



CONCEPTUALIZING AI-SUPPORTED EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND QUALITATIVE META-SYNTHESIS

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Abstract:

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed educational leadership practices by improving decision-making, organizational governance, teacher professional development, and institutional transformation. Despite the significant increase in publications on AI in education, existing studies remain fragmented, generally discussing AI from separate perspectives, such as digital leadership, AI governance, teacher readiness, prompt literacy, and technology adoption. This study aims to synthesize research developments on AI-Supported Educational Leadership, identify key themes, uncover research gaps, and formulate an integrated conceptualization as a foundation for developing educational leadership theory and practice in the era of artificial intelligence. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, combined with qualitative meta-synthesis, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A literature search was conducted through the Scopus database using keywords related to Artificial Intelligence and Educational Leadership. Articles were selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria and analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to produce a thematic and conceptual synthesis. The synthesis identified five main themes: strategic digital leadership, ethical AI governance, teacher readiness for AI, human-AI collaborative leadership, and strategic transformation of educational organizations. These five themes interact to form a conceptualization of AI-Supported Educational Leadership, which views AI as an organizational capability to strengthen leadership, organizational learning, institutional innovation, and the sustainability of educational performance. This study reveals that the existing literature remains dominated by the technology adoption perspective and has not fully explained the organizational mechanisms linking AI to the effectiveness of educational leadership. AI-Supported Educational Leadership is a leadership paradigm that integrates strategic leadership, responsible AI governance, teacher capacity development, organizational learning, and human-AI collaboration to support sustainable educational transformation. This perspective expands the concept of digital leadership by positioning AI as part of an organizational capability rather than merely an enabling technology. This study offers a conceptual synthesis that integrates various dimensions of leadership, organization, and artificial intelligence to conceptualize AI-Supported Educational Leadership. This conceptualization makes theoretical contributions to the development of the educational leadership literature while offering empirical research directions and strategic recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers to implement AI effectively, ethically, and sustainably.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Educational Leadership; AI-Supported Educational Leadership; Digital Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has fundamentally changed the educational landscape, not only in learning, but also in organizational governance, decision-making, human resource development, and educational leadership (Ghanbariha, 2026; Ismail, 2026; Yücel, 2026). The emergence of technologies such as generative artificial intelligence, machine learning, predictive analytics, intelligent tutoring systems, and various AI-based decision support systems has expanded the role of technology from being merely a learning aid to a strategic resource in the management of educational institutions (Alodan et al., 2026; Khasawneh et al., 2026; Uğur, 2026). This transformation encourages a change in the role of educational leaders who are no longer only tasked with managing administration and learning processes, but are also required to be able to build a digital vision, integrate AI into organizational strategies, develop a culture of innovation, and ensure that AI implementation takes place ethically, transparently, and is oriented towards improving the quality of education.

In recent years, academic attention to AI in educational leadership has increased rapidly. Numerous studies have addressed AI implementation from various perspectives, including AI governance and cybersecurity in higher education (Alodan et al., 2026), AI for personality assessment in entrepreneurship education (Abad-Villaverde et al., 2026), digital leadership in driving AI adoption by teachers (Yücel, 2026), Utilization of virtual reality and augmented reality in developing soft skills (Jackson & Brown-Robertson, 2026), strategic transformation towards a smart university (Ghanbariha, 2026), educator readiness through prompt literacy (Uğur, 2026), psychological well-being of educators in an AI-based work environment (Sarna et al., 2026), and the development of instruments to measure AI-based decision-making capabilities in educational leaders (Khasawneh et al., 2026). These studies show that AI has become a strategic issue in the development of educational leadership, as the success of AI implementation is greatly influenced by leaders' ability to manage organizational change, build human resource capacity, and develop governance that is adaptive to technological developments.

