PARTICIPATORY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: A META-SYNTHESIS

GESTÃO ESCOLAR PARTICIPATIVA: UMA METASSÍNTESE

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ABSTRACT

School management research focuses primarily on macro-level theorizing about concepts such as leadership. Therefore, to date, there is a gap in the area regarding participatory school management. This article systematically reviewed existing qualitative case studies on participatory school management published in peer-reviewed journals. An electronic search was conducted in an education database – ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) –, covering the period from 2001 to June 2022. To meet this objective, a meta-synthesis of qualitative case studies was adopted in order to identify possible cause and effect relationships involving the following constructs: leadership, relationship management, and administration. The results indicate that the ability and willingness of principals to encourage dialogue, as well as their active engagement in building relationships within the school community and their role as leaders, are fundamental aspects. The theoretical reference is based on authors such as Libâneo, Lück, and Paro. The research identified that, initially, the concept of school management focused only on the administrative aspects of the function; however, this concept has been transforming over time, being approached in a broader way, covering pedagogical, political, and human aspects.

Keywords: School management. Participatory management. Meta-synthesis.

RESUMO

As pesquisas sobre gestão escolar concentram-se principalmente na teorização de nível macro sobre conceitos como liderança. Por isso, até o momento, há uma lacuna na área no que se refere à gestão escolar participativa. O presente artigo revisou sistematicamente estudos de caso qualitativos existentes sobre gestão escolar participativa publicados em periódicos revisados por pares. Uma busca eletrônica foi conduzida na base de dados da educação — Eric (Educational Resources Information Centre), compreendendo o período de 2001 até junho de 2022. Para atender a tal objetivo, a adoção de uma metassíntese de estudos de caso qualitativos foi empregada a fim de identificar possíveis relações de causa e efeito entre os construtos: liderança, gerenciamento das relações e administrativos. Os resultados apontam que a habilidade e disposição do diretor em fomentar o diálogo, bem como seu engajamento ativo na construção de relacionamentos dentro da comunidade escolar e seu papel de líder, são aspectos fundamentais. A referência teórica é baseada em autores como Libâneo, Lück e Paro. A pesquisa detectou que, inicialmente, o conceito de gestão escolar centrava-se apenas nos aspectos administrativos da função, contudo, este conceito vem se transformando ao longo do tempo, sendo abordado de forma mais ampliada contemplando os aspectos pedagógico, político e humano.

Palavras-chave: Gestão escolar. Gestão participativa. Metassíntese.

Introduction

The school as a complex social organization, endowed with unique responsibilities and characteristics, must articulate human development and formation in a critical, reflective, participatory, and creative manner through its social, pedagogical, and political practices¹. It is configured as an environment conducive to thinking and democratic action, structured in such a way as to enable decision-making collectively, considering all of its active agents, such as teachers, students, management, pedagogical team, and other collaborators².

The education instituted by means of educational work requires a shared effort, in which all segments of the work units are integrated and participate collaboratively. School management is responsible for proposing practices that, in the teaching and learning process, confront theoretical conceptions, guiding documents, and methodologies, and bring about significant learning, making management efficient³.



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Understanding and conceptualizing school management means recognizing it as a process that mobilizes the skills and energies of collectively structured individuals. This process allows the agents involved, through active and competent participation, to achieve specific educational objectives to the fullest, within their work unit, as outlined by Lück³.

The search for democratic management has led managers to reflect on their pedagogical practices, aiming to establish a participatory environment in school units. Participatory management presupposes action on the part of all those involved directly or indirectly in the educational process³, as a possibility of meeting the demands of the advances and transformations in Brazilian education, with a view to producing dialogues that promote comprehensive and emancipatory education.

Participation, during this process, makes people feel responsible for the results, as they build and gain autonomy. Although participation in education is essential, such a concept has oftentimes been misunderstood and trivialized in schools. Many actions are implemented without the proper understanding and care that participation requires, which compromises its effectiveness in the educational context and its potential good results³⁻⁴.

Numerous situations and experiences of participation that are carried out within the educational contexto, without having a true democratic nature, are a warning about the importance of knowing the concept of participation in school management and about the complexity of this concept linked to everyday practice, such as the importance, sense, and meaning of the participatory environment³.

