

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: ITS ESSENCE AND CORE FUNCTIONS**Guliyev U.***Major-General**Rector of the Military Institute named after Heydar Aliyev***Badalova Ch.***Head of the Foreign Languages Department, Military Institute named after H. Aliyev,**PHD student, National Defence University**Azerbaijan, Baku city**ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6786-0900**<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18631247>***Abstract**

The article provides a scientific and theoretical analysis of the role of educational management and leadership in the effectiveness of modern education policy. Against the backdrop of globalization, changing labor market demands, and technological development, the complex challenges faced by educational institutions further increase the importance of educational management and leadership. In the article, educational management is presented as a comprehensive process that includes the efficient planning, organization, coordination, control, and evaluation of existing human, financial, infrastructural, and informational resources around a common objective. Leadership, in turn, is explained as a process of interaction between leaders and followers that encourages change. The study groups leadership characteristics, the individual qualities of followers, and situational factors as the main variables affecting leadership effectiveness. At the same time, the differences and interrelationships between the concepts of leadership and management are comparatively interpreted on the basis of theoretical approaches. The article demonstrates that effective leadership and management in educational institutions are of critical importance for creating a high-quality learning environment, increasing organizational productivity, and achieving strategic goals.

Keywords: leadership and its functions, management, quality and models of management, motivation

Introduction

The effectiveness of modern education policy depends directly not only on its proper organization but also on its effective management. Globalization and the changing demands of society and the labor market place highly serious and complex requirements on education systems. Educational management, which is the most important factor in responding to these requirements, has been defined in the literature in various ways in terms of characteristics, behaviors, influence, interaction, and relationships [9, p. 11]. It should be particularly noted that the influence exerted by the leader or administrator in this process may be either direct or indirect. This field of activity constitutes a comprehensive process that involves planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, and periodically evaluating existing resources namely human capital, financial, infrastructural, and informational resources by concentrating them around a unified goal in order to serve educational objectives [9, p. 9]. The most prioritized aims of activity in this direction are the accurate and purposeful implementation of state education policies and standards, identifying appropriate steps through diagnostic assessment to improve the quality of education, and adapting to and implementing rapidly increasing and constantly renewing technological developments and changes.

Leadership in Education

Leadership is a process that supports the achievement of shared goals by coordinating individual and collective efforts and by ensuring that people understand and agree on what needs to be done and how it should be done [8, p. 6]. This process includes not only efforts to influence and facilitate the current functioning of a group or educational institution, but also efforts to ensure preparedness for future challenges.

Educational management can be considered an interactive process involving important decisions and the participation of many individuals who influence one another. In this process, the person who bears primary responsibility for fulfilling the leadership role is referred to as the "leader," while the other members are called "followers" [8, p. 7]. Leadership may thus be regarded both as a defined role and as a process of social influence. Some followers or subordinates may assist the primary leader in carrying out leadership functions [5, p. 114]. The distinction between leader and follower roles does not mean that one individual cannot perform both roles simultaneously. Depending on the educational institution and the society in which it operates, a single person may carry out multiple functions; therefore, leadership may be shared or distributed [Derya Kiliçoğlu, p. 10]. For example, while a department head is the leader of their staff, they are simultaneously a follower of higher-ranking administrators within the institution. Shared leadership, in turn, shapes formal and informal leadership positions by involving faculty members in the decision-making process. In other words, this form of management is a shared process aimed at revealing and strengthening individual and collective capacities in order to ensure the effective performance of activities.

In the management of education, through purposeful influence on subordinates, the leader systematically structures and directs activities and relationships within the educational institution or organization. As a result, the leader plays a central role in stimulating people's motivation, engaging them in processes, effectively directing collective efforts, and contributing to the achievement of goals by increasing organizational effectiveness. At the same time, other studies emphasize

the social and cultural dimensions of leadership, such as shaping reality, jointly constructing goals, embodying values, and promoting change [1, p. 3]. In further research, leadership is explained as a social process that enables people to understand the purposes of the work and activities they perform together and fosters a sense of responsibility toward these activities [3, p. 13]. Rost (1991) defines leadership as a multidirectional influence relationship between leaders and followers aimed at achieving real change based on shared purposes [8, p. 13].

