



Review

A systematic review of the role of dialogic leadership: Characterization and impacts

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Dialogic leadership
Dialogue
Social impact
Educational leadership

ABSTRACT

As any model of educational leadership is expected to contribute to academic success, dialogic leadership has emerged as an essential model in this domain, providing compelling evidence of significant improvements in the academic outcomes of students, including reduced absenteeism among school children. Dialogic leadership is an emerging leadership approach that conceptualizes the role of members of the educational community (teachers, students, family members ...) that develop leadership practices as they engage in dialogue with others. Research has already demonstrated the positive impacts of dialogic leadership in education as well as in other sectors, for example improving leadership skills in students or enabling the participation of community members in schools, but currently, there are no studies that synthesize these findings. The purpose of this paper is to review the impacts of dialogic leadership, consolidate its defining features, and contextualize it within educational leadership research. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model was used for guidance in the reporting of this systematic review. We carried out an inductive thematic analysis on 27 articles that met the inclusion criteria. As a result, several themes emerged which describe dialogic leadership as an approach and its impacts. It is identified as an egalitarian and social justice-oriented approach that emphasizes inclusion in education. Its impacts are noted across two levels – individual and institutional. At the individual level, it has demonstrated synergies with improvements in the physical and mental wellbeing of adult learners; in self-confidence in children, staff in early education and adult learners, and in the quality of life of educational community members. While at the institutional level, among others, it has led to an improvement in the academic outcomes of students, and it has played the function of social cohesion - bringing society and community members closer and eliminating knowledge gaps through dialogue. We provide a discussion of these themes, along with the implications and suggestions for future research.

1. Introduction

Educational leadership has demonstrated to contribute to the improvement of academic outcomes and student well-being (Wu & Shen, 2022). Research shows that distributed, transformational, shared, and dialogic leadership have emerged over the past decades as leadership styles achieving impact within and beyond the school walls (Karadağ et al., 2015; Redondo-Sama, 2015; Shatzer et al., 2014). Leithwood et al. (2020) summarize the available evidence of the influence of distributed leadership on school and student

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improvement. Additionally, other studies demonstrate the impacts of transformational leadership, such as Wang (2021), showing positive effects on school climate, and Oterkiil and Ertesvåg (2014), illustrating its role in fostering innovation within educational settings. Furthermore, research shows the direct effects of shared leadership or collaborative leadership on changes in the schools' academic capacity and their indirect effects on student reading achievements (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Within the leadership models, social interactions, dialogue and communication of the school leaders, teachers and, school agents play a pivotal role in understanding leadership dynamics (Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Spillane et al., 2009; Webber et al., 2024, pp. 1–20). Amidst this context, the role of dialogue and the understanding of its impacts within diverse educational leadership approaches, including dialogic leadership, is gaining prominence.

Dialogic leadership is an approach based on the dialogic framework that encourages dialogic interactions among all participants of the educational community (teachers, students, family members, volunteers, and other stakeholders) to achieve common goals (Redondo-Sama, 2015). It is an emerging approach within school leadership that captures the role of dialogue and leadership to facilitate transformation in schools, and its development has also been explored in other domains (Amestoy et al., 2017; Campos et al., 2020; Lemmetty & Collin, 2020). Resonating with the dialogic framework is Freire's view of dialogue, which identifies dialogue as an essential and liberating component of the human experience (Freire, 1970; Padrós & Flecha, 2014). Dialogue is perceived as liberating because it is through dialogue that humans challenge oppression and become empowered (Freire, 1970).

Dialogue is highly valued within educational leadership as it enables positive relationships among educational leaders, facilitating to achieve a shared vision in their educational environments (Deakins, 2007; Shields, 2004). Dialogic leadership in schools invites members of the community and school to engage in dialogue with each other and through interaction, they develop leadership practices that contribute towards transforming the school and the communities (Padrós & Flecha, 2014). This approach by Padrós and Flecha (2014) enables teachers, students, family members, and other stakeholders to lead dialogically, while demonstrating actions and practices to support transformations in schools. It was conceptualized as a result of the INCLUD-ED research project, which the European Commission highlighted as the only project in Social Sciences and Humanities in the list of the first ten projects identified as success stories (European Commission, 2011). The project contributed to improving the educational outcomes for the children, and based on these results, several Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) were identified (Flecha & Soler, 2013).

One of these SEAs is interactive groups in which the children in a classroom are divided into groups, and in each group, children interact through dialogue on the subject-related activity under the guidance of a volunteer (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). This is an example of one of the ways in which individuals from the community can lead change dialogically in the process of education as volunteers. A significant pillar of this approach is to ensure that equal importance is given to each individual's contribution regardless of their role, level of education, profession, etc. (INCLUD-ED, 2006-2011). Within this framework, the role of a person with no education is as important as a person with a graduate degree, as they are both working through dialogue towards the shared goal of transforming the school and community, thereby promoting equality and inclusion. In this way, all individuals, regardless of their background, get the chance to become leaders, engaging others to follow in their example (Serradell, 2015).

It is important to note that dialogic leadership differs from other models of educational leadership, advancing towards roles that overcome hierarchical positions. For example, in instructional leadership, the school principal tends to be identified as the leader who closely supervises activities (Shatzer et al., 2014). In contrast, in dialogic leadership, the leadership role can be taken on by any community member (Padrós & Flecha, 2014), resonating with other works involving community members in leadership practices (Crawford et al., 2022). There are illustrative cases of members of the community leading change, as it is demonstrated in the narrative shared by Juan. Juan is a family member volunteering at an adult education school, and he describes his influence in the decision-making regarding the children's learning activities and their schedule (Redondo-Sama, 2015). With the dialogic leadership approach, the complexities that arise due to the power differential, the differences that exist between the administration and the teachers (Klein, 2017), or toxic leadership practices (Alanezi, 2022), can be avoided.

