



Research Paper

Designing a Knowledge-Based Leadership Model in Educational Organizations: A Grounded Theory Approach



Reza Taati Mahmoodabad^{1*}, Mahdi Mosleh², Mehرداد Nemati Omoughin³, Fatemeh Mohammadi⁴

1. Department of Educational Sciences Education, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran.

Corresponding author: razataati91@gmail.com

2. Department of Educational Sciences Education, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran.

3. Department of Educational Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil Branch, Ardabil, Iran.

4. Department of Educational Sciences Education, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran.

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Abstract

Knowledge-based leadership is considered one of the most important issues in the management of educational organizations. Given the rapid growth of knowledge and the increasing need for directing and managing knowledge within educational organizations, the importance of this concept has become increasingly evident. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of designing a knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations (schools). This study was qualitative in terms of methodology and applied in terms of purpose. It was conducted using the grounded theory approach based on the Strauss and Corbin model. The target population consisted of experienced educational managers and professors in the field of educational management in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Purposeful sampling was employed for participant selection. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, which continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, 15 interviews were conducted. To ensure the credibility of the data, three methods were used: researcher positioning, triangulation, and auditing by an expert reviewer. After data collection, the codes extracted from the transcribed interviews were analyzed using the three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Finally, the knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations was developed. The findings indicated that the factors influencing knowledge-based leadership in educational organizations (schools) were identified through 100 codes, organized into 11 categories and 6 dimensions, including the core phenomenon, causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences, in accordance with the grounded theory framework. These 11 categories included knowledge-based vision and orientation, knowledge management and sharing, knowledge-based culture and climate, empowerment and human resource development, evidence-based decision-making and problem-solving, knowledge-based innovation and creativity, knowledge infrastructure and technology, evaluation, monitoring, and continuous improvement, knowledge networking, interactions and knowledge synergy, and sustainable intellectual capital development. Knowledge-based leadership not only contributes to enhancing individual knowledge and skills but also transforms these capabilities into organizational knowledge and applies them in key processes, thereby leading to significant improvements in overall school performance and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

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Introduction

In recent decades, educational organizations have encountered increasing complexities due to rapid scientific, technological, and social transformations; developments that have made traditional leadership models insufficient to meet the emerging needs of these organizations. In such circumstances, knowledge-based leadership has emerged as a novel approach that emphasizes the identification, creation, sharing, and application of knowledge in educational decision-making and management processes (*Mahmoudi et al., 2021*). By relying on organizational learning, innovation, and the effective utilization of intellectual capital, this type of leadership can provide the foundation for enhancing educational quality and improving the performance of educational organizations (*Arefnezhad et al., 2023*). This concept (knowledge-based leadership) is defined as a process through which an individual supports other group members in the learning processes required to achieve collective or organizational goals (*Safari & Azadehdel, 2015*). Knowledge-based leadership encompasses transformational, motivational, and communicative requirements that promote learning in response to challenges and facilitate the ability to simultaneously engage in intellectual work (*Haghshenas Ghazi Mahalleh, 2020*). Educational organizations, due to their primary mission of human resource development and the advancement of society's intellectual capital, require leadership approaches based on knowledge and continuous learning more

than other organizations (*Nadi et al., 2022*). Knowledge-based leaders create conditions through establishing a culture of trust, participation, and experience exchange, in which individual knowledge is transformed into organizational knowledge and utilized to improve educational and managerial processes (*Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020*). Furthermore, empowering and knowledge-based leaders motivate individuals to break down passive mindsets, enhance their sense of responsibility, become more accountable for work outcomes, and engage in innovation (*Geramipour & Amjadi, 2022*). They also attempt to utilize existing knowledge through other leadership approaches, such as interactive leadership, in order to develop techniques and knowledge storage (i.e., understanding what information the organization currently possesses), facilitate knowledge transfer, and apply knowledge through the integration of different knowledge domains (*Taghvaei Yazdi & Albouyeh, 2022*). Ultimately, such leadership seeks to achieve organizational goals by promoting knowledge-based productivity, innovation, and the resolution of complex challenges, where all actions contribute to the creation of sustainable value through knowledge. *Raudeliūnienė and Kordab (2019)* emphasize the critical importance of active leadership support in organizational knowledge creation and sharing processes, considering it an undeniable and determining factor in this domain. Within this framework, the knowledge-based leadership style extends beyond traditional managerial responsibilities and focuses on broader objectives, including fostering a culture of education and

