



## Sustainability of School Leadership Regeneration Based on Digital Governance After Principal Term Limits

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### ABSTRACT

The sustainability of school leadership regeneration has become a critical issue when principal term limits are implemented within an increasingly digitalized educational governance system. Principal replacement should not merely be understood as positional rotation, but as an institutional process that determines the continuity of school quality, work culture, supervision, and organizational memory. This study aims to synthesize empirical evidence on school leadership regeneration based on digital governance and to explain how succession, digital capacity, and institutional support can sustain leadership after principal term limits. A systematic literature review was conducted using the PRISMA guidelines. The search was performed in the Scopus database using keyword combinations related to school, principal, leadership, succession, governance, digital, and education. A total of 155 articles were initially identified and then screened based on the 2021–2026 publication range, journal article type, English language, open access status, abstract relevance, DOI availability, and substantive proximity, resulting in 10 included articles. The synthesis shows that school leadership regeneration needs to be supported by role clarity, cadre development systems, knowledge transfer, external evaluation, organizational learning culture, supervision, and digital infrastructure. Digital governance was found to function as a medium for documentation, coordination, decision-making, and preservation of institutional knowledge. This study confirms that principal term limits can become an instrument of organizational renewal when they are managed through a transparent, adaptive, participatory, and data-based succession system.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

School Changes in educational governance over the last decade have positioned principals as strategic actors in maintaining quality, organizational stability, and the sustainability of school change. Their role is no longer limited to routine administration. It has expanded to strengthening teacher motivation, improving school performance, and managing a fair work climate. Hyseni Duraku and Hoxha (2021) showed that transformational and transactional leadership attributes of school principals are related to teachers' work motivation. Shen et al. (2021) confirmed that growth in principal leadership is associated with growth in school performance from teachers' perspectives. In addition, principals' agile leadership has been positioned as a factor related to teachers' job satisfaction through organizational justice (Özgenel et al., 2022). Therefore, the sustainability of school leadership needs to be placed as a governance requirement that determines the continuity of quality, work culture, and school change capacity.

Recent studies show that effective school leadership is built through the ability to mobilize organizational learning, professional collaboration, and leader resilience in responding to policy pressure. Kazemi et al. (2022) emphasized that school-level learning transformation is influenced by how principals understand teacher learning. Sahlin (2023) demonstrated that teachers make sense of principals' leadership through collaborative practices within and beyond schools. In crisis contexts, transformational leadership has been considered important for maintaining school responses to learning changes and pandemic-related pressure (Menon, 2025). Career resilience and self-efficacy among school leaders have also been found to be interrelated in supporting educational leadership success (Papaioannou et al., 2022). Thus, leadership regeneration needs to be viewed as an institutional process that prepares capacity continuity rather than merely as a structural office replacement.

Digital transformation has expanded the scope of school leadership studies because decision-making, supervision, coordination, and institutional documentation increasingly depend on technological capacity. Berkovich and Hassan (2025) showed that principals' digital transformational leadership is associated with teacher commitment and school effectiveness. Kafa (2025) positioned digitalization and artificial intelligence as new contexts that require more adaptive integration of school leadership. Karakose et al. (2021) also showed that principals' digital leadership roles and technological capabilities became teachers' concern during the pandemic. Meanwhile, Rehm et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of online social networks among school leaders in responding to educational disruption. This research map indicates that school leadership, digital governance, and organizational sustainability have developed substantially, although they have not been fully connected to the issue of regeneration after principal term limits.

The main knowledge gap lies in the limited synthesis that specifically links principal term limits, leadership regeneration, and digital governance as one sustainability framework. Studies on K-12 leadership challenges during disruption show that school leaders face pressure related to coordination, communication, and technological readiness (Parveen et al., 2022). Pashiardis and Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz (2022) emphasized that uncertainty requires educational leaders to manage complexity strategically. Röhl et al. (2024) added that school leaders' self-efficacy affects innovation. This study is directed toward synthesizing scientific evidence on the sustainability of school leadership regeneration based on digital governance. The research question is focused on how scientific evidence explains the relationship among succession, digital capacity, governance, and the continuity of school leadership.

