

Research on Educational Leadership and
Management in China since 2000s: A Systematic
Literature Review

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>Purpose: The author conducts a systematic review study focusing on educational leadership and management (EDLM) in mainland China. This article aims to describe research characteristics concerning publication volume, authorship, research topics, research methodologies, as well as leadership and management features found in the research, involving contextual intervention, leader's role, and leader-follower interaction.</p> <p>Methods: PRISMA was used in the source identification and data extraction from two international databases, one Chinese academic database, and "core" journals in this field. In total, 459 journal articles were included for analysis in the period between 2000 and 2024.</p> <p>Findings: This review draws a holistic picture of major patterns of EDLM knowledge production in China by highlighting the connections and differences compared to similar reviews in other countries or regions. Notably, the findings identified that more than half of the studies had been published in the past three years, indicating that this topic received emerging attention recently. The prevalence of quantitative literature indicates that many scholars attach importance to empirical data, and reveals a research gap in qualitative exploration for a comprehensive understanding of leaders' experiences.</p>	<p>Article History: Received: December 1, 2024 Accepted: May 13, 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Systematic review, Educational leadership, Educational management, China.</p>

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Value: *This study contributes to the landscape of leadership and management in China and connects it to the international literature, which provides sustaining power for the EDLM knowledge base.*

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Introduction

Educational leadership and management (EDLM) gained growing attention in the past decades due to educational policymakers' and leaders' increasingly diverse responsibilities associated with today's transformation in education. The necessity of region- or nation-based systematic reviews was highlighted, as it can enrich knowledge in this field and facilitate the implementation of educational leadership into practice in a certain context (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). Hence, the amount of review research in EDLM has significantly risen worldwide, for instance, in Malaysia (Adams et al., 2023), Turkey (Gümüþ et al., 2020), Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018), and Africa (Hallinger, 2017). Nevertheless, reviews that provide a general understanding of the current features of EDLM in China remain relatively limited.

Education leaders must perform various managerial and leading roles in different aspects, including human resources, funding, teacher professional development, and teaching and learning activities, as well as maintaining internal relations within the organization and

establishing external cooperation (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2013). The impacts performed by their roles on organizational effectiveness and individuals' development have been widely recognized (Bush & Glover, 2014; Leithwood, et al. 2004). Educational leaders and management teams have strong power to offer a positive context for teachers and students, facilitating student learning achievements, supporting staff members' work, and positively influencing organizational policy and processes (Gümüş et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2013; 2017). However, evidence on how Chinese educational leaders perform these functions remains scarce. It calls for an urgent need to conduct locally based systematic reviews in China, where there might be a few research articles written in its indigenous language.

Existing comparison of Chinese EDLM with other countries identified that international diversity and cross-cultural backgrounds caused several differences in requirements and responsibilities for local leaders (Huang, 2018; Wang & Chen, 2021). As educational management and leadership belongs to a complicated and multi-dimensional field, researchers argued that having diverse perspectives and adding research differentiated by environments can benefit EDLM understanding (Wang & Gao, 2022; Hallinger & Chen, 2015). Thus, it is necessary to provide a general EDLM picture for Chinese policymakers and educational leaders to draw on Western experiences (Chen & Bos, 2023), as well as to introduce knowledge of educational leadership and management in China to the international community (Walker & Qian, 2015).

Considering that the cultural and organizational contexts in various societies affect the understanding and implementation of leadership and management, it would be vital to supplement nation-based systematic reviews of literature across different cultural settings,

especially in a country like China with rapid transformation and distinct characteristics (Liu, Wang, & Liang, 2019; Yang 2021). The literature gap and practical necessity of a topographical review have prompted the current research on EDLM in China. This study aims to advance the existing body of knowledge by systematically reviewing the multifaceted aspects, moving beyond the narrow focus on principal-centric analysis to a broader range of topics with interconnected factors, such as regional policy, organizational behavior, management teams' practices and cultural hybridization. This study could enrich the global EDLM discourse by collectively redefining the evolving sociopolitical landscape in China, providing a more comprehensive and contextually relevant understanding of EDLM that extends existing research frameworks.

1. What are the publication characteristics of Chinese educational leadership and management concerning the volume, authorship, and journal distribution?
2. What are the characteristics of Chinese educational leadership and management research concerning research approach, research region, and research topic?
3. What are the key features of educational leadership and management practices in China regarding organizational context, individual ability, and interactions?

desired values in universities.

Literature review

Defining leadership or management in education is not easy, since there are no completely consistent definitions available. An early accepted conceptualization of educational leadership is "a social

influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person/group over other people/groups to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 2002; p3). Management in education is widely viewed as "coordination and control of the organization undertaken by persons holding formal administrative roles" (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018, p2). Although EDLM has a short past as a discipline (Ribbins, 2007), the tendency to focus on the interrelationship between these two paradigms is gradually clarifying the confusion. Such as, Bush (2020)'s book identified links between educational management theories and leadership models, Hallinger and Kovačević (2019)'s research revealed a paradigm transformation from "administration" to "leadership", and Adam et al. (2023)'s studies emphasized both formal management power and leadership influence. Hence, a combination of leadership and management studies meet the global research trend in EDLM.

