Research Article

Liderazgo Educativo Como Estrategia Para El Fortalecimiento De Las Universidades

Educational Leadership As A Strategy For Strengthening Universities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	El liderazgo educativo se ha posicionado como una estrategia fundamental para fortalecer a las universidades en un contexto global marcado por desafíos como la digitalización, la inclusión y la sostenibilidad. Este artículo tiene un enfoque de revisión sistemática, analiza la literatura publicada entre 2019 y 2023 sobre el tema. El análisis estuvo dirigido a identificar tendencias, brechas y oportunidades en la investigación sobre el liderazgo educativo en las universidades. Los hallazgos destacan la relevancia del liderazgo transformacional y distribuido para fomentar la innovación, la adaptabilidad y la cohesión institucional. A su vez, persisten brechas significativas, como la falta de estudios longitudinales y la escasa atención a contextos no occidentales. Además, la pandemia de COVID-19 ha subrayado la importancia de un liderazgo ágil y resiliente, capaz de gestionar crisis y promover la transformación digital. La integración de perspectivas interdisciplinarias—psicología, antropología y administración tecnológica—enriquece el análisis, ofrece herramientas para abordar desafíos complejos y desarrollar estrategias más inclusivas y efectivas. En este artículo se concluye que el liderazgo educativo es clave para el fortalecimiento de las universidades, pero requiere un enfoque contextualizado y multidimensional que responda a las demandas del siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: inclusión, innovación, liderazgo educativo, transformación digital, universidades |

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	Educational leadership has been positioned as a fundamental strategy to strengthen universities in a global context marked by challenges such as digitalization, inclusion, and sustainability. This article has a systematic review approach, analyzing the literature published between 2019 and 2023 on the topic. The analysis was aimed at identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities in research on educational leadership in universities. The findings highlight the relevance of transformational and distributed leadership to foster innovation, adaptability, and institutional cohesion. At the same time, significant gaps persist, such as the lack of longitudinal studies and the scarce attention to non-Western contexts. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of agile and resilient leadership, capable of managing crises and promoting digital transformation. The integration of interdisciplinary perspectives—psychology, anthropology, and technology management—enriches the analysis, offers tools to address complex challenges, and develop more inclusive and effective strategies. This article concludes that educational leadership is key to strengthening universities, but requires a contextualized and multidimensional approach that responds to the demands of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is becoming increasingly evident. In this sense, the areas of universities and undergraduate and graduate training programs stand out. There are several fields in which these technologies achieve value. Chon et al. (2021) and Moro et al. (2023) recognize their role in linguistic studies, as do Li et al. (2023) and Lomas & Xue (2022), who held debates based on AI-assisted reading and writing.

A more explored field is in basic and applied sciences. Dhaliwal et al. (2021) interrelate AI tools with medical sciences. Gyimah Concepcion (2020) and Lee (2023) address these issues from technological and systems-applied perspectives. On the other hand, also from the university field, Li & Huang (2020) address the contribution of AI in the development of skills in students, as well as Li & Dong (2020) who refer to it as associated with cognitive development.

Martínez Plumed et al. (2021) recognize that in a world marked by profound and accelerated transformations in the technological, social, economic, and cultural fields, universities are at a critical crossroads. Clarke (2019) states that these institutions, historically recognized as pillars of knowledge and engines of social progress, today face the challenge of adapting to an increasingly complex, competitive, and demanding global environment as stated by Delgado Fernández et al. (2019).

Increasing digitization (Sheskin et al., 2020), expectations of inclusion and diversity (Stapleton & Kin, 2019), the need for sustainability and the impacts of global crises (Romero Torres & Gamero De La Espirella, 2023), such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have redefined the role of universities and, with it, the nature of leadership required to guide them towards a prosperous and relevant future (Dörpinghaus et al., 2022). In this scenario, educational leadership emerges as a fundamental strategic element to strengthen universities as academic institutions and agents of change, capable of responding to the needs of contemporary society.

