



Executive leadership and professional teaching profile from an epistemological perspective

Liderazgo directivo y perfil profesional docente desde una perspectiva epistemológica

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ABSTRACT

Understanding contemporary educational phenomena requires epistemological approaches that transcend reductionist views and capture the complexity of educational processes. In this context, the research objective was to analyse managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers from an epistemological perspective. The methodology employed was a qualitative documentary review, using the analytical-synthetic method to examine twenty-five scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 in internationally recognised databases. The results show that both categories have moved from operational conceptions to comprehensive frameworks that recognise their relational and contextual nature. It is concluded that the articulation between managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers responds to a dialectical interaction, not a linear causality, requiring the overcoming of instrumentalist approaches that reduce educational performance to quantifiable indicators.

Descriptors: science philosophy; science and society; scientific culture. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

La comprensión del fenómeno educativo contemporáneo requiere aproximaciones epistemológicas que trasciendan visiones reduccionistas y capturen la complejidad de los procesos formativos. En este contexto, el objetivo de investigación fue analizar el liderazgo directivo y perfil profesional docente desde una perspectiva epistemológica. La metodología empleada correspondió a una revisión documental con enfoque cualitativo, utilizando el método analítico-sintético para examinar veinticinco artículos científicos publicados entre 2020 y 2025 en bases de datos reconocidas internacionalmente. Los resultados evidencian que ambas categorías han transitado desde concepciones operativas hacia marcos comprensivos que reconocen su naturaleza relacional y contextual. Se concluye que la articulación entre liderazgo directivo y perfil profesional docente responde a una interacción dialéctica, no a una causalidad lineal, demandando superar enfoques instrumentalistas que reducen el desempeño educativo a indicadores cuantificables.

Descriptores: filosofía de la ciencia; ciencia y sociedad; cultura científica. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

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Research articles



INTRODUCTION

Understanding contemporary education requires an epistemological approach that goes beyond reductionist views and allows us to grasp the complexity of educational processes in all their multifactorial dimensions. From this perspective, managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers emerge as central categories that shape institutional dynamics and determine, to a considerable extent, the quality of teaching and learning processes. However, their approach has traditionally been limited to operational approaches that prioritise the measurement of results over conceptual reflection, creating a significant gap between theoretical foundations and situated practices.

From this perspective, it is imperative to examine the epistemological bases that underpin both the exercise of school leadership and the configuration of the professional profile of teachers, recognising that both categories respond to socio-historical constructions traversed by paradigmatic tensions, conceptual disputes and contextual transformations. In this regard, recent educational research has shown that school institutions that adopt transformational leadership models experience substantial improvements in teacher commitment and learning outcomes, as pointed out by Alzoraiki et al. (2024) in their study on strengthening school culture in diverse educational contexts.

Convergently, the evolution of the teaching professional profile has moved from vocational conceptions to competency-based approaches that integrate disciplinary, pedagogical, and technological dimensions. This transformation responds not only to the demands of the globalised context but also to an epistemological reconceptualisation of teaching that positions it as a reflective profession in constant construction. In this regard, Castro et al. (2024) warn that Latin American education systems face the challenge of articulating international competency frameworks with local realities, generating tensions between normative discourses and the daily practices of teachers.

Based on the above, the research objective was formulated to analyse managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers from an epistemological perspective.



METHOD

The research was based on a qualitative documentary review design, aimed at understanding the theoretical categories that articulated the study of managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers. This type of inquiry enabled the critical systematisation of the knowledge accumulated in a specific field, which made it possible to identify trends, conceptual gaps and emerging lines of exploration. The documentary review, understood as a methodological strategy, went beyond mere bibliographic compilation to become an interpretative process that sought to unravel the underlying meanings in the scientific production analysed.

