

## Does Student-centred Leadership Integrate with Collaborative, Distributive, and Instructional Leadership? : A Recent Systematic Review (2021–2025)

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**Abstract:** Student-centred leadership has gained significant prominence in recent educational reforms, particularly in promoting equity, inclusivity, and enhancing student agency. While collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models are frequently proposed as strategies to achieve these goals, their specific contributions to student-centred leadership remain contested and insufficiently theorised in current literature. This systematic literature review (SLR) integrates empirical findings from 24 peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025, focusing on understanding how these leadership models contribute to the development and effectiveness of student-centred leadership. The review adheres to PRISMA guidelines and is grounded in Scopus and Web of Science research. It identifies six key thematic categories: (1) Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement, (2) Distributed Leadership for Educational Improvement, (3) Participative Leadership, (4) Equity-Centred and Inclusive Leadership, (5) Pedagogical Leadership and Student Impact, and (6) Innovative Instructional Leadership. The findings reveal that collaborative leadership fosters stakeholder engagement and participatory governance within schools; distributed leadership decentralises decision-making, thereby empowering educators and students; and instructional leadership aligns curriculum and pedagogy with the diverse needs of students. Furthermore, equity-focused and pedagogical leadership strategies promote inclusive learning environments, while innovative instructional approaches enhance school resilience and adaptability. However, the fragmented implementation of these models often limits their transformative potential, underscoring the need for a cohesive leadership framework that integrates collaborative ethos, distributed agency, and pedagogical coherence. This investigation is timely, given the growing recognition that traditional leadership models are insufficient to address the complexities of 21st-century schooling, including socio-economic inequalities, teenage mental health challenges, and the rapid integration of technology. The study also highlights gaps in digital equity, leadership training, and AI-driven governance, offering valuable directions for future research. The review provides educators, policymakers, and researchers with a comprehensive synthesis and practical insights for shaping inclusive, student-centred leadership in the evolving post-pandemic educational landscape.

**Keywords:** Student-centred leadership, collaborative leadership, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, educational equity, systematic literature review

## INTRODUCTION

Within past decades, educational leadership has transformed significantly from hierarchical, administrator-centred models to frameworks prioritising student agency, equity, and holistic development. Antoninis et al. (2023) argue that this transition aligns with global aspirations for inclusive and adaptable educational systems capable of addressing persistent inequities, diverse learner needs, and the socio-emotional challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Li and Karanxha (2022) emphasise that student-centred leadership has emerged as a pivotal mechanism for transformative change, focusing on amplifying student voices, integrating educational evidence into decision-making, and dismantling systemic barriers to success. Although collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models are widely proposed as strategies to achieve these objectives, Robinson and Gray (2019) contend that their specific contributions to student-centred leadership remain contested and inadequately theorised within contemporary literature. This systematic review aims to fill this gap by synthesising empirical studies published between 2021 and 2025, exploring how collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models enhance the development and effectiveness of student-centred leadership in educational settings.

The urgency of this investigation is underscored by the growing recognition that traditional leadership models are insufficient to address the complexities of 21st-century schooling. Rabbi (2025) and Sprong et al. (2019) assert that the escalating socio-economic inequalities, teenage mental health crises, and rapid technological integration necessitate leadership styles that are flexible, inclusive, and deeply rooted in pedagogy. Starkey (2019) argues that educational institutions risk exacerbating existing disparities without a shift towards student-centred methodologies. Banwo et al. (2021) assert that collaborative leadership fosters trust and cultural responsiveness in educational environments by promoting a shared vision among educators, students, and communities. Similarly, Huang and Chen (2021) provide empirical evidence demonstrating how collaborative leadership can be leveraged to advance equity-focused school reforms. Liu and Werblow (2019) and Printy and Liu (2020) argue that distributed leadership empowers frontline educators by redistributing decision-making authority within organisational hierarchies, thus challenging centralised power structures. In contrast, Kilag and Sasan (2023) underscore the continuing relevance of instructional leadership, particularly in curricular coherence, data-driven pedagogy, and continuous professional development. Despite these differing perspectives, Zhan et al. (2023) propose that these leadership models are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their strategic amalgamation offers a promising framework to address significant challenges, including inequality and scalability.

The empirical evidence further highlights the dynamic interactions between various leadership approaches. Nguyen et al. (2017) demonstrate how instructional leadership in Singapore and Finland has evolved to accommodate hybrid learning environments facilitated by decentralised decision-making. Similarly, Gauthier (2024) reports the successful integration of distributed teacher leadership and collaborative student councils in Australian schools to co-develop anti-racism curricula, yet with persisting tensions. Kallio et al. (2021) caution that top-down accountability frameworks may stifle dispersed autonomy, while Elenbaas et al. (2016) emphasise that unequal access to resources remains a significant barrier to implementing instructional strategies effectively. These tensions underscore the necessity of a comprehensive examination of how—and under what conditions—collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models converge to promote student-centred objectives.

This review systematically examines peer-reviewed articles from Scopus and Web of Science (2021–2025) to address these gaps, adhering to the PRISMA principles for methodological transparency and rigor. Louis et al. (2023) present compelling evidence that collaborative leadership amplifies the voices of marginalised students through participatory policy formulation. Traver-Martí et al. (2021) demonstrate that distributed leadership fosters teacher-driven innovations in under-resourced schools. However, Schlegel (2024) warns that emphasising instructional leadership on standardised indicators may diminish student agency, particularly in high-stakes accountability environments. This review synthesises these findings to develop a nuanced paradigm that reconciles the strengths of each model—collaborative ethos, distributed agency, and pedagogical precision—while addressing their limitations. The synthesis addresses theoretical ambiguities while offering practical guidance for policymakers and practitioners aiming to balance systemic accountability with the prioritisation of student needs. Ultimately, this study redefines educational leadership as a catalyst for equitable and sustainable change within an increasingly complex educational landscape.