continuous learning among employees, encouraging systematic knowledge and experience sharing, and modeling knowledge-based behaviors by exposing individuals to complex challenges and problems. Ultimately, this process empowers employees to practically apply their knowledge in problem-solving. Therefore, creating an environment in which employees are encouraged to utilize and enhance their skills and knowledge is essential, as it enriches the organization's individual knowledge base and facilitates access to strategic knowledge. In contrast, ineffective management practices can act as significant barriers to knowledge creation and dissemination, leading to knowledge accumulation, competition, and other negative behaviors and attitudes in knowledge-creating organizations (*Homayounfar & Arasteh, 2024*). Moreover, the lack of organizational knowledge management and the failure to operationalize knowledge in educational organizations may undermine their institutional functions (*Rashid et al., 2021*). Regarding knowledge-based leadership, numerous studies have been conducted. For instance, *Nouhekhwan Modabber (2023)* examined the effect of knowledge-based leadership on innovation performance with the mediating role of electronic knowledge management systems. The findings indicated that knowledge-based leadership has a positive and significant effect on knowledge management behaviors, including knowledge acquisition, sharing, documentation, and implementation. Furthermore, the direct effects of knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowledge

implementation, and knowledge-based leadership on innovation performance were confirmed. In another study, *Dirmina et al. (2025)* investigated the effect of knowledge-based leadership on organizational innovation with the mediating role of the illusion of control and rationality. The results indicated that knowledge-based leadership can enhance rationality and knowledge within organizations; however, ignoring environmental signals may lead to the development of an illusion of control. Nevertheless, when the illusion of control is managed and knowledge orientation is strengthened, organizations move toward innovation. *Ghayumi et al. (2020)* examined the status of knowledge leadership in educational groups at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. They found that conflict-resolution mediation, creating a climate of trust, enhancing members' knowledge, providing learning opportunities, legal orientation, participatory decision-making, respecting others, inter-organizational interactions, interdisciplinary approaches, and the presence of young faculty members were among the key factors influencing changes in knowledge leadership within these groups. *Akram et al. (2019)* also demonstrated that among various leadership behaviors, empowering leadership is critically important due to its role in creating employee autonomy and empowerment. Their findings confirmed a positive relationship between knowledge management dimensions and empowering leadership. Furthermore, *Ho et al. (2015)*, using a model based on four knowledge processes, including co-creation, internalization, sharing, and knowledge

evaluation, found that this cycle improves learners' knowledge, performance, and teaching skills. Factors such as accessibility, interactive activities, learning communities, flexibility, appropriate scheduling, cost-effectiveness, and school administrators' support were identified as among the most influential factors in this process. *Han et al. (2018)* investigated shared leadership in teams and examined the effects of coordination, goal commitment, and knowledge sharing on perceived team performance. Their findings revealed that shared leadership positively influences coordination activities, goal commitment, and knowledge sharing; these factors ultimately enhance team performance. Interestingly, each of these process variables plays a mediating role, indicating that shared leadership does not directly affect team performance but rather exerts its influence through mediating mechanisms.

Azizian et al. (2022) developed a knowledge-based leadership model aimed at organizational ambidexterity and demonstrated that knowledge-oriented leadership and its dimensions including learning orientation, creating a supportive learning environment, supporting individual and group-level learning processes, acting as a role model, knowledge-oriented training, knowledge integration and innovation, stimulating knowledge dissemination, leadership skills, supporting knowledge sharing, performance evaluation based on knowledge sharing, and rewards based on knowledge sharing have positive effects on organizational ambidexterity. Among these

dimensions, the effect of knowledge-sharing-based rewards on organizational ambidexterity was greater than that of other dimensions. Given that knowledge is not recognized as a strategic asset in Iranian schools and mechanisms for its sharing are not embedded within organizational structures, schools have become less capable of solving complex problems and adapting to emerging changes. Furthermore, the accelerating pace of transformations in education and the critical role of knowledge in sustainable development highlight the necessity of redefining leadership structures in schools. A review of domestic and international studies indicates that a context-specific model of knowledge-based leadership for educational organizations (schools) in Iran has not yet been developed. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of designing a knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations in Iran and seeks to answer the fundamental question: What is the conceptual model of knowledge-based leadership in educational organizations (schools) in Iran?