Building a democratic and participatory school requires that students be effectively ensured learning, and that organizational and pedagogical conditions that enable this be provided. In this sense, managers are considered as professionals who have a fundamental relevance in determining the school's organizational climate and culture and in the effectiveness of their students' learning.

Despite numerous investigations^{5,6,7} about management in the school environment, there is a gap to be filled when it comes to studying the participatory management model in this context. In order to reduce this existing gap, this article analyzed and synthesized the productions that address participatory management in school units, especially those published in qualitative case studies, so as to contribute to the structuring of a panorama related to participatory school management.

Methods

2.1 Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies

Meta-synthesis is characterized as a systematic review methodology that synthesizes the results of qualitative studies into categories⁸. This type of review allows for analyzing and integrating results on a particular research theme and aims to present expanded interpretations of all selected studies on a given theme, respecting the interpretive translation of each study⁹.

2.1.1 Meta-Synthesis Protocol

The protocol used for execution is based on Hoon¹⁰ and suggested by Templier and Paré¹¹; it is composed of eight steps: (1) definition of the research question; (2) location and selection of relevant articles; (3) inclusion/exclusion criterion of the sample; (4) extraction and coding of sample data; (5) individual analysis of the case study; (6) cross-sectional synthesis; (7) theory construction; and (8) discussion of the findings, as presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1 - Step and description of the Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies protocol

	STEP	ion of the Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies protocol DESCRIPTION			
(1)	Definition of the research question	The research question was defined as: How is the participatory school management model studied in the school context?			
(2)	Location and selection of relevant articles	An electronic search was conducted in the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) database, which currently has more than 1,000 indexed journals. The search covered the period from 2001 to June 2022 and is supported by the implementation of the Brazilian National Education Plan [<i>Plano Nacional de Educação</i> (PNE)] (2001-2011), which determines goals and strategies for educational policies. The search strategy was made up of the terms "school management" OR "participatory management" OR "democratic management" OR "educational management" or "school principal", both in English and Portuguese. Moreover, in order to include gray literature, a manual search was performed on the reference list of eligible studies, and Google Scholar was searched as well. The search period is supported by the implementation of the PNE (2001-2011), which determines goals and strategies for educational policies.			
(3)	Inclusion/exclusion criterion of the sample	This review included original studies available in full, both in English and Portuguese, that were considered eligible. The exclusion criteria were: a) literature reviews, opinion articles, or editorial letters; b) studies not published in journals with peer review; c) non-use of case study methodology; d) non-use of qualitative methodology.			
(4)	Extraction and coding of sample data	The eligibility selection of the studies obtained through the searches in the databases was conducted in three steps (title, abstract, and full article), and each phase was used to identify the exclusions. If there were any doubts as to exclusions, the studies were analyzed in the next phase. These examinations were conducted independently by two researchers, who evaluated the full texts and determined the eligibility of each study (AFR and PVSR), and, in case of disagreements, the opinion of a third researcher (FFRR) was taken into account. Data extraction was performed and checked by two researchers. Some abstracts, despite not presenting enough information, according to the eligibility criteria, were maintained for a full-text analysis. To this end, a standardized extraction spreadsheet was used to catalogue information related to the authors, journals, objectives, data collection instruments, and main outcomes.			
(5)	Individual analysis of the case study (case-specific synthesis)	Case-specific synthesis was performed with a view to identifying intra-case relations, themes, and core elements presented within the conceptual, attitudinal, and procedural meanings.			
(6)	Cross-sectional synthesis	Cross-sectional synthesis was carried out with the intra-case relations for meta-case relations. The objective was to assess the constitutive elements by cross-analyzing the cases, with the intention of building a general pattern among the variables and establishing relations among the cases, thus configuring a meta-case network.			
(7)	Theory construction / Theory analysis	The objective at this point is to establish the theoretical foundations, the scientific explanations, and the essential elements that allow for significant advance.			

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(8)	Discussion of the findings	Discussions around the results of the meta-synthesis study and potential
		limitations were conducted on the basis of accuracy, reliability, and validity.