As an outcome of the implementation of various SEAs, many diverse community members got involved in schools, and an improvement in the social and academic outcomes was identified (León-Jiménez, 2020; Padrós & Flecha, 2014). Therefore, dialogic leadership can be understood as an approach to leadership that seeks to promote inclusivity and reduce inequalities. Among the goals that the United Nations seeks to achieve for peace and prosperity by 2030, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) highlights the need to provide inclusive quality education, and SDG10 is aimed at reducing inequalities in the social, economic and political spheres (UN, 2019). Considering these goals and the need for a more inclusive leadership approach within education (Santamaría, 2014), dialogic leadership can be considered as a nuanced approach that potentially contributes to achieving these objectives.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

Previous research on educational leadership has elaborated and compared the established models of educational leadership, for instance, distributive leadership, instructional leadership, and transformative leadership, among many others. Meanwhile, dialogic leadership has achieved significant and meaningful impacts in the educational, health, and organizational domains, for example, improving leadership skills in master's students (Campos et al., 2020), showing the participation of community members in schools (Padrós & Flecha, 2014) or facilitating care management (Amestoy et al., 2017).

To our knowledge, there is no systematic study of dialogic leadership as a leadership approach. Additionally, the need to address diversity and inclusion within educational leadership has been highlighted (Santamaría, 2014), and at the current time where diversity in educational organizations is common (Eden et al., 2024), this is even more imperative. Dialogic leadership covers these aspects in its scope. We have identified the need to consolidate this knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to develop a systematic literature review on dialogic leadership, characterize its main attributes, and synthesize the significant impacts it has had. We have

defined the following research questions (RQs) to address these goals.

RQ1. What are the defining features that capture the essence of dialogic leadership?

RQ2. What are the resultant outcomes that emerge as a consequence of implementing dialogic leadership?

2. Methods

To respond to the RQs, we carried out a systematic literature review on dialogic leadership in education and social sciences-interdisciplinary categories. We used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) Statement and its item checklist to guide the reporting of this systematic review (Page et al., 2021).

2.1. Selection criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria defined for the selection of articles focused on four aspects: alignment with the RQs, publication type, context and time period, and are described in Table 1. We chose a broad time frame, from 2000 to 2023, to ensure the inclusion of the published literature on dialogic leadership in the last two decades, as used in previous works (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). We did not set the inclusion criteria to a certain study design, language, or population because currently the literature published on dialogic leadership is still in its early stages of expansion. The aim of this was not to lose important information related to the topic by limiting the review to a certain methodology or population.

2.2. Search strategy, databases, and information sources

The systematic literature search was developed using the following databases and information sources: Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports (JCR), Scopus, Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), Google Scholar, and CORDIS repository. We selected these databases and information sources because they include most publications from leadership research and educational leadership research, yield literature from the educational field, and due to their relevance to the theme. Before consulting these databases to find literature, we selected journals for hand searching literature in line with the explanation and suggestion by Alexander (2020), stating that when literature is found using keywords on search engines, occasionally useful information can be left out, and one of the ways the search can be more thorough is through journal hand-searching.

The literature searches were carried out from December 2022 to March 2023. The keywords identified for the search were 'leadership*', 'dialogic*', 'dialogic*leadership', 'educational*leadership', 'dialogue*', 'school*', and 'school*leadership*'. Boolean operators were used to make search terms more specific. We used the search terms "(dialogue) OR ("dialogic leadership") AND (leadership)" and others with varying combinations of the keywords. We narrowed the contributions to education, educational research, and social sciences, and included interdisciplinary works related to education. The first round of literature search resulted in a total of 387 journal articles published after 2000, in Web of Science (n = 212) and Scopus (n = 175). After removing duplicates, we retained 212 articles out of 387. Then, we eliminated 193 articles based on their title and abstracts and this resulted in a total of 19 articles.

Following this selection, we commenced the manual search for journals which resulted in a selection of 30 journals after an initial list of 111. We created, maintained, and updated this list in an Excel file. To this aim, firstly, we searched on JCR, with the following categories: 'Education and educational sciences' and 'Social sciences – interdisciplinary' to find relevant journals. Similarly, we also searched on SJR. The keywords were entered along with the name of the journal on Web of Science and Scopus. A careful search was then carried out for each title in each journal. We found 6 additional articles through this method. To identify more literature, we also carried out a search on Google Scholar with the same keywords, however, no new article was found.

Further, we identified articles from the European Commission – funded projects on the CORDIS repository, which is the European Commission's primary source of results from projects funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation since 1984. To narrow down the search for specific projects, several filters are available (language, field of knowledge, programme ...). We used the following filters; under domain, we chose the categories of 'health' and 'society', and under program, we chose the last four most recent EU's framework programmes for research and innovation, as they cover the period since 2000: Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe. After reading the descriptions of the projects, we narrowed down 12 projects with relevance to the current review. We examined the publications listed on the CORDIS

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1. Topic alignment with the RQs: The articles should contain relevance to the features that characterize dialogic leadership or the impact of dialogic leadership	Out of scope of the RQs
2. Publication type: All articles should be peer-reviewed journal articles	Articles that have not been peer-reviewed
3. Context: The practice of dialogic leadership in various sectors especially within primary, secondary, and higher education	The practice of other forms of leadership that do not relate to dialogue
4. Time period: Articles published between 2000 and 2023	Articles that were published before 2000 or after 2023

repository for some of the projects, whereas, for other projects, we visited their websites and then identified the associated publications. The total number of records identified from these projects was 30. Then, based on titles and abstract reading from these publications, we selected 2 articles and added them to our selection. Consequently, the final selection consisted of twenty-seven ($n = 27$) peer-reviewed articles. Of these selected articles, 25 articles were in English, whereas 2 articles were in Spanish. We used the DeepL programme to translate the articles originally in Spanish into English. Fig. 1 provides an overview of the process of study selection according to the PRISMA guidelines.

2.3. Analysis

The analysis follows an inductive approach, and we carried out a step by step approach to thematic synthesis on the final selection of 27 articles (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The analysis was divided into three stages. In the first stage, as proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008), we conducted a line-by-line reading of each article to identify codes. As dialogic leadership is an emerging approach, the inductive research underlined the identification of themes for the thematic analysis. Predefined codes were not used; instead, we anticipated that codes and themes would emerge from the literature. We employed the research questions as a guiding framework to highlight the codes. Upon identifying any characteristic or impact of dialogic leadership, we highlighted the text, which was the first step – identifying the codes. We used Adobe Acrobat Reader for reading the articles and for identifying and highlighting codes.

In the second stage, we generated descriptive themes from the highlighted codes. The purpose was to group similar codes in terms of meaning under the same theme (Thomas & Harden, 2008). For example, we grouped the codes ‘coming together’, ‘work together’, and ‘shared spaces between families and teachers’ under the descriptive theme of “social unity”. We created an Excel file, noting each descriptive theme down along with the codes and each article that was related to each of these themes.

