

# Developing a Performance-Based Educational Leadership Competency Development Model with a Futures Studies Approach: A Systematic Meta-Synthesis of International Studies

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aimed to develop a comprehensive model of performance-based educational leadership competencies using a futures studies approach through the systematic meta-synthesis of international studies published between 2015 and 2025.

**Methods and Materials:** This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis approach based on the interpretive framework of Noblit and Hare (1988) and the seven-step procedure of Sandelowski and Barroso. Scientific databases including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, SID, Magiran, ScienceDirect, and Noormags were systematically searched using keywords related to educational leadership competencies, performance-based leadership, educational management, and competency development. Initially, 145 studies published between 2015 and 2025 were identified. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria and conducting title, abstract, and full-text screening, 35 valid qualitative and mixed-method studies were selected for final analysis. Open coding, thematic synthesis, and axial categorization were utilized to extract conceptual categories and formulate the final competency model.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that performance-based educational leadership competencies possess a multidimensional and interdisciplinary structure organized into three major levels: causal, executive, and contextual. At the causal level, macro-leadership, policy-oriented transformation, analytical leadership, and data-driven decision-making emerged as the primary drivers of educational transformation. At the executive level, transformational and innovative leadership, learner-oriented leadership, organizational learning, and human resource empowerment were identified as core dimensions of leadership performance. At the contextual level, higher education governance, organizational culture, decentralization, and supportive policy environments were recognized as structural foundations for leadership effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** The results indicate that effective educational leadership in contemporary educational systems requires an integrated combination of transformational, analytical, learner-centered, and performance-based competencies.

**Keywords:** Educational leadership on system performance, educational leaders' competence, meta-synthesis, futures studies.

## 1 Introduction

Educational leadership has emerged in recent decades as one of the central pillars of educational transformation and organizational effectiveness in schools and higher education institutions. Contemporary educational systems are confronted with rapid technological changes, increasing social complexity, global competition, and demands for accountability and educational quality. Under such conditions, the role of educational leaders has evolved from traditional administrative supervision toward strategic, learner-centered, and performance-oriented leadership. Educational leaders are now expected to manage organizational learning, facilitate innovation, guide professional development, and create adaptive educational environments capable of responding to uncertain futures (Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger et al., 2020). The transition from bureaucratic management to transformational and instructional leadership reflects a paradigmatic shift in educational administration, where the effectiveness of leadership is evaluated based on learning outcomes, teacher development, institutional innovation, and organizational sustainability rather than solely administrative efficiency (Kemethofer et al., 2025; Ruloff & Petko, 2025).

The growing importance of competency-based leadership models in education is closely linked to the broader movement toward performance-based educational systems. Competency-based approaches emphasize observable abilities, measurable outcomes, professional behaviors, and strategic capacities that enable educational leaders to improve institutional performance and learning quality (Prasetya et al., 2020). In this perspective, educational leadership competencies are not limited to technical or managerial skills; rather, they encompass a multidimensional combination of strategic thinking, interpersonal communication, ethical commitment, organizational innovation, data literacy, and future-oriented decision-making (Sharma & Pandher, 2019). The increasing complexity of educational environments has therefore intensified the need for comprehensive competency frameworks that integrate organizational, cultural, technological, and pedagogical dimensions of leadership.

Research in instructional leadership has consistently demonstrated that effective school leadership significantly influences teacher performance, student achievement, and institutional development. Hallinger's evolution model of instructional leadership explains that educational leaders must actively shape teaching and learning processes through

goal setting, instructional supervision, evaluation systems, and professional support mechanisms (Hallinger, 2015). Later scientometric analyses further confirmed that instructional leadership has become one of the most influential paradigms in educational management research globally (Hallinger et al., 2020). Similarly, Kemethofer et al. found that educational leadership positively affects instructional quality and student academic achievement in Austrian primary schools, emphasizing the mediating role of school climate and professional collaboration (Kemethofer et al., 2025). These findings indicate that leadership competencies directly contribute to educational effectiveness through both structural and human dimensions.