Source: The authors.

ERIC is specialized in education, which means that all resources are relevant to professionals and researchers in this specific field. Although it is advisable to consider other sources in order to complement a comprehensive research, the exclusive use of ERIC can be justified when one seeks a specialized, reliable, and comprehensive education resource, with free access and advanced research tools 12,13.

Results

3.1 Search for Relevant Studies

After the ERIC database was searched, a sample was built with 07 articles published in 07 different journals, as shown in Figure 1.

3.2 Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined and applied for the selection of studies on the basis of methods, theoretical foundations, connection with the research question, and the quality of the conducted study case. After the exclusion of irrelevant texts that did not align with the research question of this article, the final sample consisted of 07 qualitative case study articles (Figure 1).

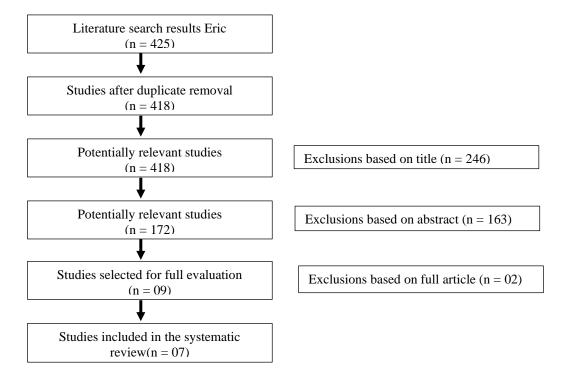


Figure 1 - Article selection flowchart

Source: The authors.

3.3 Data Extraction and Coding

Chart 2 - Matrix of studies analyzed in full

TITLE	AUTHOR	JOURNAL	OBJECTIV E	PARTICIPAN T	METHO D	INSTRUMEN T/ DATA COLLECTIO N
An Analysis of Day to Day Activities of a Sample of Primary School Principals in Ireland	Stynes, Martin; McNamara, Gerry; O'Hara, Joe (2018)	Eurasian Journal of Educational Research	To examine how school leaders deal with work and how they respond to it.	31 elementary school principals	Case study	Semi-structured qualitative interviews for follow-up and diary.
Exploring the Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals through a Distributed Leadership Framework: A Case Study	Bagwell, Jack L. (2019) ¹⁵	Educational Leadership and Administratio n: Teaching and Program Development	To explore the leadership practice of two principals of urban elementary schools through a distributed leadership structure.	02 elementary school principals	Case study	Semi-structured interviews and observations
Making a Difference in Poor Communities: Relations among Actors in Mexican Schools	Silas- Casillas, Juan Carlos; Perales- Franco, Cristina (2014)	International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education	To highlight the school principal's role in building relationships in the school community and building practices that lead to the sharing of meanings and objectives.	16 schools (08 communities)	Case study	Interview, focus groups, and observation
'Out of the Box' Leadership: Action Research towards School Improvement	Karagiorgi, Yiasemina; Afantiti- Lamprianou , Thekla; Alexandrou -Leonidou, Vassiliki; Karamanou , Marianna; Symeou, Loizos (2018) ¹⁷	Educational Action Research	To demonstrate action-research applications as an instrumental component of principals' leadership repertoire; To report how the two leaders, as internal actors, extracted meaning from the action-research process by	02 principals	Action-research	Field diaries

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			reconsidering their roles.			
Model of Values-Based Management Process in Schools: A Mixed Design Study	Dogan, Soner (2016) ¹⁸	International Journal of Higher Education	To evaluate the values-based management behaviors of school managers, according to the perceptions and opinions of teachers and, in this sense, to build a management process model based on school values.	305 teachers (quantitative) and 10 teachers (qualitative)	Case study	Quantitative - Relational and qualitative screening model - case design (observation, interview, and document analysis)
Parents' Participation in Improving the Quality of Elementary School in the City of Malang, East Java, Indonesia	Sumarsono, Raden Bambang; Imron, Ali; Wiyono, Bambang Budi; Arifin, Imron (2016)	International Education Studies	To describe parental participation in improving the quality of education in elementary schools from school substance and management.	04 schools	Case study	Interviews, observation, and documentation
Understandin g Leadership in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstance s: A Chilean Case Study	Ahumada, Luis; Galdames, Sergio; Clarke, Simon (2016) 20	International Journal of Leadership in Education	To understand the challenges that school leaders face when doing their jobs.	Principal, vice principal, teacher, students, and management team	Case study	Focus group (interviews)

Source: The authors.

