

Leadership's Soft Skills: A Key for Successful Educational Administrators

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ABSTRACT:

Educational administrators operate in dynamic institutional environments where interpersonal effectiveness is as important as managerial and technical competence. This study explores the critical role of leadership soft skills in fostering successful educational administration. It identifies essential soft skills, examines their influence on institutional outcomes, and proposes a Leadership Soft Skill Model tailored for educational leaders. Findings from existing research highlight emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and ethical decision-making as core competencies that enhance school climate, teacher motivation, and administrative efficiency. The study concludes with a conceptual model and suggests future research directions to expand empirical understanding of soft-skill-based educational leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Soft Skills, Educational Administrators, Emotional Intelligence, Communication,

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has increasingly become a central focus of contemporary discourse on institutional effectiveness and academic excellence. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2005), educational leadership encompasses practices that help set direction, develop people, and redesign organizational structures to support learning. As educational institutions operate within complex and rapidly evolving socio-economic, technological, and pedagogical landscapes, leadership is no longer confined to administrative routines or hierarchical supervision. Instead, it encompasses a multidimensional set of practices that require vision, interpersonal competence, ethical grounding, and the ability to guide diverse stakeholders toward common institutional goals. Selecting an appropriate leadership style for an educational institution necessitates a nuanced understanding of its internal context—its culture, organizational structures, staff capabilities, and prevailing challenges. Effective leaders recognize that institutions comprise individuals with different levels of experience, motivation, and capacity, and thus tailor their leadership approaches to foster inclusiveness, participation, and professional growth. As Northouse (2021) notes, effective leadership requires adapting one's approach to the needs and attributes of followers and the situational demands. This contextual responsiveness underscores the significance of soft skills as core leadership competencies. In the broader national context, educational institutions—particularly those in higher education—play an essential role in producing skilled human capital to meet societal and economic demands. Pachauri and Yadav (2014) affirm that higher education institutions “play a significant part in yielding human capital to meet the requests and expectations of society and the nation by producing skills for uptake by the respective students.” This societal expectation places additional responsibility on institutional leaders to cultivate environments that support excellence in teaching, learning, and innovation.

With the emergence of new educational paradigms, including digital learning, competency-based curricula, and evidence-driven decision-making, leadership effectiveness increasingly hinges on soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, conflict management, adaptability, and collaborative engagement. Goleman (1998) emphasized that emotional intelligence is a critical foundation for effective leadership, particularly in people-centered fields such as education. These skills enable administrators to navigate change, build trust among stakeholders, support teacher professionalism, and maintain institutional harmony. Against this backdrop, the present study positions leadership soft skills as a pivotal determinant of successful educational

administration. It seeks to explore the nature and influence of these skills, evaluate their impact on institutional outcomes, and propose a model that aligns soft-skill competencies with the demands of modern educational leadership.

Objective of the Study:

The present study is designed based on the following objectives

1. To identify and assess the core leadership soft skills that enable educational administrators to lead with effectiveness, clarity, and institutional impact.
2. To examine the extent to which educational administrators' soft skills shape critical institutional outcomes such as organizational climate, teacher engagement, and overall administrative performance.
3. To develop a comprehensive Leadership Soft Skill Model tailored to the competencies required for successful educational administration.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

This study is grounded in the premise that leadership soft skills are pivotal for the success of educational administrators, drawing on Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995). Transformational leadership emphasizes that administrator who inspires, motivate, and intellectually engage their staff create a positive organizational culture that drives performance and innovation. Emotional intelligence complements this by highlighting the importance of self-awareness, empathy, social skills, and emotional regulation, enabling leaders to manage relationships effectively and respond to complex challenges within educational settings. Within this framework, leadership soft skills—including communication, interpersonal competence, adaptability, conflict resolution, and teamwork—serve as the independent variable, directly influencing how administrators manage human and organizational resources. The dependent variable is the overall success of educational administration, operationalized through indicators such as staff satisfaction, stakeholder engagement, decision-making quality, instructional supervision, and school performance. The framework also acknowledges moderating factors, such as institutional policies, organizational culture, and professional experience, which can either strengthen or weaken the impact of soft skills on leadership effectiveness. Thus, by integrating these theories into the conceptual framework, the study posits that the practical application of soft skills is the mechanism through which transformational and emotionally intelligent leadership translates into measurable success. Administrators who effectively apply these skills are more likely to foster collaborative environments, facilitate effective communication, and enhance both teacher and student outcomes, highlighting the central role of soft skills in educational leadership.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY:

