can do more by putting in a lot of technology and innovation and that is thanks to the SEP Law. (Principal, school 2, 2017)

[on Decree 83] "*without a doubt it is a strategy, I think that the Ministry is moving forward in the sense of saying "look, we propose a strategy for the diversification of teaching, there are others, we deliver this one" and I think it is a step forward in the*

sense of first recognising that there are differences in a classroom, just as there are differences in the teachers. (Head of UTP, school 5, 2018).

The above excerpts show that this triad —SEP, PIE and decree 83— has allowed schools to have human and material resources, to train, to invest in technology and to recognise the difference in the classroom as a way to improve classroom practices. Specifically, the SEP law is valued for the resources it provides, the PIE for its way of organising support and Decree 83 for its pedagogical impact. Although participants value the existence of other relevant policies, such as Decree 67 (which regulates grade repetition) and the inclusion law, these are not recognised as transformative policies for school spaces.

Openness to change

This facilitator includes a set of discourses on the importance that management teams attach to the ability to take risks, to be flexible and open to changes in modern society. From the point of view of inclusion it implies creating innovative practices, being open to diversity and new school challenges. Let us review some quotes:

Look, there is nothing that is life or death [...] so you start to be more flexible, and especially in these last two years [in the pandemic] I mean, if you are not flexible, the only thing you do is contribute to teachers feeling more burdened. Therefore, we try to minimise administrative tasks as much as possible, so that they can concentrate their energy on the fundamental task of working with diversity. (Head of UTP, School 3, 2016).

Yes, perhaps another important thing is that we have not closed ourselves off to any possibility, perhaps from intuition, like... I don't know what we can call it, which has also helped us to take risks in order to be more and more inclusive (...) you know what I mean? I think that has also been favourable, the steps we are taking (Head of UTP, school 5, 2018).

We with our Aymara students in the school... We did not teach the Aymara language subject, what we had were instances that took into account the interests of the culture [...] so we decided in 2019 to teach it [...] So it was all a disarmament, fortunately we are very flexible in some things and we managed to make the whole programme load we had set up more flexible; hiring teachers, diverting hours. We've been doing it for three years now and with a department that has moved up to eighth grade (Headmistress, school 2, 2016).

The above excerpts show forms of management open to change and with high levels of flexibility. The focus is on leading the school from a commitment to the students, the teachers and the school culture. Flexibility and openness are recognised as virtues in the participating schools, both for

understanding the work of the school and for systematising support and tools.

Positive attitude towards inclusion and diversity

This facilitator has a strong cultural value and relates to the attitudes of school staff in understanding inclusion and dealing with diversity. According to the school leaders interviewed, they understand diversity as a (positive) value and not as a problem, so they value difference as a principle of inclusion and interpersonal relationships. Let us review some quotes:

> *When someone sees that diversity is a positive issue, that it is a positive factor in my work, in my own learning, in the development of the concept of society that we want, then I am happy when I get someone different, I am happy when I get a child who does not speak Spanish [...] I am happy when I get a child whose context presents very significant barriers because that enriches my own practice and because it also makes us grow as a society*. (Head of school coexistence, school 7, 2021).

> *Diversity is our everyday life and we must develop its full potential, and I think that the school also values the fact that there are differences so that we can learn from the differences of others, I think that is also important*. (Headmistress, school 5, 2018).

> *Being wholeheartedly committed to diversity, to inclusion, I would say that you already have 30% or 40% of the way done because they have that personal conviction, now in this school I would say that of the 100% of people who work here, 85% - I'm talking about everyone, the staff - have that conviction, in other schools where I arrived this did not exist and we had to start explaining it to them from scratch.* (Principal, school 3, 2016).

The above quotes highlight the importance of understanding diversity as a value, as a positive issue for schools and for society. Those in leadership understand that inclusion is nurtured precisely by enriching practices and learning from others.

