

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Conceptual Model of Educational Leadership in Emerging Schools: Dynamic and Future Oriented Learning Ecosystems

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ABSTRACT

Educational leadership in emerging schools, as a novel approach to school guidance and administration, is oriented toward systematically responding to the rapid technological, social, and cognitive changes in contemporary education. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to identify the dimensions and components of educational leadership in emerging schools and to propose a conceptual model for their effective leadership. This study adopted a qualitative approach and employed inductive qualitative content analysis. The research field consisted of nationally recognized experts in educational management during the period 2025–2026, who were selected through Criterion purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, 21 participants took part in the study. Data were collected through in depth semi structured interviews. Data analysis involved the extraction of meaning units, generation of initial codes, formation of main categories, and abstraction of overarching themes. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through triangulation at three levels. The findings revealed that the educational leadership model for emerging schools within dynamic and future oriented learning ecosystems is grounded in seven core dimensions: visionary and future oriented leadership, leadership for teaching and learning, technological and smart leadership, participatory and distributed leadership, Data Network Security Leadership, Strategic Planning Leadership and ethical and caring leadership. Overall, the results indicate that the proposed model can support educational leaders in enhancing the dynamism, flexibility, and developmental capacity of emerging schools.

KEY WORDS

Educational Leadership; Emerging Schools; Conceptual Model; Learning Ecosystems.



Introduction

In the current era, rapid technological developments and the emergence of artificial intelligence have created complex challenges in educational systems. Emerging schools are schools that have been formed in response to rapid social, technological, and educational changes, and their goal is to provide a flexible, creative, and future-oriented learning environment for students. These schools usually have characteristics such as technology-orientation and data-orientation, including the extensive use of digital tools, artificial intelligence, and learning management systems to personalize education and make data-driven decisions; innovation in curricula and teaching methods, including the design of flexible learning programs and the use of active and participatory methods; transformational and future-oriented leadership with a focus on creating cultural change and preparing students for future needs; emphasis on well-being and human development, including special attention to mental health, well-being, and the empowerment of students and teachers; and flexibility and responsiveness to environmental changes in order to rapidly adapt to technological, social, and economic changes (Haghighi, 2023). In other words, emerging schools are future-oriented and intelligent schools that, instead of focusing solely on traditional instruction, prioritize active learning, technology, and organizational transformation, and provide a dynamic environment for nurturing the skills and creativity of the next generation (Heydari Fard, 2016). Emerging schools, which have been established with the aim of responding to students' needs in dynamic and technological environments, require a style of educational leadership that can guide learning, teaching, and school management in an intelligent, flexible, and future-oriented manner (Luckin et al., 2016). With this in mind, the research problem is as follows: What are the dimensions and components of educational leadership in emerging schools given dynamic and future-oriented ecosystems, and what model can be developed for it?

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach and employed inductive qualitative content analysis. The research field consisted of nationally recognized experts in educational management during the period 2025–2026, who were selected through Criterion purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, 21 participants took part in the study. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data analysis involved the extraction of meaning units, generation of initial codes, formation of main categories, and abstraction of overarching themes. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through triangulation at three levels: First, data source triangulation was applied. In this process, the themes extracted from semi-structured interviews with expert professors in educational management were compared and aligned with concepts and findings in the theoretical literature and previous domestic and international studies related to educational leadership and emerging technologies. Second, researcher triangulation was employed. After the coding and categorization of the data were conducted by the researcher, the process was reviewed by several specialists in the field of educational management and qualitative research methodology, and their corrective comments were incorporated into the revision of the codes and categories. Third, analytical triangulation was used. Data analysis was carried out based on the inductive qualitative content analysis approach and followed specific stages including repeated reading of the text, identification of meaning units, initial coding, formation of subcategories, and extraction of main categories. The results of each stage were compared with the previous stage to ensure conceptual coherence and the accuracy of interpretations. The use of these strategies increased the credibility, reliability, and robustness of the research findings.

Results

The findings revealed that the educational leadership model for emerging schools within dynamic and future-oriented learning ecosystems is grounded in seven core dimensions: visionary and future-oriented leadership, leadership for teaching and learning, technological and smart leadership, participatory and distributed leadership, Data Network Security Leadership, Strategic Planning Leadership and ethical and caring leadership.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that educational leadership in emerging schools is a multidimensional and dynamic concept that requires a redefinition of the role of educational leaders in response to the technological, cognitive, and social transformations of the contemporary era. The identified dimensions suggest that leaders of these schools can no longer focus solely on traditional managerial tasks such as control and administration; rather, they must act as transformational leaders who guide human, technological, and organizational capacities toward effective and future-oriented learning. Within this framework, vision-oriented and future-oriented leadership emerges as the most fundamental dimension of the model, as it forms the basis of strategic decision-making in emerging schools. Alongside this, leadership of learning and instructional transformation strengthens the connection between education and innovation, while technological and intelligent leadership enables data-driven decision-making through the effective use of emerging technologies and data analytics. Moreover, the dimensions of participatory and distributed leadership and ethical and caring leadership provide the foundation for building social capital, trust, and organizational well-being, which are essential in smart educational environments. Furthermore, attention to data network security leadership and strategic planning leadership represents two essential pillars for organizational sustainability in technology-based schools, playing a crucial role in maintaining stakeholder trust and ensuring the continuity of learning processes. The integration of these dimensions within a coherent conceptual model highlights the necessity of a holistic perspective on educational leadership in emerging educational ecosystems—one that integrates ethics, technology, innovation, and future-oriented thinking into a unified framework. Overall, the results of this study indicate that educational leadership in emerging schools must move beyond traditional leadership patterns toward intelligent, agile, and future-oriented management approaches. The proposed model, consisting of seven key dimensions, can serve as a strategic roadmap for educational leaders and policymakers to enhance school effectiveness by focusing on vision development, learning transformation, the integration of emerging technologies, the strengthening of participatory culture, ensuring data security, and upholding ethical and human-centered values.

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Authors' Contribution

The Corresponding author was responsible for the study's conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, writing, and final approval of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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