

Pedagogical Leadership in Higher Education: A Systematic Review

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Received: 18.09.2024

Revised: 24.10.2024

Accepted: 29.11.2024

ABSTRACT

Pedagogical leadership in higher education emerges as an essential component to improve teaching and learning. The study was based on pure research, qualitative approach, systematic review and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Prisma) statement. The research showed that, although pedagogical leadership promotes a teaching and learning environment for the higher education community, it faces a series of challenges and obstacles such as lack of understanding of leadership and lack of financial support from institutions. Thus, it was concluded that pedagogical leadership plays a crucial role in the development of educational practices that respond to contemporary demands; however, pedagogical practice must institutionalize innovation, focus on reflection and adapt strategies centered on learning and applicable to professional life.

Keywords: leadership, pedagogy, education, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Education promotes human growth and development, and is not limited to acquisition of knowledge and skills. Professional learning focuses on personal growth and the development of morally committed actions in the workplace (Salo et al., 2024). In education, the teacher must acquire and apply essential pedagogical tools to positively impact academic performance of students (Pedraza et al., 2023). Likewise, the director, as an agent promoting change, is responsible for planning, programming, coordinating, implementing and evaluating actions necessary to ensure the proper functioning of educational institutions (Ibarra, 2022).

Leadership has become an essential quality for organizational management, especially for educational institutions (Cuesta & Moreno, 2021). A so-called "educational" leader must be someone with the ability to influence all levels of educational centers: administrative, teaching, management, that is, the entire educational community (Sanglier et al., 2022). In this sense, leadership is a process guides, coordinates, and motivates people involved in the development and implementation of teaching, to achieve educational goals (Amalia et al., 2020).

Pedagogical leadership is defined as the ability of a director to guide educators, prioritize student learning, and actively engage with the needs of the institution through the use of critical-dialogic tools (Acevedo, 2020). It refers to the director's ability to guide the educational process, leading planning, implementation, and evaluation, accompanying members of the educational community, and establishing objectives that guide educational work (Tafur et al., 2020). Pedagogical leadership consists of a series of actions that inspire others and facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge, beliefs, or skills in students (Peng & Chudy, 2021).

In this sense, a director's leadership must consider diverse contexts and apply personal skills to generate trust, encouraging and improving participation (Manríquez & Reyes, 2021). The educational leader is one who not only addresses the relationship between the various actors in the educational community, but also has a broader scope (Tirado et al., 2021). This is characterized by a person's ability to lead effectively, understand their team, and adopt an innovative leadership style (Ramírez, 2024).

In the context of higher education, effective leadership requires up-to-date knowledge of the sector and personal and interpersonal skills such as decision-making, flexibility, and competence in diagnosing and formulating strategies (Beerens & Van der Hoek, 2022). It also implies forward-looking management in educational

institutions, encompassing creation of an intellectual community, promoting creativity and development of competencies among teachers, staff, and students (Barik et al., 2024). Leadership is key to success of any organization, being essential to improve learning, teaching, relevance and success of higher education institutions (Dube et al., 2022).

However, pedagogical leadership can be influenced by bureaucracy, access to unqualified people or selection processes for personnel not suitable to exercise such leadership, affecting the ability to develop academic leadership allows the implementation of future educational models (Torres et al., 2024).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023), educational leadership is considered essential for school effectiveness; although socioeconomic factors significantly influence educational outcomes, strong and effective school leadership allows leadership to make a big difference, mitigating the negative effects of unfavorable socioeconomic environments and promoting a more equitable and successful environment for all students.

At the national level, there are few studies that address pedagogical leadership in context of higher education, as highlighted in the study by Laredo & Alania (2021), in which their research reveals that the majority of teachers have a high level of leadership; however, they face significant operational weaknesses, which limit their ability to develop practical actions and difficulties in implementing strategies to face challenges and take advantage of opportunities for improvement and development in the university context.