The emergence of digital transformation and futures-oriented educational systems has added new layers of complexity to leadership competency requirements. Educational institutions are increasingly required to adapt to technological innovation, digital learning environments, artificial intelligence, data-driven governance, and changing learner expectations. Consequently, educational leaders must possess competencies related to digital transformation, innovation management, and strategic foresight (Philip et al., 2023). Philip et al., through a cross-sectoral Delphi study, identified competencies such as systems thinking, adaptability, collaborative leadership, technological literacy, and strategic innovation as essential for leaders in digitally transforming organizations (Philip et al., 2023). Similarly, Ruloff and Petko demonstrated that school principals who successfully lead digital transformation prioritize learner-centered innovation, collaborative organizational cultures, and future-oriented educational goals (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). Therefore, contemporary educational leadership increasingly requires the integration of technological competence with transformational and instructional leadership capabilities.

Another important dimension in modern educational leadership concerns distributed and collaborative leadership practices. Traditional hierarchical leadership models are gradually being replaced by distributed structures emphasizing shared decision-making, collective responsibility, and participatory organizational cultures. Distributed leadership contributes to organizational flexibility, teacher empowerment, and sustainable school improvement (Malherbe, 2025). Malherbe highlighted that distributed leadership strengthens institutional performance by encouraging collaborative problem-solving and increasing professional ownership among teachers and staff (Malherbe, 2025). Likewise, Waniganayake and Stipanovic

emphasized that leadership preparation programs should focus on collaborative competencies, mentoring, and reflective professional learning to prepare educational leaders capable of functioning in dynamic educational contexts (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). Such perspectives indicate that leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on social interaction and organizational participation rather than individual authority alone.

Performance-based leadership also emphasizes systematic evaluation, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making. Data-driven educational leadership has therefore become a critical competency area in modern educational systems. Educational leaders are expected to analyze educational data, interpret performance indicators, design assessment frameworks, and utilize feedback mechanisms for organizational improvement (Gallardo, 2020). Gallardo argued that competency-based assessment systems and performance evaluation rubrics create opportunities for educational institutions to align leadership practices with institutional learning goals (Gallardo, 2020). Similarly, Demetroulis et al. demonstrated that performance-based assessment approaches improve collaborative learning, organizational communication, and institutional accountability within primary schools (Demetroulis et al., 2024). These findings suggest that effective educational leadership increasingly relies on the ability to integrate assessment literacy and evidence-based management into institutional decision-making processes.

Professional development and continuous learning are equally central to educational leadership competency development. Effective leaders are lifelong learners who continuously refine their professional capacities in response to changing educational demands (Joe & Ellen, 2021). Research has shown that sustainable school improvement is strongly associated with ongoing professional learning opportunities for both leaders and teachers. Howell et al. emphasized that performance-based professional development programs should focus on practical competencies, stakeholder collaboration, and contextualized leadership learning experiences (Howell et al., 2025). Similarly, Joe and Ellen identified reflective learning, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative inquiry as critical elements of effective professional development systems (Joe & Ellen, 2021). Consequently, competency development models must incorporate mechanisms for continuous learning and adaptive professional growth.

Human resource leadership and staff empowerment represent another major area of competency in educational leadership. Educational leaders play a decisive role in motivating teachers, managing organizational culture, supporting staff well-being, and promoting professional productivity. Hariyasasti and Purwanto found that competence, communication, work environment, and job satisfaction significantly influence teacher performance, while leadership acts as a mediating factor in strengthening these relationships (Hariyasasti & Purwanto, 2025). Similarly, Amin et al. demonstrated that effective educational leadership contributes to competency optimization and time management within nursing education environments (Amin et al., 2025). Such findings highlight that educational leadership competencies extend beyond instructional supervision toward human capital development and organizational empowerment.

The relationship between leadership and inclusive education has also gained increasing scholarly attention. Educational leaders are now expected to create equitable learning environments responsive to diverse learner needs. Inclusive leadership requires cultural competency, ethical commitment, social justice orientation, and collaborative engagement with educational stakeholders (Carter & Abawi, 2018). Carter and Abawi argued that inclusive educational leadership improves educational access and quality for marginalized learners by promoting equity-based organizational cultures (Carter & Abawi, 2018). Likewise, Castellano emphasized that cultural competency is an essential requirement for educational leaders working in diverse educational environments, particularly in gifted and inclusive education contexts (Castellano, 2021). Therefore, ethical and socio-cultural competencies have become indispensable components of educational leadership frameworks.