Interest in leadership in education is not new. Since the late twentieth century, the literature has explored how leadership styles influence the quality of education, pedagogical innovation, and institutional management. Corresponding to Gómez Miranda (2023), in recent decades, this field of study has evolved significantly, with traditional and hierarchical approaches giving way to more dynamic, collaborative, and adaptive models, as stated by Grosu et al. (2023).

Transformational leadership has been widely recognized for its ability to inspire and motivate university communities and foster a culture of innovation and resilience (Janeček et al., 2021). In this sense, distributed leadership has gained relevance by promoting the active participation of diverse stakeholders -faculty, students, and administrative staff- in decision-making, which strengthens institutional cohesion and responsiveness to complex challenges (Eslava Zapata et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, important gaps persist in the understanding of educational leadership and its impact on strengthening universities (Senna et al., 2023). Much of the existing research has focused on Western contexts, particularly in Europe and North America, which limits the generalizability of findings to other regions with different socioeconomic, cultural, and political realities (Javed et al., 2022).

Most studies have focused on specific aspects of leadership, such as its relationship with administrative efficiency or academic performance (Hujran et al., 2023), leaving aside equally critical dimensions, such as inclusion, diversity, and sustainability (Jung & Park, 2022). This fragmentation of knowledge makes it difficult to formulate comprehensive strategies that allow universities to face the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these limitations and, at the same time, opened new opportunities to rethink educational leadership. The health crisis accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in higher education and highlighted the importance of agile, empathetic, and resilient leadership (Noroña González et al., 2023). University leaders had to make quick decisions in a context of uncertainty to ensure academic continuity while attending to the emotional and social needs of their communities (Sadreddin & Chan, 2023). This historical episode has left valuable lessons on the importance of preparing universities for future crises, as well as on the role of leadership in building more flexible and adaptive institutions (Nicolas & Evrard, 2023). In this context, it is imperative to deepen the study of educational leadership as a strategy for strengthening universities. This article seeks to contribute to this effort through a systematic review of the literature published between 2019 and 2023. It identifies trends, gaps, and opportunities for research on this topic. In addition, it proposes to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives -from psychology, anthropology, and technology management- to enrich the analysis and offer a more holistic and multidimensional view of educational leadership.

Psychology, for example, can provide greater clarity on the motivational and emotional factors that influence leader effectiveness (Jenkins et al., 2020), while anthropology (Coeckelbergh & Sætra, 2023) can explore how organizational cultures and power dynamics shape leadership practices (Dwivedi et al., 2023). In turn, technology management can provide tools to manage digital transformation and take advantage of the opportunities offered by emerging technologies (Sollosy, M., & McInerney, 2022).

The relevance of this study lies in its potential to generate knowledge that advances academic discussion and provides practical tools for university leaders. At a time when universities must reinvent themselves to stay relevant, understanding how leadership can drive their empowerment is more crucial than ever. This article systematizes some studies on the subject for future research and constitutes a resource for those who seek to transform their institutions into spaces of excellence, innovation, and equity, capable of facing the challenges of the present and the future.

METHODOLOGY

It has been stated that this article is based on a systematic documentary review with a qualitative approach (Khalil et al., 2022), designed to identify, analyze and synthesize the most relevant studies published between 2019 and 2023 on educational leadership as a strategy for strengthening universities. The methodology was structured in four main stages, each with specific dimensions and indicators that ensured rigor and consistency in the research process.
The following is a synthesis of the four stages, stating the main objectives, their dimensions, and indicators. These served to identify in the literature the main trends, the challenges faced, and the opportunities in educational leadership within universities.

Stage 1: Definition of objective and search criteria
• Objective: To identify and analyze studies that explore educational leadership in the university context, with emphasis on its impact on institutional strengthening.

• **Dimensions:**
1. Temporality: Studies published between 2019 and 2023.
2. Sources: Scientific articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc, Scielo, and Google Scholar mainly, considered for their academic rigor and international relevance.
3. Language: Documents in Spanish, English, and Portuguese.
4. Inclusion criteria: Studies that address educational leadership, university management, innovation, inclusion, and sustainability.
5. Exclusion criteria: Papers not related to higher education or that do not present solid empirical or theoretical evidence.

