

Review

Counteracting Toxic Leadership in Education: Transforming Schools Through Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Leadership

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Abstract

Toxic leadership in educational settings is a pervasive issue that negatively impacts both educators' well-being and organizational effectiveness. While previous research has largely focused on defining toxic leadership traits, fewer studies have examined how contextual factors—such as school size, cultural norms, and leadership demographics—can obscure or normalize these behaviors. This narrative review aims to address the following research questions: (i) What are the key factors contributing to the emergence of toxic leadership in educational contexts? (ii) How do toxic leadership behaviors impact teachers and students? (iii) What strategies and interventions can mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership in schools? Using a structured literature search in Scopus (2014–2024), this review synthesizes existing evidence on toxic leadership traits, including authoritarianism, narcissism, and abusive supervision. The analysis highlights the role of emotional intelligence as a critical resilience factor, emphasizing how self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation can mitigate toxic leadership's harmful effects. The findings suggest that promoting leadership development programs, emotional intelligence training, and ethical decision-making frameworks can help schools counteract toxic leadership and create more inclusive and supportive environments.

Keywords: school leadership; toxic leadership; human resources management



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1. Introduction

Educational leadership is often portrayed as a bastion of positivity, where visionary individuals guide institutions towards academic excellence and the holistic development of students (Singh et al., 2019). However, historically, this positive image can be spoiled by a troubling and less frequently studied side of leadership, which is characterized as the dark side when leadership deviates from ethical, participatory, and supportive practices, eroding trust, damaging interpersonal relationships, and undermining organizational culture within the educational domain (Fatima et al., 2018; Pelletier, 2010; Singh et al., 2019; Spain et al., 2016). With this understanding of what the dark side entails (Conger, 1990), it is essential to examine the factors that contribute to its emergence in educational leadership. Given the rapidly growing interest in the issue of toxic leadership in education, the aim of this narrative review is to synthesize key themes and factors related to its manifestation, contextual influences, and the leadership strategies crucial for counteracting its harmful effects.

More specifically, this narrative review is focused on the following thematic questions:

1. What are the key factors contributing to the emergence of toxic leadership in educational contexts?

2. How do these toxic leadership behaviors impact educators and students?
3. What strategies and interventions can be implemented to mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership in schools?

This study will explore these challenges, provide some case studies and analyze the factors that influence leadership effectiveness. Additionally, it will discuss strategies and interventions designed to mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership and promote more ethical and effective leadership practices in education.

2. Literature Review Methodology

This manuscript presents a narrative review, synthesizing key themes and factors related to toxic leadership in educational settings. Unlike systematic reviews, which follow strict inclusion/exclusion criteria, the literature was selected through a broad search of peer-reviewed studies to capture diverse perspectives. To ensure a focused and academically rigorous review, a structured search strategy was implemented using the Scopus database in December 2024. The goal was to identify peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2014 and December 2024 that explore toxic leadership in educational contexts, particularly in relation to school environments and teacher experiences. As this study followed a narrative review design, no formal risk of bias assessment (Armaou et al., 2020) was conducted. Nevertheless, to ensure rigor, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and the search employed carefully selected keywords across article titles, abstracts, and author keywords, combining terms related to toxic leadership (e.g., “dark side of leadership”, “ethical leadership”) with educational terms (e.g., “school”, “teachers”, “organizational behavior in schools”). Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to enhance precision and coverage. This approach gave 32,229 initial results. To maintain relevance, the search was limited to English-language publications and peer-reviewed journal articles. Exclusion of the business-focused literature (subject area: BUSI), which was not directly relevant to educational leadership contexts. This approach yielded 78 initial results, which were subsequently screened for relevance through title and abstract review, followed by full-text assessment against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only peer-reviewed journal articles published in the last ten years were included.

Figure 1 illustrates the increasing number of studies published between January 2014 and December 2024, as identified through the structured Scopus search strategy detailed above. The data reflect the outcome of the described methodology and demonstrate the growing scholarly attention to toxic leadership within educational contexts.

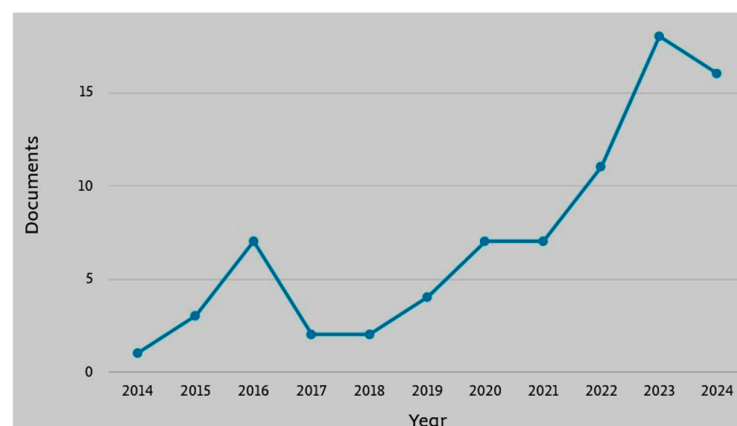


Figure 1. Annual number of peer-reviewed journal articles on toxic leadership in education (2014–2024), based on the Scopus search strategy described above.

Theoretical Framework: The framework proposed in this section is a synthesis derived from the key leadership theories and thematic findings identified in the reviewed literature, integrating concepts from toxic leadership, emotional intelligence, and the transformational leadership model in school management. In all sectors of business and workplaces, toxic leadership traits can be found. Among these traits, the so-called “Dark Triad”—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—are particularly relevant as they describe socially aversive personality features that contribute to toxic leadership behaviors (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; McCleskey, 2013; Çoban, 2022). On the question of what causes this, Lipman-Blumen (2005, 2010) emphasizes that toxic leaders may exhibit deliberately or through incompetence toxic behaviour which can be disastrous for the workforce and their organization. What makes this phenomenon surprising is that there are psychological and existential drivers that compel followers to tolerate or even enable such leaders, particularly in structured environments (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). The consequences of toxic leadership traits are significant. Saleem et al. (2022) illustrated with several examples how toxic leadership diminishes organizational commitment and increases emotional exhaustion.