In the final stage, we combined the descriptive themes to form analytical themes. As described by Thomas and Harden (2008), the reviewer must go beyond the data to infer the themes. Accordingly, for this review, each of the two reviewers acting independently, began examining the descriptive themes noted, in order to group them into meaningful analytical themes. This step was done in the light of the research questions. Categorizing all the descriptive themes into analytical themes, we carried out five different discussion rounds. This stage required a consensus between the authors, which was achieved through these several discussions, aligning with Thomas and Harden’s technique of establishing inter-coder reliability (O’Conner & Joffe, 2020). For example, in consolidating the impacts of dialogic leadership, we combined the descriptive themes: ‘improved performance, better quality of work, better coordination and organization, capacity building, increased motivation and efficiency, reduced conflicts’ under the analytical theme of “Improved well-being”. After an in-depth qualitative assessment framed in the RQs and dialogue between the authors, we created six analytical themes for the RQ1 and seven analytical themes for the RQ2. In the next section, we discuss each of the themes with reference to the research questions.

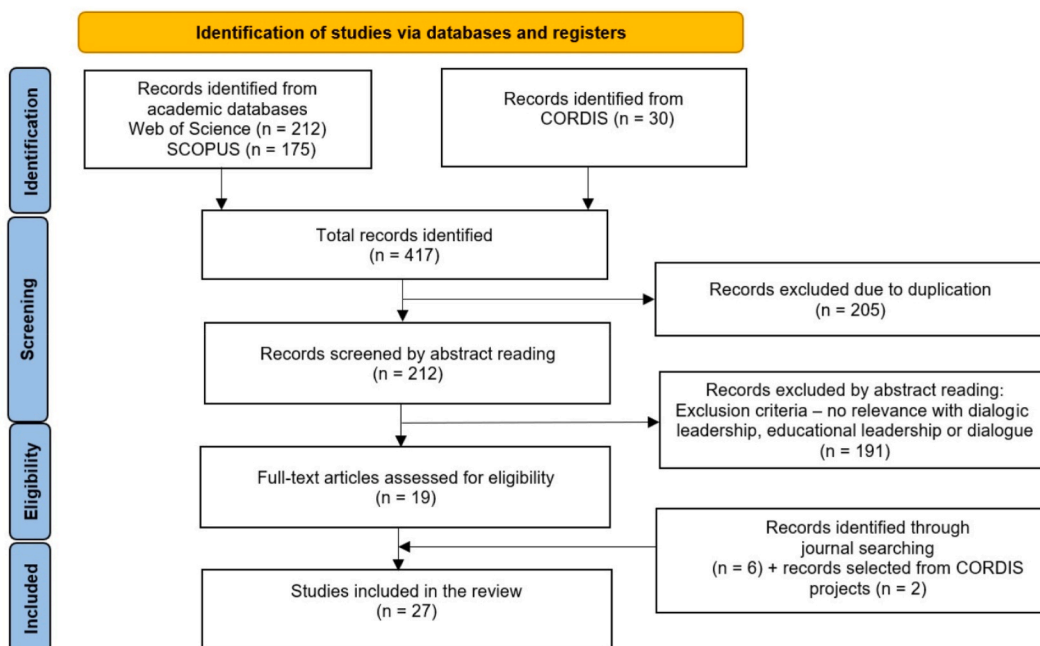


Fig. 1. PRISMA flow diagram showing the study selection process.

Table 2
Descriptive characteristics of the selected articles.

Paper	Title	Country	Design	Data source	Context	Participants	Sample size
Amestoy et al. (2014)	Dialogic leadership: strategies for application in the hospital environment	Brazil	Case study	Interviews, observation, and dialogue workshops	Hospital setting	Nurses	25
Amestoy et al. (2017)	Contributions of Paulo Freire to understanding the dialogic leadership exercise of nurses in the hospital setting	Brazil	Case study	Interviews	Hospital setting	Nurses	35
Aubert et al. (2016)	La Verneda-Sant Martí Adult School: A reference for neighborhood popular education.	Spain	Literature review	Literature and other publications, Interviews and communicative observation	Learning communities	n/a	n/a
Campos et al. (2020)	Improved leadership skills and aptitudes in an excellence EMBA program: creating synergies with dialogic leadership to achieve social impact	Spain	Case study	Open-ended questionnaires	Higher education – university	Professionals in managerial positions	35
Deakins (2007)	The role of meaningful dialogue in early childhood education leadership	New Zealand	Action research	Interviews	Education Leadership	Board, management and staff at an early childhood education centre	n/a
Flecha and Soler (2013)	Turning difficulties into possibilities: Engaging Roma families and students in school through dialogic learning	Spain	Case study	Communicative focus groups, interviews, and observations	Learning communities	School staff, family members and administrators from community organizations	n/a
García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar (2015)	Learning communities: Pathways for educational success and social transformation through interactive groups in mathematics	Spain	Case study	Interviews and observations	Learning communities	Roma children, teacher, and mothers	7
Gómez-Cuevas and Valls-Carol (2022)	Social Impact from Bottom-up Movements: The Case of the Adult School La Verneda-Sant Martí	Spain	Case study	Interviews and documentary analysis	Learning communities	Adult participants at an adult education school	5
Hamilton and Carson (2015)	Speaking of Supervision: A dialogic approach to building higher degree research supervision capacity in the creative arts	Australia	Case study	Interviews	Higher education – university	Postgraduate research supervisors	25
Lemmetty and Collin (2020)	Moment of dialogic leadership in Finnish IT organisation	Finland	Case study	Audio recordings of meetings	IT organisation	Members of a software developer team	25
León-Jiménez (2020)	“This Brings you to Life” The Impact of Friendship on Health and Well-being in Old Age: the Case of La Verneda Learning Community	Spain	Case study	Communicative focus group	Learning communities	Adult participants at an adult education school	6
Miller and Hafner (2008)	Moving Toward Dialogical Collaboration: A Critical Examination of a University—School—Community Partnership	US	Case study	Interviews, observations, and document analyses	Higher education – university	Participants including parents, government and non-profit employees, community leaders, school and university administrators, school teachers,	17

