

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN ECUADORIAN BILINGUAL PROGRAMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

LIDERAZGO ESCOLAR EN PROGRAMAS BILINGÜES ECUATORIANOS: UN ANÁLISIS DE SU IMPLEMENTACIÓN

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Abstract

This research examines how school leaders influence the implementation of bilingual programs in Ecuadorian schools. By combining ideas from transformational, situational, distributed, and evidence-based leadership theories, the study examines how forward-thinking and strategic leadership can drive institutional change, support teacher development, and enhance student learning. A mixed-method design was adopted, gathering quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews from twenty-five teachers and principals. Findings identify persistent obstacles—training shortfalls, scarce resources, and resistance to change—but also

reveal opportunities for deeper collaboration, broader inclusion, and renewed pedagogical creativity. Overall, the analysis argues that strategic, participatory, and evidence-informed leadership is crucial for enhancing bilingual education outcomes across Ecuador's diverse cultural and linguistic settings.

Keywords: Educational leadership, Bilingual education, Innovation, School management, Teacher development

Resumen

Esta investigación indaga cómo los líderes escolares influyen en la implementación de programas bilingües en las escuelas

ecuatorianas. Mediante la combinación de ideas de las teorías de liderazgo transformacional, situacional, distribuido y basado en la evidencia, el estudio analiza cómo el liderazgo progresista y estratégico puede impulsar el cambio institucional, apoyar el desarrollo docente e impulsar el aprendizaje estudiantil. Se adoptó un diseño de método mixto, recopilando datos de encuestas cuantitativas y entrevistas cualitativas a veinticinco docentes y directores. Los hallazgos identifican obstáculos persistentes —déficit de capacitación, escasez de recursos y resistencia al cambio—, pero también revelan oportunidades para una colaboración más profunda, una inclusión más amplia y una renovada creatividad pedagógica. En general, el análisis sostiene que el liderazgo estratégico, participativo y basado en la evidencia es crucial para mejorar los resultados de la educación bilingüe en los diversos entornos culturales y lingüísticos de Ecuador.

Palabras clave: Liderazgo educativo, Educación bilingüe, Innovación, Gestión escolar, Desarrollo docente

Sumário

Esta pesquisa investiga como os líderes escolares moldam a implementação de programas bilíngues nas escolas equatorianas. Combinando ideias de teorias de liderança transformacional, situacional, distribuída e baseada em evidências, o estudo analisa como a liderança com visão de futuro e estratégica pode impulsionar a mudança institucional, apoiar o desenvolvimento de professores e impulsionar a aprendizagem dos alunos. Foi adotado um delineamento de método misto, reunindo dados quantitativos de pesquisa e entrevistas qualitativas com 25 professores e diretores. Os resultados identificam obstáculos persistentes – deficiências de treinamento, recursos escassos e resistência à mudança – mas também revelam aberturas para uma colaboração mais profunda, inclusão mais ampla e criatividade pedagógica renovada. De modo geral, a análise argumenta

que uma liderança estratégica, participativa e baseada em evidências é crucial para aprimorar os resultados da educação bilíngue nos diversos contextos culturais e linguísticos do Equador.

Palavras-chave: Liderança educacional, Educação bilíngue, Inovação, Gestão escolar, Desenvolvimento de professores

Introduction

The title School Leadership in Ecuadorian Bilingual Programs: An analysis of Their Implementation speaks clearly to the realities that Ecuadorian classrooms are confronting today. As the twenty-first century unfolds, effective leadership has emerged as a crucial leverage point for schools seeking to navigate rapid technological shifts, curriculum overhauls, and broader organizational change.

In Ecuador, the Organic Law on Intercultural Education, along with its accompanying General Regulations and recent changes in the Ministry of Education's management model, have introduced substantial reforms. Yet the continuing shortage of stable school directors and the absence of coherent, long-term policies for cultivating educational leadership remain serious hurdles.