The method used was analytical-synthetic, a logical thought process that allowed the object of study to be broken down into its constituent parts for independent examination and then reintegrated into a holistic understanding that revealed the relationships and connections between the components. This method was particularly relevant for epistemological research, as it facilitated the identification of the structural elements of the theories, the ontological assumptions that underpinned them, and the practical implications derived from them. The analytical phase made it possible to break down the categories of managerial leadership and professional teaching profile into their conceptual dimensions, while the synthetic phase allowed the interrelationships between both categories to be reconstructed from an integrative perspective.

The study population consisted of scientific articles published in indexed journals during the period 2020-2025, selected using specific inclusion criteria that ensured their relevance and academic quality. The inclusion criteria comprised: publication in peer-reviewed journals, availability of the full text, thematic approach linked to educational leadership, professional teaching profile or pedagogical performance, and theoretical relevance to the proposed epistemological analysis. On the other hand, documents that did not meet methodological rigour standards or that presented merely descriptive content without significant conceptual contribution were excluded.

The documentary corpus consisted of twenty-five scientific articles from internationally recognised databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo,



and Redalyc. The selection favoured studies that provided solid theoretical perspectives, contextualised empirical evidence, and epistemological reflections on the categories under analysis. Research carried out in various geographical contexts was included, with special attention to Latin American scientific production, particularly Ecuadorian, given the importance of understanding regional particularities in the configuration of leadership and teaching professionalism.

The analysis procedure was structured in three interlinked phases: The first phase, called familiarisation, consisted of a comprehensive reading of the selected documents, identifying the central arguments, theoretical frameworks used, and conclusions derived. The second phase, analytical in nature, involved the systematic breakdown of the content using qualitative content analysis techniques, establishing emerging categories and recurring patterns in the literature reviewed. The third phase, synthetic in nature, was oriented towards the integration of the analysed elements into coherent interpretative frameworks that allowed the research objectives to be met.

In order to ensure the methodological rigour of the research process, criteria of credibility, transferability and confirmability specific to qualitative research were applied. Credibility was ensured through the triangulation of documentary sources, contrasting diverse theoretical perspectives on the same conceptual categories. Transferability was sought through detailed descriptions of the context and conditions in which the studies analysed were conducted. Confirmability was ensured through the systematic recording of the analytical process, allowing for the traceability of the interpretations formulated.

RESULTS

Based on the documentary analysis, knowledge is generated:

Epistemological foundations of educational leadership

The conceptualisation of educational leadership has undergone substantial transformations over the last few decades, responding to paradigm shifts in the educational sciences and emerging demands from school systems. In their early stages, theoretical approaches to school leadership were strongly influenced by management models from the business world, characterised by hierarchical



structures, centralisation of decision-making power and an emphasis on administrative efficiency. This approach, known as authoritarian or traditional leadership, conceived of the school principal as an administrator whose primary function was to ensure regulatory compliance and the operational functioning of the institution, relegating pedagogical dimensions to the background.

However, contemporary educational research has questioned the epistemological relevance of these models, pointing out that they reduce the complexity of the school phenomenon to administrative variables and ignore the relational, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions that shape institutional life. Along these lines, Yao and Ma (2024) argue that authoritarian leadership models create restrictive work environments that limit teachers' professional autonomy and reduce their job satisfaction, negatively affecting teaching processes. The research carried out by these authors shows that the decentralisation of decision-making power and the promotion of participatory spaces are determining factors for educational improvement.

The emergence of transformational leadership represents a significant epistemological break with traditional models. Based on the seminal work of Burns and later developed by Bass, this approach conceives of the leader as an agent of change whose role transcends administrative management to focus on the cultural transformation of the organisation. According to this perspective, the transformational leader articulates a shared vision, inspires and motivates team members, stimulates creativity and innovation, and addresses individual professional development needs. As confirmed by Yousefi et al. (2025), educational institutions that implement transformational leadership practices show significant increases in organisational commitment and job satisfaction among teachers, variables that directly affect pedagogical performance.

