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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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Review Stage at time of this submission - Completed but not published.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 8 June 2026 and was last updated on 8 June 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The study presents a systematic literature review aimed at identifying which characteristics of educational networks promote the professional development of headteachers in state schools, answering the question:

1. What characteristics of educational networks promote the professional development of headteachers in public schools?

Rationale There is currently evidence that, for school leadership to influence improvements in student learning, it must be oriented towards the pedagogical core – teachers and students interacting with knowledge – and therefore towards the strengthening of teaching practices. These effects are amplified systemically when leadership is exercised as a function that goes beyond the individual, demonstrating its distributed, relational and collaborative nature, especially when efforts

are coordinated between schools within a network. Thus, effective educational networks have become particularly relevant as a strategy for promoting sustainable improvement in schools. However, there is still insufficient evidence to confirm that these networks have a significant and consistent influence on the professional development of school leaders.

Condition being studied The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between networks and the professional development of public school headteachers, as spaces for professional learning and capacity development, by analysing the characteristics of educational networks that foster the professional development of school headteachers, with the aim of providing justifications that generate greater interest within the scientific community and exploring recommendations and directions for further development and research.

METHODS

Search strategy The databases used are Web of Science (WOS), SCOPUS, SCIELO and ERIC.

The search terms are "education networks", "school networks", "educational alliances", "learning networks", "educational collaborations", "educational improvement", "school performance", "educational outcomes", "learning outcomes", "student outcomes", "academic results", "learning achievements", "schools", "public schools" and "state schools", combined using the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR", and restricting the search to publications from the last 10 years.

Participant or population Mainly school headteachers, although members of leadership teams, including teachers, middle leaders, supervisors and others in leadership roles; according to the search results.

Intervention Networks as spaces for professional development and collaborative work.

Comparator There is no comparison.

Study designs to be included Articles published in journals, with qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods designs.

Eligibility criteria 1. Articles addressing the topic of networks, school leadership and professional learning. 2. Articles published in journals, with qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods designs. 3. Studies addressing research question. 4. Publications from 2015 to 2025. 5. Spanish or English. 6. Studies published in the field of social sciences.

Information sources An exhaustive and systematic computerised search of the electronic databases Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo and ERIC.

Main outcome(s) The main outcome is to describe the current state of networks that function as spaces for the professional learning of school headteachers and the characteristics of these educational networks that promote the professional development of headteachers, specifically in state schools. The aim was to obtain results that enable an understanding of the current state of the phenomenon under study, justify the relevance of future research on the topic, and provide recommendations for public education policy on how to strengthen the training and professional development of school leaders through collaboration and networking. Additionally,

it is hoped that this will contribute to the field of research and serve as a precedent for future studies.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The risk of bias in the studies will be assessed by examining key aspects such as authorship, participants, disciplines involved, methodology, the way in which the surveys are administered, and the context in which the intervention is delivered.

Strategy of data synthesis This review has adhered to the PRISMA 2020 statement as a general strategy, explicitly stating keywords, the search strategy, Boolean operators used, and inclusion and exclusion criteria, aiming to fulfil all elements outlined in this protocol.

Subgroup analysis None planned.

Sensitivity analysis All research ethics requirements were adhered to throughout the data analysis process and the preparation of this systematic review.

Language restriction The articles included are in Spanish and English.

Country(ies) involved Spain - University of Granada.

Keywords leadership; schools; career development; collaborative network.

Contributions of each author

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