This article examines how different leadership models—transformational, situational, distributed, and evidence-based—guide the successful launch and sustainment of bilingual programs. Collectively, these frameworks offer clear direction for steering institutional change, cultivating a cooperative culture, and ensuring that leaders are both forward-thinking and attuned to local educational contexts.

Focusing on Ecuador, the analysis reveals that effective leadership does more than boost test

scores; it also guides and balances the waves of innovation necessary in bilingual schools. For this reason, the study argues that strategic, adaptable, and data-driven leadership practices are essential to enhancing the impact of bilingual education nationwide.

Contemporary approaches to school leadership: Foundations and perspectives

Strategic leadership has gained significant relevance in educational management, particularly in a world where educational systems are constantly undergoing technological, social, and political changes. Recently, the idea has emerged that leadership is more than just management; it is seen as a professional endeavor that seeks to improve learning and promote equity in education. According to Harris et al. (2021), this type of leadership involves the ability to foster a forward-looking perspective and efficiently manage essential resources to achieve established goals, which is critical when building strong, adaptable educational centers.

This strategic orientation enhances the ability of entities to adapt to dynamic environments, promoting integration, equality, and educational quality. Lara et al. (2024) emphasize that current approaches in Latin America tend to promote collaborative work, abandoning rigid structures and thus fostering more flexible and inclusive systems that cultivate an organizational culture oriented toward continuous learning.

Excellence in teaching seeks to combat social inequality in educational settings, offering the academic community a more equitable education, where efficiency and effectiveness become goals for advancing society, and where

differences and potential vulnerabilities are reduced. For this reason, Lara et al. (2024) emphasize that educational management and school leadership are relevant, and the transformation implies a redefinition of the school leader's role, who no longer acts as a central hierarchical figure who monopolizes, but rather as a facilitator of pedagogical and cultural processes.

Recent research shows that institutional guidelines have a significant impact on the institutional climate, teacher motivation, and the adoption of new educational practices. In this regard, Striepe and Cunningham (2022) caution that leadership in schools today requires not only specific knowledge but also a profound understanding of the context and a moral commitment to educational change.

Models of school leadership in the implementation of bilingual programs

In a recent analysis conducted by Riswanti Rini (2022), it was revealed that transformational and democratic leadership stand out as the most effective methods for creating environments that promote transparent and efficient quality in education, with school management based on established goals. Furthermore, the criteria to be taken into account must perfect the person and seek the harmonious integration of each dimension with the other entities.

Bringing strategic leadership together with systems thinking offers schools a fresh and flexible approach to tackling the challenges they face today. Goffin et al. (2022) outline a classroom-based model of teacher leadership that enables decision-makers to see how this on-the-ground leadership shapes learning outcomes. Such a blend allows leaders to

examine multifaceted issues, weigh short-term demands against long-range goals, and understand how their choices affect student engagement, instructional creativity, and the overall resilience and sustainability of the school.

Regarding the challenges of bilingual education, it is essential to focus on aspects of innovation related to educational management, since the insertion, combination and adaptation of active pedagogical methods and techniques, such as project-based learning, personalized and cooperative learning, provide a common sense to the school organization and influence the behavior of its members, aiming to improve quality, tangibly expressed in student learning. Thus, Mohsenibeigzadeh et al. (2024) emphasize that teaching staff, as direct members of the training, not only need technical and technological skills but also a natural disposition to lead and become agents of a holistic educational transformation.

It seems a setback that, while studies in educational leadership are growing substantially in Latin America, there is a lack of systematization regarding their objects of study. When the political environment remains stable, institutional leaders need to rely on political agreements to drive significant change. Therefore, it is considered vital to recognize the importance of leadership as a strategic axis. As Rosales-Yepes et al. (2020) mention, this involves acknowledging the state of development, along with the consolidation of educational policies in the Spanish-speaking world, and reviewing their social, institutional, and academic relevance.