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Paper	Title	Country	Design	Data source	Context	Participants	Sample size
Morlà-Folch et al. (2022)	A research synthesis of the impacts of successful educational actions on student outcomes	n/a	Literature review	Literature	Learning communities	university faculty, staff, and students n/a	
Oliver et al. (2009)	Opening schools to all (women): efforts to overcome gender violence in Spain	Spain	Case studies	Interviews and discussion groups	Learning communities	Students, relatives, professionals, and teachers	58
Padrós and Flecha (2014)	Towards a Conceptualization of Dialogic Leadership	n/a	Theoretical	n/a	Learning communities	n/a	n/a
Redondo-Sama (2015)	Dialogic leadership in learning communities	Spain	Case studies	Interviews	Learning communities	Teachers, family members, and volunteers	9
Redondo-Sama (2016)	Leadership and community participation: a literature review	n/a	Literature review	Literature	Learning communities	n/a	n/a
Redondo-Sama (2016)	Dialogic leadership and new alternative masculinities: Emerging synergies for social transformation	Spain	Case study	Interviews	Learning communities	Adult participant, volunteers and staff members at an adult education school	6
Redondo-Sama (2020)	Supporting democracy through leadership in organizations	Spain	Case study	Interviews	Cooperative organizations	Workers at cooperatives	n/a
Ruiz-Eugenio et al. (2023)	Dialogic literary gatherings: A systematic review of evidence to overcome social and educational inequalities	n/a	Literature review	Literature	Learning communities	n/a	n/a
Serradell (2015)	Aisha, from being invisible to becoming a promoter of social change	Spain	Biography	Interview	Individual case study	Moroccan woman volunteering at a learning community	1
Shields (2004)	Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence.	n/a	Theoretical	n/a	Educational leadership	n/a	n/a
Smith et al. (2017)	Dialogic spaces: a critical policy development perspective of educational leadership qualifications	n/a	Theoretical	n/a	Educational Leadership	n/a	n/a
Temple and Ylitalo (2009)	Promoting inclusive (and dialogic) leadership in higher education institutions	n/a	Theoretical	n/a	Higher education	n/a	n/a
Valls et al. (2017)	Leadership in social movements: The case of Ojo con tu Ojo	Spain	Case study	Communicative daily life story, interviews, communicative observations, documentary analysis	Social movement	Adult participants in a social movement	4
Wang et al. (2023)	The ecology of dialogic interactions towards sustainability of school-based curriculum development	Singapore	Case study	Focus group discussions	Educational leadership and schools	School leaders, subject heads and teachers	n/a
Yliruka and Karvinen-Niinikoski (2013)	How can we enhance productivity in social work? Dynamically reflective structures, dialogic leadership and the development of transformative expertise	n/a	Theoretical	n/a	Social service and social workers	n/a	n/a

3. Results

In order to comprehensively explore the multifaceted landscape of dialogic leadership, we selected papers that span a diverse array of domains in which this form of leadership is practiced. Another key objective was to investigate the pivotal role played by dialogue in the realm of educational leadership. Our final selection of 27 articles consists of theoretical and empirical papers that generate an all-encompassing synthesis of all the work published about dialogic leadership. A summary of the study characteristics of the 27 articles is presented in [Table 2](#). In the following sections, we discuss the themes generated for each of the research questions.

3.1. RQ1: what are the defining features that capture the essence of dialogic leadership?

There are some common features that characterize dialogic leadership in the diverse areas in which it has been practiced. The dialogic leadership model was observed in the following contexts in the literature – learning communities ([León-Jiménez, 2020](#)), social services ([Yliruka & Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2013](#)), a hospital setting ([Amestoy et al., 2017](#)), a university setting ([Campos et al., 2020](#)), an IT organization ([Lemmetty & Collin, 2020](#)), a cooperative organization ([Redondo-Sama, 2020](#)) and among a group of social activists ([Valls et al., 2017](#)). Within these varied settings, we describe and summarize in [Table 3](#) the features of dialogic leadership that were found to be its unifying characteristics.

3.1.1. Egalitarianism

Dialogic leadership has been appraised as an egalitarian approach across the various contexts where it has emerged and has been practiced ([García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015](#); [Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022](#); [Redondo-Sama, 2015, 2016](#); [Serradell, 2015](#); [Temple & Ylitalo, 2009](#); [Valls et al., 2017](#)). It enables egalitarianism by giving all the participants an equal role and by valuing the input of each participant ([Redondo-Sama, 2020](#)). This is shown at different educational levels, from primary education through the promotion of interactions and dialogue among students, teachers, volunteers, and parents as identified by [García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar \(2015\)](#), to higher education institutions involving dialogue of the whole academic community, as Temple and Ylitalo suggest (2009). Thus, equality between leaders and actors is a key characteristic that defines dialogic leadership, signifying the absence of hierarchical levels of leadership and followers ([Padrós & Flecha, 2014](#)).

The egalitarianism in dialogic leadership is also linked to its role in reducing existing educational inequalities, for example improving the students' performance in mathematics in primary education ([García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015](#)). Furthermore, there is evidence of the transformation among more egalitarian social contexts after the participation in adult education activities ([Serradell, 2015](#)) and the contribution of dialogic leadership practices to gender equality ([Redondo-Sama, 2016](#)).

3.1.2. Diversity and inclusion

Another quintessential feature of dialogic leadership, noted across the literature reviewed, is diversity among individuals as they come from different ethnic minorities, nationalities, or cultures, especially within learning communities as the participants are quite often people from vulnerable groups ([León-Jiménez, 2020](#); [Redondo-Sama, 2015, 2016](#); [Smith et al., 2017](#)). This diversity manifests in other dimensions as well, including but not limited to variations in background, experience, and education ([Redondo-Sama, 2020](#)). For example, children from different ethnic communities (Roma, Moroccan-Muslim) led dialogically in schools, which allowed them to develop respect differences among them ([Padrós & Flecha, 2014](#)).

Similarly, among adults at a learning community for adult education, an inclusive atmosphere prevails, characterized by an appreciation of the diverse backgrounds among the adult participants from different nationalities ([Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022](#)). Dialogic leadership enables individuals to embrace and appreciate diversity as [Shields \(2004\)](#), in her conceptualization of leadership through dialogue, asserts that diversity in this context is an asset to be valued. In this way, when value is given to diversity, it leads to the development of more inclusive spaces where the voices of those who are normally often neglected are also given importance ([Redondo-Sama, 2016](#)). With increased dialogue in schools, educational leaders strengthen a more multicultural approach that supports the principle that all students regardless of their ethnic or cultural background, have the right to be educated with equal opportunities ([Temple & Ylitalo, 2009](#)).