Research Methodology

This study was applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of approach. Using the grounded theory method based on the Strauss and Corbin approach, the study aimed to design a knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations. The purpose of the research was to provide an in-depth and comprehensive explanation of the knowledge-based leadership model based on the experiences and perspectives of experts and specialists in this field. The study

population consisted of experienced school principals and university professors specializing in educational management who had managerial backgrounds and effective experiences in organizational leadership. Sampling was conducted through purposive and theoretical sampling; that is, participants were selected based on their direct relevance to the research topic and their ability to provide rich and relevant data. The interview process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new data were obtained and no new concepts emerged from the interviews. Theoretical saturation was reached after the fifteenth interview. Among the participants, 65% were male and 35% were female. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview designed to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and deep understandings regarding knowledge-based leadership. The interviews consisted of 14 open-ended and exploratory questions focusing on the key components of knowledge-based leadership, challenges, managerial experiences, characteristics of knowledge-based leaders, and mechanisms for developing a knowledge-oriented culture. The duration of each interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were provided to the participants for final confirmation so that they could make any necessary corrections or additions. Considering the use of interviews as the primary instrument for qualitative data collection, data credibility was considered throughout all stages of the research. To enhance the credibility and dependability of

the findings, strategies such as member checking, data triangulation, continuous comparison with the research literature, rich description of data, and research auditing were employed. Moreover, to ensure the coherence of the analysis process, data coding was conducted in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Subsequently, the paradigm model, including causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences, was extracted. Finally, based on data analysis, a review of the research literature, and consultation with experts, the knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations was developed and presented.

First Stage: Open Coding

At this stage, the mechanical reduction of data from raw information to concepts and categories, followed by the classification of categories or codes, was performed. Accordingly, after transcribing the conducted interviews and fragmenting the obtained information into meaningful units, related concepts were grouped in the form of open codes. The extracted categories were selected based on various criteria, including frequency and repetition, importance, intensity, emphasis, and the direction of words and statements.

Second Stage: Axial Coding

At this stage, two main activities were conducted:

Categorizing open codes into axial codes;

Identifying patterns, including causes, context or environment, intervening conditions, interactions, and consequences.

After identifying the open codes, these categories were classified into axial codes. In this stage, open codes that were conceptually similar were grouped into unified categories referred to as axial codes. Ultimately, five groups of axial codes were identified, including causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences.

Third Stage: Selective Coding

The purpose of this stage was to integrate and refine the categories. At this stage, a theory explaining the relationships among the categories identified in the axial coding model was developed. Through the continuation of interviews and observations, various categories were organized into specific patterns, such that some categories were identified as causal conditions for the emergence of the main category, some as contextual and environmental factors, and others as strategies, consequences, and outcomes. In this way, the initial overall model of the grounded theory was developed, in which knowledge-based leadership in educational organizations (schools) was considered the core category. During subsequent interviews and after the emergence of the initial model, the researcher attempted to fill the conceptual gaps in the model by collecting additional data and clarifying the relationships between the core category and subcategories. Finally, through achieving theoretical saturation, the

conceptual model derived from empirical data was obtained.

Findings

The entire interview transcripts were analyzed based on the grounded theory approach through three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Subsequently, the dimensions of the paradigm model, including causal conditions, the central phenomenon, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, and strategies, were identified and extracted. Then, through examining the results of the coding process, reflecting on the research literature, and utilizing the perspectives of experts outside the research team, the knowledge-based leadership model in the educational system of the Islamic Republic of Iran was developed and presented. The following section briefly describes this process.

- Open Coding

After examining the raw data line by line and identifying the initial codes, all statements were carefully analyzed, and the key underlying concepts within each statement were extracted. In some sentences, the interviewees had used terms that could be directly transformed into codes, whereas in other cases, a concept beyond the apparent meaning of the sentence was embedded, which was interpreted by the researcher and recorded as an initial code. For example, in the statement: *“One of the characteristics of knowledge-based leaders is their ability to create networking, interactions, and knowledge synergy among organizational members,”* the label “knowledge networking,

interactions, and synergy” was considered an identifiable code. However, in the statement: *“Knowledge-based leaders should be able to accurately analyze complex organizational issues and provide knowledge- and evidence-based solutions,”* the concept of “problem analysis and problem-solving ability” was identified by the researchers and recorded as an initial code. Moreover, in the statement: *“A knowledge-based leader is someone who considers every problem as an opportunity for learning, deepening understanding, and envisioning new horizons for the future of the organization,”* three codes, including “continuous learning,” “encouraging and promoting reflection and deep thinking,” and “long-term vision and goal setting in knowledge-based leadership,” were extracted. The initial codes were organized into broader concepts based on their similarity and consistency with other extracted codes,