Stage 2: Bearch and selection of documents
• Process:
1. A search was performed in the identified databases, using keywords such as *"educational leadership"*, *"university strengthening"*, *"higher education management"*, *"innovation in universities"* and *"inclusive leadership"*.
2. Filters were applied by year of publication, subject area (social sciences and education) and type of document (research articles and systematic reviews).
3. Documents were selected based on their thematic relevance, methodological quality and contributions to the field of study.
4. Number of documents initially identified.
5. Number of documents selected after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria.
6. Geographical and thematic distribution of the studies.

Figure 1 shows the indicators that were taken into account to select the sources and the initial and final balance:

Figure 1: Indicators and balance of the selected documents

ORIGIN OF DOCUMENT

Documents initially identified

Documents selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria

▲America region
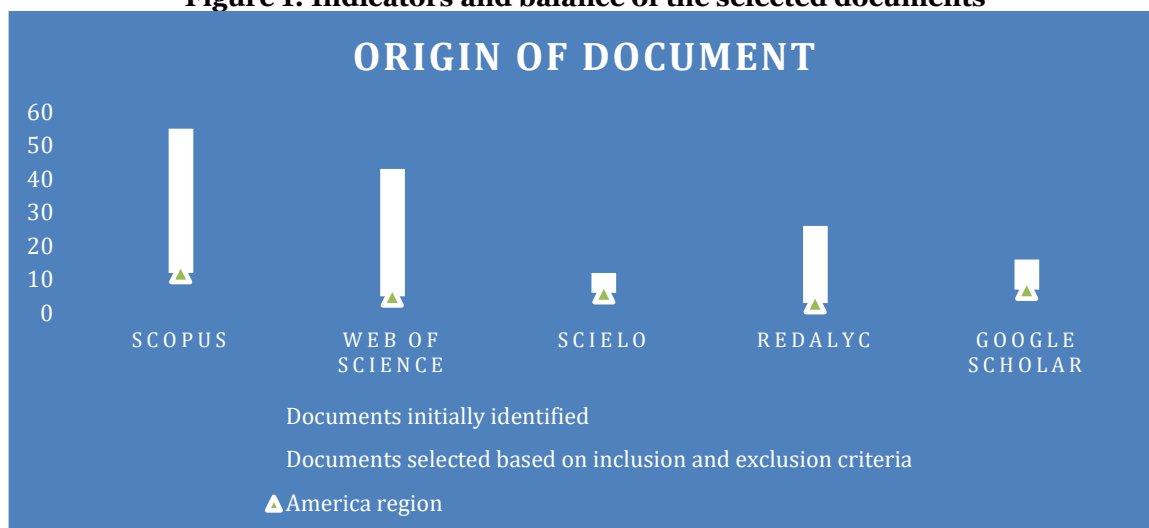
Source: Own elaboration

Stage 3: Analysis and categorization

- Process:
1. The selected papers were organized in an analysis matrix that included variables such as author, year, country, methodology, main findings and contributions to the topic.
2. The studies were categorized according to key dimensions:
  - Leadership styles: transformational, distributed, inclusive.
  - Impact areas: Innovation, adaptability, sustainability, inclusion.
  - Contexts: Geographic regions, types of universities (public/private).
3. Trends, gaps and opportunities were identified in the literature.
- Indicators:
1. Frequency of themes and sub-themes in the papers.
2. Consistency of findings in different contexts.
3. Identification of thematic and methodological gaps.

Stage 4: Synthesis and interdisciplinary integration

- Process:
1. The main findings were synthesized and the most relevant contributions to the field of educational leadership were highlighted.
2. Interdisciplinary perspectives (psychology, anthropology and technological management) were integrated to enrich the analysis and offer a holistic view of the topic.
3. Recommendations were made for future research and leadership practices in universities.
- Indicators:
1. Quality and depth of synthesis.
2. Effective integration of interdisciplinary approaches.
3. Relevance of the proposed recommendations.

Methodological rigor

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, international standards for systematic reviews were followed, such as those proposed by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). In addition, the bibliographic management software Zotero was used to organize and analyze the documents, ensuring transparency and replicability. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive and structured review. It provided a solid basis for the analysis of educational leadership as a strategy for strengthening universities.