## **CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION**

Collaborative leadership is defined as a dynamic, integrated process in which individuals, groups, or organizations work interdependently by sharing knowledge, resources, and responsibilities to achieve shared goals (Corser, 1998; Emich, 2018). This approach goes beyond parallel work by emphasizing reciprocal engagement, mutual respect, and coordinated effort. Ang'ana and Kilika (2022) highlight that leadership in collaborative contexts emerges through collective interactions, where each member contributes their unique expertise toward common objectives. Watson and Scribner (2007) describe collaborative leadership as a relational, process-oriented model grounded in trust, open communication, and mutual respect. They argue that it fosters distributed decision-making, collective accountability, and a unified strategic vision through co-created processes and joint problem-solving. Croft et al. (2021) add that leadership can emerge from any level of an organization when ideas, skills, and efforts are intentionally exchanged to address complex challenges and drive innovation. In the educational context, Hallinger and Heck (2010) and Watson and Scribner (2007), conceptualize collaborative leadership as an approach that prioritizes shared decision-making, joint responsibility, and

open communication among principals, teachers, and staff. Jong et al. (2020) further emphasize that mutual trust, transparent dialogue, and collective problem-solving are central to fostering meaningful school improvement and innovation. In essence, collaborative leadership promotes a culture of shared responsibility and inclusive participation, making it a powerful approach for driving innovation and continuous improvement in educational settings.

Distributive leadership, meanwhile, refers to the systematic sharing of responsibilities, authority, and decision-making across individuals or groups rather than relying solely on formal hierarchical roles (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This model emphasizes a fluid and context-sensitive approach that adapts to expertise and situational demands. Khmaladze (2024) characterizes distributive leadership in schools by shared responsibility, collective trust, and collaborative practices, recognizing that every member of the school community holds potential to contribute to improvement and innovation. Yıldırım (2017) adds that distributed leadership fosters a dynamic and relational environment, enabling adaptive responses to complex educational challenges. Spillane and Mertz (2015) and Subocheva et al. (2024) further argue that distributive leadership integrates shared agency, collaborative governance, and multi-level participation. They contend that school success and continuous improvement rely on the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, whose collective leadership cultivates a culture of distributed accountability and innovation. As such, distributive leadership has emerged as both a theoretical framework and a practical strategy for driving school improvement. Overall, distributive leadership encourages shared ownership and inclusive engagement, making it an effective model for fostering collaboration, accountability, and sustainable school improvement.

Instructional leadership is defined by Boyce and Bowers (2018) and Reitzug et al. (2008) as a set of deliberate practices and behaviors demonstrated by school leaders to enhance teaching and learning. These scholars emphasize that effective instructional leaders go beyond managerial duties by actively shaping curriculum, supporting high-quality instruction, and fostering professional development—ultimately aimed at improving student outcomes. They position school leaders as instructional facilitators who engage collaboratively with educators to promote pedagogical excellence. Boyce and Bowers (2018) and Shaked (2020) further frame instructional leadership as a collaborative and distributed process involving principals, team leaders, and instructional coaches working collectively to enhance teaching practices. They underscore the importance of dynamic and responsive leadership, with shared responsibilities that support continuous monitoring, feedback, and growth. Shaked (2020) also stresses the role of instructional leadership in advancing equity by ensuring all students receive high-quality education, regardless of background. Together, these scholars present instructional leadership as an integrative framework that merges leadership for learning with leadership for equity, positioning it as a key lever for sustainable and inclusive school improvement. In summary,

instructional leadership emphasizes collaboration, equity, and continuous improvement, positioning school leaders as key agents in fostering effective teaching and achieving meaningful student outcomes.

### **PREVIOUS STUDY**

Recent research underscores the evolving dynamics of educational leadership, with an increasing emphasis on pedagogical, distributed, and collaborative leadership approaches as key drivers of student-centred learning. Carrete-Marín et al. (2024) highlight rural schools' challenges, particularly in multigrade classrooms, where the lack of student-centred instructional materials that accommodate diverse age groups and learning needs remains a critical barrier. Their findings suggest that teacher training programs should integrate student-centred instructional practices and develop curricula tailored to varied learning environments, fostering greater inclusivity and adaptability. Similarly, Berhanu (2025) explores pedagogical leadership in Ethiopia, revealing that leadership styles significantly impact teacher effectiveness and students' learning experiences. His research indicates that context-sensitive leadership strategies are essential for promoting inclusive and responsive student-centred education, particularly in under-resourced settings where tailored approaches are crucial for overcoming resource limitations.

The significance of distributed and collaborative leadership in enhancing student agency and involvement has also been widely discussed. Shabalala and Gumbo (2023) propose an Africanized model of distributed leadership within environmental education, using the concept of ubuntu to enhance student engagement in sustainability efforts. Their research demonstrates that when educators, communities, and students share leadership responsibilities, learners develop a stronger sense of ownership and empowerment, enabling them to actively shape their education. Similarly, Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene et al. (2023) argue that adaptive leadership is pivotal in promoting student-centred learning environments by fostering flexibility and responsiveness among teachers and school leaders, particularly during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Haines et al. (2022) further reinforce the value of collaborative leadership in rural schools, demonstrating that data-driven decision-making processes allow students and families to influence school policies, thus promoting more equitable and inclusive educational environments. Collectively, these studies highlight how dispersed and adaptive leadership models enhance student-centred education by prioritising student voices, needs, and participation in decision-making processes.

Instructional leadership is also critical in facilitating student-centred education, particularly by aligning curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices with student engagement and achievement. Aparicio-Molina et al. (2024) examine instructional leadership in Chilean schools, revealing that high-performing institutions actively incorporate student feedback into curriculum development and instructional decisions, fostering a more learner-centred approach. In Australia, Fabry et al. (2022) identify how early childhood pedagogical leaders create student-centred learning environments by promoting teacher autonomy and facilitating professional learning communities focused on student participation and experiential learning. In higher education, Do et al. (2021) demonstrate how the Yale-

New Haven Hospital Resident and Fellow Senate supports student-led leadership development in medical education, illustrating the advantages of student governance frameworks that enhance institutional participation and decision-making. These studies reinforce the need for instructional leadership models that engage students in designing their learning experiences, ensuring that pedagogy is responsive to their needs rather than dictated solely by administrative directives.