3. Key Concepts in Toxic Leadership

3.1. Common Traits of Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership combines self-centered behaviors that harm an organization and its members (Sam, 2021; Xia et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2023; Mehraein et al., 2023; Timur & Duygu, 2024). Key behavioural traits include:

- I. Authoritarian Leadership: Excessive control over others, limiting creativity and autonomy.
- II. Narcissism: Leaders with an inflated sense of self-importance, seeking personal gain.
- III. Self-Promotion: Prioritizing personal interests, avoiding responsibility and taking undue credit.
- IV. Unpredictability: Erratic moods create an unstable work environment.
- V. Abusive Supervision: Hostile behaviors like belittling or unfairly holding subordinates accountable.
- VI. Gender Bias: Teachers may experience gender discrimination or sexual harassment by their school leadership.

These behaviors lead to decreased morale, stress, burnout, and mental health issues, ultimately undermining both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness (Wolor et al., 2022). The consequences of toxic leadership traits can be seen in particular settings, for example, Branson et al. (2024) discuss the rising stress and burnout among school leaders in Australia, which is exacerbated by toxic leadership environments, offering a critical lens on how institutional pressures contribute to leadership dysfunction. Likewise, Ahmed et al. (2025) provide a comprehensive analysis of how toxic leadership contributes to counterproductive work behaviors, which aligns with the negative outcomes identified in educational settings, such as reduced morale and productivity. In fact, the notion of the “dark side” of leadership has gained increasing attention in recent years, as researchers have recognized that the traditionally romanticized view of leadership may not always align with the realities of organizational dynamics (Fatima et al., 2018). In the context of education, this “dark side” can manifest in various forms, such as toxic leadership, unethical decision-making, and the exploitation of power for personal gain (Singh et al., 2019; Fatima et al., 2018).

In comparison with other leadership styles, toxic leadership stands in stark contrast to more constructive approaches such as transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and servant leadership (Eva et al., 2018). While transformational leadership fosters collaboration, motivation, and a shared vision to inspire followers and drive positive change, toxic

leadership often relies on authoritarian control and self-interest (Leithwood & Slegers, 2006). Similarly, servant leadership emphasizes the well-being of others, promoting ethical decision-making and fostering a culture of mutual respect and accountability (which is starkly different from the self-serving nature of toxic leadership (Eva et al., 2018; Purwani Setyaningrum et al., 2020)).

Moreover, the inclusion of transactional leadership (Bass, 2000) in this comparison provides insight into the nuances of leadership. Transactional leaders rely on reward and punishment systems, which, when applied effectively, may help manage order and behavior without crossing into the harmful territory of toxic leadership. However, when misapplied, transactional leadership can also contribute to a restrictive and controlling environment that stifles creativity and morale.

As toxic leadership is often characterized by destructive behaviors, understanding how it contrasts with and interacts with other leadership styles is crucial to addressing the challenges it poses in educational settings. Theoretical frameworks like transformational leadership and servant leadership offer potential antidotes to toxic behaviors, emphasizing ethical leadership and collaboration as opposed to control and manipulation (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Snow et al., 2021). Figure 2 illustrates key behavioral traits of toxic leadership in education. These traits have been identified by researchers (Snow et al., 2021) who have studied the phenomenon and investigated teachers' experiences with the dark side of leadership.



Figure 2. Frequently Identified Behavioural Traits of Toxic Leadership in Education.

3.2. Contextual Factors Shaping Leadership Behavior and Effectiveness

Several factors have been identified as influencing the effectiveness of educational leadership, including the size of the school, the gender and age of the leader, and the unique circumstances that may arise in different educational settings (Singh et al., 2019). For instance, larger school environments may require a more centralized decision-making process, while smaller institutions may benefit from a more collaborative and inclusive approach. Similarly, the gender and age of the leader can also play a role in shaping the leadership style and its perceived effectiveness, as societal expectations and cultural norms may influence the expectations and perceptions of followers (Pelletier, 2010).

In many educational systems, leadership styles are also influenced by cultural expectations. For instance, collectivist cultures may prioritize collaborative leadership, while individualistic societies may foster more authoritative approaches. Understanding these cultural nuances can help in designing leadership programs that are responsive to diverse environments (Lam, 2002; Or & Berkovich, 2023; Çoğaltay & Boz, 2023). Furthermore, special circumstances, such as periods of crisis or rapid change, may necessitate a more

adaptable and flexible leadership style, as the traditional approaches may prove less effective in navigating the complexities of these situations (Nasim et al., 2023; Fatima et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2019).

These contextual factors may also obscure the presence of toxic leadership. In hierarchical or highly authoritative educational structures, toxic leadership may be normalized or overlooked due to cultural acceptance of rigid power dynamics. Additionally, toxic behaviors may manifest differently depending on school size, crisis situations, or the demographic composition of leadership, making them harder to detect in certain contexts (Mahlangu, 2017). This could explain why many published studies focus on defining toxic leadership but provide limited empirical analysis of its long-term effects in educational settings. Similarly, research exploring how different leadership styles interact with toxic behaviors remains sparse (Fatima et al., 2018). Additionally, while emotional intelligence is often cited as a remedy, its practical application within school leadership remains underexplored (Jamli & Salim, 2020).

The majority of the published studies reviewed here were focused on defining toxic leadership, with few examining the long-term effects of toxic leadership in educational settings. Furthermore, few studies assess how different leadership styles interact with toxic behaviors (Fatima et al., 2018). Additionally, while emotional intelligence is often cited as a remedy, its application within school leadership remains underexplored (Jamli & Salim, 2020).

3.3. Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Leadership as Antidotes

Contrary to toxic leadership, both transformational and ethical leadership are considered effective countermeasures for mitigating toxic leadership traits. Ethical leadership is characterized by fairness, transparency, and accountability (Arar & Saiti, 2022), whereas transformational leadership emphasizes motivation and vision. Previous research has often failed to distinguish between these two leadership styles, creating inconsistencies in proposed solutions for toxic leadership. While transformational leadership can inspire positive change (Bass & Riggio, 2006), ethical leadership ensures adherence to moral and ethical standards (Arif, 2019). Rather than being opposing frameworks, these leadership styles should be viewed as complementary approaches that together provide a more holistic solution to addressing toxic leadership.