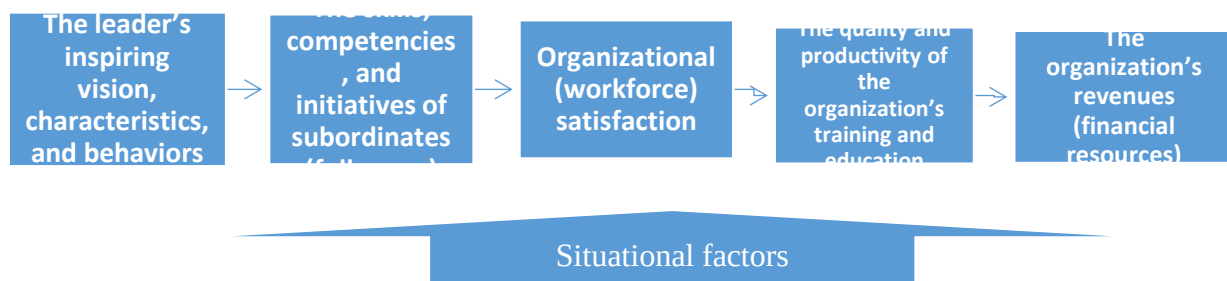
Leadership encompasses both rational and emotional processes. That is, leaders and followers interact with one another on the basis of shared and collective decisions to determine what changes they wish to implement. However, when major changes must be carried out within an organization, authority alone is insufficient to establish commitment, responsibility, cooperation, and influence over others. Leadership is therefore not merely a formal position; rather, it guides through persuasion, motivation, and unification around common goals, based on personal credibility, trust, and communication skills [8, p. 47]. Leaders increase their influence by setting an example, sharing responsibility, and taking the needs of the team into account. Consequently, leadership effectiveness is shaped more by healthy relationships and mutual respect than by formal authority. Thus, leadership can be characterized not only as a set of individual traits but also as a complex process involving interaction, commitment, and change.

One of the general indicators of a leader's effectiveness is the extent to which the performance of a

team or educational institution improves and goals are achieved. In this multifaceted process, the leader must organize and coordinate work activities; select goals and strategies; motivate trust and cooperation to achieve objectives; monitor, analyze, and compare internal and external developments; allocate resources purposefully and appropriately to activities and goals; develop subordinates' skills and self-confidence; secure support and cooperation from external educational institutions and organizations; and take into account the beliefs and values of institutional staff, directing activities evenly across all these areas [10, p. 10].

The factors influencing efficiency and productivity in educational management are interdependent in a chain-like manner, with each directly or indirectly affecting the outcome of the others. These factors, referred to as "centers of power," encompass the quantity and quality of organizational output, efficiency (achieving maximum results with minimum resources), as well as the organization's capacity for adaptation and flexibility [3, p. 158]. Accordingly, an educational institution's management performance, management structure, decision-making processes, efficient use of resources, students' academic achievement, the pedagogical competence and professional development orientation of faculty, their satisfaction with education and services, career achievements, and accreditation indicators are all among the factors contributing to the quality of leadership performance.

If the factors that support management in improving the quality of instruction within an institution are systematized, the effects of the following cause-and-effect chain can be analyzed.



One effective method for classifying leadership theories and research is to group them based on the analysis of key variables that receive primary attention. The variables that are critically important for understanding leadership effectiveness are generally clustered into three main categories: the personal characteristics of the leader, the characteristics of followers (subordinates), and the situational-contextual factors in which leadership occurs [10, p. 12].

Leader Characteristics

- Traits (personality qualities, values)
- Self-confidence and optimism
- Skills and competencies
- Behavior
- Integrity (behavior consistent with values)
- Influence strategies
- Evaluation of followers

Follower Characteristics

- Traits (needs, values, self-perception)
- Self-confidence and optimism
- Skills and competencies
- Evaluation of the leader's performance
- Trust in the leader
- Level of responsibility and effort directed toward task accomplishment
- Level of satisfaction with work activities and the leader

Situational (Contextual) Characteristics

- Type of organization or educational institution
- Leader's position, formal authority, and power resources
- Structure and complexity of tasks
- Degree of interdependence among tasks
- Organizational culture
- Uncertainty of the external environment

- Level of dependence on external factors
- National and cultural value systems

The leader-related characteristics, skills, and behaviors listed above, as well as the abilities, attitudes, approaches, and motivation levels of subordinates, function as interrelated dependent and independent variables and directly affect the overall productivity and performance effectiveness of educational institutions. The leader's management style, level of emotional intelligence, communication skills, and decision-making approach are among the key factors shaping employees' attitudes toward work, motivation, and professional development. At the same time, the individual characteristics of subordinates, their professional competencies, and their level of alignment with organizational culture play a crucial role in the realization of leadership effectiveness. The interaction among these variables fosters a collaborative environment within educational institutions, enhances the quality of the teaching process, and facilitates the achievement of strategic goals.

In addition, situational or contextual variables—such as organizational structure, available resources, institutional rules, external environmental influences, and changing socio-economic conditions—constitute an integral part of this process and either strengthen or constrain the outcomes of leadership behaviors. Taking these variables into account in a comprehensive and systematic manner is one of the key conditions for achieving desired outcomes, ensuring the sustainable development of educational institutions, and maintaining long-term productivity. In other words, as illustrated in Figure 1, the leader's personal characteristics and skills shape their behaviors. The leader's actions and decisions, as influence variables, affect and reinforce subordinates. As a result of the leader's motivation mechanisms, trust, respect, exemplary behavior, as well as the applied reward and punishment systems, collective reactions and behaviors are formed. Through these interactive and multidirectional influences, organizational performance is shaped and the quality of goal attainment is affected. At the same time, situational (contextual) characteristics indicate external and contextual factors that influence both leader behavior and subordinates' attitudes and behaviors. These factors may include organizational culture, resource availability, the external environment, or the characteristics of assigned tasks. In the proper coordination of educational institutions' activities, the efficient use of human resources, and continuous improvement, the core functions of management play a decisive role.