and this process was repeatedly conducted through several stages. Accordingly, after multiple refinement processes, the initial codes were transformed into concepts, and the concepts were then organized into broader categories based on conceptual similarities. Furthermore, the developed categories were integrated into more abstract levels through the logic of constant comparison and conceptual proximity, resulting in the formation of higher-order classes. Ultimately, after conducting an overall analysis of the interviews, 104 initial codes were identified, which were reduced to 100 codes after refinement and classified into 11 similar concepts. These concepts were subsequently categorized into five main factors representing the knowledge-based leadership model in the educational system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The results of the open coding process are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Codes Extracted from the Data

No.	Initial Codes	No.	Initial Codes
1	Learning-oriented leadership	53	Long-term perspective on knowledge capital
2	Knowledge-based vision	54	Knowledge reuse
3	Knowledge-based foresight	55	Experience transfer
4	Knowledge-based mission	56	Knowledge documentation
5	Knowledge-based goal setting	57	In-service learning
6	Strategic knowledge alignment	58	Recording lessons learned
7	Future-oriented leadership	59	Organizational knowledge storage
8	Evidence-based direction	60	Trust culture
9	Prioritizing organizational learning	61	Inquiry culture
10	Knowledge sharing	62	Preventing knowledge hoarding
11	Establishing a knowledge repository	63	Facilitating knowledge flow
12	Preserving organizational memory	64	Psychological safety
13	Conscious delegation of authority	65	Open dialogue
14	Data-driven decision-making	66	Acceptance of new ideas
15	Knowledge coaching	67	Collaboration and empathy
16	Knowledge-based succession planning	68	Continuous learning
17	Supporting self-learning	69	Employee empowerment
18	Intelligent error tolerance	70	Problem analysis
19	Developing knowledge competencies	71	Curiosity
20	Evidence utilization	72	Enhancing analytical skills
21	Supporting constructive criticism	73	Scientific reasoning

22	Professional growth	74	Collaborative problem-solving
23	Decision error control	75	Communication transparency
24	Reducing subjective decision-making	76	Decision improvement based on feedback
25	Outcome evaluation	77	Decision testability
26	Generating new ideas	78	Collective creativity
27	Testing ideas	79	Knowledge management system
28	Process innovation	80	Product innovation
29	Knowledge-based approach	81	Supporting idea generation
30	Change management	82	Utilizing expertise
31	Facilitating creative thinking	83	Knowledge-sharing platforms
32	Learning from successful innovations	84	Digital infrastructure
33	Learning technologies	85	Rapid access to information
34	Learning from others	86	Online collaboration tools
35	Organizational data analysis	87	Information integration
36	Process digitalization and intelligence	88	Knowledge performance monitoring
37	Monitoring achievement of knowledge goals	89	Knowledge quality control
38	Knowledge networking	90	Inter-unit interactions
39	Measuring knowledge productivity	91	Knowledge gap assessment
40	Integration of diverse knowledge	92	Participation orientation
41	Continuous feedback	93	Learning effectiveness evaluation
42	Intergenerational knowledge transfer	94	Horizontal communication
43	Measuring knowledge maturity	95	Inter-organizational collaboration
44	Knowledge synergy	96	Process improvement
45	Self-assessment	97	Electronic archive
46	Knowledge integration	98	Preserving and strengthening knowledge capital
47	Experience exchange	99	Institutionalization of organizational knowledge
48	Sustainability of organizational memory	100	Recording and documenting experiences
49	Transforming individual knowledge into organizational capital	101	Increasing organizational productivity
50	Enhancing activity effectiveness	102	Reducing resource and time waste
51	Strengthening organizational efficiency and accountability	103	Aligning performance with organizational goals
52	Improving the quality of processes and services	104	Improving the speed and accuracy of operations

- Axial Coding

The purpose of this stage is to determine the relationships among the categories developed during the open coding stage. At this stage, all categories are organized around

a central axis, and causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, consequences, and strategies are explained. The axial coding of the knowledge-based leadership model in educational organizations is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Axial Coding of the Knowledge-Based Leadership Model in Educational Organizations