In exploring the “dark side” of educational leadership, it is essential to recognize that leadership effectiveness is influenced not only by the individual leader but also by the broader context in which leadership occurs. For example, Argyropoulou and Lintzerakou (2025) argue that effective educational leaders must adapt their leadership practices to the unique context of their institution. They emphasize that factors such as societal values, cultural norms and external pressures play a significant role in shaping ethical leadership practices. Leadership in education must align with these contextual variables to be truly effective. This perspective highlights the importance of considering leadership in a dynamic and context-sensitive way, which is crucial when examining the complexities of toxic leadership. Arar and Saiti (2022) emphasize the critical role of ethical leadership in educational contexts, highlighting how leaders’ values and decision-making processes can significantly influence the ethical climate within schools. Their research suggests that ethical leadership, when practiced effectively, can mitigate moral dilemmas and enhance decision-making among school administrators, fostering a positive organizational culture.

While the dark side of leadership can manifest in various ways, certain contextual factors, such as cultural norms, school size, gender and age of the leader, can influence the prevalence and nature of these negative leadership behaviors. For example,

Palmer et al. (2025) emphasize the significance of cultural parameters, as cultural norms can moderate the relationship between destructive leadership and followers' job satisfaction, illustrating that the impact of toxic leadership may vary across different cultural contexts. Likewise, school size has been identified as a potential factor that can shape the dynamics of the *dark side*. Larger schools may offer more opportunities for leaders to engage in maladaptive behaviors, such as micromanaging, abusive supervision or the exploitation of power (Itzkovich et al., 2020). Additionally, the gender and age of educational leaders have also been explored in relation to the dark side. Some studies suggest that female leaders may be more susceptible to certain forms of the dark side, such as workplace bullying or relationship conflicts, due to gendered perceptions and societal expectations. Conversely, younger leaders may be more prone to overconfidence or impulsive decision-making, while older leaders may exhibit passivity or resistance to change (Mehraein et al., 2023; Pelletier, 2010; Singh et al., 2019).

Understanding these contextual factors is crucial in developing targeted interventions and strategies to address the dark side of educational leadership. The conceptual framework proposed in this review is derived from the synthesis of theoretical perspectives, particularly those of Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, Bass's transformational leadership model, and the toxic leadership traits outlined by Schyns and Schilling (2013).

4. Strategies for Resilience and Emotional Intelligence

The dark side of educational leadership poses significant challenges for leaders, followers and the broader educational community. Developing resilience and emotional intelligence can be key forces in navigating these complex dynamics. Resilience, in the context of educational leadership, encompasses the ability to adapt, recover and even thrive in the face of adverse conditions, stress and the potentially harmful effects of the dark side (Mehraein et al., 2023; Fatima et al., 2018). Leaders who cultivate resilience are better equipped to manage their own well-being, maintain a positive outlook and effectively support their teams and organizations (Spain et al., 2016). In this context, the work of Galdames-Calderón (2023) emphasizes the role of distributed leadership in improving school effectiveness, which may serve as an antidote to toxic leadership practices by fostering collaboration and shared responsibility among educators. In the same manner, emotional intelligence (EI) can further enhance a leader's capacity to address the negative impacts of toxic leadership by equipping them with the ability to manage both their own emotions and the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Educational leaders with high emotional intelligence are often better able to build strong relationships, foster trust, and navigate the interpersonal dynamics that are so critical in the field of education (Jamli & Salim, 2020; Boateng, 2023).

Beyond individual traits, the specific leadership styles employed by principals significantly influence the behavior and overall environment for teachers. For instance, Hoque and Raya (2023) found that democratic and transformational leadership styles positively impact teachers' emotional and pro-social behaviors, highlighting the importance of leaders adopting approaches that foster positive staff relations and a supportive school climate. In contrast to transformational leadership, toxic leadership behaviors, such as abusive supervision and narcissism, significantly increase turnover intentions among employees. Understanding how destructive leaders behave and predate (McCleskey, 2013; Mackey et al., 2021) can offer valuable context to these dynamics, highlighting that leaders often rely on factors such as followers' performance and personality when choosing whom to aim their destructive behavior. There is some evidence to suggest the moderating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship. Employees with higher emotional intelligence

appear to be more capable of coping with the negative effects of toxic leadership, suggesting that emotional intelligence can serve as a buffer, reducing the likelihood of turnover despite challenging work environments (Lopes et al., 2025). This aligns with the general conception that the emotional intelligence of both teachers and leaders can improve their ability to deal with diverse emotional responses and foster a collaborative environment (Panagopoulos & Anastasiou, 2023). Rodrigues et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) for leaders in fostering a positive work environment. Leaders with high EI, such as empathy and self-regulation, enhance employee satisfaction and reduce the risk of a toxic work environment that can lead to dissatisfaction and turnover. Similarly, teachers with high EI create a supportive, collaborative atmosphere that improves classroom dynamics and relationships. Together, the emotional intelligence of both leaders and teachers is essential for building a healthy, engaged school culture that promotes job satisfaction and reduces turnover. For instance, regular training in conflict resolution, mindfulness and stress management can equip leaders with tools to manage their emotional responses. Schools that implement mentorship programs where experienced leaders guide new leaders can also create a supportive network to strengthen resilience (Iordanides et al., 2014; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Kilag et al., 2023).

Given the increasing recognition of the impact of toxic leadership in education, schools must adopt structured interventions to mitigate its effects. One practical step is to implement early detection mechanisms, such as leadership self-assessments and peer reviews, to identify and address toxic behaviors before they escalate. Additionally, incorporating mandatory training on conflict resolution and emotional intelligence can help school leaders develop self-regulation and effective communication skills, reducing the risk of toxic leadership behaviors taking root.

5. Success Stories with Examples and Case Studies

Toxic leadership in educational settings can have profound negative effects on both teachers and students, leading to burnout, disengagement, and diminished school performance (Rashid et al., 2019). Addressing these issues requires targeted strategies that can reshape leadership behaviors and foster a supportive and positive school culture (Kalkan et al., 2020). By focusing on emotional intelligence, leadership development, conflict resolution, collaboration, mentorship, and ethical leadership, schools can mitigate the harmful impacts of toxic leadership. These strategies empower leaders to adopt healthier, more inclusive leadership styles, which in turn benefit the entire educational community. This approach not only improves the well-being of teachers but also enhances the overall learning environment for students.

Table 1 contains some frequently reported toxic leadership traits in educational settings and some possible strategies to prevent their proliferation. Each strategy is followed by some advantages and possible limitations for mitigating toxic leadership traits.