Table 3
Themes and sample articles for features of dialogic leadership (RQ1).

Analytical themes	Descriptive themes	Sample article
Egalitarianism	Equality among leaders and actors, reduced inequalities	García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar (2015)
Diversity and inclusion	Diverse cultural backgrounds, developing respect for differences, inclusion of marginalized groups, development of a multicultural worldview	Gómez-Cuevas and Valls-Carol (2022)
Democratic approach	Equal power, individual agency, involvement of all in decision making, bottom-up approach	Flecha and Soler (2013)
Social justice orientation	Support for disadvantaged groups, justice, freedom of expression, dynamic and evolving	Amestoy et al. (2017)
Qualities of dialogic leaders	Flexibility, friendliness, humility, appreciativeness, transparency, reliability, role models	Smith et al. (2017)
Organizational environment	Holding regular meetings, availability of learning spaces, problem-solving culture	Amestoy et al. (2014)

3.1.3. Democratic approach

The essence of dialogic leadership is in its democratic style, whereby every participating individual has agency and power (Amestoy et al., 2014; Aubert et al., 2016; Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022; Redondo-Sama, 2016, 2020; Smith et al., 2017; Valls et al., 2017). The democratic principles are evident in the functioning of the schools where dialogic leadership is practiced, as in these institutions, the decision-making ability lies with every member who is involved (Redondo-Sama, 2015). For example, in a learning community located in an impoverished neighborhood in Spain, the Roma families have become more involved in their children's education; a Roma mother described how she and her husband felt valued as the head teacher asked for their opinion and their desires as parents (Flecha & Soler, 2013).

Similarly, at an adult education school, democratic decision-making is one of the essential principles, whereby each participating adult has a voice and thereby has a say in the decision-making (Aubert et al., 2016). The same principle is also applied in cooperatives and organizations that align with the dialogic leadership approach, where workers at all levels are involved in making decisions, which ensures a democratic arrangement (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020; Redondo-Sama, 2020). In a hospital where dialogic leadership was implemented, there was a hierarchical structure of organization since it is essential to the functioning of hospitals (Amestoy et al., 2017). However, through dialogue, the leader's increased interaction ensured that the voices of those under them were represented in decision-making and provided explanations while giving orders, thereby instilling greater democracy in their practice (Amestoy et al., 2017).

3.1.4. Social justice orientation

Dialogic leadership, at its core, enables and establishes the inclusion of all individuals, especially those who, under regular circumstances, may be marginalized (Shields, 2004). For example, the Roma in Spain have faced marginalization but by engaging in the practice of dialogic leadership at school, the Roma families were able to take on an active role in their children's education (Flecha & Soler, 2013). In the current diverse context within education, where there is a need for leadership focused on justice and equality, dialogic leadership aims to promote and support disadvantaged groups, for example, people with disabilities (Temple & Ylitalo, 2009). As in the case of the dialogic leadership practice of nurses in a hospital, justice and assuming an impartial position were key components for the effectiveness of the dialogic approach (Amestoy et al., 2014). Participants who engage in the practice of dialogic leadership experience freedom of expression (Amestoy et al., 2017) and feel more valued in their roles (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020; Smith et al., 2017), thereby prevailing an atmosphere of social justice. The dialogic approach especially within education is dynamic and evolving (Wang et al., 2023), in the way that it can evolve as dialogic conversations evolve and hence provide a socially just form of leadership.

3.1.5. Qualities of dialogic leaders

Among those individuals who lead dialogically, there are certain common features that we found in the literature reviewed, briefly explained below, which are flexibility, friendliness, humility, appreciativeness, transparency, reliability, and role models.

Flexibility. The nurses who led dialogically highlighted the need for flexibility because, as the team leader, one should be willing to adjust according to the needs of the team members (Amestoy et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

Friendliness. The leaders can be friendly and engage with those they are leading as their equals, as this eliminates the barriers to communication (Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022).

Humility. Having humility as a dialogic leader was found to lead to more effective implementation of dialogic leadership (Amestoy et al., 2014; Miller & Hafner, 2008). In the case of dialogic leadership in a hospital, since the leaders had more knowledge than for example, the interns, their humility showed that they were also willing to learn and were open to dialogue (Amestoy et al., 2014).

Appreciativeness. When practicing dialogic leadership, the leaders offer praise and appreciate the work of the others (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020; Valls et al., 2017). This in turn makes those who are being led feel valued (Smith et al., 2017).

Transparency. In the practice of dialogic leadership, the leader promotes transparency in all procedures. In the context of cooperative organizations, for example, dialogic leadership entails having transparency at the internal and external levels (Redondo-Sama, 2020).

Reliability. One quality that is essential for leaders is to have the participants' trust (Amestoy et al., 2014, 2017; Serradell, 2015; Valls et al., 2017); hence the dialogic leader should be reliable.

Role models. In a dialogic leadership context, as leaders act, they become role models for the others around them, and their actions can be used as examples of how to act and lead (Amestoy et al., 2014). This is another feature that contributes towards transformation as the example of the leader inspires others to transform and follow in their path (Serradell, 2015).

3.1.6. Organizational environment

The organizational environment refers to aspects related to the physical meetings and their development, as there are some elements that set these aspects apart in the dialogic leadership context. One of these aspects was holding regular meetings, where meetings were regularly scheduled after a fixed period as decided by the participants (Amestoy et al., 2014). For example, in learning communities, dialogic literary gatherings are usually carried out weekly (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023). While the frequency can change according to the needs of the participants, having regular meetings after fixed periods is important for dialogue and discussions (Amestoy et al., 2014).

Another aspect that was noted for the learning communities was that the learning spaces were available and opened as and when required (Aubert et al., 2016). The openness and accessibility of these learning spaces enables greater opportunities for dialogue (Aubert et al., 2016) and open discussions (Hamilton & Carson, 2015), which are essential to dialogic leadership. In a university

context, in an effort to implement dialogic principles, meetings were scheduled at locations within the community, which were more practical for community members rather than at the university (Miller & Hafner, 2008). In addition to these physical aspects of the meetings, Temple and Ylitalo (2009) add that to enable dialogic leadership, there should be a problem-solving culture where people should gain from each other's experiences and help each other.