The objective of this research was to analyze pedagogical leadership in higher education, with the purpose of identifying the skills and competencies necessary for its effective implementation, as well as challenges and opportunities they face in the university context, in order to propose strategies, strengthen their development and contribute to improving the quality of education in higher education institutions. It is theoretically justified, by broadening the understanding of subject and building a solid conceptual base (Bernal, 2010), the variables were identified through the review of articles in indexed journals, specialized reports, government documents and other relevant study sources to reinforce the research. Regarding the practical justification, the study focused on offering feasible solutions to the problem posed, with the aim of providing practical contributions that fit the real problem detected (Fernández-Bedoya, 2020). Regarding methodological justification, the aim was to support the study and establish essential requirements for its development, in accordance with the object of study (Baena, 2017). Finally, regarding the social justification, it is highlighted that all research must have social relevance, in addition to establishing the scope and benefits it will bring to population (Hernández et al., 2014). In this case, the aim was to analyze pedagogical leadership in higher education, with the objective of understanding its impact on educational quality and integral development of directors, students and the educational institution.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the principles of basic research, which allowed the development of theoretical concepts that serve as primary sources, with a focus on finding practical applications to improve plans, policies and projects (Muntané, 2010). This approach involves a detailed description of phenomenon to understand and explain it using methods and techniques derived from its epistemological foundations, such as interpretation, analysis of phenomenon and inductive approach (Sánchez, 2019). Likewise, a systematic review facilitates the analysis of primary studies with the aim of synthesizing the information available on a specific topic (Manterola et al., 2013). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart was used, designed to assist authors of systematic reviews in accurately documenting the objectives of review, the methods used and the results found (Page et al., 2021).

The information was collected through search engines and by accessing key databases such as Scopus, SciELO and WOS, chosen for their relevance and accessibility they offer to authors, reviewers and readers. The relevant literature for the study was then gathered, applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, which are described in Table 1.

For the research, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied in the selection of productions. The inclusion criteria include works with a relevant theme, studies carried out between 2020 and 2024, productions in English or Spanish, and research indexed in SciELO, Scopus or Web of Science. In contrast, the exclusion criteria eliminate research with objectives other than pedagogical leadership in higher education, studies outside the analysis period or academic productions that are not available in open access.

The search began after identifying the keywords necessary for the formulation of the search equations. These were generated by combining keywords with the terms "pedagogical leadership" and "higher education", which expedited the identification of relevant studies for each category, using keywords present in the title, abstract and body of the text.

The analysis of the publications was carried out by verifying articles met the eligibility criteria and addressed the research question through an article selection process.