Studies on leadership competencies in technical and higher education institutions further reinforce the multidimensional nature of educational leadership. Sharma and Pandher identified competencies such as strategic planning, communication skills, innovation management, and institutional collaboration as essential for leaders in technical education institutions (Sharma & Pandher, 2019). Similarly, Kilag et al. emphasized that preferred educational leaders demonstrate integrity, communication ability, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and transformational capacity (Kilag et al., 2024). Lepardo and Caingcoy also found a positive relationship between school performance and the behavioral competencies of school leaders,

indicating that leadership competencies directly affect organizational outcomes (Lepardo Jr & Caingcoy, 2020). These studies collectively suggest that leadership effectiveness depends on the integration of strategic, interpersonal, ethical, and operational competencies.

Research focusing on instructional leadership skills has similarly highlighted the importance of leadership competencies in improving teacher performance and institutional efficacy. Daing demonstrated that instructional leadership skills significantly influence teachers' ratings within results-based performance management systems (Daing, 2022). In a later study, Daing and Mustapha found that school administrators' instructional leadership competencies positively affect teacher efficacy and educational performance in senior high schools (Daing & Mustapha, 2023). These findings align with broader instructional leadership theories emphasizing the leader's role in guiding curriculum implementation, monitoring instruction, and facilitating professional collaboration (Hallinger, 2015).

Leadership preparation programs have therefore become increasingly important in educational policy and institutional reform initiatives. Don et al. argued that leadership competencies should align with national educational development plans and future-oriented policy goals (Don et al., 2015). In Malaysia, educational leadership competency frameworks were directly connected to educational transformation strategies and long-term national development objectives (Don et al., 2015). Similarly, Sabahi et al. highlighted the importance of professional growth mechanisms for educational managers in achieving strategic educational visions and organizational modernization (Sabahi et al., 2019). These perspectives indicate that leadership competency development must be systematically integrated into national educational planning and institutional policy-making processes.

Theoretical perspectives on leadership competency development further support the need for integrative and future-oriented models. Meta-ethnographic and meta-synthesis methodologies provide opportunities for synthesizing diverse qualitative findings into comprehensive conceptual frameworks (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Noblit and Hare argued that meta-synthesis enables researchers to reconstruct theoretical concepts through interpretive integration of empirical findings across multiple studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Given the multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature of educational leadership competencies, systematic meta-synthesis represents an

appropriate methodological approach for developing integrated leadership models capable of reflecting contemporary educational realities.

Despite the substantial body of international research on educational leadership, significant conceptual fragmentation still exists regarding the integration of leadership competencies, performance orientation, organizational learning, and futures studies perspectives. Many previous studies have focused on isolated dimensions such as instructional leadership, transformational leadership, digital leadership, or human resource management without providing a unified competency framework capable of explaining the dynamic interaction among strategic, contextual, and functional dimensions of educational leadership (Philip et al., 2023; Ruloff & Petko, 2025). Furthermore, limited research has systematically synthesized findings across diverse educational contexts to formulate a comprehensive model of performance-based educational leadership competencies.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this theoretical and practical gap by developing a performance-based educational leadership competency development model through a systematic meta-synthesis of international studies conducted between 2015 and 2025. By integrating findings from qualitative and mixed-method studies, the research aims to identify the major dimensions, competencies, and contextual factors shaping effective educational leadership in contemporary and future-oriented educational systems. The present study ultimately aims to develop a comprehensive and integrated model of performance-based educational leadership competencies with a futures studies approach.

## 2 Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted using a qualitative meta-synthesis design with a futures studies approach in order to develop a comprehensive model of performance-based educational leadership competencies. Meta-synthesis is an interpretive qualitative methodology that systematically integrates findings from previous qualitative and mixed-method studies to construct new conceptual understandings and theoretical frameworks. In this research, the methodological framework proposed by Noblit and Hare (1988) was employed alongside the seven-step procedure of Sandelowski and Barroso to ensure systematic identification, evaluation, interpretation, and synthesis of relevant scientific evidence. The study population consisted

of all published scientific documents, qualitative studies, mixed-method studies, policy reports, and competency-oriented educational leadership research published between 2015 and 2025 in national and international scientific databases. The rationale for selecting this time interval was to capture contemporary developments in educational leadership, digital transformation, performance-based educational systems, and competency-oriented management approaches.