RESULTS y DISCUSSION

Educational leadership as a strategy for strengthening universities has been extensively studied in recent years, and the findings between 2019 and 2023 reveal key trends and challenges that merit further discussion. The following are expanded discussions around the most relevant findings, which integrate theoretical, practical, and critical perspectives. They explore how the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and technology management can enrich the analysis.

In relation to transformational leadership and its impact on university culture, it can be stated that it has been identified as a key driver for innovation and continuous improvement in universities (Brujin et al., 2022). This

leadership style focuses on achieving institutional goals and inspiring and motivating members of the university community to transcend their individual interests to contribute to the common good (Ricardo Jiménez, 2022). Its implementation is not without challenges. The first is related to organizational culture and resistance to change.

Although transformational leadership promotes innovation, its success depends largely on the existing organizational culture (Noriega, 2020). In universities with hierarchical structures and deep-rooted traditions, there may be resistance to change, especially among administrative and academic staff who perceive these transformations as a threat to their autonomy. Here, anthropology can provide a critical perspective by analyzing how power dynamics and institutional traditions influence the adoption of new leadership models (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

Another challenge is intrinsic motivation and emotional well-being. From a psychological perspective, it is crucial to explore how transformational leadership impacts the emotional well-being of teachers and students (Ripoll Rivaldo, 2023). Recent studies suggest that this leadership style can reduce academic burnout and increase job satisfaction by fostering a sense of purpose and belonging (Wang et al., 2021). It is also necessary to consider the risks of emotional overload when expectations of innovation and commitment are too high.

In another sense, there is distributed leadership, which has gained relevance as a strategy to democratize decision-making and foster collaboration between different actors in the university community. This approach is particularly useful in contexts where diversity of perspectives is essential to address complex problems (Acero Moreno et al., 2023).

In relation to its implementation, it can be said that, although distributed leadership promotes inclusion, its implementation can be complicated in institutions with rigid hierarchical structures (Anand et al., 2021). For Ball et al. (2020), the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities can generate conflicts and confusion, especially when there is no effective communication between formal and informal leaders. Anthropology can help to understand how power dynamics and informal relationships influence the distribution of leadership (Chen et al., 2020).

To this end, technology is adopted as an enabler of these processes and their implementation. From technology management, digital tools can facilitate the practice of distributed leadership (Overstreet et al., 2023). Collaborative platforms, knowledge management systems, and online communication tools can improve transparency and efficiency in decision-making (Pérez Gamboa et al., 2022). However, it is also necessary to consider digital divides and cultural resistance to the adoption of new technologies.

Another trend of interest in the region is adaptive leadership in a changing world. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for adaptive leadership in universities, characterized by the ability to respond quickly to disruptive changes. This type of leadership is essential to navigate an increasingly complex and unpredictable global environment. One of the important factors is institutional resilience. Adaptive leadership involves adjusting to immediate changes and building long-term institutional resilience. This requires a strategic vision that anticipates future challenges, such as the digitalization of education and the growing demand for soft skills in graduates (Zielińska, 2023). Psychology can contribute to the study of how educational leaders develop skills such as empathy, cognitive flexibility, and stress management, which are crucial for leading in contexts of uncertainty (Ramírez Moncada et al., 2023).

Kim (2022) states that, in this sense, the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives also takes place. Anthropology can enrich this analysis by exploring how organizational cultures influence universities' adaptive capacity (Kunst & Bierwiaczonek, 2023). For example, institutions with more flexible and open-to-change cultures can implement adaptive strategies more easily than those with more rigid and conservative cultures.

They also highlight sustainability and social responsibility in educational leadership (Li & Chen, 2023; Li, 2022). These have emerged as critical dimensions of educational leadership, especially in a global context marked by environmental crises and social inequalities. Kunke et al. (2022) assert that universities are called to develop leaders who are competent in their areas of expertise and committed to social and environmental well-being.