The research reviewed collectively highlights the essential nature of leadership models that integrate collaborative, distributed, and instructional strategies to foster student-centred education. Gento Palacios et al. (2022) argue that effective school administration must prioritise teacher development while promoting student leadership roles, thereby enabling students be active in shaping school policies and curricula. In Latin America, Jiménez Vivas and Parraguez Núñez (2023) explore gender disparities in educational leadership, finding that female school leaders exhibit superior collaborative practices that enhance student engagement and participatory decision-making. Across various educational contexts, these findings suggest that effective leadership transcends authority distribution, instead focusing on the cultivation of a collaborative, responsive, and inclusive culture that prioritises student agency, involvement, and holistic development.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The process consisted of four key phases: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Data Abstraction and Analysis. Each phase adhered to the PRISMA guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and rigor. The following describes each phase in detail:

### ***i. Identification***

This study adhered to systematic review methodology's key phases to compile a comprehensive body of related literature. The process commenced with identifying key terms and related concepts, which were explored through sources such as the thesaurus, encyclopaedia, dictionary and existing literature. All appropriate terms were meticulously identified, and search strings were developed for the databases Scopus and Web of Science (see Table 1). The systematic review process's initial phase resulted in identifying 1,267 potentially appropriate articles from both databases related to the research topic

**TABLE 1**

**The search string.**

<b>Scopus</b>	<p>TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "student-centred * leadership" OR "learner-centered* leadership" OR "student-focused leadership" OR "pedagogical leadership" OR "learning-focused leadership" OR "student-engaged leadership" OR "participatory leadership" OR "collaborative leadership" OR "equity-centered* leadership" AND education )</p> <p>Date of Access: Mac 2025</p>
<b>Wos</b>	<p>"student-centred * leadership" OR "learner-centered* leadership" OR "student-focused leadership" OR "pedagogical leadership" OR "learning-focused leadership" OR "student-engaged leadership" OR "participatory leadership" OR "collaborative leadership" OR "equity-centered* leadership" AND education (Topic)</p> <p>Date of Access: Mac 2025</p>

**ii. Screening**

The phase involved assessing the identified research items in ensuring alignment with the established research questions. This phase typically entailed selecting studies focused on student-centred leadership and its associated leadership models. Duplicates were systematically removed, resulting in the exclusion of 1,073 publications. Subsequently, 194 papers were selected for analysis per the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2). The principal criterion for inclusion was literature that provided practical recommendations, encompassing reviews, meta-syntheses, meta-analyses, books, book series, chapters, and conference proceedings not included in the most recent studies. The review was confined to English-language publications from 2021 to 2025, with 43 duplicated publications excluded.

**TABLE 2****The selection criterion is searching**

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2021 – 2025	< 2021
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject	Social science, Psychology, Arts and Humanities and Business, management and accounting	Besides Social science, Psychology, Arts and Humanities and Business, management and accounting

Following the relevant studies selection per Table 2, the next step in the systematic review process involved extracting pertinent data from the selected articles. The data extraction criteria were meticulously designed in ensuring to include only the most relevant and high-quality information. Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the criteria for data extraction, categorising each aspect and justifying its inclusion. This systematic approach ensures that the review captures key insights concerning student-centred leadership and its associated models, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

**TABLE 3**

**The Criteria Used for the Extraction of Information From the Selected Articles**

No.	Criteria	Category	Justification
1	Publication year	2021 to 2025	Studies published before 2021 were discarded to ensure relevance to recent developments.
2	Title	Student-centred leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, collaborative leadership	Focus on leadership models related to student-centred education.
3	Country	International	To get a broader perspective on leadership models across diverse educational settings.
4	Research design	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method	Inclusion of diverse research designs to capture various perspectives on student-centred leadership.

5	Research instrument	Survey, interview, case study, focus group discussion, observational studies	Diverse methods were selected to understand different aspects of leadership in educational contexts.
6	Samples	Teachers, school leaders, students	Focus on educators and students from diverse educational settings to gather insights into leadership models.
7	Challenges	Educational leadership challenges, leadership implementation challenges	To understand the practical barriers in adopting these leadership models.
8	Perceptions	Leadership effectiveness, leadership impact on student-centred education	To analyze how leadership models are perceived in terms of their effectiveness and impact.

### *iii. Eligibility*

During the eligibility phase, 151 articles were prepared for review. This phase entailed a detailed review of each article's title and core content to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and aligned with the objectives of the study. As a result, 127 articles were excluded due to reasons such as being outside the scope, having titles that were largely irrelevant, mismatched abstracts and study objectives, or lacking full-text access to empirical data. Ultimately, 24 articles remained eligible for inclusion in the review.

### *iv. Data Abstraction and Analysis*

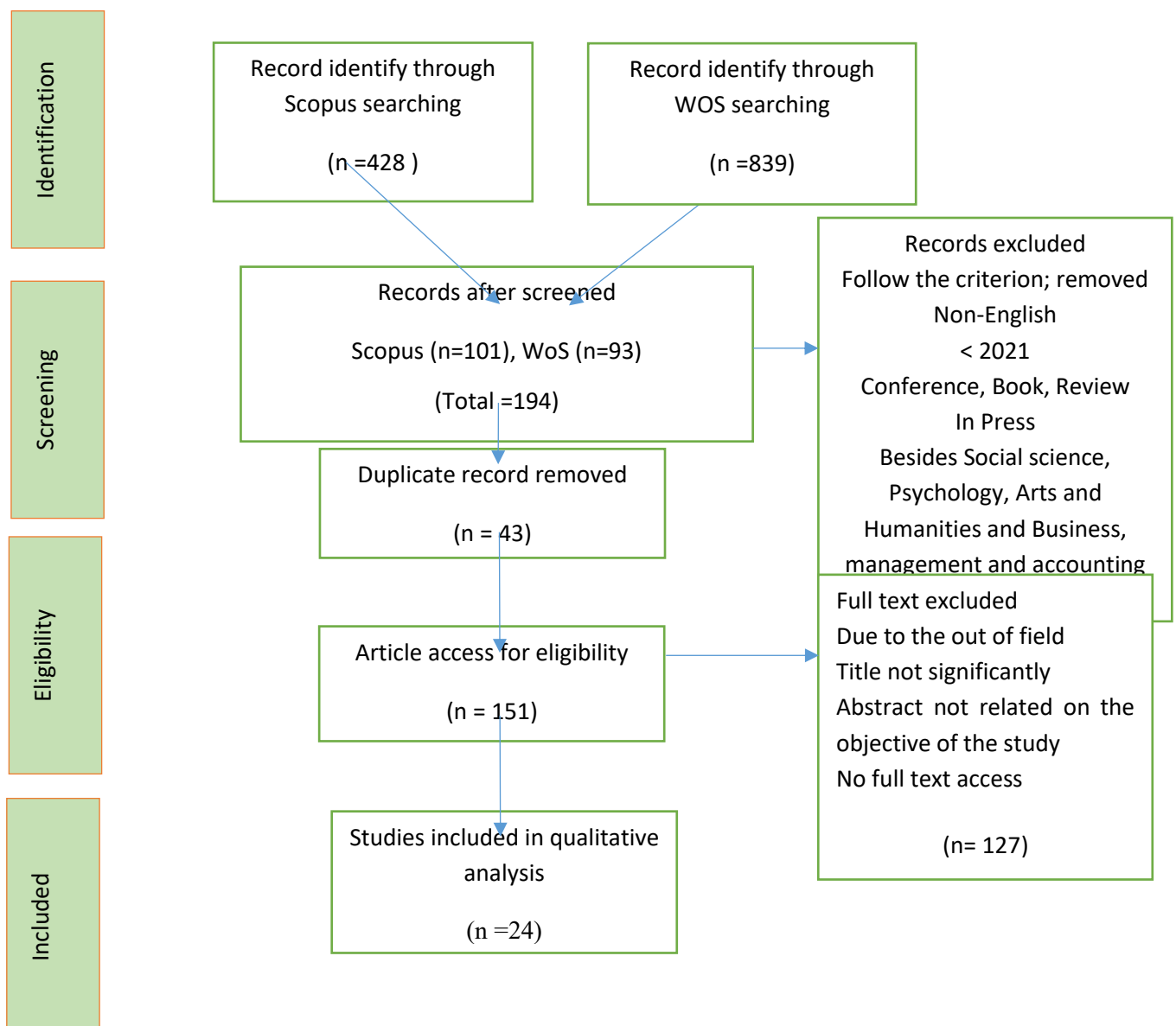
An integrative analysis was used as the evaluation approach to examine and synthesize various research designs, particularly those employing quantitative methods. Its goal was to identify key topics and subtopics. The data collection phase represented the first step in the theme development process, with Figure 1 illustrating the authors' thorough analysis of the 24 selected publications for assertions or materials relevant to the study's objectives. The authors then evaluated prominent studies concerning student-centred leadership and its associated leadership models, examining the methodology applied in each study and the corresponding research results.