The search process was conducted in multiple international and national databases, including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Emerald, SID, Noormags, Magiran, and Civilica. Keywords and combinations of keywords such as “educational leadership,” “performance-based leadership,” “educational leadership competencies,” “instructional leadership,” “competency development,” “educational managers,” “transformational educational leadership,” and “data-driven leadership” were used during the search procedure. Initially, 145 scientific documents were identified. Following title screening, duplicate removal, and relevance assessment, 39 studies were excluded because their themes were unrelated to the purpose of the research. Subsequently, the abstracts of the remaining studies were carefully reviewed, resulting in the exclusion of 42 additional documents that lacked sufficient conceptual relevance or methodological quality. Finally, after full-text assessment and eligibility evaluation, 35 studies meeting the inclusion criteria were selected for the final synthesis process. The inclusion criteria consisted of studies published in English or Persian between 2015 and 2025, research focusing on educational leaders and leadership competencies, and studies addressing performance-based, transformational, learner-oriented, or competency-centered educational leadership. Exclusion criteria included unpublished manuscripts, opinion papers, non-scientific documents, and studies unrelated to educational leadership or competency development.

The primary tool for data collection in this research was a systematic literature review and qualitative document analysis protocol developed based on meta-synthesis methodology. Data collection was performed through structured searches in scientific databases and the subsequent extraction of conceptual findings from selected studies. To ensure comprehensiveness and rigor, the researchers designed a screening and coding framework grounded in the methodological principles of qualitative synthesis. During the initial stage, bibliographic information including publication year, authorship, research setting,

study objectives, methodology, and major findings was extracted from each selected article. Subsequently, the textual contents of the selected studies were repeatedly reviewed to identify key concepts, recurring themes, leadership dimensions, and competency indicators associated with performance-based educational leadership.

The researchers employed open coding procedures to extract conceptual units directly from the textual findings of the selected studies. In this stage, words, phrases, statements, and interpretive findings related to educational leadership competencies were identified and coded. The extracted codes were then grouped according to conceptual similarities and semantic relationships to form preliminary categories. Through continuous comparison and interpretive synthesis, similar categories were merged and refined into broader thematic dimensions representing educational leadership competencies. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the synthesis process, peer-review and expert-validation strategies were utilized throughout the coding and categorization procedures. Furthermore, the study adopted an interpretive synthesis perspective, emphasizing conceptual reconstruction and theoretical integration rather than simple aggregation of findings. This approach enabled the researchers to identify underlying relationships among leadership competencies and formulate an integrated conceptual framework reflecting strategic, executive, and contextual dimensions of educational leadership.

Data analysis in the present study was conducted using qualitative thematic synthesis and interpretive meta-synthesis techniques. The analysis process followed the seven-step framework of Sandelowski and Barroso in combination with the interpretive translation principles proposed by Noblit and Hare. Initially, all selected studies were read multiple times to establish a comprehensive understanding of their conceptual content and contextual meanings. During this stage, open coding was applied to extract key statements, concepts, metaphors, and thematic expressions associated with educational leadership competencies. Each identified concept was recorded and categorized according to its semantic relevance and functional role within educational leadership processes.

Following the open coding stage, axial coding procedures were employed to organize related concepts into broader thematic clusters. Similar and overlapping codes were merged to form stable conceptual categories representing major competency domains. Through iterative comparison and interpretive analysis, the researchers identified

relationships among categories and synthesized them into higher-order dimensions. The analysis ultimately resulted in the development of nine major competency axes organized within three overarching levels: causal, executive, and contextual. The causal level included competencies related to macro-leadership, policy-making, analytical leadership, and data-driven decision-making. The executive level included transformational leadership, learner-oriented leadership, innovation management, organizational learning, and human resource empowerment. The contextual level encompassed organizational-policy conditions and higher education governance structures influencing leadership effectiveness.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, peer debriefing and expert review strategies were applied during all stages of coding and synthesis. The researchers continuously compared findings across studies to identify recurring themes and ensure conceptual consistency. In addition, interpretive synthesis techniques were used to reconstruct and integrate leadership concepts into a coherent theoretical model rather than merely summarizing previous findings. The final conceptual framework was therefore developed through systematic comparison, thematic abstraction, and theoretical integration of evidence extracted from the selected international studies.

### 3 Findings and Results

Generally, two views govern meta-synthesis. The first approach, called "Integrative," emphasizes collecting, gathering, and integrating previous studies in a way that identifies similar points in the findings of previous studies and integrates them based on variables with high reliability; it also yields results such as causal relationships between phenomena and the generalizability of findings. The second

view, "Interpretive Synthesis," emphasizes the interpretation and commentary of previous studies. In this view, comparison and interpretation are important because, using a type of induction, it predicts what might happen in similar conditions and how categories relate to each other or interact.