However, the development of this research still shows several limitations. Most studies examine AI from separate perspectives, such as AI governance, digital leadership, prompt literacy, teacher readiness, organizational transformation, or technology acceptance, resulting in partial findings. Furthermore, most research is still dominated by theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which focus on individual behavior in adopting technology. These research findings make important contributions to explaining AI adoption, but they fail to explain how educational leaders utilize AI as an organizational capability to enhance organizational learning, strengthen institutional innovation, build human-AI collaboration, and generate sustainable educational transformation. Therefore, research on AI-based educational leadership is still developing in a fragmented manner and lacks a conceptual framework capable of fully integrating the various dimensions of leadership, organization, and technology.

These limitations highlight the need for further study. To date, few studies have systematically synthesized the development of AI in educational leadership to identify conceptual patterns, relationships between constructs, directions for theoretical development, and opportunities for future research. Most studies

focus on the implementation or adoption of AI, while studies on AI-Supported Educational Leadership as an organizational capability that integrates strategic leadership, ethical AI governance, organizational learning, teacher preparedness, and human-AI collaboration remain relatively limited. This situation hinders the development of a theoretical foundation to explain how AI can support educational leadership amid increasingly complex digital transformation.

Based on these problems, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with a qualitative meta-synthesis of international publications on AI in educational leadership. Through this approach, this study not only identifies dominant themes in the literature but also synthesizes relationships between themes, reveals the direction of research development, and formulates the conceptualization of AI-Supported Educational Leadership as a new perspective in the study of educational leadership. This conceptualization views AI not only as an enabling technology but also as an organizational capability that strengthens strategic leadership by integrating digital leadership, ethical AI governance, teacher capacity development, organizational learning, and human-AI collaboration.

This research makes three main contributions to the development of educational leadership. *First*, it integrates various research findings that have developed separately into a more complete conceptual synthesis of AI-Supported Educational Leadership. *Second*, it offers a new perspective that expands the concept of digital leadership into an AI-based educational leadership paradigm, positioning artificial intelligence as part of an organization's capabilities rather than simply an adopted technology. *Third*, it outlines a future research agenda by identifying theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps that still require empirical evidence. Therefore, the results of this research are expected to enrich the educational leadership literature and provide a conceptual foundation for educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers to develop effective, responsible, and sustainable AI implementations across various educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design combined with qualitative meta-synthesis to identify, evaluate, and integrate research findings on Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Supported Educational Leadership. This design was chosen because it can produce a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of studies with diverse contexts, methods, and foci, thereby enabling the development of new perspectives on AI-based educational leadership. All stages of the study adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure transparency, consistency, and replicability of the research process. This process includes literature identification, screening, and feasibility assessment, as well as determining which articles to analyze during the synthesis stage.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted in the Scopus database via the page <https://www.scopus.com/pages/home>, selected for its highly reputable international publications in the fields of educational leadership, educational management, educational technology, and artificial intelligence. The search focused on scientific articles published between 2023 and 2026 to obtain the latest overview of the development of AI-Supported Educational Leadership. The search was conducted using a combination of keywords with the following Boolean operators: ("Artificial Intelligence" OR "Generative AI" OR "AI") AND

("Educational Leadership" OR "School Leadership" OR "Digital Leadership" OR "Educational Management") AND ("Education" OR "School" OR "Higher Education"). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles written in English and indexed in Scopus.