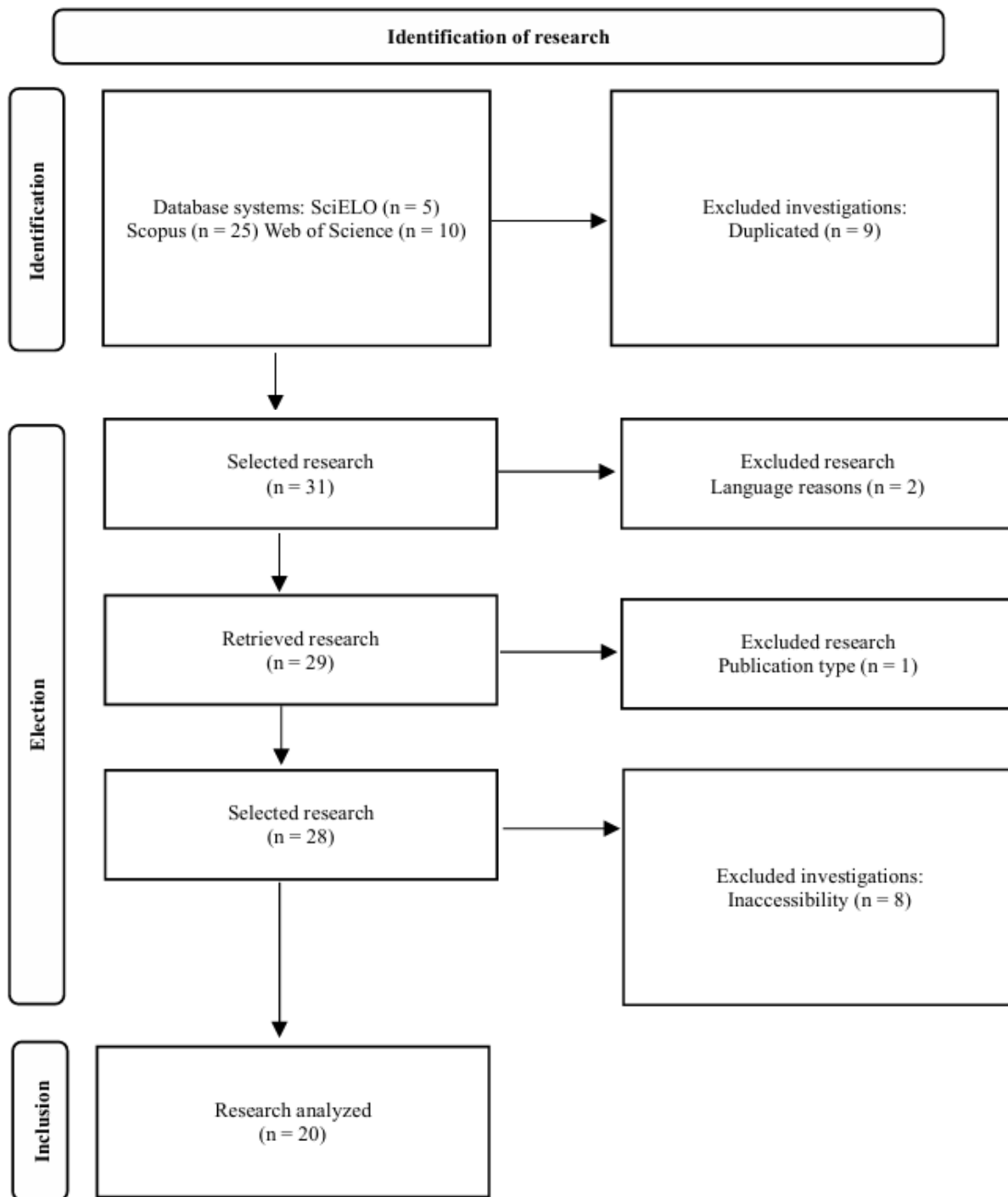


Figure 1: Selection flowchart

Table 1: Previous research

Cod	Author	Country	Title	Summary	Database
1	Aparicio et al. (2020)	Chile	Liderazgo directivo y cambio educativo: Análisis de una experiencia de colaboración universidad-escuela	The management team found that the support plan provided guidance and capacity building to respond to the demands of the educational institution.	SciELO
2	Cabana et al. (2022)	Chile	Influencia del liderazgo académico en el aprendizaje	Transformational leadership and pedagogical leadership positively and indirectly	SciELO

			significativo de los estudiantes de la Facultad de Ingeniería, Universidad de La Serena, Chile	influence the meaningful learning of students	
3	Cuéllar et al. (2023)	Chile	Liderazgo pedagógico en período de educación remota. Estudio de caso en universidades chilenas	Collaborative and innovative pedagogical leadership focused on learning overcame economic barriers and facilitated contextualized learning and horizontal relationships.	SciELO
4	Macanchi et al. (2020)	Ecuador	Innovación educativa, pedagógica y didáctica. Concepciones para la práctica en la educación superior	Pedagogical leadership drives educational innovation, based on its value for quality and the commitment of the educational community.	SciELO
5	Pedraja et al. (2021)	Chile	Liderazgo en instituciones de educación superior: Un análisis a través de Bibliometrix R	Leadership in higher education identifies four lines of research, highlighting styles, programs, female leadership and competencies.	SciELO
6	Camacho et al. (2022)	Ecuador	Liderazgo y gestión docente durante la pandemia: una visión desde la educación superior	Teachers at higher education institutions focused pedagogical actions on student leadership, ensuring continuous learning, planning and autonomy	Scopus
7	Cejas et al. (2021)	Ecuador	Pedagogical Leadership within the Framework of Human Talent Management: A Comprehensive Approach from the Perspective of Higher Education in Ecuador	Most teachers do not recognize themselves as leaders in the educational processes in which they participate, which is crucial for action and active participation.	Scopus
8	Elo & Uljens (2022)	Finlandia	Theorising pedagogical dimensions of higher education leadership—a non-affirmative approach	Educational leadership is decontextualized, applying problematic multi-level approaches and lacking a theory on pedagogical interaction and influence.	Scopus
9	Ghamrawi et al. (2024)	Finlandia	Teacher leadership in higher education: why not?	Teaching leadership in higher education fosters social enculturation, the dissemination of knowledge and emotional aptitude among new educators.	Scopus
10	Guerrero & Vásquez (2024)	Perú	Competencias de innovación pedagógica en Instituciones de Educación Superior	Education demands leaders with systematized competencies, highlighting pedagogical innovation; however, training programs lack a focus on developing this competency.	Scopus
11	James (2020)	Reino Unido	Moving from competence to	Excellence in higher education is questioned for its focus on a	Scopus