Noblit and Hare introduce three main phases for meta-synthesis: selection of studies, synthesis of translations, and presentation of the synthesis, while Sandelowski and Barroso introduce a seven-step method (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). In this research, the seven-step method of Sandelowski and Barroso has been utilized. The steps followed in this research are as follows:

Step 1) Formulating the Research Question: In the present study, the fundamental question "What is the development model of performance-based educational leadership competencies?" has been investigated.

Step 2) Systematic Review: The literature of the research population included all scientific-research documents published between 2015 and 2025 in the field of cognitive sciences that addressed performance-based educational leadership competencies. Additionally, keywords related to the subject—such as educational leaders, educational managers, leadership competency, characteristics of competent managers, performance-based leadership competency, competent management model in educational centers, competent leadership model in educational centers, and performance-based educational managers' competency—were searched and reviewed in databases and search engines such as Irandoc, Noormags, Magiran, Civilica, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Emerald, and ERIC.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

#### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Articles*

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Research Language	English or Persian	Non-English or non-Persian
Time of Study	2015 to 2025	Before 2015
Study Method	Qualitative and quantitative studies	Non-qualitative studies
Study Population	Educational leaders	Non-educational leaders
Study Conditions	Performance-based competencies, skills, and positive traits of educational leaders	Topics other than the three stated conditions
Study Type	Published articles in journals, guidelines, and international regulations	Unpublished and non-credible articles, personal opinions

Step 3) Search and Selection of Appropriate Articles: In investigating the subject under study, the research trends,

scientific scope, and scientific map of this field were first studied based on a systematic method. Therefore, in the first

section, the trend of changes in these studies was examined using Google Trends software. In the next stage, by referring to the reference system of the Ministry of Science, valid scientific journals were monitored to ensure that the primary articles were prioritized. Based on the keyword search for "Educational Leaders' Competency" in the Google Trends search engine over the last five years worldwide.

Accordingly, to utilize valid domestic and foreign sources, more than 145 articles were reviewed based on subject and title through searches in databases such as Scopus, Elsevier, Google Scholar, etc. Of this number, after reviewing and categorizing the documents based on titles focused on the subject, 39 documents were excluded as their titles and subjects did not fall within the scope related to the present research. The abstracts of the remaining 106 scientific documents were reviewed to isolate studies capable of providing the necessary analytical content through closer examination; during the review of the research abstracts, another 42 articles were excluded. Finally, by rapidly studying the content and key axes of the

articles, another 29 were rejected. Ultimately, 35 articles remained for analysis, and the results of their examination formed the findings of the present research.

Step 4) Extracting Information from Studies: In this stage, the detailed study of the selected research begins. Therefore, to answer the research question regarding the identification and classification of performance-based educational leadership competencies, the information extraction process was carried out, and open coding was used due to the qualitative nature of the data (text).

Step 5) Analyzing and Synthesizing Qualitative Findings: Sub-categories and axial categories were used to analyze the data. The coding of data begins with repeated reading of the text within lines and paragraphs to find a general understanding. Then, the texts are read word by word to extract the codes. Coding is performed by writing down the codes. As soon as the codes are identified and specified, the researcher forms a classification and places similar and related codes into a category that describes them best, thus forming the concepts.