Emotional intelligence (EI) training for school leaders helps enhance their self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. By strengthening these areas, school leaders become better equipped to manage their own emotions and recognize and respond to the emotions of others. This reduces the likelihood of toxic behaviors, such as micromanagement, aggression, or insensitivity. Toxic leadership traits often stem from low emotional intelligence, and leaders with higher EI can create a supportive and understanding work environment, thus reducing stress and conflict among teachers. Studies have shown that emotionally intelligent leaders foster positive relationships, reduce burnout, and improve organizational outcomes (Azeez & Aboobaker, 2024; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). For instance, emotional intelligence training can help principals and vice-principals become more

attuned to the needs of their staff, improving communication and reducing instances of authoritarian behavior or emotional neglect.

Table 1. Some strategies that may prevent the proliferation of Toxic Leadership Traits in an Educational Setting.

Toxic Leadership Behavior	Strategy	Advantages	Limitations	Relevant References
Micromanagement	Emotional Intelligence Training	Improves empathy, reduces control-based behaviors	It may take time to see significant changes	Azeez and Aboobaker (2024) ; Schyns and Schilling (2013)
Lack of Empathy	Leadership Development Programs	Fosters understanding and trust	Requires commitment from school leaders	Peng and Huang (2024) ; Schyns and Schilling (2013)
Aggressive Communication	Conflict Resolution Workshops	Reduces hostility, fosters open communication	Requires leaders to be receptive to feedback	Şenol and Taş (2024)
Authoritarian Control	Collaborative Leadership Models	Increases teacher involvement, enhances cooperation	May face resistance from traditional leadership styles	Orunbon and Ibikunle (2023) ; Yengkopiong (2024)
Teacher Alienation	Mentorship and Peer Support Programs	Reduces isolation, increases teacher morale	Needs a supportive environment for success	Friesen and Brown (2022)
Unethical Behavior/Favoritism	Cultural and Ethical Leadership Training	Promotes fairness and inclusivity	Requires ongoing reinforcement and commitment	Yengkopiong (2024) ; Azeez and Aboobaker (2024)

Leadership development programs that focus on enhancing the skills and competencies of school leaders, particularly in areas like ethical decision-making, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution, are also helpful ([Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020](#)). These programs can provide leaders with the tools to handle stress and difficult situations without resorting to toxic behaviors. When leaders are well-prepared through proper training, they are less likely to engage in abusive or coercive methods. Providing such development opportunities can help prevent toxic leadership by promoting more positive leadership styles. According to [Peng and Huang \(2024\)](#), toxic leadership behaviors can be mitigated when leaders receive training that emphasizes empathy, ethical conduct, and collaboration. These programs can ensure that leaders understand the importance of fostering a positive school culture, reducing the likelihood of adopting destructive leadership traits.

Conflict resolution workshops equip school leaders with the skills to address and resolve disputes constructively. Leaders learn to manage conflicts without resorting to punitive or hostile behaviors, fostering an environment of respect and collaboration. Leaders who lack conflict resolution skills often engage in behaviors such as micromanagement or hostile communication, which contribute to toxic work environments. Providing leaders with the tools to resolve conflicts effectively helps prevent these negative behaviors from escalating. [Şenol and Taş \(2024\)](#) highlight that micromanagement and aggressive behaviors can be counteracted by training leaders in conflict resolution strategies, helping create a healthier school climate. These workshops teach leaders how to handle disputes calmly and effectively, which in turn leads to a more cooperative and supportive environment for teachers.

Adopting collaborative leadership models is another powerful strategy. This approach shifts from a top-down, authoritarian style to a more democratic and participatory one, where school leaders involve teachers and staff in decision-making processes. By fostering shared leadership responsibilities, collaborative models promote a more inclusive and less hierarchical school culture. Toxic leaders often maintain control through autocratic decision-making and disregard the input of others. Collaborative leadership, however,

promotes shared responsibility, empowering teachers and reducing feelings of alienation and frustration. As shown by [Orunbon and Ibikunle \(2023\)](#), leaders who encourage collaboration are less likely to engage in toxic behaviors, such as workplace incivility or bullying, because teachers feel more valued and respected. When leaders adopt a collaborative approach, they foster trust and inclusivity, which can mitigate the risk of toxic behaviors.

Mentorship and peer support programs offer teachers opportunities to receive guidance from more experienced colleagues and support from their peers. This creates a network of support within the school, promoting a sense of belonging and community. Toxic leadership often thrives in environments where isolation and lack of support are prevalent, and providing teachers with mentorship and peer support helps counteract these issues. Studies, such as those by [Friesen and Brown \(2022\)](#), show that mentorship programs foster collaboration and trust, which can reduce the negative impacts of toxic leadership. Teachers who feel supported by their peers and leaders are less likely to experience burnout or disengagement, creating a more positive and resilient school environment.

Cultural and ethical leadership training focuses on teaching leaders to respect diversity, promote fairness, and adhere to ethical standards. This training helps leaders create a positive organizational culture aligned with the values of respect and fairness. Toxic leadership behaviors often involve unethical practices, such as favoritism, discrimination, or exploitation. Cultural and ethical leadership training equips leaders with the tools to recognize and avoid these behaviors. According to [Yengkopiong \(2024\)](#), leaders who understand the importance of ethical behavior and inclusivity are less likely to engage in toxic leadership practices. By promoting ethical leadership, schools can prevent the development of toxic cultures and create environments where fairness and respect are prioritized.

By implementing these strategies—emotional intelligence training, leadership development, conflict resolution, collaborative leadership, mentorship, and cultural and ethical training—schools can significantly reduce the proliferation of toxic leadership behaviors. These strategies not only improve the leadership styles of school leaders but also create a more supportive, inclusive, and healthy environment for teachers and students. Leaders who are emotionally intelligent, well-trained, and committed to fairness and collaboration are less likely to engage in toxic behaviors, fostering a positive school culture where teachers feel supported, valued, and motivated. As these strategies become part of the school culture, they create an environment that discourages toxic behaviors, leading to better school performance, improved teacher morale, and, ultimately, better outcomes for students.

Recognizing and addressing the dark side of educational leadership is a crucial but often overlooked imperative. It is not merely an academic exercise, but a critical step in fostering healthy, effective educational environments that prioritize student success. Toxic leadership behaviors, such as unethical decision-making, exploitation of power and a lack of transparency, can have far-reaching consequences ([Alanezi, 2024](#)). These detrimental practices can lead to high teacher turnover rates, decreased morale and ultimately, hinder the academic achievement and overall well-being of students. Confronting and mitigating the dark side of educational leadership is essential for cultivating learning communities where all stakeholders—from administrators to teachers and students—can thrive.