Throughout the process, the authors co-operated with co-authors in developing themes per empirical evidence within this study. A log was maintained during data analysis to document analyses, perspectives, inquiries, and other considerations relevant to data interpretation. The authors engaged in a comparative analysis of the findings to identify inconsistencies in the theme development process. It is important to note that any disagreements regarding the conceptualisation of themes were resolved through discussion among the authors. To ensure the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis,

two experts specialising in educational leadership conducted the expert review phase. This phase facilitated the assessment of each sub-theme's clarity, significance, and sufficiency by establishing domain validity. Adjustments were made at the authors' discretion in response to feedback and comments provided by the expert reviewers. The key research question guiding this phase was: How do collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models contribute to the development and effectiveness of student-centred leadership in educational settings?

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic process of identifying, screening, and selecting articles included in this review.

**FIGURE 1.** Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, 2009)



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section addresses the research question by identifying and summarising six key themes derived from a review of articles on student-centred leadership and related leadership models published between 2021 and 2025. It reveals developmental trends and highlights potential gaps in the field. These themes include “Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement,” “Distributed Leadership for Educational Improvement,” “Participative Leadership,” “Equity-Centered and Inclusive Leadership,” “Pedagogical Leadership and Student Impact,” and “Innovative Instructional Leadership.” Each theme is critically discussed to illustrate how various leadership models contribute to the development and effectiveness of student-centred leadership in educational settings.

### Theme 1: Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement (4)

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Broadhurst, K; Ferreira, J; Berkeley, N	Collaborative leadership and place-based development 2021	Examine place leadership in England’s local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), with a focus on the private sector’s role in relation to the public sector.	Case study approach analyzing LEPs. Examines private-public sector roles and complexity. Proposes guiding principles for collaborative leadership.	Place leadership is ideologically driven and lacks generalizability. LEPs are complex, requiring stronger collaboration between sectors. Proposes guiding principles for better place-based leadership.	Sage Journals
Shaikh S.A.; Lämssä A.-M.; Heikkinen S.	Collaborative Leadership in the Institution of Higher Education: A Sociocultural Context of Pakistan 2023	Explore the meaning and applicability of collaborative leadership in a sociocultural context where top-	A qualitative instrumental case study was conducted at a higher education institution in Pakistan. Data was gathered through open-ended interviews	Collaborative leadership is shaped by cultural traditions such as Otaq, although some cultural aspects limit participation in leadership collaboration. There is a need for more contextually aware	South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases

		down leadership is dominant, focusing on Pakistan.	and analyzed using thematic analysis.	knowledge on collaborative leadership.	
Robinson, JL; Riddell, P	Discovering and developing collaborative leadership using vectors and videos 2022	Develop a more effective approach for collaborative leadership development, addressing the limitations of traditional leadership training.	Six-step process using video recordings and a graphical language (vectors) to help groups analyze and reflect on their collaborative leadership practices.	The process enhances leadership development by allowing groups to identify and experience what advances or hinders collaborative leadership, rather than just learning theoretical behaviors.	Organizational Dynamics
Sesinyi T.W.; Gcelu N.	Exploring collaborative strategies used by School Management Teams to sustain parental involvement in Xhariep District schools 2023	Investigate the collaborative strategies employed by School Management Teams (SMTs) in primary schools within the Xhariep District to actively engage parents in the	Qualitative study using interviews with 15 participants (SMTs, teachers, and parents). The study applies collaborative leadership theory and the theory of planned behavior to analyze parental involvement.	Parental involvement is crucial for improving educational outcomes, but various societal challenges hinder engagement. Schools should empower and develop parents to enhance their participation in school partnerships.	Perspectives in Education

		educational process.			
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The first theme, *Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement* underscores the significance of contextual awareness, cultural inclusivity, and active stakeholder participation in leadership practices. Place-based leadership, although valuable, lacks broader generalizability and necessitates enhanced intersectoral collaboration within Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Cultural traditions, such as Otaq, significantly influence leadership dynamics but may also limit participation, thus emphasising the need for context-sensitive leadership approaches. Furthermore, experiential learning was found to be more effective than theoretical models in leadership development. Parental involvement, a critical component in educational success, is often hindered by societal challenges, necessitating a concerted effort from schools to empower and support parents. Strengthening collaboration through guiding principles, cultural adaptation, and robust stakeholder engagement is essential for fostering effective leadership.