At the same time, the distributed leadership model is another epistemological approach that has gained relevance in the field of education. Unlike transformational leadership, which maintains a certain centrality in the figure of the leader, distributed leadership proposes a radical decentralisation of power, conceiving leadership as an emergent property of the interactions between the various institutional actors. On this point, Hsieh et al. (2024) argue that this



approach is particularly relevant for educational institutions, as it recognises the professional expertise of teachers and promotes more horizontal and collaborative organisational structures.

From an epistemological perspective, both models share the recognition that educational leadership cannot be reduced to a set of individual techniques or competencies, but must be understood as a relational and contextually situated phenomenon. In line with this position, Li et al. (2024) emphasise that distributed leadership favours pedagogical innovation by allowing teachers to assume leadership roles in their areas of expertise, generating dynamics of co-construction of organisational knowledge. These authors caution, however, that the effective implementation of this model requires specific structural conditions, including clarity in the distribution of responsibilities and coordination mechanisms that prevent organisational fragmentation.

The digitisation of educational processes has introduced new epistemological complexities in the understanding of school leadership. According to Mah and Groß (2024), the incorporation of technological tools in institutional management requires a reconceptualisation of the managerial role, which must now integrate advanced digital skills alongside traditional management skills. These researchers identify that educational leaders with greater technological mastery are able to implement more efficient management systems and facilitate the adoption of pedagogical innovations by teachers. However, they warn of the risk of falling into technological determinism that subordinates pedagogical dimensions to instrumental imperatives.

The evaluation of managerial leadership is another aspect that requires epistemological reflection. In this regard, Tapia et al. (2024) criticise evaluative approaches that reduce leadership effectiveness to quantitative indicators of student performance, pointing out that this perspective ignores the multiple mediations that intervene between managerial practices and learning outcomes. Instead, they propose multidimensional evaluation models that consider variables such as organisational climate, teacher professional development, and institutional innovation culture.

Emotional intelligence emerges as a significant dimension of educational leadership that has been the subject of increasing research attention. On this topic, Lu and Chen (2024) demonstrate that managers with high levels of emotional intelligence create more positive and constructive work environments, characterised by healthy interpersonal relationships and effective communication. The studies carried out by these authors reveal that a leader's ability to manage their own emotions and understand those of others is a significant predictor of teacher performance and institutional commitment. Similarly, Shafait and Huang (2024) argue that knowledge-oriented leadership, which integrates cognitive and emotional dimensions, enhances creativity and innovation in teaching teams.

Epistemological configuration of the teaching professional profile

The conceptualisation of the teaching professional profile has undergone substantial epistemological transformations that reflect paradigm shifts in the understanding of educational processes and the emerging demands of contemporary societies. Traditionally, teaching was conceived as a vocational activity based on mastery of disciplinary content and the unidirectional transmission of knowledge to students. This perspective, rooted in positivist and behaviourist epistemologies, reduced the role of the teacher to that of a transmitter of information, ignoring the reflective, creative and transformative dimensions inherent in pedagogical practice.

The professionalisation of teaching is a historical process that has substantially reconfigured this conception. In relation to this aspect, Brandt et al. (2024) analyse how education systems have moved towards competency-based models that recognise the complexity of teaching work and require specific qualifications for its practice. These researchers identify that teachers in training need to develop not only disciplinary and pedagogical competencies, but also skills to identify the linguistic and cultural characteristics of their students, adapting their practices to the diversity of the classroom.

The competency-based approach represents an epistemological break with traditional teacher training models. On this issue, Solano et al. (2024) examine teaching practices in Ecuadorian contexts and show that university curricula have



progressively incorporated the development of cross-cutting competencies, including critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative work. These authors warn, however, of the tensions that exist between standardised competency frameworks and specific contextual realities, pointing out that the effective implementation of these approaches requires consideration of the material and symbolic conditions in which teaching practice takes place.