## METHOD

This study used a systematic literature review design based on the PRISMA flow. The initial identification was conducted in the Scopus database using the search string school AND principal AND leadership AND succession AND governance AND digital AND education. The initial search produced 155 articles. After the 2021–2026 publication-year limit was applied, 113 articles remained. Further screening based on journal article document type resulted in 40 articles. The English-language filter did not reduce the number of articles because all remaining articles were written in English. After the All Open Access filter was applied, 28 articles were obtained for assessment based on title, abstract, DOI, year, and substantive relevance.

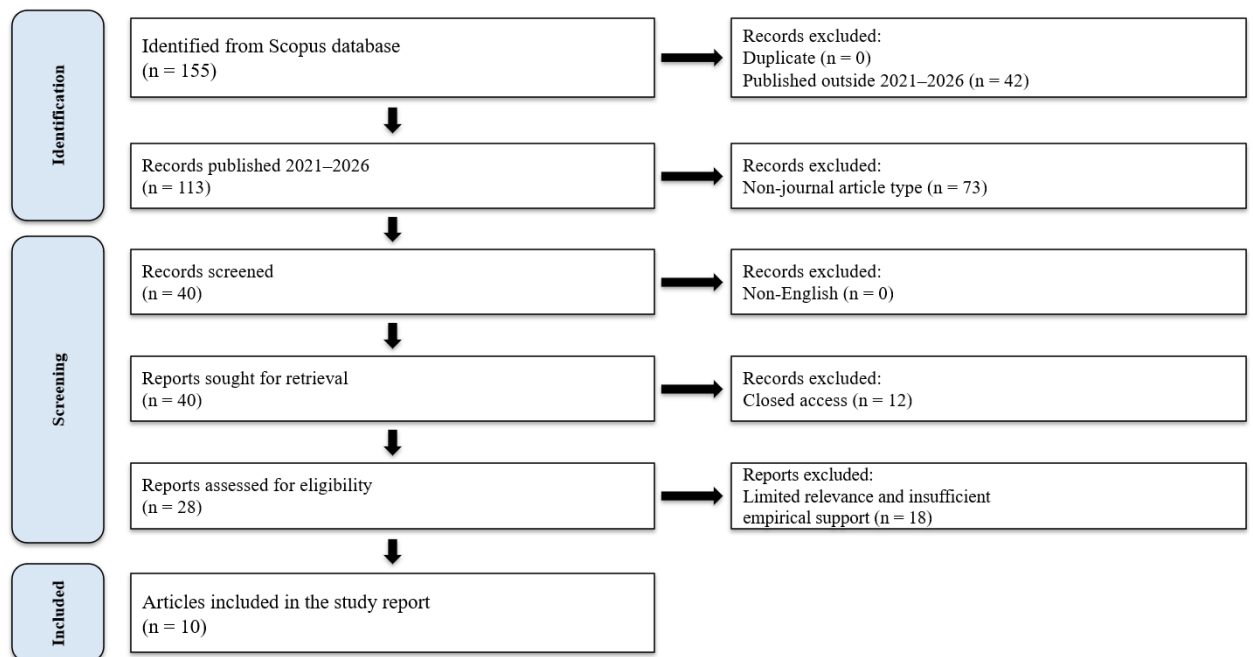
The inclusion criteria covered English-language articles published between 2021 and 2026, categorized as journal articles, provided with DOI, available in open access, and substantively related to school leadership, leadership regeneration or succession, governance, digital transformation, school evaluation, or the sustainability of educational organizations. Articles with primary data, qualitative studies, quantitative studies, mixed-method studies, case studies, Delphi studies, observational studies, or document analyses were prioritized. Articles were excluded when they were unrelated to education, school, or leadership contexts, when they were conceptual reviews that were too distant from the focus, when abstracts were unavailable, or when relevance was only terminological. DOI metadata were checked through publisher pages and open bibliographic metadata that displayed DOI, volume, issue, page range, or article number.