**Theme 2: Distributed Leadership for Educational Improvement (5)**

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Nadeem M.	Distributed leadership in educational contexts: A catalyst for school improvement 2024	Analyze the underlying theories, implementation approaches, obstacles, and outcomes associated with distributed leadership in educational settings aimed at enhancing	Theoretical analysis rooted in social learning theory and communities of practice delves into the practical strategies for implementing distributed leadership, explores the challenges faced in its application, and discusses the broader	Distributed leadership enhances school improvement by fostering collaboration, professional development, and student engagement, but challenges like resistance to change and role ambiguity must be addressed.	Social Science s and Humanities Open

		school performance.	implications for organizational growth and development.		
Heikka J.; Pitkänie mi H.; Kettukan gas T.; Hyttinen T.	Distributed pedagogical leadership and teacher leadership in early childhood education contexts 2021	Investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership is practiced in Finnish early childhood education (ECE) and its influence on teachers' commitment to their work.	Explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Survey data from 130 ECE professionals and qualitative interviews with six ECE professionals.	ECE centers adopt distributed pedagogical leadership, which positively influences teachers' reflection-leading ability and learning under teams.	International Journal of Leadership in Education
Yang W.; Lim S.	Toward distributed pedagogical leadership for quality improvement: Evidence from a childcare centre in Singapore 2023	Examine the factors that influence distributed pedagogical leadership and contribute to fostering a community of practice within a non-profit childcare center in Singapore.	A qualitative case study conducted over 10 months, utilizing observations, individual interviews, and focus group discussions with teachers.	Three key influences on quality improvement: (a) national workforce policies, (b) organizational culture and power dynamics, and (c) pedagogical vision, highlighting the complexities of ECCE reforms.	Educational Management Administration and Leadership

Yu H.; Hamid A.H.A.; Abdul Wahab J.L.; Mahmud M.I.	The impact of deans’ distributed leadership on university teachers’ job performance: the mediating role of job satisfaction  2025	Examine the impact of deans’ distributed leadership on university teachers’ job performance in Jiangsu, China, with particular attention to the mediating effect of job satisfaction.	Structured questionnaire survey with 470 university teachers. Data analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypotheses.	Distributed leadership enhances job satisfaction and job performance through organizational empowerment, collaborative decision- making, teacher participation, and resource support. Job satisfaction partially mediates this relationship, emphasizing both direct and indirect effects.	Cogent Educati on
Traver- Martí, JA; Ballestero s- Velázquez, B; Beldarraí n, NO; Maiquez, MDC	Leading the curriculum towards social change: Distributed leadership and the inclusive school  2023	Analyze how school leadership supports community participation in educational practices linking schools with their local territories.	A multiple case study conducted in four Spanish schools, employing participant observation, interviews, discussion groups, documentary analysis, and field diaries.	School leadership plays a crucial role in fostering participatory processes, with findings emphasizing the need for a collaborative leadership model and greater responsibility from families and students.	Educati onal Manage ment Adminis tration & Leaders hip

The second theme, *Distributed Leadership for Educational Improvement*, highlights its pivotal role in promoting school improvement, fostering collaboration, and supporting professional growth. Distributed leadership models enhance teacher empowerment, student engagement, and overall job satisfaction. However, challenges such as resistance to change and role ambiguity need to be effectively addressed. In Early Childhood Education (ECE), adopting distributed pedagogical leadership enhanced

teachers' capacity to lead reflective learning within their teams. Quality improvement in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is influenced by national workforce policies, organisational culture, and the pedagogical vision of institutions, reflecting the complexity of educational reforms. Collaborative decision-making, teacher participation, and resource support are critical factors contributing to job satisfaction and performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating factor. Furthermore, the study reinforces the importance of school leadership in fostering participatory processes and emphasises the need for a collaborative leadership model that encourages increased involvement from families and students.

### Theme 3: Participative Leadership (3)

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Toufighi, SP; Sahebi, IG; Govindan, K; Lin, MZN; Vang, J; Brambini, A	Participative leadership, cultural factors, and speaking-up behaviour: An examination of intra-organisational knowledge sharing 2024	Examine how participative leadership and cultural factors influence employees' willingness to raise concerns and share knowledge in supplier development efforts within the garment industry.	Surveys and interviews were done to assess leadership effectiveness, cultural dimensions, and individual characteristics. ANOVA and mediation analysis were then applied to analyze the collected data.	Participative leadership positively influences employees' willingness to speak up and their intention to share knowledge. Cultural factors, such as language proficiency and regional differences, impact speaking-up behavior, while the effectiveness of leadership partially mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing.	Journal Of Innovation & Knowledge

Vavouras E.; Koliopoulou M.; Manolis K.	From Participatory Leadership to Digital Transformation under the interpretation of Political Philosophy: Types of Leadership in Education and School Administration 2024	Investigate school leadership in relation to the integration of technology and its impact on the quality of educational work and school operation.	Theoretical exploration of leadership styles (distributed, transformational, pedagogic) and the role of technology in modern school leadership.	Technology is integral to school leadership, and the digital leader must combine various leadership styles to enhance educational quality and school efficiency.	Dia- noesis
Nerantzi C.; Gillaspay E.; Sinfield S.; Karatsiori M.; Burns T.; Hunter A.; Seat H.; Tasler N.	Like the sea: Living communityship as a form of participatory leadership within the creativity for learning in HE (#creativeHE) community 2024	Examine the educational leadership strategies employed within the Creativity for Learning in Higher Education (#creativeHE) community throughout the global pandemic.	Collaborative autoethnographic case study using visual metaphors and paired conversations to reflect on and analyze leadership experiences	Communal leadership is characterized by communityship, a hands-on and democratic leadership style that creates a supportive and harmonious environment for collective growth.	Innova tions in Educat ion and Teachi ng Interna tional

The third theme, *Participative Leadership*, emphasises the significance of inclusive and adaptive leadership in fostering engagement and organisational efficiency. Participative leadership fosters speaking-up behaviour and knowledge-sharing, although cultural factors—such as language proficiency and regional influences—can impact these dynamics. Leadership effectiveness was found to partially mediate the knowledge-sharing process. Technological integration is also crucial in school leadership within the digital age, as it requires digital leaders to adopt and integrate various leadership

styles to enhance educational quality and school efficiency. Beyond the classroom, community leadership thrives on a participatory and democratic approach, termed *community ship*, which nurtures a supportive and harmonious environment conducive to collective growth and action.