Collaboration and teamwork

Finally, a last facilitator, which as a category gathers a large number of quotes and fragments, is the importance that management teams assign to collaborative work. According to the interviewees, collaboration plays a large part in their success as schools and as a means of achieving inclusion-related goals. Collaboration and teamwork are seen as hallmarks of schools, especially in the work of middle leaders:

> *You have to have the team aligned, the team leading the core leaders, the middle leaders and the senior leaders also have to be convinced of inclusion and to plan actions. Always bearing in mind that this is our hallmark and whatever we do we have to pass it through that hallmark, we have to be aligned and all think from inclusion.* (Head teacher, school 3, 2017).

> *I have always worked with distributed leadership, I am the least centralised there is and not controlling, in that sense I am very clear about who to distribute the workload to and which people I have given the opportunity to be propositional and to give proposals and projects (*Head teacher, school 2, 2016). (Head teacher, school 2, 2016).

> *When teachers come to me for advice, help, collaboration, they do so from that point of view, from the professional point of view, from the point of view of support, of collaboration. This is also something you learn in practice and in the course of your work. To work collaboratively, and especially in diverse environments, we have to be good and we have to develop strategies, and we have to put actions into practice* (Head of UTP, school 1, 2016).

There is full consensus among those interviewed on the importance of working as a team, with shared ideas and aligned with the inclusive education project of each school. This implies deploying a distributed leadership focused on formal and informal leaders and with a school culture that values and respects differences.

Discussion and conclusions

A first group of barriers are found outside the school and are related to the state's administrative focus on guaranteeing inclusive processes and to the pre-eminence of SIMCE as a device that strains the cultural processes associated with inclusion. In terms of the former, the leaders interviewed call for greater levels of autonomy to manage diversity management processes and greater support in the provision of guidelines, resources and training. Regarding the latter, the SIMCE test is perceived as a barrier that does not provide information to advance inclusion, generates teacher attrition, decontextualises teaching and especially affects schools working with vulnerable groups.

A second group of barriers is found in school communities and refers to a lack of training on diversity care and the prevalence of peripheral student participation. The former is understood as a barrier in that it is recognised as a prerequisite for understanding support needs and for planning coherent and contextualised strategies; the latter is understood as a pending task and one that affects inclusion in its broad dimension.

In relation to facilitators, these are mainly recognised as areas within the actions of the participating schools: such as the ability to make responses more flexible, to understand diversity as a positive value and to work

collaboratively in terms of the school's project. But external facilitators are also recognised: such as the SEP law, Decree N°83 and the PIE. This triad of regulations is well evaluated by the management teams and is perceived as a set of devices that make it possible to organise support, manage resources and make teaching more flexible in diverse classrooms.

The systematised barriers and facilitators are crucial tools for understanding the progress of inclusive processes from the perspective of principals, management teams and school-level management teams. The leaders provide a detailed analysis, at both macro and micro levels, of the dimensions and variables that need to be considered in order to carry out an empirical analysis of how management teams lead schools with inclusion-focused educational projects. Barriers and facilitators to inclusion are equally relevant in all participating schools, regardless of the period in which the data were produced. This observation is both significant and understandable, as leading inclusive schools is a gradual and contextualised process that deserves further and more specific analysis according to the socio-cultural reality of the school systems.

The findings are linked to the literature on inclusive education in Chile and globally in relation to barriers and facilitators. Internationally, the literature on inclusion and leadership shows barriers linked to training on diversity and participation (López-López et al., 2023; Seyram and Klibthong, 2022), as well as a critical look at standardised tests (Apple, 2010; Bacon and Pomponio, 2020). As for Chile, inclusion has indeed become a state issue in our country (Sagredo et al., 2019). However, this has not necessarily implied the provision of baseline funding for schools and the implementation of a rights-based approach (Lerena and Trejos, 2015; López et al., 2018). Something similar happens with the pre-eminence of the SIMCE test. There is sufficient evidence to affirm that educational standardisation undermines and affects pedagogical purposes (Ángulo, 2020); firstly because it does not faithfully represent the curricular content it claims to assess and secondly because it has concrete consequences for schools (Valdés and Oyarzún, 2023). Regarding the lack of professional training on inclusion and diversity, the evidence also coincides with the results of this work. Several national and international studies agree that school communities —teachers and management teams— demand more and better training on inclusive school management (Castillo et al., 2020; González-Gil et al., 2019; Pla-Viana and Villaescusa, 2021; San Martín et al., 2020).

