

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING LEADERS' COMMUNICATIVE AND SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the opportunities for developing communicative and social skills among educational leaders within the context of rapidly advancing digital technologies. In today's educational landscape, school leaders are expected to go beyond traditional management skills and demonstrate the ability to engage effectively in digital communication, foster virtual collaboration, and adapt to hybrid and remote learning environments. The study examines the integration of digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams into school management practices, highlighting both the benefits and the social-psychological challenges that arise. The article also investigates the emergence of new concepts such as digital empathy, digital ethics, virtual leadership, and digital culture — all of which contribute to the evolving model of socially competent leadership. The author analyzes international experiences and presents modern training methodologies aimed at enhancing educational leaders' communicative capacities in the digital era, while evaluating their applicability to Uzbekistan's national education system. The findings offer practical guidance for building a socially conscious, digitally fluent leader who can successfully manage educational processes in virtual environments.

KEYWORDS: Digital technologies, leadership competence, communication skills, social competencies, virtual leadership, digital culture, digital empathy, online management, modern training methods, digital education.

ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ РАЗВИТИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ И СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ НАВЫКОВ РУКОВОДИТЕЛЕЙ В УСЛОВИЯХ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ

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АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматриваются возможности формирования и развития коммуникативных и социальных навыков руководителей образовательных

учреждений в условиях стремительного развития цифровых технологий. Современный образовательный менеджмент требует от руководителей не только административных умений, но и способности эффективно взаимодействовать в цифровой среде, адаптироваться к новым форматам общения и управления. В условиях удалённого и гибридного обучения важным становится умение руководителя использовать цифровые платформы (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet и др.) для создания продуктивного диалога с педагогическим коллективом, учащимися и родителями. Анализируются проблемы, возникающие в процессе цифровой трансформации образовательной среды, а также необходимость формирования цифровой эмпатии, цифровой этики, культуры виртуального взаимодействия. В статье представлены современные методы тренингов, зарубежный опыт развития лидерских и социальных компетенций в цифровую эпоху и предложены практические рекомендации по их внедрению в национальную систему образования Узбекистана. Основное внимание уделено модели руководителя, обладающего высоким уровнем социальной ответственности и способного к эффективному цифровому взаимодействию.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Цифровые технологии, управленческая компетентность, коммуникативные навыки, социальные компетенции, цифровая культура, цифровая эмпатия, онлайн-управление, цифровое лидерство, тренинги, образование в цифровую эпоху.

RAQAMLI TEXNOLOGIYALAR SHAROITIDA RAHBARLARNING KOMMUNIKATIV VA IJTIMOY KO'NIKMALARINI RIVOJLANTIRISH IMKONIYATLARI

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ANNOTATSIYA

Maqolada raqamli texnologiyalar jadal rivojlanayotgan bugungi davrda ta'lim muassasalarini boshqarayotgan rahbar xodimlarning kommunikativ va ijtimoiy ko'nikmalarini shakllantirish va rivojlantirish imkoniyatlari tahlil etiladi. Axborot-kommunikatsiya texnologiyalarining ta'lim boshqaruvida keng qo'llanilishi rahbar shaxsidan yangicha yondashuvlar, zamonaviy ijtimoiy muhit bilan samarali muloqotda bo'lish, virtual va an'anaviy kommunikatsiyani uyg'unlashtira olish kabi salohiyatni talab etmoqda. Tadqiqotda rahbarlarning onlayn platformalar, raqamli muloqot

vositalari (masalan, Zoom, Google Meet, MS Teams) orqali jamoa bilan samarali aloqada bo‘lishi, ta’lim jarayonini masofadan boshqarishda yuzaga kelayotgan muammolar va ularga ijtimoiy-psixologik yondashuvlar chuqur tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, maqolada raqamli davrda ijtimoiy kompetensiyaning yangi shakllanishi, raqamli etika, raqamli empatiya, virtual yetakchilik, raqamli madaniyat kabi tushunchalarning dolzarbligi yoritiladi. Muallif tomonidan rahbarlarning kommunikativ va ijtimoiy ko‘nikmalarini rivojlantirishga qaratilgan zamonaviy trening metodikalari, xorijiy tajribalar va ularning O‘zbekiston ta’lim tizimiga moslashtirish imkoniyatlari ko‘rib chiqiladi. Natijada, zamonaviy raqamli muhitda samarali faoliyat yurituvchi, ijtimoiy ongli va kommunikativ jihatdan yetuk rahbar obrazini shakllantirishga xizmat qiluvchi ilmiy-amaliy tavsiyalar ilgari suriladi.