Planning

Planning, considered the first step of educational management, involves systematic forecasting of an educational institution's future activities and represents a stage of readiness for change in achieving goals. In this phase, objectives and targets are determined and decision-making processes are finalized. As a multi-stage process, planning should be evidence-based and adaptable to situations and conditions. Decisions made at this stage may not always accurately predict future risks and challenges or may yield outcomes different from those expected [6, p. 3].

Organizing

At this stage of management, appropriate task distribution among structures and personnel is carried out, and rights, authorities, and responsibilities are defined. A key principle during structural allocation is the application of coherence, continuity, and systematic organization among activities. At the same time, the formation of creative teams within the organization, increasing employee engagement, and providing suitable infrastructure for effective performance are integral components of this process. Establishing quality assurance and accountability mechanisms, ensuring evidence-based decision-making, and promoting innovative approaches and digitalization to align changes with other steps are of particular importance at this stage [9, p. 184].

Supervision

In research, leadership is generally regarded as the process by which one or more individuals direct group activities toward common goals, influence others, and motivate them to achieve those goals [1, p. 4]. Leadership is not limited to formal authority and organizational directives; it also encompasses additional influence and motivation mechanisms that go beyond this framework [6, p. 24]. There is ongoing debate regarding the distinction between leadership and management. Clearly, an individual may be a leader without being a manager, and a manager without exercising leadership [9, p. 6]. Managers tend to focus on stability, maintaining order, avoiding risk, and achieving short-term results. Leaders, by contrast, emphasize flexibility, innovation, and adaptation, paying attention to both human capital and economic outcomes while analyzing goals and strategies from a long-term perspective. Managers are concerned with how tasks are carried out and guide subordinates accordingly, whereas leaders inspire people to perform better and increase productivity. As noted by Bennis and Nanus (1985, p. 21), "Managers are people who do things right; leaders are people who do the right things" [10, p. 13].

In other words, managers seek to predict and create order while preserving the status quo, whereas leadership seeks to generate organizational change [2, p. 508]. Both roles are important, but problems may arise if an appropriate balance is not maintained. Excessive focus on management may inhibit risk-taking and lead to aimless bureaucracy, where processes, rules, and procedures function only formally and inefficiently. Excessive emphasis on leadership, on the other hand, may disrupt order and produce impractical change. According to Kotter (1990), the importance of leadership and management is partly situational. As organizations grow and become more complex, the importance of management increases, whereas leadership becomes more critical when the external environment is dynamic and uncertain [9, p. 14]. Both roles are essential for leaders in large organizations operating in dynamic environments. Overall, managers ensure the effective implementation of programs by supervising the quality of the teaching process. At the same time, they guide efficient human resource management, appropriate staff selection, proper allocation of financial and material resources, and the development of educational infrastructure.

Implementation

To achieve management objectives, planned actions must be implemented. The implementation stage involves organization, effective communication, identification of human resources, motivation, and management. One of the most critical aspects at this stage is bringing the workforce together, assigning individuals according to tasks, establishing strong coordination in decision-making, and inspiring collaboration to enhance effectiveness. For example, when implementing a new curriculum in an educational institution, leadership must clearly define roles among teaching and administrative staff, establish effective communication mechanisms, and actively involve employees in the change process. This approach contributes to improving instructional quality and achieving institutional goals more efficiently. Additionally, the purpose of changes should be clearly explained to staff, roles and responsibilities should be precisely defined in accordance with each employee's potential, knowledge, skills, and competencies, and active participation in the change process should be ensured. This approach reduces resistance to change and facilitates successful transformation [9, p. 33].

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation can be considered alternative expressions for performance tracking and analysis. During the initial stages of an educational institution's activities, deviations from planned goals may occur. Therefore, when activities do not align with plans—such as inefficient resource use or lower-than-expected productivity—quality assurance mechanisms should be established and implemented to ensure and enhance quality. Quality assurance at this stage involves continuous monitoring of activities, assessing outcomes against predefined criteria, and addressing identified problems in a timely manner. At the same time, establishing feedback mechanisms enhances management flexibility and helps minimize potential risks. Thus, quality assurance systems not only ensure alignment with planning but also contribute to improving overall educational outcomes [4, p. 18].

Conclusion

The analyses conducted indicate that effective management and leadership are among the fundamental conditions for the sustainable development of educational institutions in modern education systems. Proper planning, organization, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in educational management are directly linked to leadership quality. Leaders' personal charac-

teristics, skills, behaviors, and influence strategies significantly affect employees' motivation, professional development, and the formation of organizational culture. At the same time, follower characteristics and situational factors play a critical role in realizing leadership effectiveness.

As emphasized in the article, leadership is not confined to formal authority; rather, it is built upon mutual trust, collaboration, communication, and motivation mechanisms. Maintaining an appropriate balance between leadership and management roles in educational institutions facilitates effective change implementation, enhances teaching quality, and supports the achievement of organizational goals. Ultimately, the leadership model described in the article highlights that the comprehensive and systematic consideration of leadership, followers, and situational variables is one of the key factors ensuring the effective functioning and long-term productivity of modern educational institutions.

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