Referred to the previous nation-based or region-based reviews that focused on leaders' influences and duties from an inclusive perspective (Adams et al., 2023; Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger & Hammad, 2019), this article explores leadership or management roles connectedly instead of differences between these concepts. Previous research has identified a broader range of educational leaders' responsibilities in work, including strategic vision and planning, curriculum reform, staff development, resource management, student support, facilitation construction, etc. (Bush, 2020; Yukl, 2002). Thus, this review does not limit the scope of organization type, such as the school or university setting, but conducts source inclusion based on leaders' roles to some extent to understand the existing focused content better.

Scholars characterized the period as consolidation since the 2000s with a rapidly increasing phase of EDLM research, showing a transfer from Anglo-American-European centered to globally distributed scholarship (Hallinger & Chen, 2015; Ribbins, 2007). The scholarship development from the 2010s was regarded as the internationalization period with emerging regional and international reviews and geographically diversified researchers (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). The rationale for selecting this timeframe is that EDLM began to attract obviously growing research interests in China also since then (Walker & Qian, 2012; 2015).

Researchers have pointed out that the current body of knowledge of educational leadership and management mainly relies on English-speaking developed countries (Gümüş, Arar, & Oplatka, 2021), like the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, which have promulgated a series of policies to support educational leaders in preparing for the specialist roles (Bush, 2020). For instance, Gümüş, et al. (2021) reviewed school leadership for social equality, and identified an obvious imbalance of research depth and breadth between Western and Non-western nations. Several existing reviews emphasized the research gap regarding EDLM knowledge production in developing countries like Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018) or Asia (Adams et al., 2023). Law (2012)' s research demonstrated that Chinese educational leaders generally indicated a coexistence with Anglo-American leadership and management values, but this needs to be further explored.

The EDLM paradigms in other nations may not be suited to the Chinese context due to significant differences in cultural, social, and educational backgrounds. Applying existing research uncritically to understand Chinese EDLM may obscure unique characteristics, such

as China's collectivist ethos and hierarchical governance, leading to misaligned interpretations of educational leadership practices (Xue & Bush, 2024). Professional growth is crucial for aspiring educational leaders or principals in China. There is a common belief that high-level leadership have a significant impact on individual and organizational performance (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). A systematic review of EDLM in China can provide theoretical guidance and practical reference for the professional development of educational leaders or administrators, which identifies local models rooted in cultural traditions and regional differences instead of simply applying existing theories (Zhu & Caliskan, 2021).

Researchers have made some efforts in EDLM reviews in China from various aspects. For example, Walker and his co-authors (Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012; Walker & Qian, 2015) carried out reviews on the subject in China that functioned as a knowledge foundation of review, but were limited to principal leadership before 2013. Liu, Wang, & Liang (2019) summarized president leadership studies in their work that only focused on the Chinese higher education setting. A more recent review was conducted by Yang (2021), which compared Chinese and American educational leadership styles but ignored management models. However, neither a systematic review to show which of these EDLM styles have significant concentration across China, nor to present the priority and relevance of studies through the distribution of knowledge production has yet to be found. A review study that comprehensively discusses international publications of EDLM in China is therefore needed to provide conceptual and methodological insights for the future.

Methodology

This study applied a topographical review that demonstrated patterns of knowledge production regarding publication, research methods, conceptual model, and characteristics of Chinese EDLM practices, which is similar to other systematic reviews in this field (e.g. Adams et al., 2023; Hallinger, 2017). The topographical review is a type of systematic review approach that collects related evidence that fits specified criteria to answer research questions through systematic searching and filtering of articles in the context of geography or a particular area (Castillo & Chen, 2015; Hallinger & Hammad, 2019). This approach was used because it could identify potentially valuable studies to explore patterns of knowledge production regarding the applied theoretical models and research topics of EDLM in China. We identified the sources using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page, et al., 2021), consisting of steps of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as shown in the flowchart (Figure 1).

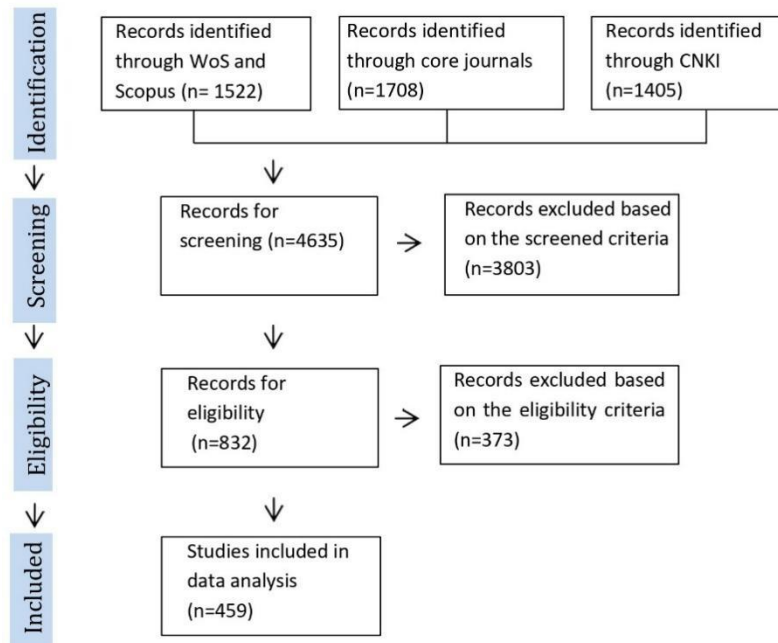


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of sources selection steps

In the identification step, the first searching action for articles was conducted using WoS and Scopus, since these two popular databases provide a rich coverage of publications. The search parameters consist of three rows: (leadership OR management OR administration) and (school* OR "higher education" OR university* OR president* OR principal*) for title and (Chinese OR China) for the topic, abstract, and keyword. Together, this process yielded 773 journal articles in WoS and 749 in Scopus, showing 1522 articles in two databases. The searching action for Chinese articles was conducted in CNKI, which is a widely acknowledged high-quality database in China. The keywords used in CNKI were: (jiaoyu lingdaoli OR xiaozhang lingdaoli OR jiaoyu guanli). Together, this process yielded 2493 English and 1332 Chinese articles in three databases.