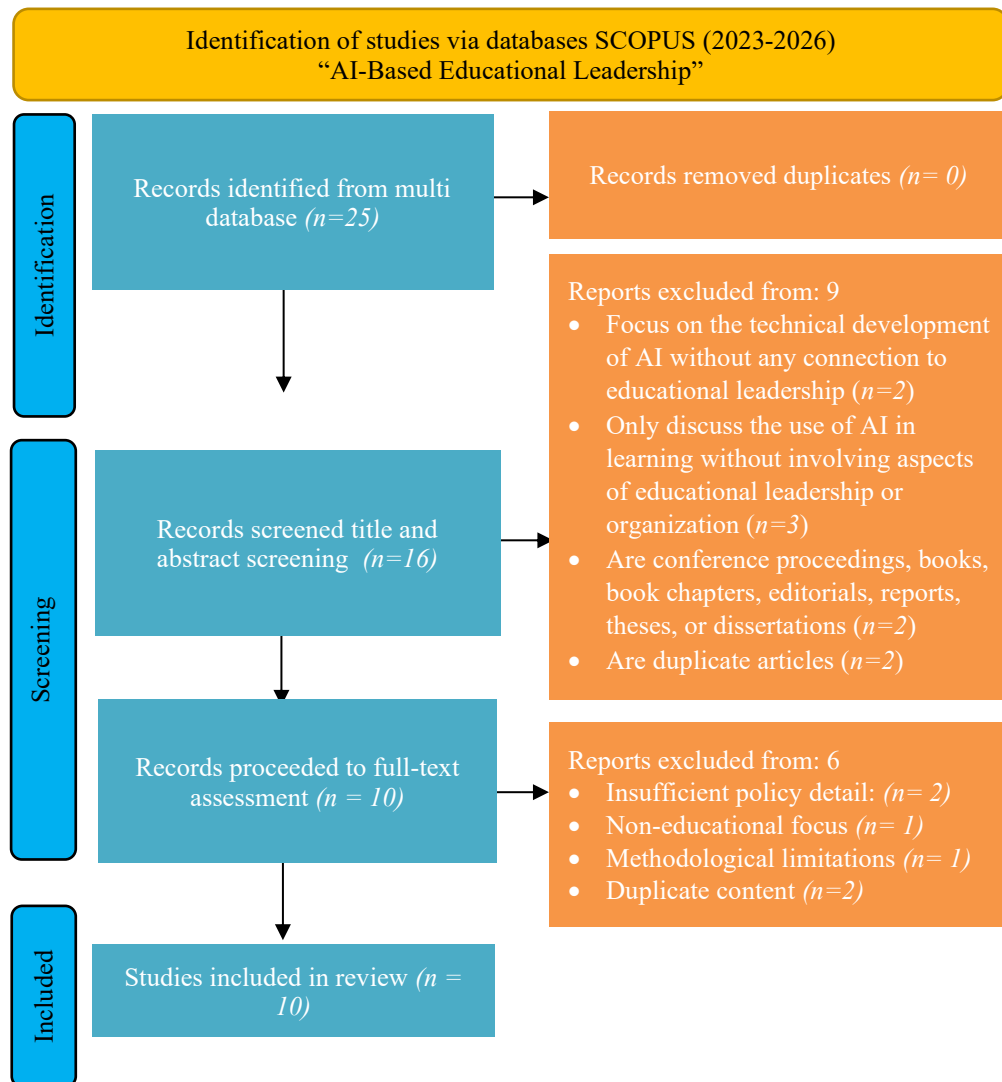


Figure 1. Study the identification process through the Scopus database

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the selected articles were directly relevant to the research objectives. Articles were included in the synthesis process if they met the following criteria: (1) Discussing the implementation of Artificial Intelligence in the context of educational leadership or management, (2) Implemented in the context of schools, universities, or educational organizations, (3) Are scientific articles resulting from empirical research or conceptual articles that contribute to the development of AI-based educational leadership, (3) Published in reputable international journals indexed by Scopus, and (5) Published in 2023-2026. Meanwhile, articles were excluded from the synthesis process if: (1) Focusing on the technical development of AI without any connection to educational leadership, (2) Only discussing the use of AI in learning without involving aspects of educational leadership or organizations, (3) In the form of conference proceedings, books, book chapters, editorials, reports, theses,

or dissertations, and (4) Are duplicate articles.

Article Selection Process

Article selection was conducted according to the four stages of PRISMA 2020: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, articles were identified using predetermined keywords. Next, the identified articles were screened by reading their titles and abstracts to ensure they aligned with the research focus. Articles that passed the screening stage were then subjected to a full-text review based on inclusion and exclusion criteria until eligible articles were identified for further analysis.