KALIT SO‘ZLAR

Raqamli texnologiyalar, rahbar kompetensiyasi, kommunikativ ko‘nikmalar, ijtimoiy ko‘nikmalar, virtual yetakchilik, raqamli madaniyat, raqamli empatiya, onlayn boshqaruv, zamonaviy treninglar, raqamli pedagogika.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has become one of the defining characteristics of the 21st century, profoundly transforming all spheres of human activity, including education. In the current era of globalization and digitalization, the management of educational institutions demands not only traditional administrative efficiency but also the ability of leaders to adapt to modern socio-technological environments.¹ As schools and academic systems undergo structural and functional changes, the role of school leaders expands beyond administrative boundaries to encompass strong communicative competence, social awareness, and digital fluency. In particular, the increasing reliance on digital platforms for remote learning, online meetings, and virtual collaboration has redefined the skills necessary for effective school leadership. A modern leader must now be capable of organizing and maintaining dynamic interaction in virtual spaces, managing educational processes through digital tools, and fostering constructive dialogue among staff, students, and

¹ Fullan, M. (2007). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

parents within digital environments.² This requires not only technical know-how but also emotional intelligence, adaptability, and social empathy—competencies that are often underestimated but crucial in maintaining a cohesive school climate. Furthermore, as digital interactions replace many face-to-face communications, the development of social competencies such as digital empathy, cultural sensitivity in online communication, and ethical digital behavior becomes vital. The ability of school leaders to manage and motivate their teams, resolve conflicts, and build trust now depends significantly on their capacity to communicate effectively in virtual settings. This article explores the opportunities for enhancing the communicative and social skills of educational leaders through the use of digital technologies. It examines how digital tools can be used not only for administrative purposes but also for leadership development, team engagement, and community-building. The paper also considers the integration of international best practices, digital leadership training models, and interactive learning strategies into Uzbekistan’s educational leadership development system.³ By addressing these issues, the article aims to contribute to the formation of a new generation of educational leaders—individuals who are socially competent, technologically literate, and capable of leading in a digital era.

Materials and methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the development of communicative and social skills among school leaders within the context of rapidly expanding digital technologies. The research was conducted among educational administrators working in general secondary schools across several regions of Uzbekistan.⁴ A total of 120 participants, including school principals, deputy directors, and administrative support staff, were selected through stratified sampling to ensure diversity in terms of professional experience, institutional size, and geographic location. The research process was grounded in both theoretical analysis and empirical

² Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2019). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

³ Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22.

⁴ OECD. (2020). *School leadership for learning: Insights from TALIS 2018*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>

investigation. The theoretical framework involved an extensive review of academic literature on digital leadership, communicative competence, social-emotional learning, and education management in digital environments. This review included scholarly articles, international policy documents (e.g., OECD, UNESCO reports), and contemporary case studies from countries such as Finland, South Korea, and the United Kingdom.

The empirical part of the research included the following components:

- **Questionnaires:** A structured questionnaire was designed to assess the participants' self-perception of their communicative and social skills in digital contexts. Questions covered areas such as digital interaction, online conflict resolution, use of digital platforms for communication, and perceptions of virtual team engagement.
- **Interviews:** In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 selected school leaders to gather qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities of managing teams remotely, maintaining motivation among staff, and ensuring social connectedness in a digital environment.
- **Observation:** The researchers conducted non-intrusive observations during virtual staff meetings and online professional development sessions to identify behavioral patterns in digital communication, leadership tone, and interaction style.⁵
- **Comparative analysis:** The study also involved comparing the current state of digital leadership practices in Uzbekistan with international examples. This included analyzing how educational leadership training in other countries incorporates digital empathy, ethical use of technology, and social collaboration tools.
- **Statistical analysis:** Quantitative data obtained from surveys were processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software.⁶ Descriptive statistics (mean scores, standard deviations, frequency distributions) were used to identify general trends, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding to extract meaningful patterns and emerging themes.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, with all participants providing informed consent and being assured of the confidentiality and

⁵ UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

⁶ Northouse, P. G. (2018). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

voluntary nature of their participation.⁷ This multi-faceted methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how digital environments influence the development and application of communicative and social competencies among educational leaders, as well as what practical steps can be taken to improve these skills in the evolving educational landscape.