In the second search action, we identified studies in core EDLM journals defined by previous research (Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant 2013) in order to avoid missing articles outside the above databases. All of these well-known journals publish in English, employ a double-blind review procedure, and are crucially focused on EDLM. Nine international journals were searched on their homepages with the term “China OR Chinese”, namely Educational Administration Quarterly (n=83), Educational Management Administration & Leadership (n=294), International Journal of Leadership in Education (n=188), International Journal of Educational Management (n=469), Journal of Educational Administration (n=267), Journal of School Leadership (n=66), Leadership and Policy in Schools (n=83), School Effectiveness and School Improvement (n=108), and School Leadership and Management (n=150). There were a group of articles (n=1708) in these journals were identified.

In the screening phase, duplicate articles that appear in databases and the core journal set were reduced (n=1178). Then, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were proposed to refine relevant studies: 1) including research published between 2000 and 2024; and excluding research in other time periods; 2) including articles in the field of social science; and excluding articles in nature science (e.g. building and environment; information system and information management; therapeutics and clinical); 3) including journal articles; excluding book chapters, conference proceedings, simple opinions pieces, and theses and dissertations; 4) including Chinese articles in Peking University Core Journals Index, excluding articles outside this index.

This study focused on articles published after the 2000s, since the 21st century witnessed an obvious expansion of research and increasing regional or national reviews in educational management and

leadership (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). The reason for reviewing articles in English language journals is that they are broadly recognized international journals that embody an abundant knowledge base in EDLM. English is widely accepted as the primary global language for scientific publication; thus, this paper can contribute to EDLM scholars to find the appropriate way to share research results. The researchers also reviewed relevant studies in Chinese language since.

On this basis, we excluded the dataset to the size of 3803 publications. Further, we ensured the remaining 832 articles' eligibility by carefully reading titles, abstracts, and some contents when we could not judge from the abstract. 195 articles were deleted for unsuitable topical focus, such as those that only addressed teachers' challenges and growth but were rare from a management perspective and those mainly discussed regional educational policies. Articles regarding school leadership and management, university governance and administration, organizational behavior and support, and educational supervision were included. 373 articles were excluded because of their lack of fit with this geographic scope, not being conducted in mainland China, or sampling collected from schools located not in Mainland China. In the end, 459 works remained for data analysis.

Data analysis of this review was conducted through quantitative and qualitative approaches. This research primarily applied bibliometrics to describe the diverse patterns of knowledge generation of Chinese EMDL. The selected articles were inputted into a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel with columns including author names, article title, journal title, key words, research approach, and organization type. Then, data were coded for further analysis. For example, each research approach was assigned a different code (qualitative 1, quantitative 2,

mixed methods 3, review 4). We applied descriptive statistics with tables and figures that highlighted the variability across publication volume, authorship, journal distribution, range of topics, and research methods. Next, content analysis was employed to interpret features of EMDL practices in China. Finally, the evolution of knowledge in China was compared that included in EMDL reviews in other regions.

Results

Features of Publications

Publication Volume. The results of publications indicated that research on educational leadership and management has increased dramatically over the past two decades (Figure 2). In total, 231 English articles and 228 Chinese articles were involved in the database, showing the similar degree of focus and speed of development of EDML research. Indeed, it was found that 41.2% (n=189) of the total studies in the review were published in the past three years (2022-2024), followed by the period between 2019 and 2021 with 21.6% (n=99), 15.5% from 2016 to 2018 (n=71). This indicates an active research trend since a growing number of research interests have significantly moved this field forward in recent years.