Data Extraction

Data from each article were extracted using a systematically compiled extraction sheet to maintain consistency in the analysis. The information collected included: (1) article identity (author, year of publication, and journal), (2) research context, (3) research objectives, (4) research methods, (5) leadership concepts used, (6) aspects of Artificial Intelligence studied, (7) main research findings, (8) theoretical implications; and (9) practical implications. All this information was compiled into a synthesis matrix to facilitate comparison among studies.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative thematic meta-synthesis approach. The first stage involved open coding of all research findings to identify key concepts related to AI-Supported Educational Leadership. The second stage used axial coding to group related concepts to form thematic categories. The third stage involved selective coding to integrate all categories into key themes that explain the relationship between leadership, AI governance, teacher readiness, organizational learning, and institutional transformation. Next, a conceptual synthesis was conducted using constant comparative analysis to identify similarities, differences, and relationships between themes emerging from all research. This process led to the conceptualization of AI-Supported Educational Leadership as an integration of perspectives on AI-based educational leadership.

Study Quality Assessment

To maintain the quality of the synthesis, each article was evaluated using criteria adapted from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist. Assessments were conducted on the clarity of the research objectives, the appropriateness of the methods, the quality of data collection, the accuracy of the analysis, the validity of the findings, and the transparency of the reporting of the research results. Only articles that met the methodological quality standards were included in the synthesis process.

Validity of Research

The validity of the research was maintained through the application of the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, a systematic data extraction process, article quality evaluation, and a gradual, iterative thematic analysis. Furthermore, a constant-comparison technique was used to ensure that the resulting themes accurately reflect the patterns that consistently emerge across all analyzed articles. Thus, the research results have a high level of credibility, dependability, and transparency, and can be replicated in future similar studies.

RESULTS

Study Selection and Characteristics

Based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines, this study identified several publications discussing the relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and educational leadership. After going through a process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final selection according to established inclusion and exclusion criteria, from 25 articles found (2023-2026) (See Figure 1), 10 scientific articles were obtained that met the requirements for analysis using a qualitative meta-synthesis approach (Table 1). All articles were published in 2026, thus representing the latest developments in AI in educational leadership.

Table 1. Results of the 2020 PRISMA Analysis on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Educational Leadership

No.	Authors (Tahun)	Journal/Source	Research Context	Key Findings
1	(Abad-Villaverde et al., 2026)	Frontiers in Education	Entrepreneurship education	AI is used to objectively identify personality characteristics, reduce self-perception bias, and support personalized learning interventions.
2	(Jackson & Brown-Robertson, 2026)	Signals and Communication Technology	Development of student competencies	Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) enhance soft skills through immersive and contextual learning experiences.
3	(Ismail, 2026)	Human-AI Leadership for Transforming Schools	Primary and secondary education	Human-AI collaborative leadership supports fairer, more transparent, and inclusive decision-making in schools.
4	(Yücel, 2026)	Frontiers in Psychology	Primary and secondary education	Digital leadership plays an important role as a determinant of teachers' cognitive and affective

5	(Ghanbariha, 2026)	Journal of Educators Online	College	mechanisms in adopting AI. AI supports strategic transformation towards smart universities by strengthening digital governance, innovation, and data-driven decision-making.
6	(Uğur, 2026)	Journal of Information Technology Education: Research	Primary and secondary education	Prompt literacy is an important competency that increases educators' readiness to integrate AI into educational practices.
7	(Compierchio et al., 2026)	Education Sciences	Online learning community	Pedagogical skills influence the success of online learning in building effective interactions, empathy, and communication in a digital environment.
8	(Alodan et al., 2026)	EDPACS	College	AI implementation requires IT governance, institutional policies, cybersecurity audits, and leadership capable of managing organizational risk and change.
9	(Sarna et al., 2026)	International Journal of Education Economics and Development	College	AI-based digital technologies and effective leadership behaviors contribute to improving

10	(Khasawneh et al., 2026)	Journal of Computer Assisted Learning	Educational administration	educators' psychological well-being. The study developed and validated an instrument to measure metacognitive disruption in AI-based decision-making among educational administrators.
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The ten articles cover a variety of educational contexts, from primary and secondary education and universities to online learning communities and educational organizations in general. Methodologically, the reviewed research includes quantitative studies, qualitative case studies, mixed-methods designs, instrument development, and conceptual articles. This methodological diversity demonstrates that research on AI in educational leadership is developing multidisciplinary, involving perspectives from educational management, leadership, educational technology, organizational behavior, and educational policy. Despite their different focuses, all studies share a common view of AI not merely as a learning technology but as a strategic resource that influences leadership, organizational governance, teacher professional development, decision-making, and institutional transformation.

