

Designing an Empowerment Model for Developing Professional and Ethical Competencies of Primary School Managers

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The research aims to design an empowerment model for developing professional and ethical competencies in primary school managers.

Method: It employs a mixed exploratory (qualitative-quantitative) method, involving selected experts from the education organization for the qualitative part. The sample size was 17, following the saturation principle. The quantitative population included 1500 primary school managers in Tehran, with a sample size of 306 determined using Cochran's formula and random cluster sampling. Data were measured using semi-structured interviews and researcher-made questionnaires. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed and reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha (0.870). Data analysis used Strauss's method for content analysis, the Delphi technique, and structural equation modeling with SPSS22 and AMOS26.

Findings: Findings indicated that 75% of primary school managers' professional and ethical competencies relate to empowerment dimensions: Technical, Human, Cognitive, Communicative, Teamwork Skills, Initiative Skills. These can explain and predict competencies comprising Individual Characteristics, Management Skills, Organizational Factors, Entrepreneurial Competence, Business Competence, Leadership, Decision Making, Collaboration.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the study successfully designs an empowerment model that significantly contributes to the development of professional and ethical competencies among primary school managers. This model, grounded in comprehensive research and expert insights, demonstrates the vital role of empowerment in enhancing the essential managerial competencies needed for effective educational leadership in primary schools.

Keywords: Empowerment, Professional Competency, Ethical Competency.

1 Introduction

Recognizing and cultivating the capacities, competencies, and capabilities of human resources play a very decisive role in the survival and continuity of an organization in competitive environments. Managers of

organizations, with the globalization of trade, rapid technological change, continuous need for reorganization, and competition based on competence, face challenges. These changes challenge the skills, competencies, and abilities of organizational managers. In the shadow of these dynamic changes, managers' competencies must also be

continuously renewed, meaning that management development should be viewed as a strategic tool (Ramezpanah et al., 2020). Therefore, since the school is a sensitive and very important organization in society, it is necessary for its managers to possess the required competencies for this position and be selected accordingly. The competencies of a manager represent characteristics that demonstrate their utmost worthiness and suitability for the position in question. Experienced managers have the ability to analyze their own and their employees' behavior in the context of broad goals and formal relationships, and to exhibit professional behavior in line with organizational goals with comprehensiveness, depth of thought, and flexibility (Jacobs, 2018).

In schools, quality depends more than anything on the competence of managers. All expected school activities, including planning, teaching, evaluation, etc., are carried out under the supervision of the manager. Thus, it can be said that the effectiveness and efficiency of schools depend on the professional competencies of managers. If we only provide hardware facilities in the school structure, such as buildings and schoolyards, but do not have a skilled and competent manager to utilize these facilities, no benefit or result will be achieved. Undoubtedly, managers play a decisive role in the effectiveness of schools (Jafari Rad et al., 2019). Therefore, identifying and counting the characteristics and professional competencies of managers is not an easy task, as various social groups and layers, with different philosophies and viewpoints, have different expectations from managers, and rapid changes in science and technology also change the competencies required of managers to perform their duties (Abdollahi et al., 2014). As studies and background reviews show, professional competence refers to the emergence of specific behavioral characteristics in individuals and people. Some competency models emphasize specific technical skills of a job or occupational group, while others emphasize a combination of knowledge, abilities, skills, and other characteristics in a mix of individual, organizational, and professional competencies (Kamarei et al., 2021).

On this basis, one of the prerequisites for management is ethics, which creates a good company and enterprise. In other words, one of the important competencies of managers is ethical competence. Ethical competence is defined as problem-solving and decision-making skills for individuals, processes, and specific organizational tasks. Organizations must be effective in achieving their goals; ethics plays an important role in this context. There are many examples of

organizations that have failed in the field of ethics, paying exorbitant costs and sometimes even leading to bankruptcy. In contrast, organizations that meet ethical demands likely experience coordination within the organization and confidence externally, as well as the possibility of increased profit and effectiveness. Therefore, organizations must manage these issues (Ghamooshi et al., 2019).

Ethical behaviors are only part of ethical competence. Ethical competence is not synonymous with theoretical knowledge but is primarily related to the understanding of practical codes, laws, and guidelines. Ultimately, ethical guidelines cannot be a solid basis for ethical competence (Sadeghian gharaghiea et al., 2020). According to Pohling, Bezduch, Eigenstetter, Stumpf, & Strobel (2017), ethical competence includes deliberate actions and decisions in situations where responsibilities exist. Human resources hold themselves accountable to ethical principles and act in such a way that legal and economic standards are also observed. Organizations need the knowledge, opinions, energy, and creativity of all managers, from front-line to top-level (Pohling et al., 2016).

