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Redefining Education and Leadership: Perspectives from Pedagogy, Well-Being, and Digital Transformation

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Contemporary societies are undergoing rapid and profound transformations shaped by globalization, digitalization, and shifting social expectations. These developments have placed education and leadership at the center of scholarly and professional debates. Educational institutions are challenged to prepare individuals not only with technical knowledge but also with critical thinking, emotional resilience, ethical awareness, and the capacity for innovative action. At the same time, leaders across sectors are called upon to navigate increasingly complex environments, fostering inclusive cultures and sustainable practices. This issue, entitled **Redefining Education and Leadership: Perspectives from Pedagogy, Well-Being, and Digital Transformation** brings together four insightful contributions that address these challenges from diverse methodological, cultural, and disciplinary perspectives.

The papers included in this issue reflect the growing recognition that effective leadership and meaningful education require holistic, human-centered, and evidence-based approaches. Recent scholarship emphasized the importance of integrating emotional intelligence, critical pedagogy, mindfulness, and digital transformation within educational and organizational contexts (Bush, 2021; Fullan, 2020; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for adaptive leadership and innovative pedagogical practices that respond to new social and technological realities (Dhawan, 2020). Within this evolving landscape, the present issue explores how spirituality, critical thinking, mental well-being, and digital innovation can contribute to more inclusive and effective educational and leadership practices.

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The first article of this issue, entitled **“Cultivating Spiritual Self-Leadership: A Pathway towards Authentic Spiritual Leadership”**, by Shelly Lyons, examines the role of spiritual self-leadership in promoting authenticity and inclusivity within contemporary workplaces. Drawing on a narrative inquiry study involving 25 Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs), Shelly Lyons explores how individuals who experienced highly mobile and cross-cultural childhoods develop identity, belonging, and professional purpose. The study investigates the ways in which spiritual self-leadership can support ATCKs in navigating the benefits and challenges associated with their unique backgrounds.

Lyons proposes an original Spiritual Self-Leadership model that highlights the importance of cultivating one’s inner life as a foundation for authentic leadership. The research demonstrates that when leaders engage in reflective and spiritually grounded practices, they are better equipped to foster connectedness, empathy, and holistic well-being in their organizations. Although the study focuses on ATCKs, its implications extend to all individuals seeking to develop deeper self-awareness and meaningful leadership capacities. This contribution enriches the growing body of literature on values-based and purpose-driven leadership (Jihye Oh & Jia Wang, 2020); Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2019).

The second paper, entitled **“Mindful Moments: Strategies for Alleviating Anxiety in Elementary Students, Both Onsite and Online”**, by Gina Solano, addresses one of the most pressing concerns in contemporary education: the rise of anxiety among young learners. Gina Solano presents a qualitative action research project aimed at designing and implementing mindfulness-based lessons for second-grade students. Recognizing that anxiety negatively affects both academic performance and overall well-being, the author developed a series of weekly mindfulness activities to help children manage stress and emotions.

Originally implemented in a traditional classroom environment, the project was adapted to an online format during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal that mindfulness interventions were effective in both settings, leading to noticeable improvements in students’ emotional regulation, focus, and classroom behavior. Teachers involved in the project reported enhanced learning environments and more resilient students. The study strongly supports the inclusion of mindfulness practices as part of everyday school routines, aligning with broader research highlighting the benefits of social-emotional learning and well-being programs in schools (Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Weare, 2020).

The third contribution, entitled **“Designing and Implementing a Module to Foster Critical Thinking in Management Education: An Exploration of Rationale and Methods”** by Elton Xhetani & Ailson J. De Moraes, focuses on higher education pedagogy and, more specifically, on the challenge of cultivating critical thinking skills

among management students. Xhetani and De Moraes present a reflective study based on the redesign of a final-year undergraduate module at a UK Higher Education Institution. Responding to problems of student disengagement and surface-level learning, the authors implemented a pedagogical intervention emphasizing student-led inquiry, dialogic learning, and case-based analysis.

Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data—including student reflections, surveys, and assessment results—the study demonstrates significant improvements in academic confidence, engagement, and depth of learning. Students moved from passive reception of knowledge to active critique and independent reasoning. This research offers valuable insights into how relatively small but well-structured pedagogical changes can transform learning experiences and promote critical capacity. The findings resonate with contemporary discussions on active learning and transformative pedagogy in higher education (Freire, 2018; Brookfield, 2020).

The last paper of our issue, entitled **“When Marketing Education Meets Artificial Intelligence: Boosting Students’ Career Optimism in Tunisia”**, by Trimech et al., expands the scope of this issue by examining the intersection of artificial intelligence, higher education, and student career expectations within the field of marketing. Trimech and colleagues investigate how the rapid integration of AI technologies into marketing practice is reshaping educational programs and influencing the professional outlook of marketing students in Tunisia.

Based on a questionnaire administered to final-year bachelor’s students, the study employs factor analysis to assess perceptions of training quality, employability, and career opportunities. The results indicate that despite limited resources and structural challenges, students display strong optimism about their professional futures. Many view digital marketing and AI-driven tools as promising avenues for entrepreneurship and innovative career paths.

Importantly, the research reveals that levels of optimism shape career aspirations: highly optimistic students tend to envision local entrepreneurial ventures, while others consider international careers or specialized professional tracks. This paper contributes to current debates on AI in education and the need for curricula that prepare students for rapidly evolving labor markets (Luckin et al., 2020; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

The author categorizes these factors into four hierarchical levels and proposes strategic pathways for advancing digital transformation: strengthening information infrastructure, creating collaborative innovation platforms, promoting pedagogical reform, and optimizing governance through data-driven management. This paper provides a valuable framework for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to enhance institutional resilience and competitiveness in the digital era. It contributes to the expanding literature on educational innovation and digital leadership (Selwyn, 2021; Bond et al., 2021).

Concluding Remarks

The four papers included in this issue demonstrate the breadth and diversity of contemporary research on education and leadership. They highlight that innovative practices emerge from multiple sources: inner personal development, emotional well-being, critical pedagogical reform, digital transformation, and technological innovation such as artificial intelligence.

Together, these contributions underline a shared message: education and leadership must evolve in holistic and interdisciplinary ways if they are to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. By integrating human-centered values with technological progress, educators and leaders can create learning environments that are inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented.

This issue invites readers—educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners—to reflect on the interconnected nature of educational and leadership challenges. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, we can move toward more holistic approaches that empower individuals and institutions alike. We hope that the ideas presented here will inspire further dialogue, research, and innovative action in the ongoing effort to build more thoughtful and sustainable educational futures. We hope that this issue will inspire further research and practical initiatives that continue to bridge disciplines and foster innovative practices across educational and organizational contexts.

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