AI-Supported Educational Leadership Research Trends

The synthesis of these results indicates a paradigm shift in AI research in education. Previous studies tended to focus on technology adoption, digitalization of learning, and infrastructure readiness. In contrast, recent research has begun to position educational leadership as a key factor determining the success of AI implementation in educational organizations.

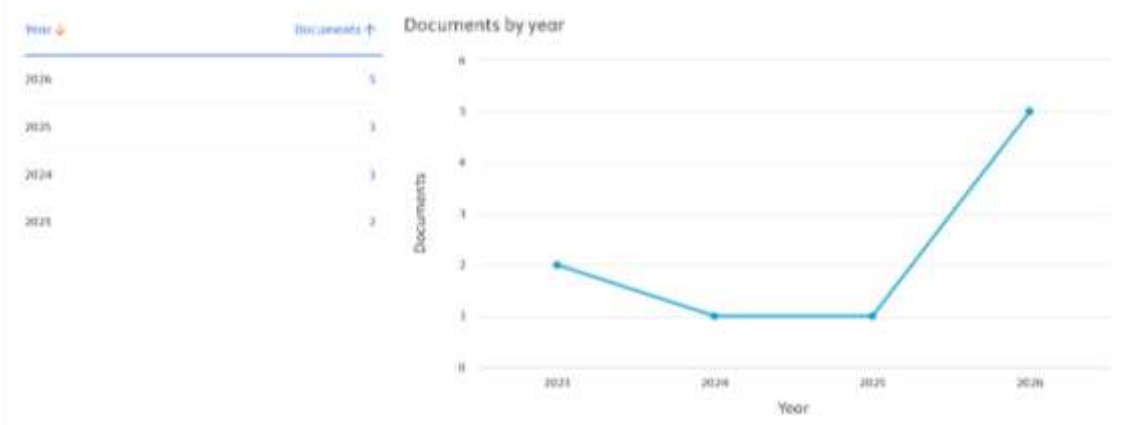


Figure 2. AI-Supported Educational Leadership Research Trends (2023-2026)

Based on the synthesis results, five main research trends were identified. First, research on digital leadership emphasizes the role of leaders in driving AI implementation. Second, research on human-centered AI leadership emphasizes collaboration between humans and artificial intelligence in decision-making. Third, research on ethical AI governance highlights the importance of

transparency, data security, privacy, and accountability in the use of AI. Fourth, research on teacher AI readiness, including AI literacy, prompt literacy, and teacher professional competency development. Fifth, research on the transformation of educational organizations, specifically how AI encourages the formation of more adaptive, innovative, and sustainability-oriented educational institutions. These findings demonstrate that AI has evolved from a mere technological innovation to an organizational capability that requires strategic leadership to create sustainable institutional change.

Key Themes of AI-Supported Educational Leadership

The meta-synthesis yielded five main themes, interrelated in explaining the development of AI-Supported Educational Leadership;

Theme 1. Digital Leadership as a Driver of AI Implementation. All research positions digital leadership as the primary foundation for AI implementation in educational institutions. Educational leaders play a role in building a digital vision, allocating technology resources, developing a culture of innovation, and preparing the organization for AI-based transformation. Thus, leadership no longer functions merely as a technology manager, but as a driver of the organization's digital transformation.

Theme 2. Human-Centered AI Leadership. The second theme demonstrates that AI is not intended to replace educational leaders, but rather to strengthen decision-making through analytical support and more accurate information. While AI can provide data-driven recommendations, strategic decisions still require ethical considerations, empathy, professional experience, and contextual understanding that only humans possess.