Therefore, to achieve professional and ethical competencies, organizations empower managers at all relevant organizational levels to encourage them to take initiative without pressure, value the collective interests of the organization with minimal supervision, and perform duties as owners of the organization. Empowering managers is an effective technique for increasing the productivity of managers and optimally using their individual and group capacities and abilities in line with organizational goals (Hassan Beigi et al., 2017). Empowerment means creating conditions that allow individuals to first perform their tasks with internal motivation and secondly with complete success, as empowerment is an inevitable program for more work with less expense (Sharifati et al., 2016). Empowerment is one of the challenges for managers in the modern age. Managers who are empowered must be more efficient in performing tasks than those who are not (Azeem & Altalhi, 2015).

Therefore, one of the main components and requirements in this matter is having a cultural and educational atlas model to rely on in order to develop and implement policies for promoting ethical and professional competence based on existing data. These atlases will contain databases, and there are various parameters with different topics in them. With the help of this information, policies for promoting ethical and professional competencies can be developed and implemented in a real environment. In this work, an elite,

committed, and specialized group from the field of educational management will be utilized. By properly using material and human resources, they will transform raw and talented individuals into creative, balanced, and developed human resources to realize the main goal of society, and this is the duty of the educational manager. It seems that the society under study is still far from an ideal state. Therefore, the general concern of the researcher as the main issue of this research is to present a model for developing the professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers based on the identification of empowerment dimensions.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study is applied in purpose and utilizes a mixed-method research approach, combining exploratory (qualitative and quantitative) methods. For the qualitative part, the Delphi method was employed, while the quantitative section was survey-based. Strauss's method was used for content analysis. The qualitative participants included all the experts and authorities from the Tehran Education Organization with experience in management and policy-making in primary schools, aiming for consensus through the Delphi method. The sample size in the qualitative part was determined to be 17, based on the principle of theoretical saturation. Initially, no specific sample size was set, and it continued until theoretical saturation was achieved after 17 interviews. In the qualitative approach, purposeful sampling of information-rich samples was used, and the researcher selected individuals from the pool of potential persons who could enrich the data collection process. Initially, for the empowerment expert interviews aimed at developing professional and ethical competencies in primary education, one key expert in the field was approached. After conducting interviews, other experts who were considered knowledgeable were identified in the same way. In the quantitative section, the statistical population included all 1500 primary school principals in Tehran. The sample size for this part was determined to be 306 using Cochran's formula, with 181 from public schools and 125 from private schools. The sampling method in the quantitative part was random cluster sampling.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was library-based, and the measurement tools included semi-structured interviews in the qualitative part and researcher-made questionnaires in the quantitative part, with questions derived from interview data. The questionnaire's validity was established in two ways: 1. face validity and 2. content validity. For face validity, the questionnaire was presented to a group of experts, and for content validity, calculations related to AVE and CR coefficients for questionnaire items were validated. The reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.870 using Cronbach's alpha test. Data in the qualitative part was analyzed using the Delphi technique, and in the quantitative part, structural equation modeling was used with SPSS22 and AMOS26 software.

3 Findings and Results

Considering the qualitative stages of the research derived from the experts' responses in the Delphi technique, the steps were as follows:

A- To the four-dimensional variable of "Managerial Empowerment," at the end of the first Delphi stage and based on expert opinions, one dimension described as "Communicative" was added, making it five dimensions. From the five-dimensional variable of "Managerial Empowerment," at the end of the second stage, one dimension described as "Social Intelligence" was removed, making it four dimensions. From the four-dimensional variable of "Managerial Empowerment," at the end of the third stage, two dimensions described as "Teamwork Skills" and "Initiative Skills" were added, making it six dimensions. Finally, the variable "Managerial Empowerment," after three qualitative Delphi stages in the fourth stage (decision and approval), had six dimensions: 1. Technical, 2. Human, 3. Cognitive, 4. Communicative, 5. Teamwork Skills, 6. Initiative Skills.