3.2. RQ2. What are the resultant outcomes that emerge as a consequence of implementing dialogic leadership?

According to the conceptualization of dialogic leadership by Padrós and Flecha (2014), dialogic leaders aim to work collaboratively with diverse participants to bring about ameliorative changes in the school and community. The outcomes of developing and implementing dialogic leadership noted in the different contexts were wide-ranging, with impacts at the individual and organizational levels as presented in Table 4.

3.2.1. Changes at the individual level

1. **Improved well-being.** We revised the examples of dialogic leadership in the selected literature and showed that implementing it in diverse contexts had positive impacts on the well-being and quality of life of the individuals involved. For the elderly who were practicing and developing their leadership through dialogue at an adult education school, meaningful dialogic interactions helped them to establish strong social support networks (León-Jiménez, 2020). Creating strong social bonds was important for them as many of them were isolated after the death of their spouse or due to not having their family around.

Another case study of the same learning community examined how the participants at the school developed their dialogic leadership practice while concurrently developing lasting friendships (Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022). These social connections, along with a supportive environment at the school, led to increased happiness among the adult participants. In addition to the positive effects on the mental well-being of these participants, it was observed that their physical health also improved notably, contributing to an overall increase in general well-being (León-Jiménez, 2020).

2. **Improved self-confidence.** At the individual level, an improvement in self-esteem was noted among the elderly at a learning community for adult education, through building strong interpersonal relationships and friendships while leading dialogically (León-Jiménez, 2020). A similar trend was noted among the staff of an early childhood organization, where dialogue was used to develop a shared vision, and through an open dialogue, participants were involved in the decision-making for the organization (Deakins, 2007). After engaging in dialogic interactions and being a part of the decision-making, participants felt empowered and showed increased self-esteem (Deakins, 2007).

While these results were noted for adults, similar effects were also identified among children in a learning community. In a longitudinal case study, García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar (2015) found that within children in the 5th grade, participation in a classroom intervention based on dialogic interactions resulted in improved self-efficacy and confidence.

3. **Improved quality of life.** Another key feature of dialogic leadership is transformative dialogue, which enables positive emotions to emerge (Amestoy et al., 2017; León-Jiménez, 2020; Serradell, 2015). A mutual desire to transform reality between two people leads to dialogue that is nurtured through love and hope (Amestoy et al., 2017). At the learning community for adult education, participants report a deep feeling of love and connection for the other participants, which they have developed due to the activities

Table 4
Themes and sample articles for impacts of dialogic leadership (RQ2).

	Analytical themes	Descriptive themes	Sample article
Changes at the individual level	1. Improved well-being	Developing lasting friendships, increased happiness, improved mental and physical well-being	León-Jiménez (2020)
	2. Improved self-confidence	Empowered individuals, improvement in self-efficacy.	García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar (2015)
	3. Improved quality of life	Therapeutic effects, love, hope, sense of purpose	Serradell (2015)
Changes at the institutional level	1. Improvement in academic outcomes	Generation of knowledge through dialogue, reduced absences, learning progress, reversing school failure, improvements in math and language skills, acquiring literacy skills	Redondo-Sama (2015)
	2. Increased productivity	Improved performance, better quality of work, better coordination and organization, enabling capacity building, increased motivation and efficiency, reduced conflicts	Valls et al. (2017)
	3. Increased social cohesion	Social unity, strong social bonds, reduced loneliness, solidarity, greater community involvement, dialogic leaders as role models for others.	Oliver et al. (2009)
	4. Social transformation	Positive changes in community, improvements in the family lives and thinking of individuals, realization of shared vision through dialogue leading to change.	Redondo-Sama (2020)

based on dialogic interactions (León-Jiménez, 2020). The other positive emotion, hope, emerged within several women of a community after seeing Aisha, a Moroccan woman who fulfilled her dream of going back to school (Serradell, 2015). Aisha also led through dialogue and her initiative and leadership influenced the improvement of quality of life of the other women in the neighborhood (Serradell, 2015). The other women, along with Aisha, participated in discussions regarding important aspects of the neighborhood. A similar example of community participation and dialogic engagement for a purpose was observed also among the adults who were participating at the adult education school, as they made decisions and engaged in dialogue with others (Aubert et al., 2016).

3.2.2. Changes at the institutional level

1. **Improvement in academic outcomes.** Morlà-Folch et al. (2022) compiled all the evidence on the impacts of SEAs, all of which are based on the dialogic framework. For example, dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs) are gatherings where participants engage in a discussion of classical literature after reading an agreed-upon section of it. The adults developing their dialogic leadership at the La Verneda learning community regularly participated in DLGs, which enabled them to connect and build knowledge through dialogue (Redondo-Sama, 2016). Among the studies reviewed by Morlà-Folch et al. (2022), the implementation of the SEAs resulted in improved academic outcomes, reduced school absenteeism, and increased learning progress (León-Jiménez, 2020). Learning was also observed as an outcome at individual and collective levels at an IT organization where dialogic leadership was implemented, and after engaging in dialogue, the learning reflected the addition of knowledge about the views of others (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020).

In learning communities, dialogic leadership enables family members to be involved in the education process. Family involvement is directed toward reversing school failure among children (Padrós & Flecha, 2014), another positive outcome that helps to improve the overall academic standing of the school. In the schools where children and community members were developing dialogic leadership, there was an increase in the overall academic outcome of students (Flecha & Soler, 2013) and, in one case, more specifically in math and learning (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015) while in another an increase in language skills among adults (Serradell, 2015). In the adult education school, La Verneda, adults who previously had had no education acquired literacy skills and became able to read and write (Aubert et al., 2016).

2. **Increased productivity.** The dialogic leadership, when applied in different contexts, led to outcomes that contribute to increased productivity. For example, the nurses at the hospital in Brazil developed strategies to implement dialogic leadership in their practice (Amestoy et al., 2014). Developing strategies that allowed them to have an increased dialogue with other professionals in the hospital led to improved performance; specifically, it led to an improvement in the quality of care they provided (Amestoy et al., 2014). Greater dialogic interactions also contributed to better coordination among the professionals and better organization in the hospital (Amestoy et al., 2017). Similarly, within academic leadership, dialogic leadership can promote higher cooperation among educational leaders due to increased communication (Temple & Ylitalo, 2009). For example, for PhD supervisors, a conversational approach helped to develop supervision skills as they engaged in dialogue with other supervisors (Hamilton & Carson, 2015). As a result, dialogue enabled capacity building and cooperation within academic leadership.