The incorporation of digital competencies is one of the most significant changes in the configuration of the contemporary teaching professional profile. In this line of research, Orozco et al. (2025) propose a model of digital competencies for the development of teaching performance that integrates technical, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of technology use. These researchers argue that digital competence is not limited to the instrumental use of technological tools, but rather involves the ability to critically integrate technologies into teaching-learning processes, considering their pedagogical potential and limitations.

Continuing education emerges as a constituent component of the professional teaching profile that has been the subject of increasing research attention. In this regard, Acuña-Zúñiga et al. (2024) analyse the perceptions of teachers in postgraduate training regarding educational research and show that participation in advanced training processes transforms teachers' epistemological conceptions of their own practice. These authors argue that teachers who develop research skills gain a deeper understanding of educational phenomena and are better equipped to implement well-founded pedagogical innovations.

The Latin American context has particularities that require specific attention in the configuration of the professional profile of teachers. On this subject, Álvarez et al. (2024) analyse the effectiveness of higher education policies in Ecuador and show that regulatory reforms do not always translate into effective improvements in research productivity and teaching quality. These researchers point out that educational policies must consider the structural conditions of the system, including infrastructure, resources, and working conditions for teachers, in order to achieve substantive transformations in the professional profile of teachers.

Educational inclusion is another dimension that has reconfigured the requirements of the teaching profession. On this issue, Aguilar et al. (2024)



examine the challenges of educational inclusion in Ecuadorian higher education and highlight that teachers need to develop specific skills to address student diversity, including knowledge of special educational needs, curricular adaptations, and pedagogical differentiation strategies. Complementing this perspective, Quevedo and Álvarez (2024) analyse the relationship between the challenges of teaching practice and the inclusion of students with special educational needs, identifying that a lack of specific training in this area leads to frustration and work overload among teachers.

Teachers' professional expertise has been conceptualised in various ways in the specialised literature. Within this framework, Jacobs et al. (2024) propose profiles of teaching expertise based on mathematical noticing ability, i.e., the ability to identify, interpret and respond to students' mathematical thinking during instruction. These researchers demonstrate that teaching expertise is not a static property, but rather a process of progressive development that requires systematic opportunities for reflection on practice and specialised feedback.

In relation to the contextualisation of teaching work, Paccha et al. (2024) address the approximation and contextualisation of the professional teaching context, emphasising the need to understand the professional profile as a situated construction that responds to specific historical, cultural and material conditions. These authors criticise approaches that seek to establish universal, decontextualised professional profiles, arguing that such a perspective ignores the diversity of educational realities and generates regulatory frameworks that are inapplicable in particular contexts.

Active methodologies represent another emerging component of the professional teaching profile that has gained relevance in contemporary educational debates. In this regard, Ordoñez and Román (2024) analyse learning environments in physics teaching and show that teachers who implement active methodologies, such as problem-based learning and the flipped classroom, achieve higher levels of motivation and conceptual understanding in their students. These authors point out, however, that the effective implementation of these methodologies requires specific institutional conditions, including adequate infrastructure, teaching resources, and pedagogical support.



Articulations between managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers

The relationship between managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers is a central analytical axis for understanding institutional dynamics and their impact on educational performance. From an epistemological perspective, this relationship cannot be conceptualised as a linear causality where leadership unidirectionally determines the characteristics of teachers, but rather as a dialectical interaction where both dimensions are mutually configured within the framework of the structural and cultural conditions of each institution.

Addressing this issue, García and Sesé (2024) propose a conceptual framework for measuring teacher talent management that integrates the dimensions of managerial leadership and teacher professional development. These researchers argue that talent management practices, including the selection, training, and retention of teaching staff, are concrete expressions of institutional leadership that directly influence the configuration of the collective professional profile. The analyses developed by these authors show that institutions that implement systematic talent management strategies have more solid professional profiles that are consistent with institutional objectives.