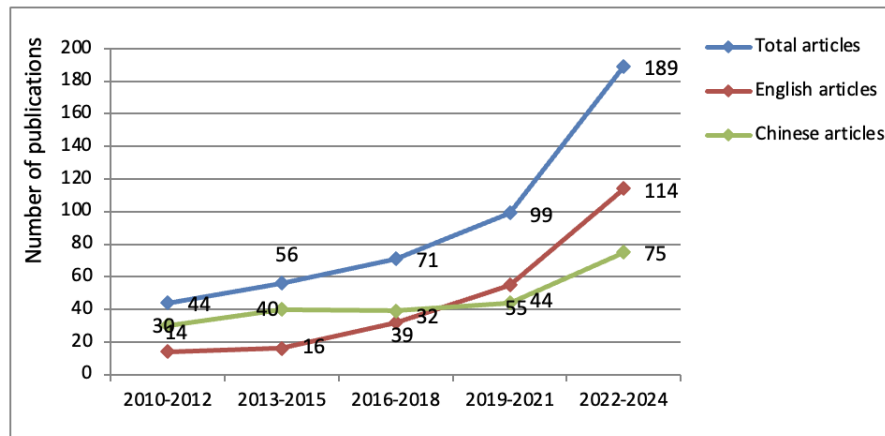


Figure 2. Journal publication volume

Authorship. Of the scholars who had authored or co-authored at least 6 articles concerning Chinese EDLM, five of them were found in English publications and five in Chinese publications (Figure 3). Allan Walker (n=16) and Xinping Zhang (n=14) contributed to the most articles in two languages, respectively, which followed by Haiyan Qian, Philip Hallinger, Zhenxiang Sun, Peng Liu, Shengnan Liu, Decheng Zhao, Yulian Zeng, Chen Junjun and Shuang Zhang. Studies of these top researchers have been widely cited by scholars interested in this field. For example, Qian and Walker (2013)'s study on the path of principal leadership and its impact on teacher development under Chinese educational reform was cited by the following relevant studies (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Zheng et al., 2016). It is notable that not all the productive researchers listed are affiliated with Chinese institutions.

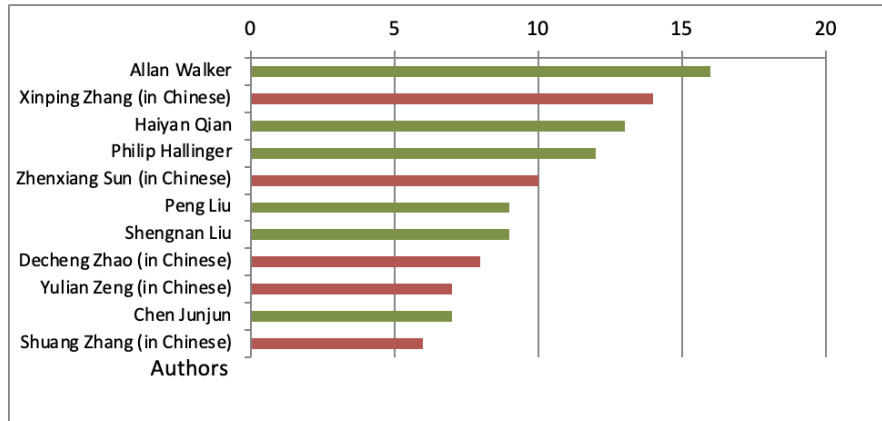


Figure 3. Distribution of key authors

Next, we used a series of coding to classify the authors' backgrounds in each study: (1) MC means all authors are from China; (2) IA refers to all international authors; (3) CI involves Chinese authors who affiliated with international institutions for the research; and (4) CA refers to articles co-authored by international and Chinese researchers. The results indicated that only 9 out of 228 Chinese articles are from the CA group, and the rest belong to the MC group. The authorship types of English articles are diverse: 20.4% of articles are MC, 8.2% are IA, 29.1% are CI, and 42.3% belong to CA, showing that partnership between Chinese and international scholars represented the largest portion of research in English literature.

Journal Distribution. As shown in Figure 4, there are eight international journals that have published at least seven articles regarding EDLM in China. EMAL published the highest number of studies (n=42), followed by IJLE (n=17), SUS (n=15), IJED (n=13), JEA (n=12), FIP (n=9), IJEM (n=7), APER (n=7), and FEC (n=7), dispersing in both international EDLM journals and general education journals. Other journals like EAQ (n=4) and LPS (n=0) have lower publishing

rates, which were also identified as rare sources for research from African, Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018) and Arab societies (Hallinger & Hammad, 2019). These articles were distributed across 42 journals. There are 5 journals in Chinese publications that have published at least seven articles. *Middle School Management* published the highest number of relevant studies in Chinese languages. Learners and researchers may find interest in the distribution of articles for their future learning and publication. In addition, there were more international “core” journals that belong to the EDLM catalog, which revealed a potential “blind spot” in Chinese EDLM journal development to some extent. The results showed that international journals seemed to provide more chances for researchers in this field than Chinese journals. The article distribution across different journals shows a limited number of Chinese publications in well-known international EDLM journals.