#### Theme 4: Equity-Centered and Inclusive Leadership (4)

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Rivale-Bell N.	Equity Centered Leadership of Principals Who Narrowed the Race-Based Academic Achievement Gap 2022	Examine how successful elementary school principals in a diverse district reduced the racially influenced achievement gap in reading through the enhancement of their leadership practices.	A descriptive multi-embedded case study utilizing archival data, focus group observations, and individual interviews to gather insights from principals.	Ongoing learning opportunities are necessary to support reflective practices and challenge institutional racism. The study recommends fostering equity-based, inclusive communities in schools.	Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies
Lavadenz, M; Kaminski, LRG; Armas, EG; López, G	Equity Leadership for English Learners During COVID-19: Early Lessons 2021	Investigate how local policies and practices were developed and applied to design and implement distance	Collected and analyzed three key district policy documents from different phases of the pandemic. Conducted interviews with district and	Three key themes were identified: (1) tackling connectivity issues and the digital divide, (2) improving learning experiences for diverse English Learners, and (3) transitioning from collaborative leadership to	Frontiers in Education

		learning aimed at promoting equity for English Learners during the pandemic.	school leaders. Used grounded theory for data triangulation and coding.	collaborative virtual leadership. An equity leadership framework for English Learners was developed.	
Thessin, RA; Teklesela ssie, AA; Trimmer, LB; Shepard, SD; Clayton, JK	Leveraging a Candidate Assessment System to Develop an Equity-Centered School Leadership Pipeline Through a University-District Partnership 2024	Analyze the elements of a School Leadership Preparation Program's (SLPP's) Candidate Assessment System (CAS) used to identify and select leaders with a strong focus on equity.	Applied qualitative content analysis to CAS documents used for selecting aspiring equity-centered leaders in a university-district partnership program.	CAS aligned with equity-centered leadership principles, involving diverse constituencies in its design and implementation. Additionally, instructional leadership emerged as a key component of leading for equity.	<i>Educational Sciences</i>
Crisol-Moya E.; Romero-López M.A.; Burgos-García A.; Sánchez-Hernández Y.	Inclusive Leadership From the Family Perspective in Compulsory Education 2022	Examine the measures and efforts undertaken by school leadership teams to promote diversity and inclusion,	Descriptive-exploratory study with a cross-sectional, quantitative approach. Data collected from 631 families across 25 schools	Identified strategies to prevent truancy and foster a respectful, inclusive school environment. Emphasized the family's key role in developing an inclusive school culture. Recommended	Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research

		focusing on how these efforts are perceived and experienced by families.	using a questionnaire.	increasing family awareness and student participation in inclusive education efforts.	
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The fourth theme, *Equity-Centered and Inclusive Leadership*, emphasises the need for continuous learning opportunities that support reflective practices while addressing institutional racism and fostering equitable school communities. Key focus areas include overcoming connectivity issues and addressing the digital divide, enhancing learning experiences for diverse English learners. The transition from collaborative to virtual leadership is integral in developing an equity leadership framework, particularly for English learners. The Collaborative Assessment System (CAS) aligns with equity-centered leadership by engaging diverse stakeholders, further enhancing the role of instructional leadership in advancing equity. Strategies aimed at preventing truancy and promoting a respectful, inclusive school environment underline the essential role of families in cultivating inclusive school cultures. Increasing family awareness and fostering greater student involvement is critical to strengthening inclusive education initiatives.

#### **Theme 5: . Pedagogical Leadership and Student Impact (4)**

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Grice C.; Seiser A.F.; Wilkinson J.	Decentring pedagogical leadership: educational leading as a pedagogical practice  2023	Examine how pedagogical leadership has evolved in Sweden and Australia, highlighting differences in conceptualizations and practices.	The theory of practice architectures was used to analyze historical changes in pedagogical leadership in both countries.	The study recognized different degrees of pedagogical understanding and differences between individual and collective pedagogy in both policy and leadership. It also raised concerns about the global state of educational leadership and the shift away	Journal of Educational Administration and History

				from student-centered pedagogy.	
Zárate Z.E.; de la Hoz J.P.	Moral pedagogical leadership: perceptions of secondary school students  2024	Analyze students' perceptions of their moral development and what kind of moral leadership they value. Compare the influence of teachers vs. other contexts on moral development.	A questionnaire was applied to 131 Spanish students. Data analyzed using SPSS and MAXQDA.	Students recognize the moral influence of their teachers, especially humanities teachers. They value teacher empathy, closeness, and affection more than technological methods.	Revista Brasileir a de Educaca o
Llorent-Bedmar V.; Navarro-Granados M.; Cobano-Delgado Palma V.C.	Pedagogical leadership exercised by the principals of disadvantaged schools in Spain 2021	Examine principals' practices in leadership, specifically for pedagogical, in disadvantaged schools within Madrid.	Mixed methodology with quantitative and qualitative: a questionnaire for teaching staff and interviews with school principals.	Leadership practices associated with teacher individualism, including classroom supervision and collaboration with other schools, received low ratings. Both teachers and principals concur that principals should have a greater role in decision-making, particularly in staff hiring, to enhance school efficiency.	School Leadersh ip and Manage ment

Bøe M.; Heikka J.; Kettukan gas T.; Hognesta d K.	Pedagogical leadership in activities with children – A shadowing study of early childhood teachers in Norway and Finland  2022	Investigate ECE teachers’ pedagogical leadership in Norwegian and Finnish centres during teacher- initiated, child- initiated, and basic activities.	Shadowing methodology to study ECE teachers per observations through video.	The study outlines three key categories of pedagogical leadership: organizing, facilitating essential areas, and providing motivation and support. It highlights that pedagogical leadership is a versatile concept, relevant for guiding children's activities in early childhood education (ECE) environments.	Teaching and Teacher Educatio n
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The fifth theme, *Pedagogical Leadership and Student Impact* explores the depth of pedagogical understanding and distinguishes between individual and collective pedagogy in policy and leadership contexts. Concerns regarding the global shift away from student-centred pedagogy highlight the need for a stronger focus on student learning. Students, particularly those in the humanities, place great value on the moral influence of teachers, favouring empathy, closeness, and affection over purely technological teaching methods. Leadership practices associated with teacher individualism, such as classroom supervision and cross-school collaboration, were perceived as less effective, with both teachers and principals advocating for greater principal influence in decision-making, especially in staffing decisions aimed at enhancing school efficiency. Pedagogical leadership is categorised into three primary roles: organising, facilitating core areas, and motivating/supporting. The study underscores pedagogical leadership as a flexible, adaptive approach, particularly relevant in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for guiding young children’s learning experiences.