			excellence: the role of training managers in providing pedagogical leadership in UK further education	minimum competency; however, the experience of directors could boost its quality.	
12	Kinnunen et al. (2024)	Finlandia	Bringing clarity to the leadership of teaching and learning in higher education: a systematic review	Leadership in higher education addresses concepts such as academic leadership, educational leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership.	Scopus
13	Kärkkäinen et al. (2023)	Finlandia	How does university teachers' pedagogical training meet topical challenges raised by educational research? A case study from Finland	Pedagogical leadership is rarely included in the content of courses in university pedagogical practices.	Scopus
14	Palomino et al. (2022)	España	Incidence of Pedagogical Leadership in the Students' Performance in Higher Education	Pedagogical leadership oriented to improving performance is limited, emphasizing incorporation as an element of change and improvement in higher education institutions. The evaluation of pedagogical leadership in principals is crucial but challenging, requiring improved organizational development and student performance	Scopus
15	Palomino et al. (2023)	España	Evaluation of pedagogical leadership through the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). Adaptation to the context of Higher Education in Spain	The pedagogical leadership of principals is positively evaluated by principals, supervisors and teachers with perceptions of effectiveness.	Scopus
16	Palomino et al. (2024)	España	Effectiveness of educational leadership through directors' performance in online higher education. The biggest online university in Spain	Educational leadership is a crucial factor in educational excellence, thus requiring leadership to focus on learning as the core of the management exercise.	Scopus
17	Rosales et al (2023)	Colombia	Liderazgo eficaz para la calidad educativa y la acreditación universitaria en el caribe colombiano	Teaching leadership in institutions is relatively low in Chinese private higher education institutions	Scopus
18	Zhang et al. (2021)	China - Australia	Exploring Teacher Leadership and the Factors Contributing to It: An Empirical Study on Chinese	Teaching leadership is characterized by stimulation that motivates students to achieve their personal and academic goals.	Scopus

			Private Higher Education Institutions		
19	Velásquez & Hernández (2020)	México	Influence of the teaching Leadership in the motivation of university students	Pedagogical leadership impacts teaching performance and student achievement, suggesting clear resources and goals to improve academic achievement.	Scopus
20	Alonzo et al. (2021)	Ecuador	Liderazgo pedagógico y rendimiento académico en los estudiantes del Curso de Investigación Descriptiva en la carrera de Enfermería de la Universidad Regional Autónoma de Los Andes-Ecuador	The management team found that the support plan provided guidance and capacity building to respond to the demands of the educational institution.	Web of Science

RESULTS

In the present research, 20 articles were recorded from a total of (40) publications that were found under the search criteria in both SciELO (5), Scopus (25) and Web of Science (1). By reviewing these articles, 20 researches were selected for the review.