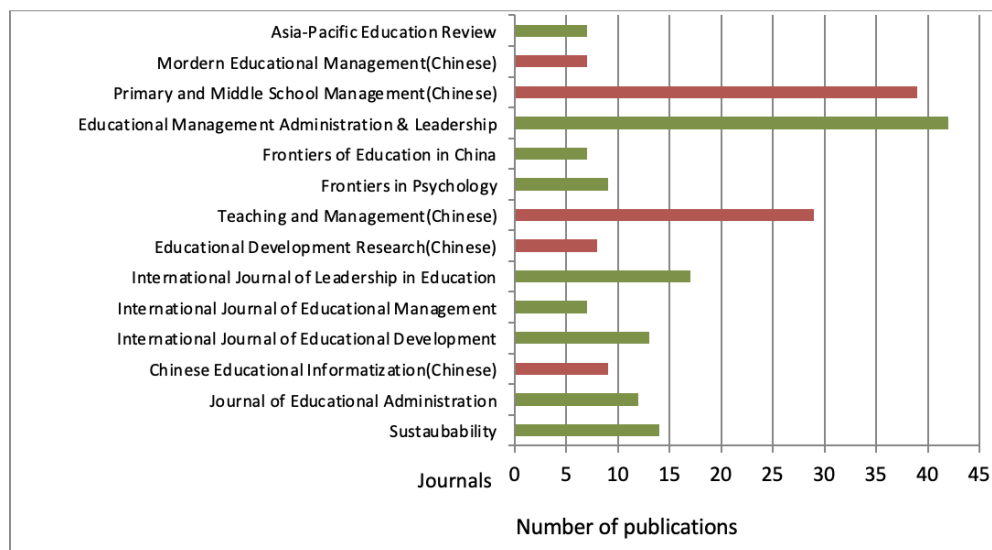


Figure 4. Distribution of key journals

In terms of the journal type (Figure 5), reviewed articles mainly belong to leadership and management (n=101, 51.5%), followed by general education (n=34, 17.3%), Asia-Pacific studies (n=16, 8.2%), Chinese studies (n=11, 5.6%), general management (n=8, 4.1%), and educational technology (n=5, 2.6%), with the rest (n=21, 10.7%) belonging to other social sciences. Chinese language publications were university journals (24.4%), and those focused on general education (31.4%), educational technology (15.7%), vocational and higher education (8.4%), other social sciences (8.4%), teacher education (5.8%), and educational management (5.8%). Apart from general education, the second most common type for Chinese publications is the university journal. Chinese language educational technology journals are much more likely to include related articles than are those in the English language.

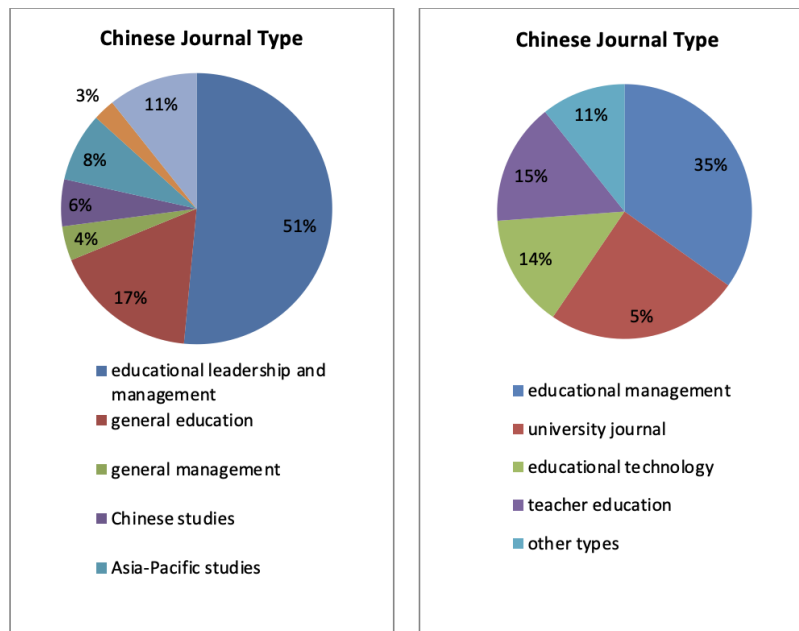


Figure 5. Distribution of journal type

Nature of Research

Research Approach. In terms of research methods, 17 articles applied a conceptual or commentary method, 13 articles were comparative research, 22 articles were review, and the other 407 articles were empirical studies. There was a preference for exploring leadership and management in the school context (60.7%) over the college or university context (37.3%), which is in line with review results found in some developing societies (Adams et al., 2023; Gümüş et al., 2020). In addition, 6 studies were conducted from an inclusive perspective (both school and higher education) and 3 studies were finished without a certain level of context. Although all categories of papers contribute to an increasing and well-established knowledge base, their distribution offers insight into the research focuses and priorities within a particular society.

Among the empirical studies, over 58.7% applied the quantitative method, 28.0% used a qualitative approach, and 13.3% used the mixed method of research. An imbalanced proportion toward the knowledge base EDLM is indicated by the prevalence of quantitative over qualitative approaches among researchers in China. It may ignore narratives and institutional ambiguities that qualitative approaches capture, hindering the development of comprehensive theories of Chinese EDLM. Based on a four-level statistical classification in existing reviews (Hallinger & Chen, 2015; Castillo & Hallinger, 2018), we coded the statistical type of quantitative and mixed-method studies in this research. Level 1 descriptive statistics accounted for 22.2%, Level 2 single causal factor was responsible for 30.9%, Level 3 correlation analysis with multivariate controls made up the proportion of 18.5%, and Level 4 multiple-factor modeling in complex constructs accounted for 28.4%. The findings indicated a low percentage of use of

complex statistical approaches. The distribution of knowledge production method is characteristic of literature that shows an early development phase.

Research Regions. Although it was difficult to identify these studies' regional distribution across Chinese mainland due to the huge quantity of Chinese provinces and cities, we found two features when comparing Chinese research with literature in this field from other countries. First, it is worthwhile noting that scholars paid special attention to leadership development in the remote countryside or rural western regions in China (n=43). Second, some scholars conducted leadership and management research (n=16) in megalopolises like Shanghai or Beijing (de jure population over 20 million). Educational resources and development opportunities for leaders vary from region to region, which calls for further explorations on the similarities and differences in leadership characteristics to achieve the aim of equity in education proposed by the Ministry of Education in China.

Research Topics. We cataloged the included literature by eight research topics (Table 1), and found some works belonging to more than one topic. For instance, Ma and Marion (2021)'s and Zheng, Yin, & Li (2019)'s studies on the connection between principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy were assigned to the groups of *instructional leadership* and *effects on teachers*. Some topics discussed in only one article, such as contingent reward leadership, transnational leadership, system leadership, dual leadership, inclusive leadership, team temporal leadership, spiritual leadership, student leadership, sustainable leadership, mixed governance, emergency management, teacher' aggressive management, reputation management, and university-school partnership, were not included in the list. The results

of research topic indicated that scholars have rich exploration interests in Chinese EDLM.