There are several studies which highlight the importance of leadership behaviors in shaping job satisfaction and professional satisfaction, emphasizing that effective leadership significantly enhances the work environment and academic outcomes as leadership can affect job satisfaction and performance of teachers ([Koutouzis & Malliara, 2017](#); [Panagopoulos et al., 2023](#); [Ibarra et al., 2023](#)), this indicates that the consequences of toxic leadership practices are far-reaching and severe. Furthermore, the detrimental effects of

toxic leaders can be substantial, as meta-analyses have demonstrated. These negative impacts can encompass reduced job satisfaction, increased stress and burnout and impaired organizational performance. To better illustrate these challenges, exploring real-world case studies can offer valuable insights. Understanding the dark side of leadership can be more effectively achieved through concrete examples, which vividly show how toxic leadership, unethical decision-making and the exploitation of power manifest in educational settings (Braun et al., 2018).

Recent research suggests that the “dark side” of leadership, including toxic behaviors, ethical lapses and the exploitation of power, is not limited to the business world. In fact, the education sector may be particularly vulnerable to such dysfunctional leadership due to the inherent hierarchies, resource constraints and political nature of many educational institutions (Bess & Goldman, 2001; Windsor, 2017). The existing literature provides valuable insights into the realities of unethical leadership in educational settings. Studies have revealed that the dark side of leadership often manifests in the form of authoritarian, narcissistic and psychopathic behaviors, collectively described as the ‘dark triad’ traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and further explored within Goleman’s Dark Triad framework (Arif, 2019). These destructive leadership practices can include the abuse of subordinates, disregard for ethical principles and a single-minded pursuit of personal gain at the expense of the greater good (Windsor, 2017). The prevalence of such behaviors is not insignificant, with some studies reporting that up to a third of employees have experienced destructive leadership “often” (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Wolor et al., 2022; Dahlan et al., 2024). Clearly, this is a pervasive issue that requires urgent attention.

A leader’s ability to share power, empower subordinates and encourage participatory decision-making is vital to creating a positive school culture. Empowered teachers and staff are more likely to be engaged, motivated and aligned with the institution’s vision, reducing the potential for toxic leadership to take root (Hoque & Raya, 2023). However, the reality is that many educational institutions struggle with the “dark side” of leadership, where leaders exhibit destructive behaviors such as authoritarianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, leading to a deterioration of the school’s culture and environment (Arif, 2019). Travis et al. (2024) explore the role of dark personality traits in unethical decision-making, highlighting that individuals with high levels of narcissism and other dark triad traits are more likely to justify unethical actions through moral disengagement. This process, where individuals rationalize their behavior to avoid guilt, can contribute to the escalation of unethical decisions over time. These findings are particularly relevant in educational settings, where such leaders may foster toxic environments that negatively impact both teachers and students.

Understanding and addressing the influence of dark personality traits is crucial for mitigating toxic leadership in educational institutions. Several studies highlight the severity of this issue, with researchers documenting real-world examples of how the “dark side” of educational leadership can manifest in practice. One study reported a prevalence rate of about 11% of destructive leadership behaviours in the Netherlands, with a third of employees reporting that they experienced such behaviours (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). These findings underscore the alarming reach and impact of toxic leadership in educational settings. In another study, it was observed that leadership ambiguity and the “system” pressures on leaders in universities and K-12 schools often lead to behaviours that are not adequately explained by existing leadership theories (Bess & Goldman, 2001).

In educational settings, the authoritarian leadership style has been observed to contribute significantly to the burnout of teachers and the disengagement of students. Research by Itzkovich et al. (2020) highlights that in large educational environments, an authoritative approach may inadvertently foster an atmosphere of micromanagement, where teachers

feel stripped of autonomy and control. This can lead to high levels of stress and dissatisfaction, as seen in various case studies across educational institutions (Singh et al., 2019). For instance, a high school principal who maintained strict control over instructional methods and teacher performance without allowing for professional input created a toxic culture where staff morale was consistently low. The negative consequences were not confined to teachers alone but extended to students, who exhibited signs of disengagement due to the oppressive atmosphere (Landay et al., 2018).

Leaders who assert psychopathic tendencies, including a lack of empathy and an overemphasis on control, create environments where both teacher and student well-being are compromised. These tendencies are correlated with lower leadership effectiveness, as teachers, like other staff members, reported higher levels of job dissatisfaction, increased turnover intentions and negative effects on their mental health (Landay et al., 2018). Additionally, the integration of transactional leadership in these environments, as noted by Itzkovich et al. (2020), can further exacerbate the situation. The reliance on reward and punishment systems, without fostering an intrinsic motivation to succeed, often results in a disengaged workforce. This model contrasts sharply with transformational leadership, which, when practiced effectively, can mitigate such negative effects by promoting emotional intelligence and resilience among both staff and students (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Peng and Huang (2024) studied the negative consequences of authoritarian leadership in education. Their research revealed that this leadership style harms students' well-being by causing emotional exhaustion, which in turn reduces their overall sense of well-being. Furthermore, students with higher levels of narcissism were less affected by emotional exhaustion compared to those with lower narcissism. These results emphasize the need for educational leaders to adopt more empathetic and supportive leadership styles to safeguard students' emotional health and well-being. Likewise, Snow et al. (2021) also examined toxic leadership in schools, providing further evidence of its detrimental impact on educators. Their study identified significant consequences of toxic leadership, such as decreased job satisfaction, reduced professional agency, and heightened attrition rates. Teachers reported negative effects not only on their professional lives but also on their personal well-being, including anxiety, depression and physical symptoms like migraines and exhaustion. Moreover, Snow et al. (2021) found that toxic leadership behaviors like narcissism, self-promotion, and authoritarian control often lead to a "toxic workplace culture," where staff morale plummets and negative behaviors such as incivility and mistrust spread among colleagues. These findings emphasize the emotional and psychological toll that authoritarian leadership styles take on both students and staff. An authoritarian leadership style in educational settings not only impacts teacher well-being but also diminishes the overall educational experience, affecting both staff morale and student outcomes. To prevent these outcomes, schools must recognize the harmful effects of toxic leadership behaviors and consider integrating more supportive and collaborative leadership practices.