3.4 Case-specific analysis

According to Hoon¹⁰, when conducting a case-specific analysis, the researcher is guided to explore "each case study in terms of the variables which logically influence others, which variables are likely to appear together". This process of mapping the possible influences contributes to the construction of a theoretical model that outlines causal connections, aligning with the perspectives of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña²¹, and Eisenhardt and Graebner²².

Through case-specific analysis, several propositions that can be explored in future investigations present themselves. This method enhances the understanding of the interactions among specific variables, in addition to providing a solid basis for theoretical development, as suggested by the methodological and theoretical approach mentioned.

Chart 3 - School management dimensions from the meanings of the theme analyses

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT	CONCEPTUAL MEANINGS	PROCEDURAL MEANINGS	ATTITUDINAL MEANINGS
Article 1	School administration; School leadership	Administration, management, and leadership.	Deal with the unexpected; Advise, support, explain, and guide; Personal investment of time and energy from principals.
Article 2	Relationship management; School administration	Team management.	Motivate and empower; Face challenges.
Article 3	Relationship management; Principal's role	Management of solid relationships and bonds.	Promote a dialogue process; Provide consistent spaces; Engagement with the community; Message bearer and articulator of needs.
Article 4	School leadership	Management and leadership of the community and all parties involved.	Planning; Act and observe; Reflect.
Article 5	Relationship Management	Value Management, management process, and strategic planning.	Values-based management: Understand the needs, respect professional ethics, act fairly cooperate. Management based on care level: justice, respect, helpfulness, cooperation, solidarity, honesty, and freedom. Management based on values employed by administrators: ethics, honesty, diligence, justice, equality, respect, and helpfulness.
Article 6	Relationship Management	Learning aspects, student matters, facilities and infrastructure, public relations, educational finances, and members of the school unit.	Parental participation; Facilities and infrastructure matters; Relationship between school and community; Personal matters.
Article 7	Relationship management; School leadership; School administration	Relationship management and action operationalization.	Face challenging circumstances; Encourage practices that promote high expectations in students; Meet the school's basic needs; Examine leadership practices;; Strengthen bonds with

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	parents and students;
	Assign responsibilities;
	Collaborative work for the
	school community.

Source: The authors.

3.5 Cross-Sectional Analysis

In the cross-sectional analysis synthesis, the seven articles evidenced that school principals play roles that transcend the purely pedagogical sphere of the unit. Their duties comprehend administrative, managerial, and leadership responsibilities in relation to the entire faculty, to the students, and to the school community. The studies show that the various roles principals take on include the ability to "put out fires" – a jargon from the administrative field –, which requires readiness to deal with unpredictable and random events, as well as engagement in tasks outside their conventional schedule, and willingness to take the necessary actions. From these analyses, it was possible to identify three constructs: leadership, relationship management, and administration.

3.5.1 Leadership

In times of constant changes, developing leadership competences and skills becomes more pressing than ever. Encouraging the various school actors to improve teaching and learning processes, adopting new strategies, and creating a conducive environment for building and sharing knowledge points to the promotion of shared leadership. In this model, everyone, regardless of whether they are formally instituted leaders or not, must be encouraged to participate actively.

As for leadership, the collected indicators ^{15,17,20} show that an effective distribution of leadership among individuals lays the essential foundation for the construction of a school culture aimed at continuous teaching improvement. This model involves the promotion of open dialogues about pedagogical practices, offering teachers significant opportunities for them to become involved in the decision-making process. Therefore, there is a need to encourage and actively support teachers in their efforts to take responsibility in the creation and leadership of professional development initiatives ²³.

The articles also highlight leadership as one of the main skills to be developed and enhanced by managers, because it is through it that they engage, motivate, and empower other actors to meet the needs of the school unit. However, leadership practice should not be a responsibility exclusive to principals. All teachers must be involved in this process by working to improve their own practices, showing leadership through observation and active participation, supporting the development of leadership among their colleagues¹⁵.