Table 1.

Research topic of selected studies

Topics	Sub-Topics	No. of English articles	No. of Chinese articles	Percentage
Leadership styles	Teacher leadership	20	27	10.2%
	Principle leadership	18	19	8.1%
	Instructional leadership	15	24	8.5%
	Transformational leadership	11	15	5.4%
	Distributed leadership	6	10	3.5%
	Technology leadership	5	6	2.4%
	Female leadership	5	6	2.4%
	Authentic leadership	3	8	1.5%
	Learning-centered leadership	3	7	2.4%
	Middle-level leadership	3	4	1.5%
	Curriculum leadership	3	5	1.7%
	Moral leadership	3	6	1.9%
	Paternalistic leadership	2	3	1.1%
	Servant leadership	2	4	1.3%
	Academic leadership	2	4	1.3%
Management types	Student management	6	3	1.9%
	Crisis management	4	3	1.5%
	Knowledge management	3	3	1.3%
	Financial management	2	4	1.3%
	Human resource management	2	6	1.7%
EDLM's effect	Effect on teacher	38	29	14.6%

	Effect on organization	13	27	8.7%
	Effect on student	10	15	5.4%
Interventions of EDLM	Influencing factors of EDLM (social-cultural, traditional cultural, organizational context, training, individual traits, initiative)	18	22	8.7%
Cross-region comparison	Leadership in rural or China's western region	10	18	6.1%
	Cross-country or cross-culture leadership	9	14	5.0%
Leadership development and strategies	Leadership development	19	26	9.8%
	Leadership strategies	7	27	7.4%
Leadership conceptualization	Leadership conceptualization and evaluation	5	20	5.4%
General EDLM's Aims	Organizational effectiveness and improvement	2	3	1.1%
	Curriculum reform	2	4	1.3%
	Educational change	2	3	1.1%

Note: The total percentage is not equal to 100% because several studies were classified to multiple groups and several seldom occur topics were not included.

As shown in the above table, the examination of EMDL's effects, including the influences on teachers (14.6%), organizations (8.7%), and students (5.4%), was the most significant research topic, while the interventions of EDLM accounts for less percentage (8.7%). More leadership styles than management types were discussed in the database. In terms of the subject of leadership, the focus on teacher leadership (10.2%) is more than principal leadership (8.1%), but less on middle-level leadership (1.5%) and paternalistic leadership (1.1%). Furthermore, instructional leadership (8.5%), transformational

leadership (5.4%), distributed leadership (3.5%), and technology leadership (2.4%) account for significant proportions. Researchers also examined leadership development (9.8%), leadership strategies (7.4%), leadership model and evaluation standards (5.4%), as well as rural-city (6.1%) and cross-culture (5.0%) leadership comparison. The findings concerning topical foci showed a scarcity of concentration for *general EDLM's aims*. There are only two articles in each sub-topic, namely *organizational effectiveness and improvement* (Hallinger & Liu, 2016; Wei, Ni, & Yoon, 2023), *curriculum reform* (Qian, & Walker, 2013; Walker et al., 2011), and *educational change* (Liu, 2020), but which were frequently explored topics in other regions or countries (e.g. Adams et al. 2023; Hallinger & Hammad, 2019).

Characteristics of Chinese Leadership and Management

Through the research content analysis, we summarized characteristics of EDLM practices in China into three foci: contextual roles, leaders' roles, and interaction between leaders and other stakeholders. Research regarding the cross-society comparison, the influence of culture, institutional climate, and EDLM's impact on the organization were classified into contextual understanding. Articles referring to leadership styles and management models comprised the group on the topic of the leader's role. Research about the effects of leadership and management on teachers and students were categorized into the topic of interaction.

Contextual Roles. Scholars have continually worked to enhance contextual understandings of leadership and management, referring to cross-nation (Huang, 2018; Chen & Bos, 2023), cross-cultural (Dinh et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2021), political (Yang, 2020), transformational (Szeto, Cheng, & Sin, 2019), and traditional Chinese (Onsman, 2012), organizational (Zhu & Engels, 2014) contexts. A

common assumption among these studies is that educational organizations usually run under sets of cultural values and contextual influences, which affect the daily work of management teams or individual leaders. Also, the review dataset contains studies that focus on the impact of leadership and management on organizational commitment (Huang et al., 2021), organizational trust (Zhang, Bowers, & Pang, 2023), and organizational identification (Li et al., 2023). Thus, we viewed the relationship between leadership and organizational context as interactive and two-way.

Notably, political culture is viewed to weightily shape leaders' behaviors and practices, since principals should transfer education reform proposed by the central government into school reality (Yang, 2020). China's general top-down accountability context required educational leaders to strengthen internal construction within organizations and respond to external demands, which was markedly different from the bottom-up style in Japan (Huang, 2018) or collaborative management strategy in French culture (He & Liu, 2018). Although there is a relatively nationally centralized educational administrative system compared to Western countries, scholars argued that increasing region- and school-based management requirements and power shows the new trends in education reform (Qian & Walker, 2011; 2013). Moreover, existing research reemphasized influences of socialist ideology in aspects like the generalization of ideological and political training for educational leaders and teachers, and construction of party-government model universities (Shen, Huang, & Fan, 2020).