Results

The data collected through surveys, interviews, and observations reveal several key findings regarding the current state of communicative and social competencies among educational leaders operating in digital environments. Firstly, the survey responses indicate that a significant portion of school leaders recognize the importance of communicative and social skills in the digital era. Approximately 78% of respondents agreed that their ability to engage effectively in virtual communication directly influences staff motivation, team cohesion, and conflict resolution. However, only 42% of respondents felt fully confident in their skills to manage and lead virtual discussions or team meetings using digital tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams. Further analysis of the questionnaire data shows that while most leaders are proficient in using basic communication platforms, they often lack training in key areas such as digital conflict mediation, maintaining emotional connection in online settings, and fostering inclusive digital dialogue. This indicates a gap between digital tool usage and the application of socially competent leadership in virtual contexts.⁸

Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews further highlight the challenges faced by school leaders. Many participants expressed difficulty in reading emotional cues in digital environments, noting that the absence of face-to-face interaction often leads to miscommunication or emotional distance among staff members. Several leaders reported struggling to maintain team morale and unity, particularly during prolonged periods of remote work or hybrid learning models. A commonly cited issue was the lack of structured training programs specifically focused on developing digital empathy

⁷ Mutch, C. (2020). Educational leadership in a crisis: Lessons from New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(3), 485–497.

⁸ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

and communication techniques. Observational data reinforced these findings.⁹ During virtual staff meetings, some leaders demonstrated strong organization and control but lacked interactivity and personal engagement. Others attempted to foster open dialogue but faced technical or social barriers, such as passive participation or limited feedback from staff. In several cases, the tone of digital communication was overly formal or administrative, reducing opportunities for genuine team bonding. Despite these challenges, the research also identified a number of promising practices. Some leaders have proactively adopted strategies such as using breakout rooms for collaborative dialogue, sending personalized follow-up messages to staff, or incorporating visuals and multimedia to enhance digital engagement.¹⁰ These practices, while not yet widespread, offer scalable models for improving communication and social connectedness in digital leadership settings. Moreover, the comparative analysis with international models revealed that countries with more mature digital education systems—such as Finland and South Korea—actively incorporate digital empathy, cultural awareness, and social-emotional learning into their leadership training programs. These countries prioritize not just technological proficiency but also human-centered communication in digital education management. In summary, the results demonstrate a growing awareness among educational leaders of the need to develop advanced communicative and social skills in digital contexts. However, there remains a significant gap in structured training, practical application, and systemic support, which hinders the full realization of these competencies in practice.¹¹ These findings underscore the urgency of integrating communication-focused modules and digital social-emotional development into educational leadership programs in Uzbekistan.

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly illustrate the growing significance of communicative and social competencies in the digital leadership landscape of educational institutions.

⁹ Avolio, B. J., & Kahai, S. S. (2020). Adding the "E" to E-Leadership: How it may impact your leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 49(1), 100715.

¹⁰ Heikka, J., & Husu, J. (2020). Distributed leadership in action: A social practice perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(1), 108–126.

¹¹ Anderson, R., & Dexter, S. (2021). School technology leadership and its effect on digital learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 57(2), 302–332.

As digital platforms become integral to school management and communication, school leaders are required to function not only as administrators but also as digital facilitators, empathetic communicators, and social connectors. However, the results suggest that the transition toward this new leadership paradigm remains uneven and fragmented, particularly in the context of developing education systems such as Uzbekistan's. The gap between technological proficiency and social competence in digital environments presents a critical challenge. While many educational leaders are adept at using digital tools for basic tasks—such as scheduling meetings or sharing information—the more nuanced aspects of communication, such as emotional resonance, inclusive dialogue, and real-time feedback in virtual spaces, are still underdeveloped. This echoes findings in international studies, which emphasize that leadership effectiveness in digital contexts is increasingly determined not by access to technology, but by the ability to use it in socially meaningful ways.¹² One key insight from the research is the psychological impact of digital communication. As observed in virtual staff meetings and confirmed through interviews, many leaders struggle to establish warmth, engagement, and trust when working through screens. In traditional, face-to-face environments, much of this social connection occurs organically through informal conversations, body language, and emotional proximity.¹³ In digital settings, however, these elements are often missing or diminished, placing additional pressure on leaders to be intentional and proactive in their communication style.