DISCUSSION

Pedagogical leadership is positioned as a procedure based on human and social relations, in which university management teams can manage interruptions in the educational process by making collaborative decisions (Cuéllar et al., 2023), showing a more intentional and directive action in teachers, allowing the development of capacities in the institution (Aparicio et al., 2020), promoting the continuous improvement of training process and strengthening community relations (Rosales et al., 2023).

Pedagogical leadership considers the teacher as a key instrument in the improvement of teaching and learning (Cejas et al., 2021), acting as support and contributing to the professional growth and success of new educators (Ghamrawi et al., 2024). Likewise, it facilitates the creation of an educational environment that promotes continuous learning and professional development, adapting to social and technological changes without losing institutional independence (Elo & Uljens, 2023).

In this sense, pedagogical leadership is essential to guide the development of educational practices not only adapt to current demands, but also promote a teaching and learning environment for all those involved (Kärkkäinen et al., 2023). In addition, pedagogical leaders must promote an institutional culture of pedagogical innovation, and align themselves with a comprehensive educational plan positively influences students' values (Velázquez & Hernández, 2020) and allowing training processes to expand and achieve a profound impact on quality and advancement of education (Guerrero & Vásquez, 2024).

Consequently, research aspects have emerged in higher education institutions, one of the characteristics being research on the attitudes, competencies, knowledge and qualities that leaders must have to be effective (Pedraja et al., 2021). Likewise, distributed leadership, which converges organizational changes, interaction, networks, knowledge (Cejas et al., 2021) and facilitates the analysis of participatory and collaborative processes (Kinnunen et al., 2024). On the other hand, transformational leadership addresses the values and purposes of teaching leadership in universities (Kinnunen et al., 2024), and also develops the potential of students, strengthening the development of attitudes, values, and competencies (Cabana et al., 2022).

Although pedagogical leadership in the framework of higher education is a tool could help find ways to improve effectiveness of managerial leadership, development of such tools has been a constant challenge (Palomino J. et al., 2023), due to facing competitive disadvantages such as lack of financial support and lower academic competence (Zhang et al., 2021). Although there are continuing education programs aligned with institutional and state guidelines, they often lack a focus on the competence of pedagogical innovation (Guerrero & Vásquez, 2024).

One of the factors is the lack of understanding of leadership by some teachers, who are not willing to assume the responsibility that it entails, due to level of commitment, the educational process (Cejas et al., 2021), as well as the lack of financial support and lower academic competence (Zhang et al., 2021); therefore, it has been relegated to the background in technical-vocational education and training (James, 2020), being that it is not

considered a central component of pedagogical training, reflecting the absence of clear objectives that promote pedagogical leadership among teachers (Kärkkäinen et al., 2023).

Pedagogical practice in higher education must institutionalize a culture of innovation, focusing on reflection and change in educational processes (Macanquí et al., 2020). Likewise, they must adapt various pedagogical strategies focused on learning, guaranteeing continuity and designing strategies to ensure meaningful teachings and skills applicable to their professional life (Camacho et al., 2022). An effective leader designs communication strategies, fosters trust, manages feedback, establishes a role model, understands socio-emotional aspects, promotes healthy interaction, and manages conflicts in the team (Velázquez & Hernández, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Pedagogical leadership in higher education emerges as an essential component to improve teaching and learning, considering teacher as a key factor in professional development and academic success. Likewise, pedagogical leaders must foster an educational environment encourages innovation and continuous improvement, adapting to social and technological changes.

However, the implementation of effective pedagogical leadership faces significant challenges, such as a lack of understanding and financial support, limiting its impact on institutions. In that sense, leaders must promote an institutional culture prioritizes pedagogical innovation and the development of competencies in teachers.

Likewise, distributed and transformational leadership plays a crucial role in transformation of universities, by facilitating collaborative processes and strengthening values and competencies in students, which contributes to an inclusive educational environment aligned with institutional and state objectives, despite existing barriers. In conclusion, pedagogical leadership is essential to guide development of educational practices that respond to contemporary demands. To maximize their effectiveness, it is essential that institutions adopt strategies that foster innovation and continuous improvement, overcoming financial and academic competition challenges.

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