#### **Theme 6: Innovative Instructional Leadership (4)**

Authors	Title and Year	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journa l
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Boston J.	Voice Praxis: Social Positionality in UK Spoken Word Practice  2023	Examine the evolving role of practitioner voice educators in British higher education and conservatory actor training, with a focus on promoting inclusive and accessible education.	The article explores the reconfiguration of the student/tutor dynamic and the influence of diverse personal and professional knowledge within the voice studio.	The author argues that student needs are most effectively met through practices based on transparent and intersectional principles. The article critiques existing voice pedagogy and proposes a theoretical framework for developing a socially responsive voice practice.	Voice and Speech Review
Bonet, L; Rykkja, A	Why is managerial shared leadership in creative organizations a more resilient, transparent, open, and generous constellation? A case analysis approach  2023	Explore the manner in which the integration was done by cultural organizations towards various leadership models and the evolution of them over time.	Case study of Snøhetta, a multinational architecture firm, examining how multiple leadership models are integrated and how these models have evolved over time.	Collaborative leadership styles can impact career trajectories and enhance organizational resilience. Striking a balance between paradoxical institutional logics can lead to organizations becoming more transparent, open, and sustainable.	European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy
Glaés-Coutts, L	The Principal as the Instructional	Examine the role of principals in	Reflection responses from twenty principals	A minority of principals have a good understanding of the	Leadership

	Leader in School-Age Educare 2023	pedagogical leadership within the School-Age Educare (SAEC) program in Sweden.	in the project “The Pedagogical Task of School Age Educare.”	instructional aspects of the SAEC program. The lack of specific SAEC training in the Swedish national principal program leaves principals at a disadvantage in leading and developing this part of the school system.	and Policy in Schools
Bravo C.V.; Hernández M.E.M.; Delgado S.C.	Leadership as Learning: a student-focused training approach 2023	Describe the creation of a student-centered leadership training model designed to guide school management practices, focusing on fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for both educators and students.	A participatory research process that includes reflection on practices and professional dialogue between teacher trainers and school leaders.	The training of school leaders should transform into a collaborative learning process with teachers, addressing challenges within their own practices while fostering the development and learning of students.	Educación and Realidad

The sixth theme, *Innovative Instructional Leadership*, stresses the importance of transparent, inclusive, and collaborative leadership in fostering educational excellence and organisational resilience. A socially responsive instructional framework is proposed to address the limitations of existing voice pedagogy, thereby ensuring a more student-centred learning environment. Collaborative leadership styles positively influence career growth and institutional sustainability through transparency and

openness. However, gaps in instructional leadership remain, particularly in School-Age Educare (SAEC), where many principals lack adequate training, limiting their effectiveness. To address these deficiencies, school leader training should transition to a learning-with-teachers approach, emphasising real-world challenges to improve student learning and professional development. The following table presents a summary of the key findings, organized by theme, leadership model, contributions to student-centred leadership, and the key gaps identified in the reviewed literature.

**TABLE 4**  
**Findings Summary**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Leadership Model</b>	<b>Contribution to Student-Centred Leadership</b>
Collaborative Leadership and Community Engagement	Collaborative	Enhances stakeholder participation (parents, community), fosters inclusive decision-making, builds trust, encourages student voice
Distributed Leadership for Educational Improvement	Distributed	Empowers teachers and students, decentralises decision-making, fosters collaboration and innovation
Participative Leadership	Participative	Encourages speaking-up, knowledge sharing, and co-creation of educational content; supports democratic governance
Equity-Centred and Inclusive Leadership	Collaborative / Instructional	Reduces systemic inequalities, promotes inclusivity for marginalised students, supports reflective practices
Pedagogical Leadership and Student Impact	Instructional / Pedagogical	Aligns teaching with moral and emotional student needs, enhances teacher-student relationships, supports personalised learning
Innovative Instructional Leadership	Instructional	Integrates student feedback in instruction, supports professional growth, promotes flexible learning models

## **DISCUSSION**

Collaborative leadership is vital in enhancing stakeholder engagement and fostering relationships between schools and their surrounding communities. This leadership model enables the active participation of students, teachers, and parents in developing educational policies and curricula, thereby promoting a sense of agency and belonging among students. Schools that implement collaborative leadership frameworks establish participatory environments where student voices are recognised, and learning environments are shaped to address a community's diverse needs (Broadhurst et al., 2021). However, cultural and systemic barriers, such as hierarchical decision-making and traditional leadership norms, can hinder inclusivity and limit the effectiveness of these models (Shaikh et al., 2023). Adaptive leadership strategies are essential for overcoming these barriers and ensuring

collaborative leadership frameworks can enhance student-centred learning. Experiential learning in leadership development is particularly effective, as it empowers students to take on leadership roles and co-create their learning experiences rather than passively receiving instruction (Robinson & Riddell, 2022). Moreover, Sesinyi and Gcelu (2023) underscore the critical role of family involvement in fostering student achievement while recognising that societal challenges often impede parental engagement in school partnerships. Addressing these challenges necessitates empowering parents and ensuring inclusive decision-making across all levels.

In addition to collaborative leadership, distributed leadership has been identified as a key factor in advancing student-centred education by decentralising authority, promoting teacher autonomy, and engaging students in decision-making processes. This approach cultivates a governance framework that empowers students and teachers to take on leadership roles, fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and accountability (Nadeem, 2024). Heikka et al. (2021) highlight the importance of distributed pedagogical leadership in early childhood education, noting that it encourages teacher reflection and student engagement, further emphasising the significance of shared leadership in adaptive learning environments. Yu et al. (2025) confirm that distributed leadership among university deans correlates with increased faculty satisfaction and improved institutional governance, reinforcing the value of distributed leadership across educational contexts. However, challenges such as role ambiguity and resistance to decentralisation must be addressed to ensure clear definitions and effective implementation of leadership responsibilities (Traver-Marti et al., 2023). When properly structured, distributed leadership fosters teacher-student partnerships, encourages peer leadership among students, and enhances collaborative learning environments that support student-centred education.