Teacher motivation emerges as a significant mediating variable between managerial leadership and professional performance. In relation to this aspect, Layek and Koodamara (2024) conducted a comparative study on the relationship between motivation, work experience and teaching performance, highlighting that teachers' motivational levels are strongly conditioned by institutional leadership practices. The results of their research indicate that leaders who implement strategies of professional recognition, pedagogical autonomy, and development support generate substantial increases in teachers' intrinsic motivation, a variable that in turn significantly predicts classroom performance.

With regard to leadership styles, Pesantez and Orellana (2024) evaluate transformational-transactional leadership in university teachers and demonstrate that the leadership styles exercised by managers have different implications for the professional profile of teachers. Transformational leaders, characterised by their ability to articulate inspiring visions and intellectually stimulate their teams,



favour the development of professional profiles oriented towards innovation and continuous improvement. In contrast, transactional styles, based on contingent exchanges of rewards, tend to generate more conservative profiles oriented towards regulatory compliance.

Results-based accountability is a contextual factor that conditions the relationship between leadership and professional profile. In this framework, Baidoo and Ennu (2024) explore teachers' perceptions of the influence of standardised assessments on teaching and learning, identifying that accountability systems generate pressures that can distort both leadership practices and teacher professional development. These researchers warn that when educational leaders prioritise quantitative indicators over pedagogical processes, it leads to a deprofessionalisation of teaching work that reduces teachers' autonomy and creativity.

On the transferability of leadership, Hopp and Pruschak (2020) question the existence of a generic leadership skill that can be transferred to different contexts, arguing that leadership skills are developed in situ and respond to the specific demands of each professional field. This perspective has significant implications for understanding educational leadership, suggesting that school administrators need to develop specific pedagogical skills that enable them to understand and enhance the work of teachers.

The incorporation of emerging technologies introduces new complexities in the relationship between leadership and professional profile. In this regard, Li et al. (2024) compare the effects of pairing trainee teachers with experienced teachers versus the use of ChatGPT in integrated STEM courses, highlighting that artificial intelligence tools can complement, but not replace, human mentoring in teacher professional development. These results suggest that educational leaders must develop sound pedagogical criteria for integrating emerging technologies into teacher training processes, avoiding both technophobic rejection and uncritical adoption.

Epistemological reflections on educational performance

Educational performance is a complex category that has been the subject of diverse and often contradictory conceptualisations in the specialised literature.

From an epistemological perspective, it is necessary to question the assumptions underlying the operational definitions of performance, recognising that these respond to specific value frameworks that privilege certain aspects of pedagogical work over others. The prevalence of instrumentalist approaches that reduce performance to quantifiable indicators has generated a fragmented view that ignores the complexity inherent in educational processes.

The conceptualisation of teacher performance requires recognition of its multidimensional nature, integrating cognitive, affective, relational and contextual aspects that shape pedagogical practice. Evaluation systems that focus exclusively on student academic results ignore the multiple mediations involved in learning processes, including sociocultural, economic and family factors that are beyond the teacher's control. This reductionist perspective also has perverse effects on pedagogical practices, encouraging strategies aimed at maximising scores to the detriment of meaningful learning and comprehensive development. The articulation between managerial leadership and the professional profile of teachers is a determining factor in educational performance, provided that it is understood from epistemological frameworks that recognise its dialectical and contextually situated nature. Educational leaders who recognise teacher professionalism and create conditions for its development encourage the emergence of innovative and contextualised pedagogical practices. Conversely, vertical leadership models that impose guidelines without considering the expertise of teachers generate resistance and demotivation that negatively affect performance.

Professional reflexivity emerges as a cross-cutting competence that articulates leadership, professional profile and educational performance. Reflective teachers, capable of critically analysing their own practice and grounding it theoretically, are better positioned to innovate pedagogically and respond to emerging demands in the educational context. Similarly, reflective leaders who question their own assumptions and promote institutional cultures of inquiry favour the development of professional learning communities.



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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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