The identification stage produced 155 articles from Scopus. After the 2021–2026 publication-year limitation was applied, 113 articles remained. After the journal article type limitation was applied, 40 articles remained. After the English-language limitation was applied, the number of articles remained 40. After the All Open Access limitation was applied, 28 articles remained. At the abstract screening stage, 28 articles were evaluated.

A total of 18 articles were excluded because they did not meet the focus on school leadership, digital governance, succession or regeneration, or did not provide adequate empirical support. No DOI duplication was found among the screened articles. The final stage resulted in 10 included articles that were considered the most relevant for synthesis.

### PRISMA Flowchart

The article selection flow followed the PRISMA guidelines, beginning with identification in the Scopus database and ending with the final inclusion of articles that met the eligibility criteria for further analysis. The flow describes the number of records at each stage and the reasons for systematic exclusion, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart**

## RESULTS

The selection results show that 10 of the 28 articles met the substantive relevance criteria. The selected articles covered three main clusters, namely principal leadership and policy pressure, school governance and reform, and the sustainability of leadership regeneration through organizational learning, succession, and digital transformation.

**Table 1. Article Review Results**

| No | Author(s)                  | Findings                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Karanikola et al. (2025)   | Unclear legal frameworks, policy changes, and burdens of authority trigger distress among principals. Participatory reform is required to clarify roles and operational support. |
| 2  | Montecinos and Lira (2025) | Chilean reform expanded autonomy, but performance contracts, central targets, and financial limitations                                                                          |

| No | Author(s)                    | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                              | constrained principals' institutional decision-making space at the local level.                                                                                                                                            |
| 3  | Andika et al. (2024)         | Burnout among private school principals was understood as a complex work-experience process that affects behavior and requires sustainable contextual mitigation strategies.                                               |
| 4  | Boateng Coffie et al. (2022) | CEO succession requires board roles, systematic planning, value-added competencies, and knowledge transfer to maintain organizational continuity during leadership transition.                                             |
| 5  | De Maere et al. (2022)       | Organizational learning is a prerequisite for implementing IT governance. Enablers and inhibitors need to be identified so that the theory-practice gap can be reduced sustainably within organizations.                   |
| 6  | Serra et al. (2025)          | Strategic vision and mobilizing leadership are related to external school evaluation. Innovation emerges at the boundaries of accountability and institutional quality improvement.                                        |
| 7  | Dimmock et al. (2021)        | Local adaptation of Vietnamese reform was supported by school culture and professional development. External enablers shaped internal change processes in a complex and loosely coupled manner.                            |
| 8  | Johnson et al. (2023)        | Successful principal practices include setting direction, developing people, designing organizations, and managing instructional programs, which are consistently influenced by policy contexts and professional identity. |
| 9  | Umah et al. (2023)           | Digital skills among madrasah principals promoted digital teams, technology management, work culture, and a more effective, efficient, and inspiring madrasah environment.                                                 |
| 10 | Suyanto et al. (2024)        | Servant leadership, school culture, supervision systems, and good school governance strengthened teacher competence and educational performance significantly.                                                             |

## DISCUSSION

The first finding shows that the sustainability of school leadership regeneration cannot be sufficiently understood as a process of replacing school principal office holders. It needs to be positioned as a governance issue related to roles, authority, and institutional support. Karanikola et al. (2025) demonstrated that principal distress emerges when legal frameworks, work procedures, and policy stability do not provide role certainty. This finding is aligned with Andika et al. (2024), who positioned principal burnout as a complex work experience that

affects leadership behavior. In the policy context, Montecinos and Lira (2025) showed that decentralization does not always produce real autonomy because central targets and performance contracts continue to limit the decision-making space of schools. Therefore, principal term limits need to be followed by an institutional support system so that leadership replacement does not become an organizational disruption.