Theme 3. Ethical AI Governance. All studies emphasize the importance of AI governance as part of educational leadership competencies. This governance encompasses algorithm transparency, personal data protection, cybersecurity, fairness in AI use, and institutional accountability in managing intelligent technology. Therefore, the success of AI implementation is determined not only by technological sophistication but also by the quality of organizational governance.

Theme 4. Teacher Readiness and Professional Capacity. The next theme shows that the success of AI implementation is significantly influenced by teacher readiness. Educational leaders play a role in improving AI literacy, prompt literacy, digital competence, and teacher confidence in utilizing AI to support learning and administrative tasks. Therefore, teacher professional development is one of the most important organizational capabilities in AI-based educational transformation.

Theme 5. Strategic Transformation of Educational Organizations. The final theme shows that AI implementation not only alters technology use but also drives changes in organizational structure, work culture, decision-making processes, and institutional innovation. AI contributes to the formation of educational organizations that are more adaptive, responsive to change, and capable of sustainably improving institutional performance.

The analysis shows that these five themes do not stand alone; rather, they interact to form an AI-based educational leadership system. Digital leadership provides strategic direction for AI implementation, while AI governance ensures responsible use of technology. At the same time, teacher readiness strengthens organizational capacity through continuous professional learning. The interaction of all these components results in collaboration between humans and AI, ultimately driving the transformation of educational organizations as a whole.

These findings demonstrate that AI-Supported Educational Leadership cannot be understood as a set of separate competencies, but rather as an integrated organizational capability that links leadership, technology, governance, human resource development, and a culture of innovation within a unified system.

Conceptualizing AI-Supported Educational Leadership

Based on the meta-synthesis results, this study produces a conceptualization of AI-Supported Educational Leadership. This conceptualization views AI not as a stand-alone external technology, but as an organizational capability integrated into educational leadership practices. This conceptualization consists of five main components. Strategic Digital Leadership serves as a guide for the vision and strategy for AI implementation. Ethical AI Governance ensures transparency, accountability, and the responsible use of AI. Teacher Readiness for AI strengthens organizational capacity by increasing professional competence and fostering continuous learning. These three components then form Human-AI Collaborative Leadership, namely the ability of leaders to combine AI-based analysis with experience, ethical considerations, and professional decisions. Furthermore, this capability drives the Strategic Transformation of Educational Organizations, characterized by an increased culture of innovation, organizational adaptability, and the sustainability of educational institutions' performance. Thus, AI-Supported Educational Leadership is an organizational capability formed through the dynamic interaction between leadership, AI governance, teacher capacity development, organizational learning, and human-AI collaboration to produce sustainable educational transformation.

DISCUSSION

Meta-synthesis results indicate that research on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational leadership has undergone a significant paradigm shift. While the initial focus of AI development in education remained on using technology to support the learning process and improve administrative efficiency, recent research has begun to view AI as an integral part of educational organizational transformation. This shift is evident in the increasing dominance of studies that position leadership as a strategic factor in determining the success of AI implementation (Ghanbariha, 2026; Ismail, 2026; Sarna et al., 2026). Thus, the success of AI implementation is no longer determined solely by technological sophistication, but by leaders' ability to build a digital vision, develop a culture of innovation, manage organizational change, and ensure that AI use remains aligned with educational values.

The findings of this study also show that the concept of AI-Supported Educational Leadership evolved from the concept of digital leadership. Most previous research views digital leadership as a leader's ability to utilize digital technology to improve organizational effectiveness (Ismail, 2026; Yücel, 2026). However, this study's findings demonstrate that AI presents far greater complexity than conventional digitalization, as it involves data-driven decision-making, automated organizational processes, predictive analytics, and collaboration between humans and intelligent systems. Therefore, educational leadership in the AI era requires more than just mastering digital competencies; it must also integrate artificial intelligence with ethical considerations, professional experience, empathy, and decision-making that prioritize students' interests and the sustainability of the educational organization.