Row	Axial Codes	Initial Concepts (Open Codes)
1	Knowledge-Based Vision and Orientation	Knowledge-based vision; knowledge-based foresight; knowledge-based mission; knowledge-based goal setting; strategic knowledge alignment; future-oriented leadership; evidence-based direction; prioritizing organizational

		learning; long-term perspective on knowledge capital; learning-oriented leadership
2	Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing	Knowledge sharing; experience transfer; knowledge documentation; organizational knowledge storage; preventing knowledge hoarding; establishing a knowledge repository; facilitating knowledge flow; recording lessons learned; <u>preserving organizational memory</u> ; knowledge reuse
3	Knowledge-Based Culture and Climate	Trust culture; psychological safety; inquiry culture; open dialogue; acceptance of new ideas; collaboration and empathy; intelligent error tolerance; curiosity; <u>supporting constructive criticism</u> ; communication transparency
4	Empowerment and Human Resource Development	Continuous learning; knowledge coaching; employee empowerment; conscious delegation of authority; professional growth; in-service learning; development of knowledge competencies; supporting self-learning; enhancing analytical skills
5	Evidence-Based Decision-Making and Problem-Solving	Data-driven decision-making; evidence utilization; problem analysis; scientific reasoning; reducing subjective decision-making; outcome evaluation; decision improvement based on feedback; decision testability; decision error control
6	Knowledge-Based Innovation and Creativity	Generating new ideas; collective creativity; process innovation; testing ideas; supporting idea generation; integration of diverse knowledge; facilitating creative thinking; learning from successful innovations; knowledge-based <u>change management</u>
7	Knowledge Infrastructure and Technology	Knowledge management system; knowledge-sharing platforms; digital infrastructure; rapid access to information; electronic archive; online collaboration tools; organizational data analysis; process digitalization and intelligence; information integration; learning technologies
8	Evaluation, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement	Knowledge performance monitoring; learning effectiveness evaluation; measuring knowledge productivity; continuous feedback; self-assessment; knowledge quality control; knowledge gap assessment; monitoring achievement of knowledge goals; process improvement
9	Knowledge Networking, Interactions, and Synergy	Knowledge networking; inter-unit interactions; knowledge synergy; participation orientation; inter-organizational collaboration; utilizing expertise; experience exchange; horizontal communication; knowledge integration; learning from others
10	Sustainable Intellectual Capital Development	Preserving and strengthening knowledge capital; institutionalization of organizational knowledge; intergenerational knowledge transfer; recording and documenting experiences; transforming individual knowledge into <u>organizational capital</u>
11	Performance Improvement, Optimization, and Enhancement	Increasing organizational productivity; reducing resource and time waste; improving the quality of processes and services; improving the speed and accuracy of operations; enhancing activity effectiveness; aligning performance with organizational goals; strengthening organizational efficiency and accountability

- Selective Coding

Finally, in the selective coding stage, based on the results obtained from the previous coding stages, the core category was selected and systematically linked to the other categories. In order to integrate and present the knowledge-based leadership model in

educational organizations, after identifying the core category and relating the other categories within the systematic paradigm model of grounded theory, the developed model was refined. Consequently, the final research model was obtained and is presented in Figure 1.