The second cluster confirms that school leadership regeneration can be sustained only when school-level change processes are able to adapt to local contexts. Dimmock et al. (2021) showed that educational reform does not work linearly because external driving factors must be translated through school culture, professional development, and central-local relations. Johnson et al. (2023) also positioned context as an important factor in successful principal practices, especially when direction setting, people development, organizational design, and instructional management are implemented simultaneously. Serra et al. (2025) added that external evaluation can encourage innovation when strategic vision and mobilizing leadership are present within a school improvement culture. Thus, principal regeneration needs to be designed as an institutional adaptation that connects policy, local capacity, and organizational learning culture.

The digital dimension expands the discussion because regeneration governance no longer depends only on administrative procedures, but also on organizational ability to use technology for coordination, documentation, and decision-making. Umah et al. (2023) showed that madrasah principals' digital skills shape digital teams, technology management, work culture, and a more effective madrasah environment. At the organizational level, De Maere et al. (2022) showed that IT governance implementation requires organizational learning so that the gap between theory and practice can be reduced. Suyanto et al. (2024) strengthened this dimension through evidence that good school governance can moderate the relationship among leadership, school culture, supervision, teacher competence, and performance. Therefore, digital governance must be understood as regeneration infrastructure, not merely as the use of technology in school administration.

The issue of succession provides an important basis for interpreting principal term limits as a momentum for leadership planning rather than merely the end of an office period. Boateng Coffie et al. (2022) emphasized that sustainable succession requires board roles, systematic planning, value-added competencies, and knowledge transfer. In the school context, this principle needs to be translated into cadre mapping, documentation of good practices, and inter-leader learning mechanisms. Montecinos and Lira (2025) warned that overly centralized regulation can reduce principals' innovation space, while De Maere et al. (2022) showed the importance of organizational learning in implementing IT governance. Umah et al. (2023) added evidence that school digital transformation requires leadership capable of building teams and a new work culture. Therefore, strong regeneration must integrate succession, organizational learning, and digital governance.

The final synthesis shows that the sustainability of school leadership regeneration after principal term limits requires a model that binds three main aspects, namely governance stability, cadre readiness, and digital capacity. Suyanto et al. (2024) showed that good school governance strengthens the relationship among leadership, supervision, and teacher performance. Johnson et al. (2023) emphasized that principal practices are always shaped by context, while Dimmock et al. (2021) showed that reform succeeds when schools are able to carry out local adaptation. At the same time, Serra et al. (2025) demonstrated the value of external evaluation as a driver of innovation, while Andika et al. (2024) warned of leadership fatigue risk when support is inadequate. The synthesis of the ten included articles confirms that school leadership regeneration based on digital governance is an important issue because it provides an empirical basis for strengthening the research agenda and developing principal succession models. Therefore, principal term limits need to be balanced with a regeneration system based on data, cadre development, supervision, and preservation of school knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This systematic review concludes that the sustainability of school leadership regeneration cannot be separated from clear governance, institutional support, digital capacity, and planned succession mechanisms. The ten included articles show strong relevance to school leadership, governance, digital transformation, educational reform, and leadership continuity. The synthesis confirms that principal term limits have the potential to become an instrument of organizational renewal when supported by cadre mapping, knowledge transfer, documentation of good practices, external evaluation, and strengthening of school culture.

The conceptual model derived from this synthesis is school leadership regeneration based on digital governance. The model positions technology not merely as an administrative tool, but as an infrastructure for maintaining organizational memory, accelerating coordination, strengthening supervision, and supporting data-based decision-making. Without stable governance and an explicit cadre development system, principal replacement risks producing disruption, burnout, role uncertainty, and loss of institutional knowledge. Conversely, when term limits are managed through a transparent, adaptive, and participatory digital succession system, schools have greater opportunities to maintain quality, innovation, and leadership continuity.

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