Effective educational leadership increasingly depends on a combination of soft skills—interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive abilities that enable administrators to manage complex human and organizational dynamics. Among these, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical determinant of leadership effectiveness. Chaudhary, Ali, Maqsood, Nasarullah, and Calimlim (2024) found that higher EI among 289 educational leaders significantly improved school climate, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and teacher satisfaction. Similarly, Al-Nashash (2024) reported a strong positive correlation between principals' EI and leadership practices, underscoring its relevance across public and private educational contexts. Omotayo (2024) demonstrated qualitatively that EI shapes instructional leadership, conflict resolution, and relationship management, while Ulutaş (2024) synthesized multiple studies showing EI contributes to organizational synergy, conflict management, job satisfaction, and crisis handling. These findings highlight the importance of identifying and assessing the core leadership soft skills that enable administrators to lead effectively—a key objective of the present study.

Beyond emotional intelligence, other soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and relational abilities also play a vital role in leadership effectiveness. Research indicates that strong communication skills enhance trust,

collaboration, and engagement among teachers, students, and stakeholders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2016). Teamwork and participatory leadership improve teacher commitment and instructional outcomes (Fullan, 2007), while Fakhrou, Moarbes, Abou Rjeily, and Essa (2022) demonstrated that teamwork and cooperation are positively associated with EI, reflecting the interdependent nature of leadership competencies. Investigating how administrators' soft skills shape critical institutional outcomes such as school climate, teacher engagement, and overall administrative performance aligns directly with the second objective of this study.

Adaptability and problem-solving have also been identified as essential competencies. Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) highlighted that adaptive leaders effectively navigate policy changes, reforms, and unexpected challenges, while Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) emphasized that problem-solving and analytical skills allow leaders to make informed, data-driven decisions balancing institutional goals and human needs. Recent studies confirm that emotionally intelligent and adaptable leadership supports teacher well-being and performance, even during crises (Sahito, Kerio, & Jabeen, 2024; Floman, Ponnock, Jain, & Brackett, 2024; Zhou, Qin, et al., 2025; Sulaiman & Ismail, 2025). These insights support the need to develop a comprehensive Leadership Soft Skills Model reflecting the competencies necessary for successful educational administration, fulfilling the third objective of the present study.

Despite extensive research on individual soft skills, significant gaps remain. Most studies focus predominantly on EI, often neglecting other critical skills such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, and ethical decision-making. Many rely on cross-sectional designs and self-reported data, limiting causal inferences and objectivity. Few studies examine the combined effect of multiple soft skills on administrative effectiveness, particularly in non-Western or culturally diverse educational settings. These gaps highlight the importance of the present study, which seeks to provide a holistic understanding of how a comprehensive soft-skills profile impacts school effectiveness, teacher outcomes, and organizational performance over time. To summarize the current state of research, Table 1 presents a review of key studies, their focus, and findings, providing a foundation for understanding the relevance of soft skills in educational leadership and guiding the objectives of this study.

Author(s) & Year	Title of the Study	Focus of Study	Key Findings
Chaudhary, Ali, Maqsood, Nasarullah & Calimlim (2024)	The Influence of Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership and School Climate	Examined EI among 289 educational leaders and its impact on school climate, decision-making, interpersonal dynamics, and teacher satisfaction	Higher EI significantly enhanced school climate, interpersonal relationships, and teacher satisfaction, showing EI as central to effective leadership.
Al-Nashash (2024)	Emotional Intelligence and its Relationship to the Leadership Practices of the Principals of Private Schools in the University District	Correlational study among 105 private-school principals examining EI and leadership practices	Strong positive correlation between principals' EI and their leadership practices; EI is relevant across public and private schools.
Omotayo (2024)	Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership: A Case Study of School Administrators	Qualitative study investigating how EI influences leadership practices and instructional leadership	EI shapes instructional leadership, conflict resolution, and relationship management, providing depth beyond quantitative findings.