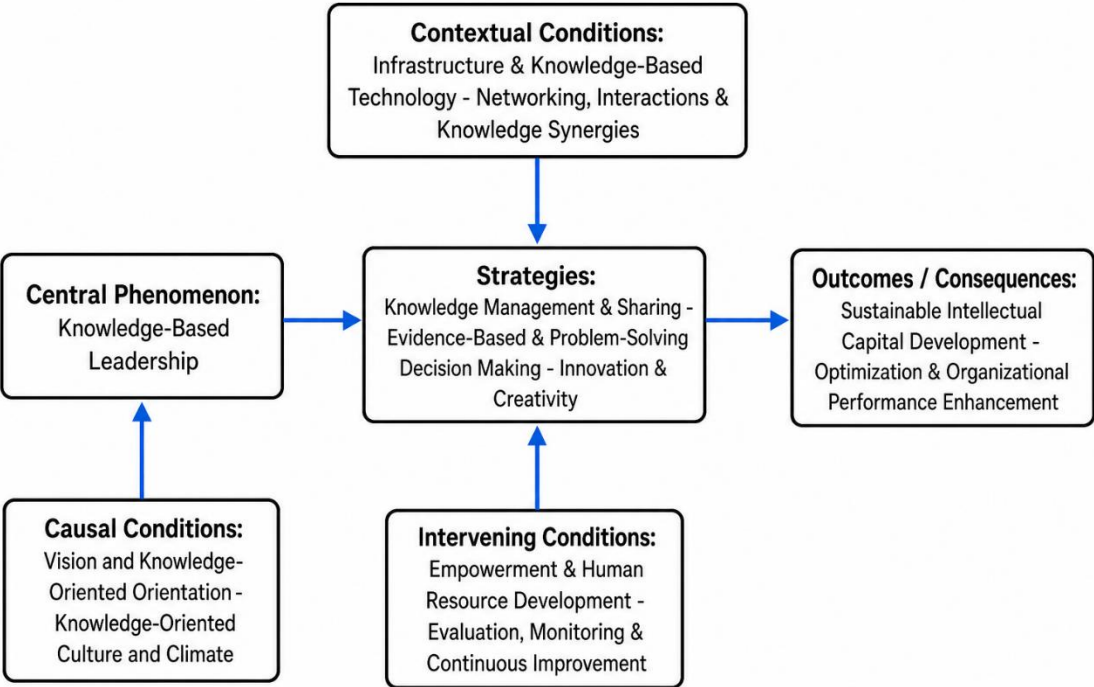


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Knowledge-Based Leadership in Educational Organizations

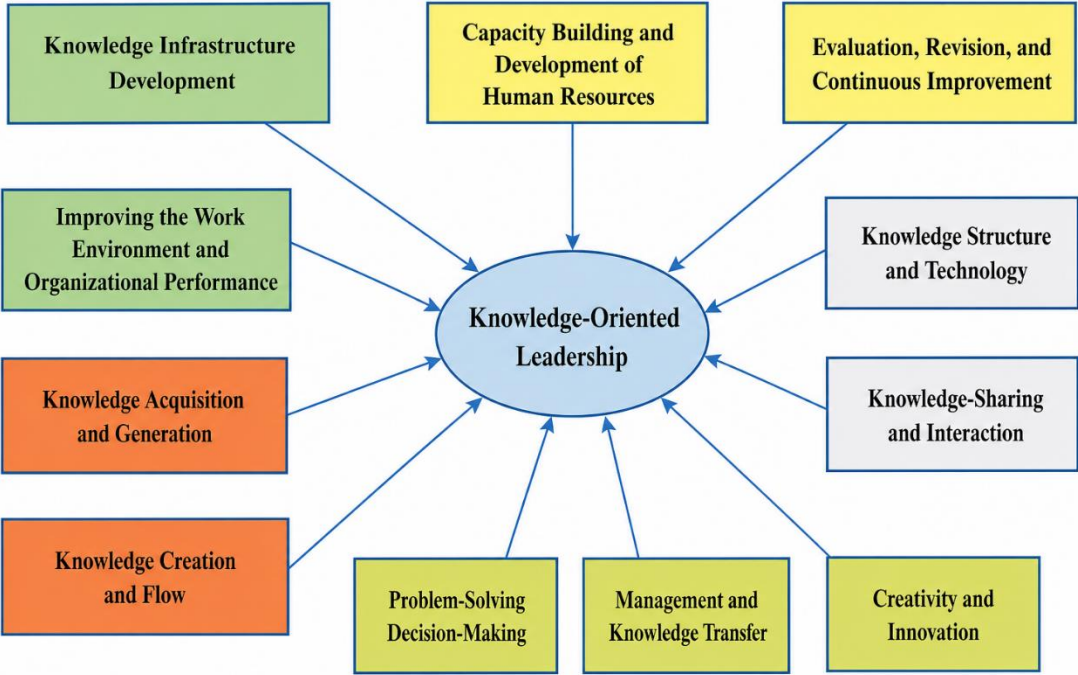


Figure 2. Knowledge-Oriented Leadership Model in Educational Organizations

Discussion and Conclusion

In educational environments, particularly schools, knowledge is a fundamental asset for students' growth and development and for improving the quality of education. Knowledge-oriented leadership in schools plays a critical role by providing an appropriate context for knowledge exchange, encouraging innovation in teaching and learning methods, and empowering teachers. Such leadership, through actively guiding the educational team toward the creation and application of new knowledge, can contribute to the development of deeper and more meaningful learning experiences for students. The presence of this type of leadership not only enhances the academic and educational quality of schools but also improves administrative and instructional processes, thereby increasing the overall effectiveness of the organization and assisting schools in achieving their educational and developmental goals.