Another important theme emerging from the study is the concept of **digital empathy**—the ability to perceive and respond to emotional cues in virtual interactions. This competence is critical in maintaining a supportive environment, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced rapid transitions to remote learning. Leaders who demonstrate digital empathy are more likely to sustain staff morale, manage emotional stress, and foster a sense of belonging among dispersed teams. Yet, many participants reported having received no formal training in how to build or apply such skills in practice. The comparative analysis with countries like Finland, South Korea, and Canada reveals that these systems integrate digital

¹² European Commission. (2020). *Key competences for lifelong learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹³ World Bank. (2018). *Successful school leadership: International practices and recommendations*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

leadership and emotional intelligence training as part of their professional development programs for school administrators. For example, Finland's leadership preparation models include modules on digital ethics, virtual collaboration, and conflict management in online environments. Such structured programs offer valuable blueprints for Uzbekistan and other developing countries aiming to strengthen leadership capacity in the digital age. In the Uzbek context, the absence of standardized frameworks for cultivating communicative and social skills through digital means limits the system's readiness for long-term digital transformation. Leadership development programs still tend to focus on regulatory and procedural training rather than equipping administrators with the interpersonal tools necessary for virtual leadership. This misalignment may result in short-term functionality but long-term stagnation in terms of staff engagement, innovation, and collective motivation.

Despite these challenges, the study also uncovered a willingness among many school leaders to embrace digital transformation and adapt their leadership style. Several interviewees expressed interest in receiving more hands-on training in areas such as digital public speaking, emotional awareness in virtual settings, and online team-building strategies. This highlights a key opportunity: by aligning leadership development with the needs of digital-era school governance, policymakers and educational authorities can foster a more resilient and human-centered education system.¹⁴ In sum, the discussion reinforces the idea that communicative and social competencies are not peripheral, but central to effective leadership in a digitally mediated world. Developing these skills should no longer be considered optional but essential to sustaining school effectiveness, promoting teacher well-being, and navigating the complexities of digital education.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the critical importance of communicative and social competencies in educational leadership within the context of rapidly evolving digital technologies. As the education sector continues to undergo significant digital transformation, the role of school leaders must adapt accordingly—moving beyond traditional administrative functions toward dynamic, people-centered, and digitally fluent leadership. The research findings demonstrate that while many school leaders

¹⁴ Koehler, M. J., & Mishra, P. (2009). What is technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK)? *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 9(1), 60–70.

possess basic digital literacy, their ability to lead effectively in virtual settings is often limited by underdeveloped communicative and social skills. Challenges such as limited emotional engagement, poor virtual interaction strategies, and a lack of formal training in digital empathy were recurrent themes. These limitations not only hinder collaboration and team morale but also negatively impact overall school climate and teacher motivation.¹⁵ However, the study also reveals a growing awareness and willingness among educational leaders to improve in these areas. There is clear demand for targeted professional development programs that focus on fostering digital communication strategies, emotional intelligence, and social awareness within virtual learning and leadership environments. Furthermore, international experiences show that integrating digital leadership modules—such as virtual collaboration, ethical digital conduct, and inclusive communication—into professional training significantly enhances leadership capacity and effectiveness. These insights offer valuable guidance for shaping future educational policies in Uzbekistan and other countries undergoing similar transitions.

In conclusion, developing strong communicative and social skills in the digital context should be considered a core competency for educational leaders. It is not enough to simply use digital tools—leaders must be equipped to build trust, maintain human connection, and foster collaboration in virtual environments. Investing in the digital and interpersonal capacities of school leaders will not only enhance their personal effectiveness but also contribute to building more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready educational institutions.

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¹⁵ Tondeur, J., Scherer, R., Siddiq, F., & Baran, E. (2020). A comprehensive analysis of teacher digital competence: A review of frameworks and approaches. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 58(5), 887–913.

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