School leadership and its impact on learning in bilingual contexts

In complex educational contexts, such as bilingual programs, school leadership has been demonstrated to be a crucial factor in enhancing learning outcomes. Both administrative theory and research on progress in school effectiveness have clarified that leadership-based influence capacities must consider the active participation of other organizational actors, both in formal and informal roles. Likewise, Menon M. E. (2024) explains that mediating variables, such as teacher motivation, school culture, and institutional climate, have an indirect effect on academic outcomes.

Educational management must be consolidated as a strategic approach when cultural and pedagogical challenges are constantly on the rise, especially in the curricula, moving towards an assertive distribution of power, according to the organizational reality of the center, from the traditional and bureaucratic formal delegational stage to the cultural one. Training in transformational leadership and academic training, as indicated by Carpio et al. (2023), should be positively correlated with student performance in secondary schools; however, there are still limitations due to structural factors, such as resource scarcity and administrative overload.

Respectable management is key to ensuring that the work of each member of an institution has meaning and is part of a project that belongs to everyone. In other words, it is essential to ensure that everyone is working in the same direction to achieve the desired outcome and continually improve. In this regard, pedagogical leadership, in particular, has been recognized as a strategic model for optimizing instruction in bilingual environments. Menon and Lefteri (2021) emphasize that to develop linguistic and cognitive competencies in two languages,

student-centered educational practices, such as active and personalized learning, should be promoted, in addition to fostering curricular innovation and collaboration among teachers.

To generate an institutional culture that appreciates linguistic and cultural diversity, values must be fostered in a more equitable and relevant way, highlighting the impact of school leadership on learning. This must be done jointly, maintaining the potential influence that all participants possess in one way or another within the school, predominantly educators and students, since their formative interactions shape learning. All of this implies promoting an inclusive vision of bilingualism, not only as an academic tool, but as a right and an opportunity for students' holistic development.

School leadership in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity

In countries like Ecuador, where multiple languages and cultures coexist, educational management represents a growing challenge for educational systems in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. Campos et al. (2020) emphasize that school leadership is not an end in itself, but rather a means to improve, change, strengthen, and develop learning processes and, consequently, the quality of education in the classroom. In this sense, the most effective leadership styles in these contexts are democratic and transformational, as they promote and foster environments of interest, where the educational community can actively participate, collaborating with and motivating others.

To manage diversity ethically and pedagogically, educational leaders must develop intercultural competencies that foster

multiculturalism in schools. The management of educational institutions requires the fulfillment of intercultural competencies in contexts where management teams must make delicate decisions in the face of cultural, linguistic, and social differences within their school communities. Consequently, Queupil et al. (2023) attribute not only adapting the curriculum but also making an apparent change in organizations to ensure educational justice and equality.

Consolidated as a decisive and crucial approach to addressing diversity in educational institutions, inclusive leadership has established itself as a model based on values such as equity, participation, and collective decision-making. Indeed, to emphasize the urgency of redesigning educational organizational structures toward prototypes of distributed, shared, and intercultural leadership, Leithwood (2021) highlights responding to the demands of culturally diverse contexts. Thus, diversity can be managed and leveraged as an opportunity to enrich teaching and learning processes.

An inspirational and analytical perspective on leadership that challenges methods that marginalize rather than promote more equitable teaching is challenged at every level in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. As an integral part of the institutional curriculum, it is essential to recognize diverse languages, whether they originate from cultural identities or are foreign. The primary cultural mediators, in this case, school leaders, must act and connect the practices of their constituents to build bridges by recognizing the differences between knowledge and ways of life, ensuring that everyone, with free access to quality education, can chart their paths and potentially

exert influence, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background.