The evidence discussed above highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of educational leadership, one that considers the unique systemic factors to effectively address the challenges posed by the dark side of leadership in academic settings. Deviations from positive leadership ideals can take many forms, including the abuse of subordinates, resulting in the proliferation of toxic leadership behaviors (Arif, 2019; Windsor, 2017).

These examples reveal the practical consequences of toxic leadership. Leaders who exhibit narcissistic tendencies may prioritize their own self-interest over the well-being of the institution and its members. This behavior can create a toxic organizational culture that discourages innovation, stifles dissent and undermines trust (Arif, 2019; Fatima et al., 2018). The negative effects of such leadership practices—ranging from abusive supervision

to workplace bullying—can severely affect both individuals and organizations, eroding morale and productivity.

Leadership behaviors, both positive and negative, often transcend sectors, and comparing education with other sectors can help identify challenges within the educational context while offering possible solutions or mitigation strategies. The contexts and pressures that leaders face in academia differ significantly from those in the corporate or public sectors. Educational leaders must navigate complex power dynamics, political landscapes, and a diverse array of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and the broader community.

Evidence from other sectors reveals that leadership ambiguity and a lack of accountability can exacerbate toxic leadership behaviors—a challenge particularly prevalent in educational settings due to hierarchical structures and resource limitations. Unlike many other sectors, where toxic leadership primarily affects employees, educational settings present a unique dimension: the impact on students. Toxic leadership not only harms the staff and organizational culture but also has detrimental consequences for students. A school environment dominated by toxic leadership can foster a climate of fear, disengagement, and reduced academic performance, which undermines the educational experience and outcomes for students.

One strategy to reduce the proliferation of toxic leadership traits in school settings is transformational leadership, which we will explore in the following section.

6. Transformational Leadership as a Potential Solution

By developing resilience and emotional intelligence, educational leaders can better mitigate the negative impacts of the dark side, foster a more positive and supportive organizational culture, and ultimately drive sustainable and meaningful change within their institutions (Itzkovich et al., 2020; Vera et al., 2020).

In light of the potential “dark side” of educational leadership, the concept of transformational leadership has emerged as a promising approach that may offer a more positive and effective path forward. Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating followers, fostering a sense of shared vision and empowering individuals to reach their full potential (Leithwood & Slegers, 2006). This leadership style has been associated with improved student outcomes, enhanced teacher satisfaction and the creation of a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. Studies have suggested that transformational leadership can help mitigate the negative aspects of the “dark side” by promoting a culture of trust, collaboration and ethical decision-making, and this can help mitigate the negative aspects by promoting a culture of trust, collaboration and ethical decision-making (Snow et al., 2021; Arifin, 2024). However, some scholars have argued that transformational leadership may not be a panacea for the dark side of educational leadership (Waldman et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2023) as there is some evidence to suggest that transformational leadership which can foster a positive and inclusive environment may also inadvertently enable or overlook certain negative behaviors, such as charismatic leaders exploiting their influence or prioritizing their own agenda over the collective good (Snow et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025). Likewise, although transformational leadership can create a culture of collaboration and trust (Chen et al., 2018; Friedman, 2016; Anastasiou & Ntokas, 2024), it is important to acknowledge the other leadership styles prevalent in educational settings, such as transactional leadership which is often more rule-bound and less dynamic in fostering positive change or servant leadership, which emphasizes the well-being of others. These styles also have implications for how leaders may manifest the *dark side*, and understanding these nuances is key to selecting the right leadership approach for different contexts. Apparently, different leadership styles, such as

transactional, transformational and servant leadership, can each have unique implications for how the dark side of leadership may manifest (Geroy et al., 2008; Braun et al., 2018; Itzkovich et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2018; Arif, 2019; Mackey et al., 2021). Recognizing these differences and adapting leadership approaches accordingly is crucial in navigating the complex challenges of the dark side in educational settings to deal with toxic leadership. For example, while transformational leadership is often discussed as a *solution* to the dark side of leadership, it is important to explore other leadership styles that may offer valuable insights or alternative approaches to address the challenges of the 'dark side' in educational settings. Furthermore, transactional leadership and servant leadership contribute to the overall dynamics of leadership in educational contexts and may provide different perspectives on mitigating the potential for the dark side to emerge (Atasoy, 2020; Anderson & Sun, 2015).

However, transactional leadership is based on an exchange of services for rewards, with the leader maintaining control over the rewards (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This style may be more prone to the dark side, as the focus is on compliance rather than intrinsic motivation. Transactional leaders may be more likely to engage in unethical behavior or exploit their power for personal gain (Chen et al., 2018; Deluga, 1990). This leadership approach can create a culture of extrinsic motivation, where followers are primarily driven by the promise of rewards rather than a shared sense of purpose or intrinsic desire to contribute (Deci et al., 2017)

7. Reducing the Proliferation of Dark Leadership

There are several psychological and emotional aspects of leaders that may lead to toxic behaviors (Spain et al., 2016). The dark triad of personality traits, comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy, has been linked to abusive supervision and exploitative leadership in organizational settings (Arif, 2019). Leaders who possess a high degree of sociopolitical savvy and the ability to adaptively deploy various leadership tactics may be more inclined to leverage their dark personality tendencies when they believe it will serve their personal interests or lead to favorable organizational outcomes, even if those tactics come at the expense of their followers' well-being or the institution's ethical standards (Cruickshank & Collins, 2015). Stress and the need for control may also contribute to the emergence of dark leadership in education. Leaders under high levels of stress may resort to more authoritarian, micromanaging and impulsive behaviors to assert their dominance and cope with the pressures they face (Spain et al., 2016). Insecurity, the desire for social status and a lack of emotional intelligence can further exacerbate these tendencies. Furthermore, power dynamics within educational leadership often dictate the balance between ethical and toxic behaviors. Leaders who abuse their authority may exploit their position for personal gain, but those who use power responsibly can leverage it to implement positive change and support their teams. A leader's ability to share power, empower subordinates, and encourage participatory decision-making is vital to creating a positive school culture. Empowered teachers and staff are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and aligned with the institution's vision, reducing the potential for toxic leadership to take root.

The 'dark side' of educational leadership can have devastating consequences for both the individuals involved and the organization (Fatima et al., 2018; Windsor, 2017; Arif, 2019). Abusive and unethical leadership practices can erode trust, morale and overall organizational performance.