Ulutaş (2024)	Systematic Review of Studies on The Emotional Intelligence of School Principals	Meta-level review analyzing multiple studies on principals' EI	EI linked to leadership outcomes such as conflict management, organizational synergy, job satisfaction, and crisis handling.
Sahito, Kerio & Jabeen (2024)	The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Educational Leadership: Its Influence on School Climate and Teacher Motivation	Investigates how principals' emotional competence affects school climate and teacher motivation	EI positively influences school climate and teacher motivation, reinforcing the role of EI in supportive school environments.
Floman, Ponnock, Jain & Brackett (2024)	Emotionally Intelligent School Leadership Predicts Educator Well-Being Before and During a Crisis	Examined how emotionally intelligent leadership affects teacher well-being	EI predicts teacher well-being, even during crises, showing the importance of soft skills under stress.
Zhou, Qin et al. (2025)	The Relationship Between the Principals' Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management: Based on Latent Profile Analysis	Uses latent profile analysis on 363 principals to study EI and conflict-management behaviors	Different EI profiles influence conflict-management styles; EI manifests differently across leaders.
Sulaiman & Ismail (2025)	The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Styles in Enhancing Teacher Performance in High Schools	Quantitative study on EI and leadership styles	EI combined with effective leadership style significantly enhances teacher performance.
Jitkhot, Ariratana & Toomnan (2024)	Leadership Soft Skills of the Administrators Affecting Effectiveness of Teachers' Performance	Examined multiple soft-skills (teamwork, communication, information management, problem-solving, ethical professionalism) and teacher performance	Combined soft-skills predicted 85.1% variance in teacher performance; teamwork and information management were highest scoring.
Neiroukh, Ansari, Abu Dalu, Khlaif, Barahmaeh, Zubeidi, Shtayeh & Daher (2024)	Organizational Communication Competence of Public Secondary School Principals Through Utilizing WhatsApp	Investigated principals' communication competence via digital tools	Digital tools improve communication competence, information sharing, conflict resolution, and decision-making.
Frontiers (2025)	Core Competencies for School Leaders: Insights from Educational Experts	Identified core leadership competencies (communication, problem-solving,	Leadership success depends on a holistic skill profile; global frameworks guide school leadership development.

		relationship-building, strategic planning)	
Frontiers (2025)	Meta-Synthesis of School Leadership Competencies to Support Learner- Centered, Personalized Education	Synthesized studies on leadership competencies for learner-centered education	Relational leadership, participative leadership, adaptability, and inclusive practices are key for effective leadership.
Tshabalala & Faremi (2024)	The Leadership Role of the School Principal in Developing and Improving Learner Performance in Eswatini Schools	Qualitative case-study on principals' leadership practices and learner outcomes	Principals' vision-setting, staff development, and goal orientation improve student outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study is organized objective-wise to reflect its focus on leadership soft skills in educational administration. It first examines the key competencies that enable administrators to lead effectively, and then explores how these skills influence important institutional outcomes, such as the climate of the educational institute, teacher engagement, and overall administrative performance. Finally, the discussion integrates these insights to propose a comprehensive Leadership Soft Skills Model, illustrating how these competencies can support effective and sustainable educational leadership.

Objective 1: To identify and assess the core leadership soft skills that enable educational administrators to lead with effectiveness, clarity, and institutional impact

The findings of this study strongly indicate that leadership soft skills are central to the effectiveness, clarity, and institutional impact of educational administrators. Among these skills, emotional intelligence (EI) emerges as a foundational competency. Consistent with previous research (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Omotayo, 2024; Al-Nashash, 2024), administrators with high EI are better able to perceive, understand, and manage both their own emotions and those of others, allowing them to navigate complex interpersonal and organizational dynamics effectively. Ulutaş (2024) further emphasizes that EI significantly influences leadership outcomes, including conflict management, organizational synergy, job satisfaction, and crisis handling. Administrators possessing high EI exhibit superior clarity in decision-making, maintain transparency in communication, and are able to lead with empathy, thereby positively influencing staff perception and institutional stability.

Beyond emotional intelligence, the study identifies other critical soft skills that enhance leadership effectiveness. Communication skills enable administrators to convey vision and expectations clearly, provide constructive feedback, and engage stakeholders effectively (Neiroukh et al., 2024; Sutomo, 2025). This competency is closely linked to building trust, minimizing misunderstandings, and facilitating organizational coherence. Teamwork and relational skills are equally important, as they foster collaborative decision-making, shared responsibility, and mutual support among staff, which are essential for achieving institutional goals (Jitkhot et al., 2024; Frontiers, 2025).