Dimensions of school leadership according to contemporary reference frameworks

In recent years, emphasis has been placed on improving the "quality" or "effectiveness" of education. A growing number of countries participate in international assessments that rank education systems based on student performance. Countries that perform well on these tests are considered to have high-quality education systems, while other countries are pressured to take steps to improve their students' scores at all levels of the system. According to Fuenmayor (2025), educational leadership is essential as an object of study with ontologically clear features and to strengthen its application in diverse school contexts. In some countries, better results are obtained due to the similarity in the scores of students from different social groups, which results in less variability and contributes to higher performance.

Espuny and Sallán (2023), regarding the most notable orientations in improving inter-learning processes, mention that pedagogical leadership focuses on data-informed decisions and professional teacher improvement, based on high expectations, and therefore implies establishing a shared perspective of educational excellence. Educational leadership is called to be a catalyst for social entrepreneurship, promoting transformative projects that respond to the real needs of the school community. Thus, educators must align themselves with current educational paradigms and, therefore, cultivate student-centered skills that are essential in bilingual contexts, such as active and individualized learning.

The planning, distribution, and evaluation of human, material, and technological resources are part of the resources, such as compendia and tool guides, that encompass strategic management. Through this practice, principals can establish appropriate learning environments, even in schools facing greater limitations. Fuenmayor (2025) argues that for successful leadership to occur, the ability to mobilize both intrinsic and extrinsic resources must be measured, supporting pedagogical innovation and affirming the continuity of initiatives, as is required in bilingual programs.

Moving toward a culture of respect, equity, and collaboration has enabled institutions to achieve significant relevance in contemporary school management, particularly in terms of ethical and relational leadership. According to Espuny and Sallán (2023), the primary function of a leader is not established exclusively in their judicious commitment, but in the ability to intertwine relationships of trust. By acting with complete flexibility in diverse contexts, principals can effectively address the diversity of their community, fostering cooperative and collaborative work, essential components of successful educational management.

Strategic planning, an inspiring institutional vision, and collective commitment are essential for aligning efforts toward common goals. It is consistently emphasized that current models of educational leadership, along with managerial action, must be based on conscious criticism and a profound assessment of the specific context. Indeed, each principal is required not only to read the regulations but also to transform them into practices that reflect the realities and shortcomings of the immediate environment, thereby governing sustained cycles of progress. Operational leadership,

consequently, ceases to be a mere administrative function and is established as a key strategy for transforming the institution into an inclusive, innovative zone truly connected to its local culture.

Challenges and opportunities for school leadership in implementing bilingual programs

In school settings, implementing bilingual programs is by no means a straightforward process. A series of structural, cultural, and pedagogical obstacles demand flexible, strategic, and adaptive educational management. Student dropout rates, the erosion of institutional legitimacy, and the rigidity of public policies, according to Ruecker (2021), are identified as key tensions in Latin American education systems that continue to undermine efforts such as bilingual education. Faced with these seemingly negative scenarios, mediators and immediate leaders must reflect on what each community truly needs and what the education system mandates.

The diversity of approaches reflects the complexity of leadership in educational practice, demonstrating that there is no single model; instead, it must be adapted to the context. Consequently, one of the main challenges is providing professional training and updating skills for managing bilingual programs. According to Day et al. (2020), for a true transformation to occur not only in the organizational structure of schools but also in the institutional culture that values linguistic diversity as an educational resource, distributed and collaborative leadership is essential.

The challenges are evident, as are the significant opportunities for strengthening

school leadership in conjunction with bilingual programs, which can become spaces for experimentation that lead to continuous improvement. In these contexts, pedagogical experiences centered on the student and the development of intercultural competencies are promoted. In this way, Sandoval et al. (2021) emphasize that educational administrators currently promote being inclusive, innovative, and collaborative, which reinforces their ability to adapt to changing contexts and thus guide potential pedagogical transformations.