In the present study, participants emphasized the importance of causal conditions in knowledge-oriented leadership. Having a knowledge-oriented vision and direction, as well as a knowledge-based organizational culture and climate, were identified by participants as the main factors underlying causal conditions. Knowledge-oriented leaders, by possessing a clear vision for the creation, sharing, and facilitation of knowledge, play a key role in shaping learning organizations within educational settings (Jafari *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the existence of such organizations provides the foundation for the growth and expansion of a

culture of knowledge and learning within the organization; a culture that can become deeply rooted over the years and have a lasting impact on the organization's structure and identity (Zhang & Cheng, 2015). The findings of this study are consistent with those of Han *et al.* (2018), who identified knowledge-oriented mission, knowledge-based goal setting, strategic alignment of knowledge, evidence-based direction, prioritization of organizational learning, a long-term perspective toward knowledge capital, a culture of trust, psychological safety, inquiry-oriented culture, open dialogue, acceptance of new ideas, collaboration, and empathy as among the most important components of knowledge-oriented vision and direction, as well as knowledge-based organizational culture and climate. In explaining these findings, it can be argued that schools should have a clear and well-defined perspective regarding the importance of knowledge, the ways of acquiring it, and how it can be applied in teaching-learning processes. When school staff, including principals and teachers, possess a strong knowledge orientation, they can guide students toward deeper learning, scientific curiosity, and inquiry-based thinking. This vision makes educational activities purposeful and prevents fragmentation and the waste of resources. Furthermore, the existence of a knowledge-oriented culture and climate encourages teachers to engage in continuous learning, share their experiences, and adopt innovative instructional approaches. It also enables students to feel psychologically safe to ask questions, express their ideas, and even make

mistakes as part of the learning process. In such an environment, collaboration among teachers and knowledge exchange are strengthened, leading to the establishment of a clear knowledge-oriented vision and a dynamic, supportive knowledge culture within schools, enabling them to effectively generate, share, and apply knowledge.

Contextual factors were introduced by the participants as one of the main factors influencing knowledge-oriented leadership. Knowledge-oriented infrastructures and technologies, along with knowledge-based networking, interactions, and synergies, were identified by participants as the primary components of contextual conditions. Today, in order to realize effective management practices, provide necessary facilities and equipment, design and develop appropriate financial allocations, and implement effective models for optimal allocation and utilization of financial resources, the issue of resource allocation and consumption as well as effective management in this area has become highly important and critical, particularly due to the severe shortage of public and governmental resources allocated to education. On the other hand, the availability of technological tools is essential for transformation in the field of education and empowerment (*Beiramipur & Echresh, 2022*). Through technological tools and infrastructures, extensive networks and interactions can be established, and knowledge, which has become increasingly extensive, can be shared and disseminated within technological frameworks. The findings of this study are consistent with the

studies of *Nouhehkhwan Modabber (2023)* and *Ho et al. (2015)*, who identified knowledge management systems, knowledge-sharing platforms, digital infrastructure, rapid access to information, online collaboration tools, organizational data analysis, process intelligence, participation, inter-organizational collaboration, utilization of expertise, experience exchange, and horizontal communication as the most important components of knowledge-oriented infrastructures and technologies, as well as knowledge-based networking, interactions, and synergies. In explaining this finding, it can be stated that the Ministry of Education has made efforts, particularly in the field of organizational learning, through in-service training programs and workshops. However, it should utilize the framework of knowledge-oriented leadership to identify required knowledge and facilitate knowledge exchange among organizational members. Moreover, school principals can contribute to the scientific synergy among schools by using digital platforms and online tools.

Participants identified intervening factors as the third influential factor affecting knowledge-oriented leadership. They believed that human resource empowerment and development, as well as evaluation, monitoring, and continuous improvement, are intervening factors influencing knowledge-oriented leadership. The most important and vital asset of any organization is its human resources. The quality and empowerment of human resources are considered the most significant factors contributing to the survival and sustainability of organizations;

empowered employees create empowered organizations (*Taghvaei Yazdi & Albouyeh, 2022*). Furthermore, empowerment training enhances job satisfaction, promotes the optimal utilization of individuals' intellectual capacities, and reduces their stress levels. Therefore, in order to continuously utilize individuals' intellectual capital, educational organizations should engage in ongoing monitoring and improvement of learning quality. This finding is consistent with the research findings of *Akram et al. (2019)* and *Nouhekhwan Modabber (2023)*, who identified continuous learning, employee empowerment, informed delegation of authority, professional growth, in-service learning, development of knowledge competencies, increased organizational productivity, reduction of resource and time waste, and improvement of processes as the most important components of human resource empowerment and development, as well as evaluation, monitoring, and continuous improvement. Knowledge-oriented leadership in schools cannot be achieved merely through administrative instructions; rather, it requires an environment in which intervening factors function as facilitators. Empowerment in schools extends beyond theoretical training; it includes informed delegation of authority to teachers, enabling them to participate in educational decision-making processes. Furthermore, in knowledge-based schools, continuous monitoring serves as a feedback mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of human resource development. Reducing resource and time waste, which is a major concern of educational systems, is only