Adaptability and problem-solving skills further equip administrators to respond proactively to changing educational policies, technological innovations, and unexpected challenges. RSIS International (2025) highlights that adaptive leaders are capable of balancing operational demands with strategic planning, allowing schools to remain resilient and effective in dynamic contexts. Ethical professionalism, integrity, and accountability are additional competencies that reinforce credibility and facilitate principled decision-making (Sutomo, 2025).

Taken together, these soft skills enable administrators to lead with clarity, decisiveness, and institutional impact, positioning them as effective leaders who can align human, operational, and strategic resources to achieve school objectives. The findings underscore that leadership effectiveness in education is not merely a function of

technical or managerial skills but is deeply rooted in the ability to harness interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive competencies synergistically.

Objective 2: To examine the extent to which educational administrators' soft skills shape critical institutional outcomes such as organizational climate, teacher engagement, and overall administrative performance

The study findings demonstrate that leadership soft skills have a significant and multi-dimensional impact on institutional outcomes. Administrators with strong EI, communication, teamwork, and relational competencies cultivate a positive organizational climate characterized by trust, cooperation, and a sense of shared purpose (Sahito et al., 2024; Floman et al., 2024). This type of climate reduces workplace conflicts, encourages collaboration, and promotes a culture of inclusivity and accountability.

Teacher engagement is particularly sensitive to the presence of these soft skills. Administrators with strong relational and communication competencies foster motivation, commitment, and instructional initiative among teachers (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2025; Floman et al., 2024). This enhanced engagement translates into improved teaching practices, better classroom management, and ultimately, higher student achievement. Leadership adaptability, cultural competence, and conflict-resolution skills further ensure that engagement is sustained even in culturally diverse or high-pressure environments (RSIS International, 2024; Neiroukh et al., 2024).

The study also demonstrates that leadership soft skills significantly influence overall administrative performance. Administrators who integrate EI, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving skills make better strategic decisions, manage conflicts effectively, and optimize resources efficiently (Ulutaş, 2024; RSIS International, 2025). The latent profile analysis by Zhou et al. (2025) indicates that variations in EI among principals correspond to differences in conflict-management styles and overall effectiveness, suggesting that both the quality and combination of soft skills are critical determinants of institutional impact.

Soft skills also enhance organizational resilience and responsiveness. Administrators capable of adaptive leadership can implement reforms, integrate new technologies, and adjust to changing policies while maintaining organizational stability (RSIS International, 2025; Neiroukh et al., 2024). Intercultural leadership practices and diversity-sensitive skills enable administrators to manage heterogeneous staff populations effectively, ensuring equitable treatment, inclusion, and collaboration (RSIS International, 2024). Collectively, the study highlights that soft skills are central not only to individual leadership effectiveness but also to broader institutional outcomes, including organizational climate, teacher engagement, and administrative performance. Administrators equipped with a combination of EI, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and ethical professionalism are more likely to create schools that are effective, cohesive, and capable of sustaining high performance even under challenging conditions.

Objective 3: Discussion on Developing a Comprehensive Leadership Soft Skill Model for Successful Educational Administration

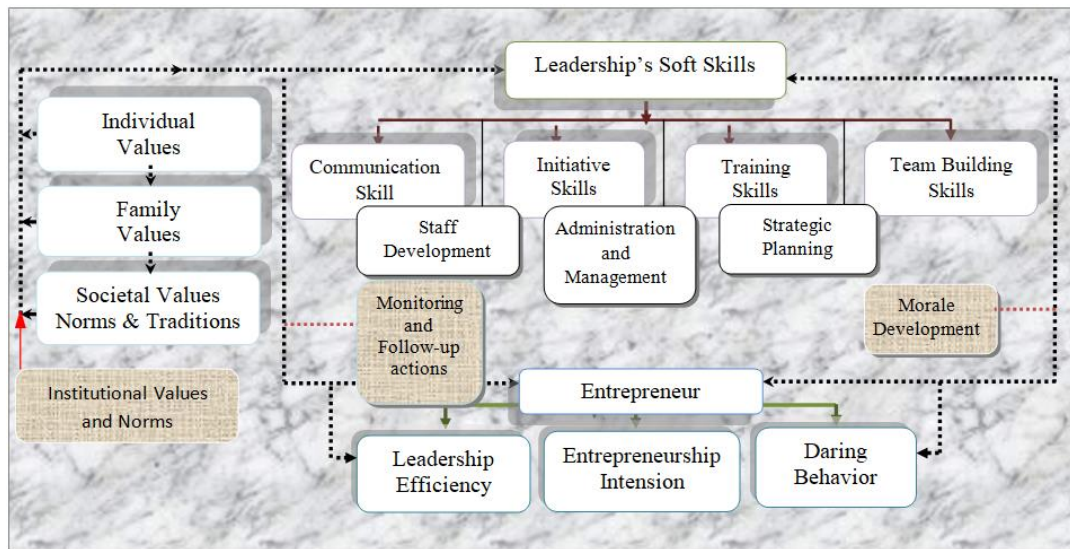
The development of the Leadership's Soft Skill Model for Successful Educational Administrators synthesizes the findings from the first two objectives and integrates them into a cohesive conceptual framework. This model illustrates how individual, familial, societal, and institutional value systems serve as foundational determinants of leadership behavior, shaping the ways in which administrators perceive their roles, interact with stakeholders, and respond to organizational challenges. These value systems form the broader socio-cultural context in which soft skills are learned, internalized, and applied, reinforcing the idea that leadership is both personally grounded and socially influenced.