It cannot be denied that among the primary considerations is the need for public policies that support school leadership in implementing bilingual programs. Rosales-Yepes et al. (2020) argue that educational systems must consolidate policy guidelines that recognize leadership as a strategic axis for academic quality, especially in culturally and linguistically diverse environments. A tacit trend regarding the absolute need for leadership that inspires, transforms, and fosters participation within regulatory frameworks, ongoing training, and evaluation systems that monitor impactful leadership with authentic educational outcomes.

To create resilient educational communities capable of facing challenges and responding appropriately to the vulnerabilities that arise in their environment, school leadership must be guided by bilingual programs. To achieve this, leaders with an ethical vision and a firm commitment to equity, as well as ensuring access to education for every student, are required. An environment that values dialogue, innovation, and collaboration facilitates the adoption of transformative approaches, while hierarchical, authoritarian, or control-centered structures tend to limit the initiative of teaching

teams and continuous professional development. In this regard, school leadership is not only promoted as the complete management of human and material resources; on the contrary, it seeks to inspire, transform, and mobilize all members of the community toward a more inclusive and relevant approach.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to thoroughly examine the impact of innovative leadership on management and school development. The quantitative approach facilitated the measurement of perceptions and patterns through structured surveys. In contrast, the qualitative approach provided in-depth exploratory insights into the experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of educational stakeholders through semi-structured interviews or focus groups.

The research employs a non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive design, collecting data at a single point in time without altering any variables. Its goal is to clarify how innovative leadership relates to school management while leaving the day-to-day functioning of the school undisturbed. Study participants included principals, teachers, and students from a public school in Guayaquil located in Zone 8, District 09D05. Due to limited access, a convenience sample of 25 individuals was selected, comprising 19 teachers and six principals, drawn from both the morning and afternoon shifts.

A structured survey was administered as a quantitative Likert-type instrument (5-point scale) to teachers and administrators. This instrument also allowed for the evaluation of perceptions regarding leadership, the

implementation of innovative strategies, and institutional management. The instruments were validated and adjusted based on suggestions from experts in the field.

Qualitative instruments included semi-structured interviews with school administrators to explore leadership practices and decision-making processes, as well as focus groups with administrative teachers to identify experiences related to the institutional environment, educational innovation, and community participation.

The research was conducted in three phases: the first phase consisted of the initial diagnosis, which included document review, survey administration, and gathering perceptions through preliminary interviews. The second phase consisted of primary data collection, which involved the application of instruments and direct observation. Finally, data analysis: using descriptive statistics for the quantitative component and thematic analysis for the qualitative information. These analyses were carried out using spreadsheets, frequencies, and percentages.

Discussion

Respondents were asked to assess three key factors related to educational leadership and resources using a 5-level Likert scale. The analysis focuses on the combined percentages of responses marked as 'Agree' and 'Totally Agree' for each factor.

Survey results indicate that 36% of respondents perceive a lack of innovative leadership training for teachers and principals. Regarding institutional support for implementing instructional strategies, 20% believe it is insufficient. Finally, 80% identify limitations in

technological and educational resources, which could hinder the adoption of innovative teaching approaches. These findings highlight critical areas that require attention within the academic institution (Table 1).

Table 1.

Summary Table of Survey Results

Critical factor	Number of respondents (agree + totally agree)	Percentage (%)
Innovative leadership for teachers and principals	9	36%
Insufficient institutional support for instructional strategies	5	20%
Limitations in technological and educational resources	20	80%

Resistance to change in educational innovation

The survey results reveal that 60% of the 25 respondents believe resistance hinders the implementation of new teaching methodologies. Additionally, 50% think it limits the adoption of innovative educational technologies, and another 60% report that it generates negative attitudes toward change. These findings suggest that resistance to change has a significant impact on key aspects of educational innovation (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Perception of resistance to change in educational innovation.