In terms of facilitators, there is also some relevant consensus in the literature. Although a positive attitude towards diversity and collaborative work are prominent factors in the management of inclusive processes at the international level (Booth and Ainscow, 2015), it is worth highlighting the

idea of openness to change. According to the literature (Corica, 2020; Helfrich et al., 2009; Murillo and Krichesky, 2012; Stevens, 2013) schools that are open to and prepared for change have a greater chance of success and school transformation. Thus, in order to drive change processes, schools' willingness, professional flexibility and collective commitment must necessarily be increased (Murillo and Krischesky, 2012).

These results allow us to discuss the trade-offs between inclusion, standardisation and school leadership (Valdés and Oyarzún, 2023). In an educational scenario sedimented by curricular standardisation and by the lack of support, according to what is pointed out by the management teams, the exercise of leadership is subject to the double militancy of installing inclusive processes and responding to the SIMCE test and other *accountability* devices. This clash of meanings is recognised by the specialised literature as detrimental to school communities, as it facilitates the segregation of students who do not meet educational standards (Allbright and Marsh, 2020; Dougherty and Weiner, 2017; Mikelatou and Arvanitis, 2021). This scenario creates a tense, paradoxical and ambivalent school scenario for leading the transition towards an inclusive school, a matter that in daily practice must be resolved by management teams, who are called upon by educational policies, in the case of Chile, as the agents in charge of managing inclusive processes (Mineduc, 2015).

This coincides with Sisto's studies (2018, 2019, 2020) that show the consolidation of a *Chilean-style inclusion* that governs through evaluations and consequences and with the presence of critical knots inherent to the new public management model (López et al., 2018).

Finally, the contribution of this work allows us to offer a set of recommendations for education policy and for schools.

A first recommendation derived from this study is to intervene the SIMCE by eliminating its consequences for schools (categorisation, rankings, economic rewards, threat of closure, etc.). Although its negative effects have been widely reported (Bellei, 2020), more attention should be paid to its consequences in order to consolidate an inclusive leadership style (Valdés and Oyarzún, 2023).

The second recommendation is to empower school leadership teams, management teams and middle leaders (PIE coordinators and school coexistence officers, among others). The literature on inclusive leadership affirms that managing an inclusive school is everyone's task, not just that of school principals (Ryan, 2016). The literature on inclusion recognises that it is not possible to consolidate inclusive schools without the active presence of other leaders beyond principals, such as informal leaders and middle leaders (Valdés and Pérez, 2023).

The third recommendation is to relieve school leaders of administrative tasks and promote training on diversity. Leading an inclusive school requires time and training, so in order to deploy inclusive leadership practices, it is necessary to remove the large amount of administrative tasks that principals have to carry out and that take up the majority of leadership tasks (Ryan, 2016).

The fourth recommendation is to understand and insist on inclusion from a broad perspective (Booth and Ainscow, 2015) —not only with a focus on students with learning difficulties— and under baseline funding, that is, that the resources received by schools do not depend on the diagnostic categories of students. Management teams demand more support from the state, but also more freedom to manage resources in a localised way and in line with the characteristics of each school.

The fifth recommendation is to promote leadership practices that enable real student participation in school decisions (Seyram and Klibthong, 2022). The importance of considering student voice (and that of other stakeholders, of course) is related to putting broad, non-adultcentric and democratic inclusion into action (Sandoval and Waitoller, 2022).

The main limitation of this work relates to the research design in the pandemic context. Due to the sanitary confinement, in the case of the last two schools, narrative rather than observational techniques predominated. The latter is relevant to unveil cultural manifestations in school spaces.

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