At the core of the model lies a set of four essential leadership soft skill domains—communication skills, initiative skills, training skills, and team-building skills. These competencies collectively represent the behavioral and relational components of effective educational leadership. Communication skills support transparent information-sharing, conflict management, and stakeholder engagement, which are vital for staff development and collaborative work cultures. Initiative skills foster proactive decision-making, innovation, and administrative responsiveness, thereby strengthening management and organizational direction. Training skills enable leaders to support continuous professional development and strategic planning, both of which are indispensable for

educational improvement. Team-building skills enhance morale development, promote trust, and strengthen staff cohesion, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and productive school environment.

The model further emphasizes that these soft skills translate into tangible administrative functions, such as staff development, administration and management, strategic planning, monitoring, and follow-up actions. These processes demonstrate how soft skills are operationalized within school settings—moving from abstract competencies to concrete leadership practices that shape institutional functioning. The inclusion of monitoring and follow-up actions underscores the ongoing and iterative nature of effective leadership, where administrators continuously assess progress, address challenges, and refine their strategies.

Exhibit: Leadership's Soft Skill Model for Successful Educational Administrators



Source: Developed by author

An important component of the model is the integration of the entrepreneurial dimension within educational leadership. This reflects the emerging expectation that educational administrators must think and act entrepreneurially—demonstrating foresight, resource mobilization, risk management, and innovation. The model links soft skills to three entrepreneurial outcomes: leadership efficiency, entrepreneurship intention, and daring behavior. Leadership efficiency captures the administrator's ability to translate skills into effective organizational performance. Entrepreneurship intention reflects their willingness to adopt new ideas, implement reforms, and pursue growth-oriented initiatives. Daring behavior symbolizes the courage to challenge traditional norms, embrace change, and take calculated risks—qualities increasingly necessary in dynamic educational environments.

Overall, the model presents a holistic and multidimensional framework that captures the interplay between values, soft skills, administrative functions, and entrepreneurial outcomes. It illustrates that successful educational leadership extends beyond technical expertise to encompass emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, and value-based competencies. By integrating these elements, the Leadership's Soft Skill Model provides a comprehensive guide for current and aspiring educational administrators, policymakers, and professional development programs. It also highlights the pathway through which soft skills not only enhance day-to-day administrative practices but also empower leaders to innovate, inspire, and sustain organizational excellence in an evolving educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of leadership soft skills in educational administration by identifying key competencies, assessing their impact on institutional outcomes, and developing a comprehensive model for effective leadership. The findings highlight that core soft skills—including emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and ethical professionalism—are essential for

administrators to lead with clarity, decisiveness, and institutional impact. These competencies significantly influence the climate of the educational institute, teacher engagement, and overall administrative performance, demonstrating that leadership effectiveness is closely linked to the ability to manage interpersonal, emotional, and organizational dynamics. Building on these insights, the study proposes a Leadership Soft Skills Model that integrates core competencies, administrative functions, value systems, and entrepreneurial dimensions, providing a holistic framework for sustainable and innovative educational leadership. Overall, the research underscores that successful educational administration depends not only on technical and managerial expertise but also on the strategic application of soft skills to enhance individual leadership effectiveness and promote institutional excellence.

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