B- To the seven-dimensional variable of "Professional and Ethical Competencies," at the end of the first Delphi stage and based on expert opinions, one dimension described as 1. Decision-Making was added, making it eight dimensions. From the eight-dimensional variable of "Professional and Ethical Competencies," at the end of the second stage, one dimension described as "Interpersonal Characteristics" was removed. From the seven-dimensional variable of "Professional and Ethical Competencies," at the end of the third stage, one dimension described as "Collaboration" was added. Finally, the variable

"Professional and Ethical Competencies," after three qualitative Delphi stages in the fourth stage (decision and approval), had eight dimensions: 1. Individual Characteristics, 2. Management Skills, 3. Organizational Factors, 4. Entrepreneurial Competence, 5. Business

Competence, 6. Leadership, 7. Decision Making, 8. Collaboration.

The questionnaires developed from these dimensions showed high reliability with a coefficient of 0.870.

Figure 1

The Model with Standard Estimations

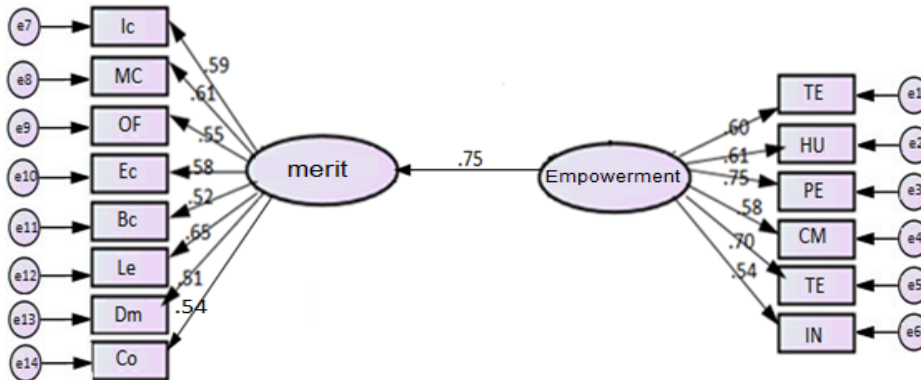


Figure 2

The Model with T-Values

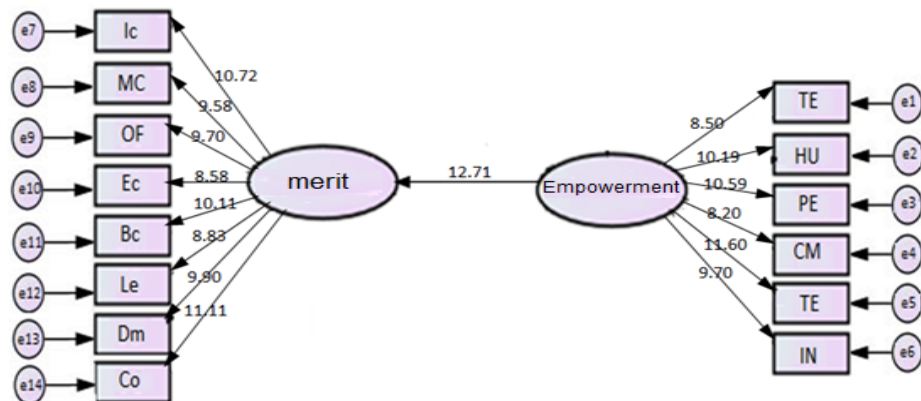


Table 1

Path Coefficients and t-values

Pathways	Path Coefficient (Standard Estimate)	t-value	Significance Level	Status
Professional and Ethical Competencies ← Individual Characteristics	0.59	10.72	0.000	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Management Skills	0.61	9.58	0.000	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Organizational Factors	0.55	9.70	0.000	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Entrepreneurial Competence	0.58	8.58	0.002	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Business Competence	0.52	10.11	0.003	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Leadership	0.65	8.83	0.000	Acceptance
Empowerment → Merit	0.75	12.71		

Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Decision Making	0.51	9.90	0.002	Acceptance
Professional and Ethical Competencies --> Collaboration	0.54	11.11	0.000	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Technical	0.60	8.50	0.000	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Human	0.61	10.19	0.001	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Cognitive	0.75	10.59	0.000	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Communicative	0.58	8.20	0.001	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Teamwork Skills	0.70	11.60	0.000	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Initiative Skills	0.54	9.70	0.001	Acceptance
Empowerment --> Professional and Ethical Competencies	0.75	12.71	0.000	Acceptance