possible through enhancing teachers' knowledge competencies. Knowledge-oriented leaders should strive to transform schools from merely educational institutions into professional learning communities where the learning of teachers and students is simultaneously and mutually enhanced.

The fourth important element identified by the participants was strategies. They believed that knowledge management and knowledge sharing, evidence-based problem-solving decision-making, and innovation and creativity play key roles in guiding the flow of knowledge by knowledge-oriented leadership in educational organizations, particularly schools. Knowledge-oriented leaders influence the performance processes of educational organizations through knowledge management, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving-based decision-making. They attempt to improve organizational learning processes through the application of knowledge management (*Geramipour & Amjadi, 2022*). The findings of this study are consistent with those of *Ho et al. (2015)*, who emphasized components such as the use of evidence, problem analysis, scientific reasoning, reduction of subjective decision-making, integration of diverse knowledge sources, facilitation of creative thinking, learning from successful innovations, knowledge-based change management, knowledge sharing, experience transfer, knowledge documentation, and organizational knowledge storage. In explaining this finding, it can be stated that knowledge management and sharing, evidence-based problem-solving decision-

making, and innovation and creativity are three fundamental dimensions that help school leaders direct the flow of knowledge appropriately. When school principals purposefully identify, organize, document, and share existing knowledge among organizational members, they create conditions in which teachers' individual experiences are transformed into collective and usable knowledge. This process enables decision-making to move away from personal preferences and subjective judgments toward scientific, analytical, and evidence-based decisions. From this perspective, knowledge-oriented leadership should not be limited to the transfer of existing knowledge; rather, it should establish organizational learning mechanisms that enable the generation, sharing, and application of knowledge in real school contexts.

The fifth dimension identified by the participants was the consequences of knowledge-oriented leadership in educational organizations (schools). Participants believed that knowledge-oriented leadership leads to the development of sustainable intellectual capital and the optimization and enhancement of performance in educational organizations. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of (Han *et al.*, 2018), Nouhekhwan Modabber (2023), and Akram *et al.* (2019). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that knowledge-oriented leadership, by creating a dynamic culture that prioritizes continuous learning, sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge, and professional development of employees, directly contributes to the enrichment and

sustainability of schools' intellectual capital. This means that the collective knowledge, skills, and experiences of staff members not only increase but also become sustainable organizational knowledge through documentation and transfer, reducing dependence on specific individuals. Subsequently, enhanced intellectual capital functions as a driving force for optimizing and improving organizational performance, as it facilitates evidence-based decision-making, more efficient educational processes, innovation in teaching and management practices, and greater adaptability of schools to environmental challenges. Ultimately, these processes lead to improved student learning quality, increased employee job satisfaction, and more effective achievement of educational goals. Therefore, knowledge-oriented leadership not only enhances knowledge and skills at the individual level but also transforms them into organizational knowledge and applies them within key processes, resulting in significant improvement in overall school performance and ensuring long-term sustainability. Given the qualitative nature of this study and the use of a grounded theory approach based on an interpretive paradigm, one inherent limitation of the research is the active and dynamic role of the researcher's perspective in the process of coding and extracting categories. In other words, researchers' assumptions, interpretations, or unconscious biases may influence data interpretation and the development of the final knowledge-oriented leadership model. Although efforts were made in this study to minimize such effects through bias-control strategies such as peer

review, data auditing, and obtaining feedback from participants, completely eliminating interpretive elements in qualitative research is impossible. This limitation is directly related to the validity and depth of the extracted concepts in the developed model (such as dimensions of knowledge-oriented culture or empowerment strategies), because accuracy in qualitative analysis constitutes the foundation for the trustworthiness and applicability of the model in educational contexts. Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers develop valid and reliable instruments (such as questionnaires) based on this model to measure the dimensions and components of knowledge-oriented leadership. These instruments can be utilized in future quantitative studies.

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