Roh and Yoon (2023) agree that the consulted literature shows the existence of challenges regarding the integration of sustainability. Although many universities have adopted sustainability agendas, their effective implementation requires committed leadership and a long-term vision. From technology management, it is possible to explore how green technologies and environmental management platforms can support these initiatives (Neirotti et al., 2021). It is also necessary to address cultural resistance and financial constraints that may hinder their implementation.

Another important challenge is in terms of social responsibility and equity. Anthropology can provide a critical look at how universities address issues of equity and inclusion in their leadership strategies (Pérez Egües et al., 2023). For example, how are the perspectives of marginalized groups integrated into decision-making? How is diversity and inclusion promoted in leadership processes? (Matsika & Zhou, 2021). This demonstrates the need for the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives, which, in the view of the authors consulted and in correspondence to this, is agreed to be essential to enrich the analysis of educational leadership. Each discipline brings unique tools and approaches that can complement each other to provide a more holistic understanding of the subject. Table 1 lists the three main disciplines addressed in this study and their contribution:

Table 1: Disciplines that contribute to the study of educational leadership

Discipline	Essence	Contribution
Psychology	Helps to understand how leadership styles influence the emotional well-being, motivation and performance of members of the university community.	Provides insights on how to develop emotional and social skills in educational leaders. (Gronier et al., 2023; Choudrie et al., 2023)
Anthropology	Offers an in-depth look at organizational cultures and power dynamics that influence the implementation of leadership strategies.	Ethnographic studies can reveal how institutional traditions and values facilitate or hinder change. (Nam et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023)
Technology management	This discipline is crucial to understand how technological tools can enhance educational leadership in an increasingly digitized world.	Knowledge management platforms, data analytics, and communication systems can improve efficiency and transparency in decision-making. (Hathaliya et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023)

Source: Own elaboration

During the 2019-2023 period, research on educational leadership in the university context has highlighted several key aspects. First, transformational leadership is considered to foster innovation, academic staff motivation, and the adaptability of universities to social and technological changes. This leadership style is associated with greater job satisfaction and improved institutional performance.

In turn, distributed and collaborative leadership has been identified as a growing trend toward new leadership models, where decision-making is shared among different actors (managers, professors, and students) (Rodríguez Torres et al., 2023). This approach promotes a culture of collaboration and empowerment, which is essential to facing complex challenges in higher education.

In relation to leadership and technology, it can be stated that, with the acceleration of digitalization, educational leadership has incorporated strategies to integrate emerging technologies into university management (Roman-Acosta et al., 2023). Several authors highlight the importance of leaders who foster digital literacy and pedagogical innovation. Inclusive leadership and diversity are other key aspects. Recent literature has emphasized the need for leaders who promote inclusion and diversity in universities. This includes attention to underrepresented groups and the creation of more equitable academic environments.

The following are promoted as trends:

• Focus on sustainability: there has been a growing interest in how educational leadership can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting sustainable and socially responsible institutional practices.

• Adaptation to the pandemic: COVID-19 has prompted research on how university leaders have managed the crisis, highlighting the importance of resilience and adaptive capacity.

• Globalization and international cooperation: educational leadership has been linked to strategies to strengthen the internationalization of universities, including global alliances and exchange programs.

The present study also identified some gaps on the subject in the literature consulted. The three main ones are based on the fact that there is a lack of longitudinal research that analyzes the long-term impact of different leadership styles on institutional strengthening. Most studies focus on universities in Europe and North America, leaving a gap in the understanding of educational leadership in Latin American, African, and Asian contexts. Third, it is evident that there is a need to develop more robust metrics to assess the impact of educational leadership on academic quality and institutional innovation.

At the same time, it was possible to identify some future research opportunities such as:

• Leadership in emerging universities: exploring how educational leadership can boost the development of universities in developing countries.

• Artificial intelligence and leadership: investigate how AI can support strategic decision making in university leadership.

• Leadership and student well-being: delve into the role of leadership in promoting the mental and emotional well-being of students.