**Table 2**

*Performance Based Competencies of Educational Leaders*

Main Category	Subcategory	Sources	Frequency
Macro-Leadership Thinking and Policy Making for Educational Transformation	Upstream laws and documents; philosophy and vision of the education system; motivation and determination for transformation; leadership intelligence; design of performance-based strategies; exemplary performance; policy decision-making	Ranjbar et al. (2020); Sabbahi et al. (2019); Torkzadeh & Fahimi (2024); Hallinger et al. (2020)	4
Analytical Leadership and Educational Knowledge	Development of educational operational plans; evaluation of previous methods and feedback acquisition; ability to develop managers' competencies; professional development of managers; decision-making ability and problem solving in complex environments; environmental monitoring and analysis; knowledge of management and policy making; performance analysis and data management	Joo et al. (2021); De Castro et al. (2021); Zhou et al. (2023); Hosseinpour et al. (2021); Rahman & Khademi (2024); Hallinger et al. (2020)	7
Data-Driven and Outcome-Oriented Leadership	Evaluation in education; evaluation approaches; assessment literacy; effective feedback; social responsibility; recruitment of competent human resources; improvement of educational tools; implementation of their ideas	Gallardo (2020); Dimitriou et al. (2024); Amin et al. (2025); Balaschk (2015); Wajnicka (2016); Joo et al. (2021); De Castro et al. (2020); Carter & Abbey (2018)	8
Analytical and Knowledge-Based Leadership	Development of educational operational programs, assessment of previous methods and feedback acquisition, ability to nurture mentors' competencies, professional development of managers, decision-making and problem-solving ability in fast-changing situations	Fathi Vajargah (2016); Smith (2019)	5
Transformational and Innovative Leadership	Acceptance of change, Creativity, Transformational planning, Innovation management, Transformational behaviors	Philip et al. (2023); Lipardo & Cainco (2020); Read et al. (2019)	
Learner-Oriented and Development-Oriented Leadership	Organizational learning, Continuous professional development, Self-direction and feedback seeking, Nurturing future leaders	Asadi Sharif, Jahangir & Rezaei (2024); Javidi, Zirak & Momeni (2023)	
Human Leadership and Empowerment	Resource and Training, Motivation, Succession planning, Efficient recruitment, Performance productivity enhancement	Javidi & Momeni (2023); Zamanian & Jahangir (2021); Rezaei & Chenari (2024); Haryasasti & Purwanto (2025)	
Higher Education Leadership and Academic Governance	Academic competence of university presidents, Academic reputation/credit, Political neutrality, Financial resource diversity	Khalili, Khorsandi & Tanhaei (2020)	
Organizational-Policy Context of Education	Administrative structure, Organizational culture, Supportive climate, Decentralization, Upstream regulations	Jafari Rad & Zahed Babelan (2020); Sabahi et al. (2019)	

Table 2 is the result of the systematic meta-synthesis process of domestic and international studies regarding performance-based educational leadership competencies. In this table, the data extracted from sources in domestic and corresponding international articles, after the extraction of sub-categories and main categories, have been organized into 9 stable axial categories. Each axial category represents a key area of educational leaders' competencies at the strategic, executive, and contextual levels and includes a set of synonymous sub-codes collected and conceptually integrated from valid research. Thus, the present table reflects the final semantic network of the meta-synthesis model and is considered the basis for formulating the

conceptual model of performance-based educational leadership competency development in this research.

Step 6) Quality Control: To determine the reliability of the research data, a peer-review strategy was utilized.

Step 7) Presentation of Findings

In this research, the performance-based educational leadership competencies extracted from the text of selected studies were considered as concepts. Their classification into similar groups produced categories that were ultimately integrated into a comprehensive description of the research subject, forming the dimensions of competency. Consequently, the conceptual model of performance-based educational leadership competency was obtained, which is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Performance-Based Educational Leadership Competency Model



## 4 Discussion

The findings of the present meta-synthesis demonstrated that performance-based educational leadership competencies possess a multidimensional, dynamic, and context-dependent structure. The final model extracted from the analysis of international studies between 2015 and 2025 identified nine major competency axes operating at causal, executive, and contextual levels. These findings indicate that contemporary educational leadership can no longer be understood merely as administrative supervision or managerial authority; rather, it represents an integrated system of strategic thinking, organizational learning, data-driven decision-making, professional ethics, innovation management, and human resource empowerment. The extracted model therefore reflects the transformation of educational leadership from a traditional bureaucratic function toward a learner-centered, evidence-based, and future-oriented paradigm.

One of the most significant findings of this study was the central role of transformational and innovative educational leadership in improving organizational performance and educational effectiveness. The analysis showed that competencies such as creativity, acceptance of change, innovation management, and transformational planning form the core mechanisms enabling educational leaders to guide institutional transformation. These findings are strongly aligned with the work of Philip et al., who emphasized adaptability, innovation capability, and systems thinking as critical competencies for leaders managing digital transformation (Philip et al., 2023). Similarly, Ruloff and Petko found that school principals who successfully lead educational transformation prioritize future-oriented educational goals and collaborative innovation strategies (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). The consistency between the present findings and previous studies suggests that transformational leadership competencies are increasingly essential in educational environments characterized by uncertainty, technological change, and growing accountability pressures.