In the context of professional development, it is worth highlighting the role of managers in encouraging and motivating teachers to become qualified leaders, offering significant opportunities for growth and improvement. Alfaro and Aray²⁴ stress that the effort dedicated to improving leadership in educational institutions should not be limited to principals; on the contrary, it must extend to teachers, encouraging the creation of new roles and responsibilities aimed at collective cooperation. This is justified by the understanding that effective leadership occurs in a collective manner, promoting creativity and improvements in educational processes.

3.5.2 Relationship Management

Regarding the management of relationships within school units, studies point out 15,16,18,20 that the ability and willingness of a principal to foster dialogue, as well as their active engagement in building relationships within the school community, are fundamental aspects. Such practices facilitate the sharing of meanings and objectives, and strengthen

collaborative ties among all members of the educational community, thus contributing to a more cohesive environment oriented towards the same goals.

A principal's desire and ability to promote spaces for dialogue are central characteristics of schools, in addition to showing integration and relational leadership. Thus, principals, by adopting participatory management during their management, become the bearer of the message, being an effective articulator of the school community's needs. By actively promoting dialogue spaces, they contribute substantially to the construction of a solid bond with the community, establishing expressive collaboration for the development and continuous improvement of the educational institution, for quality in education, and for students' learning.

The school is committed to passing on knowledge, and the family, to basic education – this union is imperative for integral educational success.

Each of the subjects involved in each of the institutions needs to recognize their attributions in the face of the subject who needs education, that is, the student. The construction of the relationship between school and family, as cooperation, needs to be strengthened in a relationship in which there is trust, in the first place; it implies putting oneself in other's shoes, not just exchanging ideas and discussions^{25, 28}.

There is no doubt about the fact that the union between family and school is paramount for pedagogical success. The forms of family participation range from attending pedagogical meetings, through checking homework and talking with the children, to actually engaging in activities held at the school itself. Such actions strengthen the bonds of commitment and involvement, and can very strongly show the importance of the family and school relationship.

When the school's pedagogical project makes room for family participation and recognizes the differentiated roles between school and family in its construction, it contributes significantly to students' learning and development process^{26,27}. Therefore, it is the family's duty to provide an environment for learning²⁸, while the school's is to create opportunities for involvement between parents and children, as well as between parents and teachers, in order to maintain good relationships among all parties involved and allow students' development to be shared.

3.5.3 Unit Administration

School principals play crucial roles in the administration and leadership of educational institutions, are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of the curriculum, promoting a positive and secure learning environment, and overseeing the performance of both teachers and staff. Furthermore, principals act as mediators between the school and the community, facilitating communication and collaboration with parents and other concerned parties. They also manage financial and material resources, ensuring that the school has the means necessary to achieve its educational objectives. Through strategic leadership and vision, principals have a direct influence on the quality of education and on the academic success of students^{14,15,20}.

Administration is seen as a key component of their role, since they need to deal with the unexpected, interact with the team, have work ethics, work outside their regular schedule, and be willing to do whatever is needed¹⁴. For this reason, school principals have several responsibilities and, in order to fulfill them, they need to develop some skills.

In the scope of essential skills for the job of an educational manager, highlight is given to guidance, effective communication, socialization ability, interaction skills, and performance of an active and public role in the life of the local community. These competences strengthen the effectiveness of school management and contribute to the formation of a dynamic, collaborative educational environment which is adaptable to the demands of this evertransforming scenario^{4,29}.

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It is also emphasized that a manager's skills to run a school unit includes leadership ability, which is essential for one to face the challenges of the educational environment, as it is always evolving. In this sense, clear and direct communication with teachers is an important element to promote an effective understanding of established goals and expectations.

3.5.4 Participatory Management in the School

Participatory management in the school aims to strengthen the educational community and improve the teaching-learning process, actively involving all team members, including managers, teachers, staff, parents, and students, creating a collaborative environment that promotes the exchange of ideas and the making of joint decisions.