This meta-synthesis also identified that digital leadership, ethical AI governance, teacher readiness for AI, organizational learning, and institutional

transformation are not stand-alone components, but rather form an interacting system (Alodan et al., 2026; Uğur, 2026; Yücel, 2026). Digital leadership provides strategic direction for AI implementation, while AI governance ensures that the entire process is transparent, accountable, secure, and responsible (Ismail, 2026; Yücel, 2026). At the same time, teacher preparedness through increased AI literacy, prompt literacy, and digital competency strengthens the organization's capacity to utilize AI effectively. The interaction of all these components fosters collaboration between humans and AI, fostering a culture of innovation and organizational adaptability and improving the quality of decision-making (Alodan et al., 2026; Ismail, 2026; Uğur, 2026; Yücel, 2026). These findings show that AI implementation is a systemic organizational transformation process, so its success depends on the synergy between technology, leadership, governance, and human resource development.

However, the synthesis also revealed conceptual fragmentation in the existing literature. Most studies still examine AI from separate perspectives, such as technology adoption, digital leadership, AI governance, prompt literacy, or teacher readiness, without integrating all these dimensions into a coherent conceptual framework (Ghanbariha, 2026; Ismail, 2026; Uğur, 2026). In addition, many studies still use the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which focus on individual behavior in accepting technology (Uğur, 2026). While this approach is relevant for explaining AI adoption, it fails to account for how leadership leverages AI as an organizational capability to drive innovation, organizational learning, and sustainable institutional transformation. Therefore, a more comprehensive theoretical perspective is needed that simultaneously connects the dimensions of leadership, organization, and technology.

Based on these findings, this study proposes AI-Supported Educational Leadership as a new conceptualization in the study of educational leadership. This conceptualization views AI not merely as a technological tool but as an organizational capability that strengthens the leadership process by integrating strategic leadership, ethical AI governance, human resource readiness, organizational learning, and human-AI collaboration. This perspective expands the concept of digital leadership, which has previously been more technology-focused, into a leadership paradigm that positions AI as part of the overall transformation of educational organizations. Thus, this study contributes to the conceptual development by integrating leadership, artificial intelligence, organizational learning, and continuous educational transformation into a single perspective.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide important implications for educational leaders and policymakers. AI implementation cannot focus solely on providing technological infrastructure; it must also be accompanied by strengthening leadership capacity, improving AI literacy among teachers, developing ethical AI governance policies, fostering a culture of innovation, and establishing professional learning communities that support human-AI collaboration. This holistic AI implementation strategy will help educational institutions build more adaptive, innovative organizations and sustainably navigate technological change without neglecting humanitarian values and educational ethics.

Despite making important conceptual contributions, this study still has several limitations. This review only synthesized articles published within a specific period, thus not depicting the longitudinal development of AI-supported educational leadership. Furthermore, most of the reviewed studies came from developed countries, and a few from developing countries, so generalizing the

results still requires caution. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct quantitative meta-analyses with a larger number of studies, develop empirical models that examine the relationships between AI-supported educational leadership, organizational learning capability, AI trust, innovation climate, digital resilience, and sustainable educational performance, and conduct cross-country studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of AI implementation in various educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully synthesizes the latest developments on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational leadership through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and qualitative meta-synthesis approach, demonstrating a paradigm shift from AI as a learning-supporting technology to AI as a strategic organizational capability. The synthesis yielded five main themes: strategic digital leadership, ethical AI governance, teacher readiness for AI, human–AI collaboration, and educational organizational transformation, which were then integrated into the conceptualization of AI-Supported Educational Leadership. This conceptualization expands the educational leadership literature by positioning AI as an organizational capability that supports decision-making, organizational learning, teacher professional development, and continuous institutional innovation. From a practical perspective, these findings confirm that successful AI implementation requires strengthening leadership capacity, AI literacy, prompt literacy, ethical AI governance, and an adaptive organizational culture. However, the limited number and scope of reviewed articles indicate the need for further research through quantitative meta-analyses and cross-context empirical studies to test and validate the AI-Supported Educational Leadership model and its relationship to organizational capabilities, trust in AI, innovation climate, digital resilience, and sustainable educational performance.

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