Another significant impact caused by contextual change is constantly developing technology and innovation, which has integrated into different types of educational organizations that shape technology-

related responsibilities for leaders. Following national educational informatization policies, Chinese schools and universities have implemented reforms that have rebuilt the roles of leaders and educators. Accordingly, there was an emerging academic focus on technology leadership or leadership for ICT integration into education (Wu et al., 2019; Yuting et al., 2022). The findings suggest paying more attention to the transformation from traditional to technology-integrated educational contexts for scholars and educators.

Leader's Role. In line with global literature, the review found that Chinese educational leaders played various roles in creating an effective learning and teaching environment, performing rich management and leadership models in China. As shown in Table 2, we compared the existing evidence in China with the classification framework proposed by Bush and Glover (2014). Although we identified that most types of management and leadership occurred in the Chinese context, additional leadership styles were found, such as servant leadership (Latif, et al., 2021), e-leadership (Wu et al., 2019), or sustainable leadership (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2021), and additional management models like crisis management (Lawrence & Wu, 2020). Further explorations are needed to discern whether these new statements have emerged from existing types or as new models, which distinguish educational leaders in China from other regions. It also cannot be inferred that the types of EDLM that are not being studied in China do not exist in Chinese educational practices, as the reason may be a lack of research during the given review period.

Table 2.

Typology of management and leadership

Management model	Chinese EDLM	Leadership model	Chinese EDLM
Formal	√	Managerial	√
Collegial	√	Participative	
		Distributed	√
		Teacher	√
Political	√	Transactional	√
		Transformational	√
		Postmodern	
Subjective		Emotional	
Ambiguity	√	Contingent	√
Cultural	√	Moral	√

Interaction between Leaders and Followers. Scholars also highlighted the relationship between leaders and other stakeholders, including teaching staff, administrative staff, and students, as found in many studies in different societies. Evidence in China has discussed the direct relationship between educational leadership and teachers' efficacy (Ma & Marion, 2021), professional learning (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Zheng, Yin, & Li, 2021), knowledge sharing (Zhang et al., 2023), teacher ICT competency (Yuting et al., 2022), and job satisfaction (Dou et al., 2017). Although several studies noted the effect of leadership and management on student performance and learning outcomes (Lee, et al., 2012; Li, Zhu, & Li, 2022), the research on the interaction between leaders and students is significantly less. The reason for this may be that the effect of leadership on students is indirect in line with the previous argument (Leithwood et al., 2004).

These identified relationships proved that most Chinese educational and leadership practices were in accordance with the generally accepted theoretical frameworks (Bush & Glover, 2014; Bush 2020), such that, leadership functions as an influencing process promoting

achievements of shared vision and educational goals through interactions with various stakeholders. In accordance with previous reviews (Walker & Qian, 2015; Yang, 2021), a remarkable feature is that Chinese educational leaders presented significant sensitivity to organizational structure settings and human resource networks, particularly connections to different department heads and influential team members. These sensitivities reflected the concept that building up broader relationships with followers and other leaders was necessary for top leaders to coordinate internal and external resources for their organizations and themselves (He & Liu, 2018; Yang, 2020).

Discussion

This systematic review provided a new insight into the EDLM knowledge base by drawing an in-depth picture of research in China. Compared to the previous reviews on Chinese school leadership (Walker et al., 2012; Walker & Qian, 2015), this work extends the review range by including articles on higher education and the past decade to present a comprehensive and more recent knowledge production. The results generally showed that EDLM research in China is in line with the Asian trend (Hallinger & Chen, 2015), and expands faster than in Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018) and Africa (Hallinger, 2017), showing that scholars have been struggling to catch up with EDLM research in developed countries, especially in recent years.

Regarding question 1, we identified an active research trend with a significantly growing number of research publications that moved to this field in the past three years. The findings point out the direction for scholars to locate the needed literature and share the research outcomes. Reasons for the fast academic development in China might

be the increasing requirements on educational organizations and leaders set by the Chinese Ministry of Education (CMOE), international academic exchange or study abroad opportunities, and the growing pressure of publishing tasks in journals (Dinh et al., 2021; Liu & Huang, 2023). However, the article distribution across different journals shows a limited number of Chinese publications in well-known international EDLM journals.

The results of authorship indicate a trend in the past two decades that collaborative relationships between international and Chinese researchers have taken a critical role in research, and more scholars with mainland backgrounds have taken on research studies as first authors since 2017, such as Liu and Hallinger (2018) and Ma and Marion (2019). However, among these scholars who contributed to international publications as the first author, most were not affiliated with Chinese institutions. Thus, it is necessary to create more exchange opportunities and communication platforms for Chinese researchers. Besides this, the recent MC authorship research (Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Huang, Zhang, & Huang, 2020) showed independent research ability of local scholars has improved. Given the irreplaceable position of the English language in academics, Chinese scholars with bilingual competency are necessary, since they are able to access both international and local knowledge and collaborate with scholars worldwide. This research suggests creating collaborative networks of local and international scholars is a way to connect Chinese EDLM further to the global knowledge base.