The findings further revealed that learner-oriented and development-oriented leadership constitutes another foundational dimension of effective educational leadership. Competencies related to organizational learning, continuous professional development, self-direction, and nurturing future leaders were identified as central components of sustainable educational improvement. This result is consistent with the perspective of Joe and Ellen, who argued

that effective professional development systems depend on reflective learning, collaborative inquiry, and ongoing competency enhancement (Joe & Ellen, 2021). Likewise, Waniganayake and Stipanovic highlighted the importance of preparing educational leaders through reflective and collaborative learning experiences that foster adaptive leadership capacity (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). The current findings therefore reinforce the argument that educational leadership should be conceptualized as a continuous learning process rather than a static managerial role.

The study also demonstrated the growing importance of data-driven and results-oriented leadership in contemporary educational systems. Competencies such as assessment literacy, educational performance evaluation, effective feedback, and evidence-based decision-making emerged as key indicators of effective leadership performance. These findings correspond closely with Gallardo's argument that competency-based evaluation systems strengthen institutional accountability and align leadership practices with learning outcomes (Gallardo, 2020). Similarly, Demetroulis et al. showed that performance-based assessment mechanisms improve collaboration, communication, and educational effectiveness within schools (Demetroulis et al., 2024). The consistency of these findings suggests that educational leaders increasingly rely on analytical and evidence-based approaches to guide institutional development and organizational learning.

Another major finding concerns the importance of analytical and knowledge-based educational leadership. The results indicated that competencies related to problem-solving, operational planning, environmental analysis, and competency development are essential for managing educational organizations in rapidly changing contexts. This finding supports Hallinger's instructional leadership framework, which emphasizes the leader's role in guiding educational processes through strategic planning and instructional supervision (Hallinger, 2015). Furthermore, Hallinger et al. demonstrated that instructional leadership research has progressively shifted toward evidence-based and knowledge-oriented models of leadership effectiveness (Hallinger et al., 2020). The present study extends these perspectives by showing that analytical competencies are not isolated technical skills but interconnected capacities influencing organizational adaptability and educational innovation.

The findings additionally highlighted the significance of human resource leadership and empowerment in improving

institutional performance. Competencies such as staff motivation, training, succession planning, efficient recruitment, and productivity enhancement were identified as essential dimensions of educational leadership. This finding is strongly supported by the study of Hariyasasti and Purwanto, who found that communication, competence, job satisfaction, and organizational support significantly influence teacher performance through leadership mediation mechanisms (Hariyasasti & Purwanto, 2025). Similarly, Amin et al. emphasized that educational leadership contributes directly to optimizing competency development and improving professional effectiveness in educational institutions (Amin et al., 2025). These findings collectively indicate that educational leadership effectiveness depends substantially on the leader's ability to strengthen human capital and organizational commitment.

The meta-synthesis also demonstrated that ethical-social leadership and inclusive organizational culture play a critical role in educational performance. Competencies such as social responsibility, cultural competency, collaboration, and equitable participation were identified as central dimensions of effective leadership. This result aligns with Carter and Abawi's argument that inclusive leadership improves educational quality and accessibility by promoting equity-based organizational cultures (Carter & Abawi, 2018). Castellano likewise emphasized the importance of cultural competency for educational leaders working in diverse educational settings (Castellano, 2021). The integration of these dimensions into the final model suggests that educational leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on the capacity to manage diversity, foster inclusion, and establish ethical learning environments.

An important contribution of the present study lies in identifying the organizational-policy context of education as a structural foundation for leadership competency development. The findings demonstrated that administrative structures, supportive organizational climates, decentralization, and upstream educational policies significantly influence the realization of leadership competencies. This result is consistent with Sabahi et al., who emphasized that professional growth and organizational development of educational managers are closely connected to strategic educational policies and institutional support systems (Sabahi et al., 2019). Similarly, Don et al. argued that educational leadership competencies should align with national educational development plans and long-term transformation strategies (Don et al., 2015). Therefore, leadership competencies cannot be fully understood

independently from the institutional and policy environments in which educational leaders operate.

The study further revealed that higher education leadership and academic governance constitute a distinct competency domain requiring scientific credibility, academic neutrality, financial management capability, and institutional governance skills. These findings are aligned with Sharma and Pandher's research emphasizing strategic management, communication, and innovation competencies among leaders of higher education institutions (Sharma & Pandher, 2019). Likewise, Kilag et al. found that preferred educational leaders demonstrate integrity, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and strategic leadership abilities (Kilag et al., 2024). The inclusion of academic governance within the final model reflects the growing complexity of leadership responsibilities in higher education systems confronting financial, technological, and political challenges.