Considering the presented model, the pathways between variables are the effectiveness of the concerned factors. In Figure 1, the factor load estimation, and in Figure 2, the t coefficients of each variable are shown. Table 1 shows the status of each dimension of empowerment for developing professional and ethical competencies of primary school principals through the estimation of standardized path coefficients (t-value) along with the factor load of each variable. All factor loads had a desirable status and the capability of measuring dimensions. Table 1 indicates that, based on structural model results, the relationship between components and sub-dimensions of empowerment for developing professional and ethical competencies of primary school principals is significant with t-values (above 1.96 for each model parameter according to the one percent error rule in rejecting the null hypothesis). Given the significance and positivity of these coefficients, it can be stated that there is a significant and positive effect between the components and sub-components of the empowerment dimensions for developing professional and ethical competencies of primary school principals.

Table 2

Goodness of Fit Indices for the Confirmatory Factor Model Based on the Original Model

Index	Achieved Value	Acceptable Value	Status
GFI	0.94	GFI > 90%	Acceptance
AGFI	0.93	AGFI > 90%	Acceptance
CFI	0.92	0.90 < CFI < 1	Acceptance
CMIN/df	1.89	Value less than 3	Acceptance
RMSEA	0.006	RMSEA < 0.1	Acceptance

The GFI index, indicating the amount of relative variance and covariance explained by the model, is above 0.9 for these models. The root mean square residual value, the difference between elements of the observed matrix in the sample group and the elements of the estimated or predicted matrices in this study, indicates a suitable explanation of covariances. The values of the fit indices like NFI, NNFI, IFI, and CFI also indicate a very suitable fit of the designed

model compared to other possible models. The powerful index of the root mean square error of approximation RMSEA for the path model is below 0.08, which is an acceptable value. The goodness-of-fit indices of the factor confirmation model based on the original model are shown in Table 2.

Based on the R2 value, it is evident that 75% of the professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers are dependent on the dimensions and components of empowerment, which include six dimensions: 1. Technical, 2. Human, 3. Cognitive, 4. Communicative, 5. Teamwork Skills, and 6. Initiative Skills. These dimensions can explain and predict the professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers, which comprise eight dimensions: 1. Individual Characteristics, 2. Management Skills, 3. Organizational Factors, 4. Entrepreneurial Competence, 5. Business Competence, 6. Leadership, 7. Decision Making, 8. Collaboration. In other words, the elements and components of empowerment are 75% effective in the professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The researcher in the current study aimed to provide a comprehensive model suitable for primary schools, which has been reviewed and approved by experts in the fields of organization, management, and ethics. The study of professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers with an empowerment approach in the current research shows that empowerment, after completing three stages of the Delphi qualitative technique in the fourth stage (decision and approval), consists of six dimensions: 1. Technical, 2. Human, 3. Cognitive, 4. Communicative, 5. Teamwork Skills, 6. Initiative Skills. Similarly, the variable "Professional and Ethical Competencies" after completing four qualitative Delphi stages, comprises eight dimensions: 1. Individual Characteristics, 2. Management Skills, 3. Organizational Factors, 4. Entrepreneurial Competence, 5. Business Competence, 6. Leadership, 7. Decision Making,

8. Collaboration. The findings of this research showed a significant and positive effect between the components and dimensions of professional and ethical competencies of primary school managers with an empowerment approach. These findings are consistent with the research results of previous studies (Becker & Bish, 2017; Fanelli et al., 2020; Mousavi et al., 2021; Venn et al., 2022).

It should be noted that primary schools must gradually and step-by-step follow a roadmap and long-term strategic plan to achieve these concepts, and developing an operational plan is essential to implement them. Adopting a paradigmatic approach with a local and regional perspective also helps in this realization. However, these two variables are not on-line variables, and in the field of behavioral sciences, such concepts are distantly related. The competency of managers is directly related to their empowerment; in some cases, depending on the professional skills variable, it can also indirectly influence organizational citizenship behavior. In some instances, these two variables may also have overlapping relationships. Based on the above results, the following practical suggestions are presented:

- Conducting in-service training through various workshops to teach professional competencies to managers.
- Enhancing respectful behavior and civil virtues among employees in terms of organizational citizenship

behavior can be achieved through fostering personal and organizational interest and professional skills.

- Organizational citizenship behavior can be institutionalized by utilizing managers' competencies and strengthening professional skills.
- Striving to improve professional and ethical competencies with an empowerment approach through online and internet-based educational classes and workshops.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Authors Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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