Critical factor	Number of respondents (agree + totally agree)	Percentage (%)
Resistance hinders the implementation of new teaching methodologies	15	60%
Resistance limits the adoption of innovative technologies	13	52%
Resistance generates negative attitudes toward change	15	60%

Role of the Educational Authority

The majority of respondents consider that the educational authority responds reactively rather than proactively to educational changes (50% agree). Additionally, 55% indicate that the lack of innovative initiatives affects teacher professional development. On the other hand, 40% believe that the absence of innovative leadership harms the institution's academic and technological advancement. These results highlight the need for more proactive and creative leadership to improve institutional adaptation to change (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Perceptions of the Role of the Educational Authority

Perception	Number of respondents (agree + totally agree)	Percentage (%)
<i>Reactive rather than proactive response to changes</i>	13	50%
<i>Lack of innovative initiatives affects teacher development</i>	14	55%
<i>Lack of innovative leadership harms academic and technological growth</i>	10	40%

Collaborative Work and Learning Environment

The results indicate that the lack of leadership hinders collaborative work, with 50% of respondents in agreement. Additionally, 55% believe that the absence of a clear vision prevents the integration of innovative methodologies. Furthermore, 50% state that resistance to change limits collaborative spaces. This highlights the need for more strategic leadership to enhance dynamic learning (see Table 4).

Table 4

Perceptions of Collaborative Work and Learning Environment

Perception	Number of respondents (agree + totally agree)	Percentage (%)
<i>Lack of leadership hinders collaborative work</i>	13	50%
<i>Absence of a clear vision prevents integration of innovative methodologies</i>	14	55%
<i>Resistance to change limits collaborative spaces</i>	13	50%

Impact of Innovative Strategies

The data analysis reveals that the majority do not perceive a positive impact of innovative leadership on the use of effective teaching strategies (40% disagree). However, it is acknowledged that innovative strategies contribute to academic performance, with 40% in agreement.

Regarding the development of critical and creative skills, there is a negative perception, with 40% disagreeing. In summary, while there is some recognition of the benefit to academic performance, the overall effectiveness of innovative strategies remains questioned (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Perceptions of the Impact of Innovative Strategies

Perception	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
No positive impact of innovative leadership on the use of effective strategies	10	40%
Innovative strategies contribute to academic performance	10	40%
Negative perception of the development of critical and creative skills	10	40%

Limitations

Every research project has constraints that shape its findings and should be considered when reading the results. The main limitations of the current study are as follows:

- Small, non-random sample: Participants were recruited on a convenience basis, which limited the sample's ability to reflect the larger population of educational institutions accurately and restricted the findings' broader applicability.

- Brief data-collection period: Feedback was gathered within a narrow window of the academic year, which may have led to short-term stresses or events influencing respondents' views of leadership and management.
- Social desirability bias: Respondents may have filtered their answers due to concerns about possible repercussions or the power imbalance that exists between teachers and administrators.
- Infrastructure constraints: Persistent shortages of digital tools in the school environment curtailed the real-time adoption of several proposed innovations, making it impossible to measure their immediate impact.
- Absence of longitudinal tracking: Because the study relied on cross-sectional data, it offers only a snapshot rather than a moving picture of how leadership practices evolve or how durable they might prove.

Conclusions

Innovation is crucial in enhancing administrative efficiency and promoting school development, as evidenced by the findings of this research. Nonetheless, significant structural and cultural barriers hinder its implementation within the institutional framework. The primary conclusions are as follows:

There is an immediate necessity to enhance leadership training in innovative practices, particularly via teacher refresher programs and institutional backing.

Resistance to change and a lack of proactivity among educational authorities are significant impediments to pedagogical transformation. Notwithstanding these obstacles, innovative pedagogical approaches can enhance academic achievement and classroom dynamics, provided a supportive institutional context is in place.

Institutional culture must be redefined to foster participatory leadership, emphasizing cooperation, technological integration, and active learning. This research demonstrates a correlation between leadership and educational innovation in urban school environments, underscoring the necessity for institutional policies that empower school leaders as catalysts for enduring change.

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