To address these challenges and reduce the likelihood of dark leadership taking hold, educational institutions must adopt a comprehensive approach. A key aspect is the need for a stronger focus on ethical leadership training and development. Educational leaders, both current and aspiring, must acquire the necessary skills to create a positive, supportive

and empowering work environment. Ethical leadership programs should emphasize the development of empathy, transparency and accountability, equipping leaders to navigate the complexities of educational institutions without resorting to toxic behaviors (Arif, 2019).

Another crucial issue is the implementation of robust accountability measures. This includes introducing 360-degree evaluation systems, whistleblower protections and clear disciplinary procedures for unethical conduct. Establishing a culture of transparency and open communication is vital. Staff members should feel empowered to raise concerns without fear of retaliation, fostering a healthier organizational environment that discourages the perpetuation of toxic leadership (Itzkovich et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2007).

Furthermore, educational institutions must prioritize the well-being and professional development of their staff. Providing resources and support for both leaders and educators is essential in mitigating the harmful effects of toxic leadership. By investing in the growth and well-being of their educators, schools can cultivate an environment that promotes innovation, collaboration and a sustained focus on student success (Anastasiou & Ntokas, 2024; Wolor et al., 2022).

8. The Challenges of a Rapidly Changing Educational System

As the landscape of education evolves and new challenges emerge for educational leaders. The rapid integration of technology, the rise of remote learning and shifting educational paradigms require leaders to adapt quickly and continuously. These changes bring about new complexities in decision-making and leadership strategies, creating a dynamic environment where the pressures on educational professionals, including leaders, are greater than ever. This ever-changing context presents challenges in maintaining quality education, ensuring equitable access and managing resources effectively. These stressors can sometimes lead to negative leadership behaviors, especially when the pressures of constant change become overwhelming (Branson et al., 2024).

While the vast majority of educational leaders are driven by an unwavering commitment to student success and the betterment of their institutions, a small but troubling number succumb to the temptation of abusing their power (Arif, 2019). The inherent complexity of educational leadership is a key factor in the emergence of the *dark side*. Educational leaders must navigate a web of competing stakeholder demands, limited resources and high-stakes accountability measures. In the face of such pressure, some resort to unethical decision-making, toxic leadership behaviors and the exploitation of their position for personal gain (Sam, 2021; Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2015; de Wet & Jacobs, 2021). These challenges can sometimes overwhelm leaders, leading them down a path where their actions negatively affect the entire educational ecosystem, including teachers, staff and students.

Figure 3 presents the Conceptual Model of Toxic Leadership in Educational Settings based on the literature reviewed in the present study. This issue of toxic leadership is a rapidly emerging subject in educational leadership research (Figure 1). To counteract the tendencies for toxic leadership and mitigate the dark side, educational leaders must cultivate emotional intelligence. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are often better able to build strong relationships, foster trust and navigate the interpersonal dynamics that are critical in the field of education (Jamli & Salim, 2020). Research by Panagopoulos and Anastasiou (2023) further emphasizes that emotional intelligence plays a key role in leadership effectiveness, particularly in contexts where leaders need to manage diverse emotional responses and foster a collaborative environment.

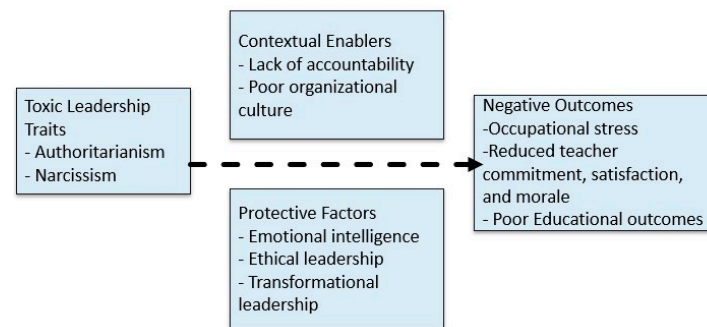


Figure 3. An illustration of the Conceptual Model of Toxic Educational Leadership Outcomes.

Although this review focuses on conceptual and psychological dimensions of toxic leadership, cross-cultural and post-COVID contexts merit attention. Cultural norms shape leadership perceptions; for example, [Lam \(2002\)](#) showed that organizational learning and leadership effectiveness vary by cultural setting. Similarly, [Çoğaltay and Boz \(2023\)](#) found that teacher responses to toxic leadership are influenced by power distance and individualism.

In times of sudden challenging situations, such as a significant change in the evaluation of schools or teachers or during the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural dynamics are relevant and can create stressful conditions for teachers. This can be a challenging situation for school leaders; in some cases, toxic leadership could evolve. For example, [Netolicky \(2020\)](#) emphasized how the COVID-19 crisis challenged traditional leadership, requiring greater emotional intelligence and adaptability of leadership in diverse and under crisis educational environments.

9. Discussion

This review focused on aspects of toxic leadership behaviors within educational settings and the strategies to counter their adverse effects. This study expands existing leadership theories by demonstrating that toxic leadership should not be examined in isolation but rather in relation to contextual variables such as school size, cultural norms, and leadership demographics. Unlike previous research that primarily focuses on toxic leadership traits, this study highlights how environmental and situational factors influence the way toxic behaviors manifest and are perceived in educational settings. By integrating emotional intelligence as a moderating factor, this study proposes a framework where leadership resilience serves as a key countermeasure to the spread of toxic leadership. The studies reviewed here indicate that toxic leadership, characterized by behaviors such as authoritarianism, narcissism, and abusive supervision, severely impacts educator morale, student engagement, and overall institutional effectiveness ([Singh et al., 2019](#); [Snow et al., 2021](#)). These harmful leadership traits are not frequently explored in leadership models, yet there is evidence suggesting the urgent need for addressing toxic leadership in schools through practical interventions ([Fatima et al., 2018](#); [Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)). The prevalence of such behaviors often contributes to a toxic organizational culture, which may also lead to increased organizational gossip, as noted by [Doğan and Aslan \(2024\)](#). Strategies like the development of emotional intelligence, leadership development programs, and collaborative leadership models present promising ways to reduce the harmful effects of toxic leadership ([Azeez & Aboobaker, 2024](#); [Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)). Emotional intelligence training, in particular, stands out as an effective approach to managing interpersonal challenges within educational leadership, helping leaders regulate their emotions and cultivate a positive school culture ([Lopes et al., 2025](#); [Spain et al., 2016](#)). In addition to the above, leadership development programs focused on ethical decision-making and occupational stress can also empower school leaders with the necessary skills to navigate

the complexities of educational environments and address toxic behaviors (Peng & Huang, 2024; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

As educational institutions face ongoing challenges, it is essential for leaders to gain trust, especially during times of crisis. Effective leadership becomes even more pronounced in such moments, as the dark side of leadership can have devastating consequences (Bess & Goldman, 2001). Toxic behaviors like authoritarianism, lack of empathy, or unethical decision-making can emerge under pressure and further divide institutions (Windsor, 2017). This breakdown in leadership hinders the school's ability to respond adaptively, make informed decisions, and support both staff and students, particularly when strong, ethical leadership is most needed (Vera et al., 2020). Moreover, school culture and contextual factors such as school size, gender, and the leader's age must be considered when mitigating the negative effects of toxic leadership (Orunbon & Ibikunle, 2023; Arar & Saiti, 2022).