Similarly, participative leadership crucially fosters student-centred learning environments by encouraging knowledge sharing, inclusive decision-making, and democratic governance within educational institutions. Toufighi et al. (2024) emphasise that this leadership style fosters innovation and transparency, enabling collaboration between students and educators to design meaningful learning experiences. Vavouras et al. (2024) highlight the role of technology in participative leadership, noting that digital platforms and feedback mechanisms enhance student engagement in school governance and decision-making. Nerantzi et al. (2024) argue that participatory leadership within community-based learning environments strengthens collective responsibility, promoting collaboration among students and educators in addressing challenges and co-developing solutions. Cultural factors, such as language barriers and regional differences, can influence participation levels, necessitating adaptive leadership strategies that accommodate diverse student backgrounds and ensure equitable engagement.

Pedagogical leadership plays a central role in shaping student learning and improving the overall quality of education. Grice et al. (2023) highlight concerns regarding the global shift away from student-centred pedagogy, which threatens to undermine the focus on student learning within leadership frameworks. Zárata and de la Hoz (2024) assert that students place significant value on the moral

influence of teachers, particularly in the humanities, where empathy and strong teacher-student relationships are essential for development. Llorent-Bedmar et al. (2021) examine the impact of pedagogical leadership in disadvantaged schools, revealing that teacher individualism and inadequate inter-school collaboration hinder the effectiveness of school leadership. Bøe et al. (2022) categorise pedagogical leadership into three primary roles: organising, facilitating, and supporting, stressing the need for a flexible and adaptable leadership approach, particularly in Early Childhood Education (ECE). These findings indicate that educational leadership must prioritise student-centred methodologies, ethical leadership, and inter-institutional collaboration to enhance student learning outcomes.

Equity-centred leadership is essential to ensuring that student-centred education is accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalised students. Rivale-Bell (2022) emphasises the importance of leadership frameworks that address systemic inequalities, digital access disparities, and cultural biases that affect student engagement. Lavadenz et al. (2021) identify the digital divide and resource inequities as significant obstacles hindering disadvantaged students' educational opportunities. Thessin et al. (2024) advocate for establishing structured leadership pipelines to equip school administrators with the competencies required for equity-centred leadership, effectively addressing these challenges. Crisol-Moya et al. (2022) underline the importance of family involvement in fostering inclusive school cultures, suggesting that strong partnerships between parents and schools are integral to student success. Enhancing digital inclusion, participatory governance, and culturally responsive leadership practices are crucial to cultivating equitable educational environments that promote student-centred learning for all students.

Innovative instructional leadership is vital for enhancing educational resilience and flexibility. Boston (2023) critiques traditional voice pedagogy and advocates for a socially responsive educational framework that promotes inclusive, student-centred learning. Bonet and Rykkja (2023) examine collaborative leadership within creative organisations, highlighting how shared leadership improves organisational transparency, resilience, and sustainability. Glaés-Coutts (2023) analyses instructional leadership within Sweden's School-Age Educare (SAEC) programme, noting that many principals lack adequate training, which limits their capacity to lead and develop effective instructional strategies. Bravo et al. (2023) suggest that leadership training should transition to a learning-with-teachers model, wherein school leaders collaborate with educators to address fundamental challenges in instructional leadership. These findings underscore the necessity of inclusive, collaborative, and adaptive instructional leadership strategies that can effectively meet the evolving demands of education.

In conclusion, integrating collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership is essential for optimising the benefits of student-centred leadership. Collaborative leadership enhances engagement, distributed leadership fosters shared responsibility, and instructional leadership ensures pedagogical effectiveness. These leadership models can empower students to actively engage in learning, improve teacher-student relationships, and strengthen educational resilience. A structured leadership model

incorporating shared governance, equity-oriented policies, and instructional flexibility is necessary, as these elements collectively enhance the scalability and sustainability of student-centred education.

## **CONCLUSION**

The increasing relevance of collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership models reflects a growing recognition of the need for educational environments that are inclusive, adaptable, and attuned to student needs. The integrated application of these leadership frameworks fosters stakeholder engagement, promotes shared responsibility, and strengthens instructional coherence. Together, these elements contribute to a robust learning ecosystem where students are not passive recipients but active participants in shaping their educational experiences.

Nevertheless, the fragmented implementation of these models continues to limit their transformative potential. Inconsistencies in adoption hinder efforts to enhance student agency, influence school governance, and drive institutional reform. As such, future research must focus on developing a cohesive leadership framework that merges collaborative ethos, distributed agency, and instructional adaptability. Such a framework would not only enhance student engagement and teacher effectiveness but also improve the overall resilience and responsiveness of educational institutions.

Moreover, the role of emerging technologies, particularly AI-driven tools, in leadership training presents a promising yet underexplored frontier. Integrating learning analytics, virtual simulations, and data-informed decision-making holds substantial potential for elevating leadership development within student-centred educational paradigms. Addressing this research gap is essential to ensuring that future leadership models remain aligned with the digital realities of contemporary education.

Finally, the expansion of equity-centred leadership remains imperative in confronting global educational disparities. Issues such as digital exclusion, uneven access to participatory governance, and the persistence of systemic inequities demand leadership approaches that are both inclusive and transformative. Establishing a responsive, unified leadership model that links administrative decision-making with pedagogical practice is therefore crucial. By aligning leadership strategies with the goals of student empowerment, equity, and institutional transformation, educational systems can more effectively respond to the complex challenges of the 21st century.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study underscore the need for policy changes that prioritise the integration of collaborative, distributed, and instructional leadership within educational frameworks. Policymakers should support the professional development of school leaders by offering training programs that

encompass the principles of these leadership models, focusing on fostering shared decision-making and student-centred practices.

Educational institutions must also establish more inclusive leadership structures that promote the active involvement of all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents. Schools should be encouraged to implement collaborative governance models that empower students to take ownership of their learning and contribute to policy formulation.

Furthermore, there is a need for policies that address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to resources, particularly in underserved communities. Providing training for school leaders to effectively incorporate AI-driven tools and data analytics into their decision-making processes will be essential in preparing them for the evolving demands of the educational landscape. By aligning policy with these recommendations, educational systems can foster environments that not only improve student outcomes but also ensure the sustainability and adaptability of schools in the face of ongoing challenges.

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