To summarize, the three main interdisciplinary perspectives are psychology, anthropology, and technology management. Psychology can enrich the analysis of educational leadership by studying the motivational and emotional factors that influence leaders and their teams. For example, understanding how emotional intelligence impacts leadership effectiveness. From anthropology, it is possible to explore how organizational cultures and power dynamics within universities affect the implementation of leadership strategies. Technology management can provide tools to manage digital transformation in universities by analyzing how leaders can effectively integrate emerging technologies.

Table 2 presents an organized matrix of the categories and themes derived from the analysis of the documentary review on educational leadership as a strategy for strengthening universities. The matrix facilitates the

identification of patterns, trends, and relationships among the themes analyzed. This structure also facilitates the qualitative analysis of the data:

Table 2: Category and topics associated with the study

Category	Topic (main focus)
Transformational Leadership	Impact on motivation and innovation in universities.
Distributed Leadership	Collaborative participation in decision-making.
Inclusive Leadership	Promotion of diversity and equity in universities.
Innovation	Strategies to promote pedagogical and technological innovation.
Adaptability	Responsiveness to changes and crises (COVID-19).
Sustainability	Contribution to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals.
Technology	Integration of emerging technologies in university management.
Well-being	Impact of leadership on emotional and academic well-being.
Collaboration	Promotion of inter-institutional networks and alliances.
Organizational Culture	Influence of leadership on institutional culture and climate.
Globalization	Strategies for the internationalization of universities.
Crisis	Crisis management and institutional resilience.
Psychology	Emotional and motivational factors in leadership.
Anthropology	Cultural and power dynamics in universities.
Technology Management	Management of digital transformation in universities.
Evaluation	Metrics to measure the impact of educational leadership.
Regions	Differences in the application of leadership by geographic region.
Public Universities	Challenges and opportunities in public institutions.
Private Universities	Challenges and opportunities in private institutions.
Gender	Gender perspectives in university leadership.
Equity	Strategies to reduce gaps in access and participation.
Resilience	Capacity for recovery and adaptation to adversity.
Community	Relationship between leadership and the university community.
Educational Policies	Influence of public policies on university leadership.
Training	Training programs for educational leaders

Source: Own elaboration

Educational leadership is an evolving field that requires innovative and multidimensional approaches to address the current and future challenges of universities. Recent findings highlight the importance of leadership styles such as transformational, distributed, and adaptive, as well as the need to integrate principles of sustainability and social responsibility. In addition, interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology, anthropology, and technology management offer valuable tools for understanding and improving leadership practices at the university level. Future research should explore how these perspectives can be effectively integrated in the training and development of educational leaders, as well as in the implementation of institutional policies that promote the strengthening of universities.

CONCLUSIONS

Educational leadership has become a key strategy for strengthening universities, especially in a context of rapid social and technological change. Despite this, important gaps persist that require attention, particularly in terms of geographic and methodological diversity. Interdisciplinary perspectives offer a valuable framework for addressing these challenges and enriching the understanding of leadership in higher education.
Educational leadership, in its transformational and distributed modalities, is emerging as a key strategy to strengthen universities in a dynamic and challenging global context. The studies reviewed show that this type

of leadership fosters innovation, adaptability, and institutional cohesion, essential elements to face challenges such as digitalization, inclusion, and sustainability. Its effective implementation requires a contextualized approach that considers the cultural, social, and economic particularities of each region.

Significant gaps persist in educational leadership research regarding its long-term impact and application in non-Western contexts. Most studies focus on universities in Europe and North America, limiting the understanding of how these practices can be adapted to diverse realities. In addition, there is an urgent need to develop robust metrics to assess the impact of leadership on academic quality, innovation, and the well-being of university communities.

The integration of interdisciplinary perspectives-psychology, anthropology, and technology management-enriches the analysis of educational leadership and offers tools to address complex challenges. These disciplines provide valuable insights into the emotional, cultural, and technological factors that influence leadership effectiveness, providing a more holistic framework for its study and application. Future research should take advantage of this interdisciplinary approach to develop leadership strategies that are more inclusive, resilient, and adapted to the needs of the 21st century.

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2. Data curation:
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5. Research:
6. Methodology:
7. Project management:
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9. Software:
10. Supervision:
11. Validation:
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