Strategies for resilience, emotional intelligence development, and promoting transparency and accountability play an important role in addressing these challenges (Mehraein et al., 2023; Itzkovich et al., 2020). The integration of servant leadership and a positive leadership mindset can help counteract toxic leadership (Coetzer et al., 2017; Eva et al., 2018). Collaborative approaches, leveraging technology, and focusing on positive changes within the educational system are key elements in navigating the complexities of the dark side of educational leadership (Leithwood & Slegers, 2006; Yengkopiong, 2024).

A critical component of addressing the dark side is an inclusive approach to leadership development. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members, in leadership development programs ensures that leadership decisions are reflective of the needs and values of the entire school community (Atasoy, 2020; Arif, 2019). This inclusivity fosters transparency, accountability, and trust, which can help prevent the rise of toxic leadership behaviors and promote a culture of mutual respect and collaboration (Koutouzis & Malliara, 2017; Peng & Huang, 2024). To systematically counteract toxic leadership, education policymakers should consider embedding ethical leadership training and emotional intelligence assessments into leadership certification programs. Additionally, school governance boards should establish clear accountability structures, such as anonymous teacher feedback mechanisms and external leadership audits, to evaluate school leaders' effectiveness beyond traditional performance metrics. By institutionalizing these mechanisms, schools can create a leadership culture that prioritizes ethical decision-making, transparency, and well-being.

Ultimately, embracing the light within the dark side requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the individual, organizational, and systemic factors contributing to the emergence of negative leadership behaviors (Windsor, 2017; Argyropoulou & Lintzerakou, 2025). This approach fosters a more ethical, inclusive, and transformative educational landscape that empowers both leaders and the communities they serve (Fatima et al., 2018; Sam, 2021). Technological developments could help leadership. For example, the convergence of AI and HRM can empower educational leaders to anticipate risks and foster healthier work climates, serving as a counterbalance to toxic leadership (Anastasiou, 2025).

The studies reviewed in this work have practical significance for school leaders, policymakers, and teacher training. Schools should consider integrating leadership development modules focused on empathy, self-regulation, and constructive communication into professional development initiatives. The "dark side" of educational leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires a nuanced understanding. Addressing toxic leadership in educational settings requires a multifaceted approach that includes both transformational and ethical leadership. While transformational leadership fosters motivation and change, ethical leadership ensures fairness and integrity, making it essential for mitigating toxic leadership behaviors. Future research should further investigate toxic

leadership in different cultural contexts, including Greek primary education as highlighted by Tzortzos and Anastasiou (2025), to develop targeted interventions. The effectiveness of any leadership style is heavily influenced by contextual factors, such as school size, gender, age and the unique circumstances that educational institutions may face (Leithwood & Slegers, 2006; Heenan et al., 2023; Fatima et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2019). The examination of the “dark side” of educational leadership highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and complexities inherent in this field. By acknowledging the potential for negative leadership behaviors and their impact on educational institutions, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can work to develop strategies and frameworks that promote more effective, ethical and transformative forms of leadership. This includes defining the dark side of educational leadership, identifying its key characteristics and understanding the psychological factors that contribute to its emergence.

10. Conclusions and Implications for Practical Measures

This narrative review aimed to investigate the emergence, consequences, and mitigation of toxic leadership in educational settings. The study addressed three main questions: (1) the key factors contributing to the emergence of toxic leadership, (2) the impacts of such leadership on educators and students, and (3) strategies to mitigate its effects.

This narrative review explored the emergence, consequences, and mitigation strategies of toxic leadership in educational settings by addressing three key research questions: (1) What are the key factors contributing to the emergence of toxic leadership in educational contexts? (2) How do these toxic leadership behaviors impact educators and students? (3) What strategies and interventions can be implemented to mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership in schools?

Key factors contributing to the emergence of toxic leadership include a combination of personal traits and contextual influences. Toxic traits such as authoritarianism, narcissism, self-promotion, unpredictability, and abusive supervision were frequently identified as core behaviors that damage educational environments. Additionally, contextual variables such as school size, organizational structure, cultural norms, and leadership demographics—including the gender and age of school leaders—can obscure or exacerbate toxic behaviors. High-stress environments, hierarchical school systems, and cultural tolerance for authoritarianism may allow toxic leadership to persist or go unchallenged.

The impact of toxic leadership on educators and students is profound and multifaceted. Educators exposed to toxic leadership often report decreased morale, job dissatisfaction, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and increased intentions to leave the profession. These experiences also undermine their professional autonomy and commitment to the school. For students, the indirect effects manifest in diminished academic engagement and well-being, as toxic leadership disrupts the school climate and weakens instructional quality through its adverse influence on teachers.

To mitigate the effects of toxic leadership, a range of strategies has been identified. These include leadership development programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and communication skills. Emotional intelligence training enhances self-awareness and empathy, equipping leaders to better manage interpersonal dynamics and stress. Conflict resolution workshops help reduce aggression and improve collaboration, while collaborative leadership models promote inclusivity and shared decision-making. Mentorship and peer support networks offer protective resources to staff, reducing feelings of isolation. Finally, institutional mechanisms such as accountability structures, self-assessment tools, and early detection systems can help identify and address toxic behaviors proactively.

The findings suggest that mitigating toxic leadership requires a combination of personal development and systemic intervention. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these interventions across different cultural and educational contexts, particularly through longitudinal and comparative studies. Such work will support the design of evidence-based policies and training programs that promote ethical, emotionally intelligent, and transformational leadership in education.

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