Other factors linked with an increase in productivity that affected individuals at a more personal level were increased motivation (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Serradell, 2015; Valls et al., 2017) and higher efficiency (Amestoy et al., 2017). The increase in motivation linked to dialogic leadership was observed in diverse contexts: among children and families at a primary school (Flecha & Soler, 2013), among adult activists (Valls et al., 2017), and among adult participants at a learning community for adult education (Serradell, 2015). Similarly, the changes in the level of efficiency among workers were noted among the nurses in a hospital setting (Amestoy et al., 2017) and among workers at a cooperative (Redondo-Sama, 2020). Beyond their enhanced productivity within an organizational context, dialogic leadership empowered individuals to assume a more productive role within society by motivating their voluntary participation in research; for instance, the adults at the La Verneda learning community in Barcelona consistently participate in European research projects (León-Jiménez, 2020).

In addition to these enhancements in favorable consequences, a parallel reduction in adverse occurrences, specifically conflicts, was also observed in contexts where dialogic leadership was being implemented (Amestoy et al., 2017; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). A synthesis of the learning communities implementing actions based on the dialogic model found that specifically, the action based on conflict reduction generated very positive outcomes, especially in high-conflict areas (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). On the other hand, when dialogic leadership was practiced by the nurses in a hospital, it also led to reduced conflicts between the different health professionals and nurses (Amestoy et al., 2017).

3. **Increased social cohesion.** A common factor that was found in the literature related to dialogic leadership was social cohesion and overall improved social outcomes. As dialogue is the cornerstone of dialogic leadership (Redondo-Sama, 2016), an increase in dialogue not only brought about social unity but also resulted in creating long-lasting friendships (Campos et al., 2009; León-Jiménez, 2020; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Serradell, 2015; Valls et al., 2017). For example, among the elderly at the adult education school, strong ties of friendship were created when they led dialogically, which also helped to reduce loneliness in some cases (León-Jiménez, 2020). School children helped each other and formed friendships after engaging dialogically (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). Similarly, for adult social activists leading dialogically for social change (Valls et al., 2017) and among women, especially

from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Spain, leading dialogically fostered strong bonds of friendship (Oliver et al., 2009; Serradell, 2015). Among those who were leading for social change, there was also a strong sense of solidarity that united them (Oliver et al., 2009).

Much of the literature on learning communities practicing dialogic leadership also reports on solidarity as a common denominator among those practicing it (Gómez-Cuevas & Valls-Carol, 2022; León-Jiménez, 2020; Serradell, 2015; Valls et al., 2017). For dialogic leadership, the participants must realize a shared goal, and after it has been envisioned, the individuals develop a sense of unity between themselves for achieving the targeted goal (Redondo-Sama, 2020). While bringing individuals closer, dialogic leadership practice also contributed to greater family and community involvement (Aubert et al., 2016; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Padrós & Flecha, 2014; Redondo-Sama, 2015, 2016). Family involvement also empowered students, especially those students whose parents had lower levels of education, and when they saw them contribute meaningfully to the school, they served as role models for them (Padrós & Flecha, 2014). Meanwhile, Aisha, a Moroccan immigrant woman leading dialogically in an impoverished neighborhood, also set an example for other immigrant women in her neighborhood, who were inspired and motivated by her example (Serradell, 2015).

Temple and Ylitalo (2009) surmise that dialogic leadership would foster a sense of belonging within community members, and in the learning communities where people were leading through dialogue, community involvement not only increased but also contributed to positive outcomes in learning processes in schools (Redondo-Sama, 2015). Indeed, dialogic engagements have been considered as opportunities for sharing knowledge and in turn, bringing people closer (Hamilton & Carson, 2015; Wang et al., 2023).

4. Social transformation. The literature on learning communities describes how leading dialogically has brought about changes in the schools and in the lives of the students (Padrós & Flecha, 2014). The most consistently reported change as an outcome of dialogic leadership is community transformation (Padrós & Flecha, 2014; Redondo-Sama, 2015, 2016; Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023). In learning communities, community transformation takes place when different members of the community, in addition to the students and teachers, develop their leadership practices and contribute meaningfully to the schools (Padrós & Flecha, 2014). The increased community engagement in schools, enabling dialogic leadership, has also contributed to academic success (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). The success in the schools, along with the community involvement, contributes to social transformation.

The transformation can also be at an individual level as the individual's life is impacted. For example, at a cooperative organization enabling dialogic leadership, an employee described having experienced a change in his way of thinking and family life (Redondo-Sama, 2020). Meanwhile, dialogic leadership has also demonstrated to have transformative outcomes at the organizational level (Deakins, 2007; Redondo-Sama, 2020). Through dialogue, the staff and management at an organization for early childhood education came to a consensus on the vision and goals for the organization and, in this way, were able to bring about a complete change to the organization (Deakins, 2007).

4. Discussion

The impacts and characteristics of dialogic leadership have previously not been synthesized in the form of a literature review. This review was carried out with a view to consolidating the findings about dialogic leadership, which is a relatively recent approach as compared with more established models of distributive and transformational leadership, among others. To address these goals, we defined two research questions regarding the defining features of dialogic leadership and the impacts of dialogic leadership. We discuss the results from each of these questions below.

The results from the current review reveal that the research that discusses the impacts of dialogic leadership and dialogic leadership as an approach are all qualitative in nature with the majority ($n = 17$, 63%) being case studies. This reflects the need to have empirical studies at a broader scale that would measure the impact across a large sample or show the transferability of dialogic leadership to broader contexts.

Additionally, 21 out of the 27 studies have been conducted within the educational context – schools, higher education, and adult education. The rest of the studies were carried out in healthcare ($n = 2$), corporate organizations ($n = 2$), and within social work ($n = 2$). While this depicts the versatility of dialogic leadership as an approach, it also underscores its strong potential for implementation within educational contexts. Moreover, it may signify the openness and flexibility among educators, practitioners, and other professionals who continuously seek improvements in schools and respond to evolving circumstances.