The present findings also reinforce distributed and collaborative perspectives on educational leadership. The identified competencies indicate that leadership effectiveness increasingly emerges through organizational interaction, teamwork, and collective learning rather than hierarchical authority structures. This conclusion is consistent with Malherbe's findings regarding the role of distributed leadership in promoting school improvement and collaborative problem-solving (Malherbe, 2025). Similarly, Cobb's review of school principals as special education leaders emphasized the necessity of collaborative and inclusive leadership approaches in complex educational environments (Cobb, 2015). These findings suggest that educational leaders who foster participation and collective engagement are better positioned to achieve sustainable organizational development.

The integration of futures studies perspectives within the present model represents another important theoretical contribution of the research. The findings suggest that educational leadership competencies must increasingly incorporate strategic foresight, adaptability, innovation capacity, and responsiveness to technological and societal change. The role of digital transformation competencies identified in this study aligns closely with Philip et al.'s findings regarding the strategic capabilities necessary for managing organizational transformation in digitally evolving systems (Philip et al., 2023). Similarly, Ruloff and Petko emphasized that future-oriented educational leadership depends on the ability to align institutional goals with emerging technological and social realities (Ruloff &

Petko, 2025). Therefore, futures-oriented competency development appears essential for preparing educational leaders capable of managing uncertain and rapidly changing educational environments.

Methodologically, the present study demonstrates the usefulness of meta-synthesis as an approach for integrating fragmented educational leadership literature into a coherent conceptual framework. The use of Noblit and Hare's interpretive synthesis methodology enabled the extraction and integration of recurring themes across diverse educational contexts and research traditions (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Unlike traditional literature reviews, the meta-synthesis approach allowed the present research to reconstruct educational leadership competencies as interconnected conceptual categories rather than isolated variables. This methodological contribution strengthens the explanatory capacity of the final model and enhances its applicability for policy-making, leadership training, and organizational development initiatives.

## 5 Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that effective educational leadership is fundamentally systemic and integrative in nature. Educational leaders achieve organizational effectiveness not through isolated managerial skills but through the interaction of strategic thinking, professional ethics, data utilization, organizational learning, innovation management, and human resource empowerment. The final nine-axis model therefore provides a comprehensive representation of performance-based educational leadership suitable for contemporary educational systems confronting technological transformation, organizational complexity, and future uncertainty. By integrating strategic, executive, and contextual dimensions, the model contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical development of educational leadership competencies across schools and higher education institutions.

One limitation of the present study concerns the dependence on previously published qualitative and mixed-method studies, which may contain contextual biases associated with different educational systems and cultural settings. Additionally, the selected studies covered diverse institutional contexts and methodological approaches, which may have influenced the consistency of extracted themes. Another limitation relates to the restricted availability of longitudinal and empirical performance data in some reviewed studies, limiting direct comparison between

leadership competencies and measurable educational outcomes. Furthermore, although the study included international literature between 2015 and 2025, some relevant studies published outside the selected databases may not have been included in the analysis.

Future research should examine the empirical validity of the proposed competency model through quantitative and mixed-method studies conducted across different educational contexts. Longitudinal studies investigating the relationship between educational leadership competencies and institutional performance indicators such as student achievement, teacher satisfaction, organizational innovation, and digital transformation are particularly necessary. Comparative international studies may also provide deeper insight into the contextual adaptability of the model across diverse educational cultures and governance systems. Additionally, future studies should explore the integration of artificial intelligence, digital governance, and sustainability leadership within educational leadership competency frameworks.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational policy-makers and leadership preparation institutions should redesign professional development programs based on integrated competency frameworks emphasizing transformational leadership, data literacy, organizational learning, and ethical decision-making. Educational organizations may utilize the proposed nine-axis model as a framework for leadership evaluation, professional training, recruitment, and succession planning. Universities and teacher-training institutions should also strengthen competency-based leadership curricula focusing on strategic foresight, collaborative leadership, innovation management, and evidence-based educational governance. Finally, educational systems should establish supportive organizational cultures and decentralized structures that enable educational leaders to effectively implement learner-centered and performance-oriented leadership practices.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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