To answer question 2, the distribution of research type indicates the need for further conceptual articles to theorize how leadership and management are shaped by Chinese educational contexts. Although a concept of educational leadership and management consistent with

internationally recognized models (e.g. Gümüş et al., 2021; Hallinger & Chen, 2015) that are widely accepted in China, the uniqueness of each educational system decides various practices and challenges in different countries. Thus, the misalignment caused by different social and educational cultures must be noted when studying the influence of Western EDLM theories. For instance, some scholars considered Chinese localized characteristics into these concepts in their research, such as Confucianism (e.g. Onsman, 2012) and dual leadership under the Communist Party of China (Xu & Law, 2015). Studies on how scholars contribute to theories from local perspectives and how to connect to international literature are recommended in the future. Also, the results indicated that scholars preferred to employ existing Western models in their empirical quantitative studies. The prevalence of quantitative studies has implications for rich types of future research, since diverse research methods can contribute to the development of comprehensive theories and deeper understanding of the complex influencing factors of EDLM in China.

Moreover, more recent studies specified the geographic research context of urban or rural regions (Liu, 2024; Liu, S., & Hallinger, 2018), revealing the across-region differences in leadership practices and strategies in China. Regional disparities in research focus reflects the uneven distribution of educational resources. Given the economic and geographical reasons, the unequal educational resource distribution is unavoidable at the present stage, which leads to different EDML challenges and strategies for leaders between big cities and small towns that demand further explorations on the similarities and differences to develop leadership and management. Therefore, researchers need to explore more deeper and offer suggestions to alleviate the structural contradictions in EDLM policy implementation.

Besides, there were significantly more academic focuses on the school context than the university setting concerning this topic, which indicates the potential research gap in EDLM research for effective management of higher education in China. Studies on the school mainly discussed principals' leadership, while articles in the university involve more roles like presidents, faculty leaders, academic managers, middle-level administrators, and more management responsibilities referring to not only leadership but also various administrative tasks, like institutional governance and administration (Huang, et al., 2018) and academic and reputation management (Chen & Zhu, 2021; Dinh et al., 2021).

Question 3 addressed the EDLM practices, including human-context interaction, leaders' roles, and leader-follower relations, which indicates the actual situation in China. It found that Chinese educational leaders' roles mainly align with the highly recognized models (Bush & Glover, 2014) and other nation-based reviews in EDLM (Adams et al., 2023; Hallinger & Hammad, 2019). In line with Huang et al. (2021) and Qian and Walker (2019)'s arguments, the choice of effective management and leadership styles in China is context-dependent and should consider the size and structure of the institution, the available internal resources, and the external environment. Thus, the essential requirement for developing effective leadership strategies is to follow national educational policies and integrate such strategies into the environment at large. For example, CMOE released the *Construction Guidance for Ideological and Political Training for Higher Education in 2020*, which launched a high-quality evaluation system and incentive mechanism, increasing demands on political and transactional capability.

In addition, leadership practices are closely linked to the changing external environment. The evolving educational environment, such as Chinese curriculum reform (Qian, & Walker, 2013) and the advancement of educational technology (Yuting et al., 2022) requires corresponding leadership developments and timely research support to follow changes. For instance, the public emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed global education into a field that relies more on mobile technology and networking, particularly increasing crisis management and technology leadership demands. The trend of wide usage of educational technology could extend the traditional range of educational leaders (Bush, 2020) by involving technology leaders, like the heads of the ICT center in the Chinese context. Notably, this article provides a deeper contextual comprehension of how Chinese educational leaders practice leadership and management to navigate organizations in the current ever-changing environment. It is observed that the key features of educational leadership and management practices in China are shaped by the organizational context, individual ability, and interactions within the educational system.

Despite our best efforts to make a complete review, the limitations concerning the collection of articles in the specified databases stand out. Although we selected three authoritative databases and “core” international journals, other relevant works may have been excluded, and it would be rushed to claim that this review represents a full perception of EDLM literature in China. Additionally, in this study, we only focused on leadership and management in the education field. More studies should be conducted in other research contexts that can extend insights to leaders of enterprises or public authorities. To do so, we should consider broadening the scope of databases and research

types, as well as adding rich research content that may support scholars and readers in framing future studies.

Conclusion

This study filled the gap of a limited systematic review by including more types of organizations and more recent Chinese EDLM studies and adding significant Chinese content to the international knowledge base. There has been an obviously increasing publication trend in research interests, particularly in the past three years. Despite the changes in research hotspots compared to previous studies and the slight differences between Chinese EDLM features and those of other countries, the common goal of enhancing educational leadership and management remains the same. The choice of research topics changed along with the advancement of EDLM knowledge and the evolvement of the societal and political environment. A significant change is that research interests in the first decade in this review were mainly on the construction of conceptual and theoretical understanding, standards exploration, and educational policy interpretation, while studies attempted to investigate specific issues and relationships through collecting empirical data in the next decade. This study offers a reasonable representation of literature in China, which serves as a reliable foundation for determining future directions of leaders' ability development and EDLM research.

The present review contributes to an overview of research that is the first step to promoting effective leadership and management in China. Scholars are concerned with various challenges faced by Chinese education leaders; thus, we underline the need for leadership and management development. An ongoing exploration of the responsibilities and practices of educational leaders in China could be

a critical path to catching up with effective organization management in other developed countries. The training program should be provided not only for a single top leader, but also for senior or middle management teams like heads of teaching and research groups, as the evidence supported (Tang, 2022; Zhang, Wong, & Wang, 2022). Besides, future studies in theory-driven and in-depth exploratory approaches are suggested for real problems in the EDLM context in China. It is hoped that scholars in China put more effort into improving and contributing to the development of the Chinese knowledge base by establishing cooperation with international scholars.

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