Regarding the RQ1, we found that dialogic leadership is an approach that is grounded in egalitarianism and democracy. However, there were some nuances when comparing its conceptualization in the literature. Specifically, the conceptualization of dialogic leadership provided by Padrós and Flecha (2014) slightly differs from Amestoy et al. (2017), as in the case of Amestoy et al. (2017), having more professional experience enabled a smoother practice of dialogic leadership and hierarchical relationships within leadership were present whereas, in the conceptualization by Padrós and Flecha (2014), leadership does not rely on professional experience and a hierarchy is not usually established within leadership. Rayner (2009) expressed the need for an inclusive leadership approach, keeping in perspective the increasing diversity within education. Our results highlight that dialogic leadership fits within educational leadership as a timely approach that can cater to the quickly evolving social environment. Furthermore, we found that dialogic leaders exhibit qualities consistent with successful school leaders practicing social justice leadership, including challenging environments (Amestoy et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017), as observed in prior research (DeMatthew et al., 2016).

For the RQ2, while evaluating the impacts of dialogic leadership, we noted that the changes were either at the individual level and at the institutional level. This is similar to Morlà-Folch et al. (2022) as they identified the impacts of SEAs at individual, group, and

community levels. The current review covers other domains besides educational institutions as dialogic leadership is practiced more broadly. Additionally, as dialogic leadership enables greater social interaction, one reason for the positive impacts at the personal level is related to increased socialization. Consistent with this notion, prior research reports that positive social interactions contribute to an enhancement of psychological well-being (Urzúa et al., 2020).

At the organizational level, within schools, an improvement in academic achievement was identified (Flecha & Soler, 2013; García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Padrós & Flecha, 2014). As dialogic leadership in schools entailed the involvement of parents and other community members, these results are in line with the findings that increased parental involvement (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011) and community involvement (Bukoski et al., 2015) in school leads to positive outcomes, for example in academic improvement for the children. Our findings extend previous research (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Bukoski et al., 2015) by highlighting the potential for families and community members to cultivate leadership skills through their involvement in school affairs. From this, we may conclude that fostering greater family engagement and fostering closer ties between school staff and families offer a more advantageous approach compared to traditional models, which often maintain a distance between schools and families.

For the reporting of the systematic review, we used the PRISMA model and having a standardized protocol for the reporting was helpful in making the writing process more structured (Page et al., 2021). However, we found that a certain aspect of reporting, the risk of bias assessment, is more suited to reviews that encompass empirical studies. For our review, we used a variety of literature including empirical studies, review articles, and theoretical papers, as the aim was to synthesize all findings on dialogic leadership. As noted by Katikireddi et al. (2015), calculating the risk of bias is complicated for systematic reviews that use diverse study designs, as for theoretical papers and reviews, there are no tools or clear protocols to measure the risk of bias. While we did not calculate the risk of bias, we followed a technique for quality appraisal as adopted by Vest et al. (2021), considering the diversity of the selected literature. This suggested that if studies indicated an IRB approval or funding source, these can be taken as crude indicators of quality where other techniques are problematic, and the articles in our study met these criteria.

4.1. Practical implications

The practical implications of this systematic review for teachers and professionals in education focus on what they can do to generate dialogic leadership practices that enable a more inclusive, participative and transformative approach in schools and educational organizations. As shown in 3.1, the defining features of dialogic leadership can inspire developments in leadership practices involving various members of educational communities. In this vein, schools can apply these findings to exercise their leadership by involving families and community members in education, which has demonstrated to improve academic outcomes and foster leadership skills among family members (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015). At the same time, the defined qualities of dialogic leaders identified in 3.1.5 can inspire concrete actions and changes in leadership practices that schools and teachers can implement. Therefore, practical implications can be linked to raising awareness and fostering ongoing development of dialogic leadership. As Deakins (2007) demonstrated, organizations can implement training programs that emphasize the principles of dialogic leadership, promoting egalitarianism and democratic decision-making processes. This can enhance teamwork, productivity, and social cohesion within the organization. Similarly, policymakers and stakeholders can develop policies and practices that encourage dialogic practices, ensuring that leadership strategies are inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse groups.

As the focus within leadership research shifts toward social justice (Furman, 2012), this systematic review provides a timely synthesis of dialogically-oriented leadership practices. There is potential to use these findings to raise awareness of the methods that foster dialogic leadership both within and beyond school settings. The results described in 3.2 provide an insightful overview of initiatives that practitioners can promote to enhance the impacts of leadership practices. In the daily activities of agents working in diverse educational settings, they are encouraged to include actions fostering friendship, solidarity, and learning through dialogue. By actively engaging in these aspects, schools can lead to improved academic outcomes and promote social transformation in dialogic ways.

4.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

One limitation related to this systematic review is that the selected studies were based on very diverse populations. While some studies focused on the practice of dialogic leadership and the use of dialogue among children, others focused on adults, and one on the elderly. Since the studies were not equally distributed across these age groups, the review was not categorized by age. However, the impacts may differ based on age groups, and those results related to adults may not apply to children. Another limitation is we were not able to calculate the risk of bias for individual studies. This was due to the inclusion of theoretical and review papers in the literature. Since the literature published about dialogic leadership is still expanding, we could not limit the selection of literature to a certain study design.

Future research should consider having a narrower focus on the practice of dialogic leadership within one domain, for example, within healthcare. This may allow to identify impacts that are exclusive to that sphere. Given the limited literature published on dialogic leadership to date, significant opportunities exist to explore its potential through both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

5. Conclusion

The current systematic review has synthesized the existing literature on dialogic leadership, offering an overview of its

characteristic features and the impacts it brings about. The findings reveal that dialogic leadership is an approach rooted in egalitarianism, democracy, and social justice. The attributes of dialogic leaders highlight the need for leaders to have a worldview based on equality and justice. The outcomes of dialogic leadership highlight its utility in improvements at the individual and at the institutional level. The practice of dialogic leadership was empowering in various ways for individuals, while it also played a significant role in making large-scale changes in organizations, for instance, improving productivity and creating solidarity across communities. Organizations and schools need to adopt free-flowing dialogue as a way to strengthen the individuals and also to build camaraderie among them as in the long term these outcomes may lead towards greater results among other positive outcomes.

Funding

This work was funded by the European Social Fund and the Spanish Agency of Research under the Ramon y Cajal grant number RYC2018-025860-I; and from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 945413; and from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV).

Disclaimer

This work reflects only the author's view and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author used Grammarly in order to check the grammar and punctuation of the text. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Acknowledgements

Gisela Redondo-Sama: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Supervision.
Shiza Khaqan: Investigation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing- original draft.
Ramon y Cajal grant number RYC2018-025860-I, FSE/AGENCIA ESTATAL DE INVESTIGACION.

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