With room for the active participation of all actors in school decisions, a more engaged and collaborative educational community is created. The diversity of perspectives enabled by this approach enriches the decision-making process and strengthens ties among all members of the school community. Participatory management recognizes the importance of individual contributions and values the community, promoting a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Including teachers in the definition of goals, pedagogical strategies, and professional development stimulates innovation and enhances the quality of teaching. Ultimately, by adopting a participatory approach, schools cultivate an environment that promotes educational excellence, preparing students for the challenges of the contemporary world in a more holistic and inclusive way. By highlighting the intrinsic ability of these institutions in problem solving, it is made evident that teachers play a central role, characterized by reflective practices that can be shared with their peers³⁰.

As noted by Marques³¹, "everyone's participation, in the various levels of decision and in the successive stages of activities, is essential to ensure the organization works efficiently." However, it is imperative to understand participation as a dynamic and interactive process that transcends mere decision-making. This process is characterized by mutual support in the daily life of educational management, with its actors overcoming challenges and limitations, facing the inherent difficulties and effectively fulfilling their social purpose, in addition to contributing to the development of their social identity³.

In summary, the articles address^{15,16,18,19,20}, both directly and indirectly, the aspects involving participatory management, including strategies for instructing and assigning responsibilities, promoting direct communication, defining goals in collaboration with professionals, as well as encouraging and supporting the efforts of school managers in order to promote responsibilities in the sense of creating and leading initiatives, with a view to developing their capacity and strengthen ties by means of participation. Moreover, they provided information on the enactment of the practice and distribution of leadership, on tools, on routines, and on the context of specific situations.

In light of the foregoing, it is understood that participation is possible through numerous forms and with different goals in the school context. For Lück³, these participations with different intensities can be identified as participation through presence, verbal expression, discussion, political representation, decision-making, and engagement.

Conclusions

This meta-synthesis makes room for researchers and professionals to comprehensively examine the practice of leadership, people management, and unit administration, encouraging

and considering the perspective of various actors at all school levels. This implies a fundamental reassessment of how human capital can contribute to school efforts in the sense of reducing the gap of educational opportunities.

A principal's active and engaged stance when interacting with different actors in the school context plays a vital role in the social construction of reality, both in the community and in the school itself. It was evidenced, through the findings of the meta-synthesis, that the promotion of dialogic processes and the creation of consistent spaces for their actors are essential characteristics of schools with stable processes, standing out as fundamental elements for the strengthening of interaction and collaboration in the educational environment.

Theoretical Contributions

It is concluded that studies addressing elements related to participatory school management are rare. Additionally, reviews involving the qualitative approach in this field are incipient.

In order to bring about scientific progress and improve the applicability of studies in the professional sphere, systematic reviews of this sort may have a significant impact on the field in question, as they offer an opportunity for researchers to reflect on various aspects of school management, especially in areas with a considerable volume of investigations. Thus, this approach contributes to consolidating existing knowledge and fosters discussions and reflections that drive significant advances in the understanding and effective implementation of participatory management in the educational context.

Managerial Implications

The managerial implications of the present study are significant, especially considering that school managers oftentimes perform a variety of functions that are crucial to their roles. In addition to their conventional responsibilities, such as the effective administration of resources and processes, the study highlights the importance of school managers actively engaging in collaboration, development, and shared understanding. This deeper comprehension can positively influence the school environment, promoting a more effective management oriented towards common goals.

Given the complexity of the functions of a manager and the data analyzed, it was found that democratic actions are listed from national and municipal documents that reach the school unit. Therefore, emphasis is worth giving to the importance of school managers when it comes to the decisions that must be made, considering that, when they lack references for guidance, it is their role to adopt actions that guarantee democratic management. The interactions that are made possible tend to influence subordinate professionals and the school community, indirectly and regardless of their physical presence in these contexts.

Therefore, this research advocates that a broader understanding of the role of a manager and the challenges they face requires an in-depth and well-founded study of their daily routine, qualitatively. Furthermore, it is essential to identify support and encouragement from the educational administration, which is core to daily school management, supported by the precepts established in official documents and general educational guidelines. This tends to assist managers in the development of lighter management.

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