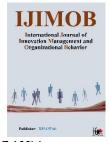


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Development of a Model for the Professional Competence of Middle Managers in the Educational Administration Headquarters

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aimed to develop a model for the professional competencies of middle managers in education, including general managers, their deputies, heads of centers, and their deputies.

Methodology: The research method was qualitative and aimed at practical application. The research population included all academic experts in educational management, general managers, their deputies at the headquarters level of education, all related studies, research, and articles, as well as relevant documents and laws. A sample of 9 managers and 7 experts, 70 articles, books, or research, and 4 relevant documents and laws were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a document review form for studies, research, articles, and regulations, as well as a semi-structured interview form. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis and MAXQDA software.

Findings: According to the findings of this research, the most important components of professional competence for middle managers in education include 10 main categories derived from 62 subcategories: Personal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Work Competencies, Global Mindset, Aspiration for Excellence, General Managerial Ability, Professional/Advanced Management Skills, Resource Management, Specialized Knowledge, and Success Enabling. These categories were ultimately presented in the form of a model.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that the model of professional competence for middle managers in the headquarters area of education is capable of examination and can be used by educational system planners.

Keywords: Professional competence, middle managers, education, model, headquarters area

Introduction

oday, management and the competencies of managers are at the forefront of organizational issues, with competent



managers recognized as a national competitive advantage for successfully steering organizations in general, and education in particular, through the turbulent waves of change and competition towards ideals (Zahedi & Sheikh, 2010). Managers with desirable traits and competencies balance work and life, self-awareness, and self-development (Steyn & Van Staden, 2018), propel the organization towards growth and excellence, enhance performance, and cultivate meritocracy and competence in the system (Poorkarimi et al., 2017; Poorkarimi & Sedaghat, 2014). They also facilitate the effective performance of roles within the organization and the achievement of professional strategic goals (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999), leading to professional success (Strydom, 2015). Moreover, they facilitate organizational success in today's dynamic and unpredictable environment (Karp, 2013) and enable the alignment of flexible development amidst challenges (Singh et al., 2013). This reality has transformed managerial competencies into a significant research topic over recent decades, investigated and explained in various fields, both nationally internationally (Ko, 2012; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Testa & Sipe, 2012).

Studies have been conducted on the competencies of managers at Payame Noor University (Godarzi & Soltani, 2017), research-oriented organizational managers (Panahi et al., 2018), city service organization managers (Jamshidi Kohsari et al., 2016), and managers of national projects (Taslimi et al., 2013) are examples of such studies at the national level. Internationally, studies have included educational institution managers (Shukhratovich, 2022), professional experiences and competencies required by managers in Islamic countries (Wulandari & Dwiatmadja, 2020), sports and physical education coaches (Jonni, 2019), healthcare service managers (Liang et al., 2018), hospital leaders (Shum et al., 2018), manufacturing industry managers (Steyn & Van Staden, 2018), nursing managers (Goktepe et al., 2018), hotel industry managers (Wong & Lee, 2017), educational managers (Astereki et al., 2022), and primary school managers (Bafadal et al., 2019).

In education, meritocracy in general and managerial competencies in particular are deemed critical, emphasized in national documents like the Fundamental Transformation Document and the Formal and General Education System Guideline (Astereki et al., 2022), the Governance and Management Subsystem of the Formal and General Education System (Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Education, n.d.), and the Implementation Plan of the Fundamental Transformation Document in the Sixth

Development Plan (Astereki et al., 2022). More specifically, the Fundamental Transformation Document in Strategy 6-22 states, "Selection of managers at various levels should be based on meritocracy, their leadership in divine and human values, and scientific standards, efficiency, and commitment to the objectives of the formal education system." The official and general education system guideline in the Islamic Republic of Iran considers meritocracy a principle and highlights a significant shift "from arbitrary appointment of managers based on administrative rules to meritocracy in management." The execution plan of the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education in the Sixth Development Plan also includes in item 89, strategy number 1-18, "Developing a model of meritocracy in appointing managers from headquarters to school management...".

Additionally, researchers (Astereki et al., 2022; Bafadal et al., 2019; Javidan et al., 2018; Kamarei et al., 2021; Shabani et al., 2018) have studied school managers' competencies. However, research on the competencies of higher-level managers, such as ministers, deputies, and general directors of education at the headquarters and provincial levels, who hold significant responsibilities like policy-making and planning and steer the education system, has been neglected, with many high-level managerial appointments in education, especially among middle managers at the Ministry of Education, influenced by political currents or personal preferences, overlooking the competencies of managers. This situation has resulted in the performance of education, akin to that of most organizations that do not adhere to a system of meritocracy and competence-centeredness in the selection and appointment of managers and staff, and disregard the principle of productivity, leading to unsatisfactory performance (Godarzi & Soltani, 2017). Just as competent managers can lead to organizational success and transformation, the opposite is true, and managers lacking necessary competencies will not be able to guide the organization to achieve its goals and employ appropriate methods (Asad et al., 2021) and will not have satisfactory performance. Thus, the success of education depends on appointing competent managers. Since the competencies of managers vary from one organization to another and across different managerial levels (Jamshidi Kohsari et al., 2016), and since these competencies have not yet been defined for middle managers in education, the fundamental questions of this research are, "What are the dimensions and components of professional competencies for middle managers in the educational headquarters staff?" "What model can be proposed for the



professional competencies of middle managers in the educational headquarters staff?"

2 Methods and Materials

This research employed a qualitative methodology aimed at practical application. The research population included all academic experts in educational management and general managers and their deputies at the level of the education ministry's headquarters, all related studies, research, and articles, as well as relevant documents and regulations. The sample, selected through purposive sampling, included 9 managers and 7 experts (until theoretical saturation), 70 articles, books, or studies, and 4 related documents and laws.

For data collection, forms for the documentary review of studies, research, articles, and regulations were used, along with a semi-structured interview form. The validity of the interview form, assessed by 4 subject matter experts, was estimated at 0.49, indicating high agreement on its content validity. The reliability of the interview form was checked through the calculation of Spearman's correlation coefficient between two administrations at different times, which was 0.71. Data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software for qualitative data analysis.

3 Findings and Results

In consideration of the research questions, the findings are as follows. The dimensions and components of professional competencies for middle managers in the headquarters area were identified through the coding process of interview texts and scientific sources, as shown in Table 1.

 Table 1

 Dimensions and Components of Professional Competencies of Middle Managers in Headquarters

Main Category	Subcategories	Codes (Identified Concepts)
Personal Skills	Flexibility and Adaptability	Flexible, adaptability, emotional flexibility, timely response, high adaptability, ability to work in changing conditions, timely change in management methods, business management
	Motivation	Motivation, self-motivation, interest in education, inspirational
	Risk-Taking	Willingness to take risks
	Commitment	Committed, having commitment
	Psychological Balance	Managing self-behavior at work psychologically, psychological balance, psychological readiness
	Emotional Intelligence	Emotional intelligence, high emotional intelligence, manager's skill in using and interpreting emotions in decision-making or problem-solving
	Pragmatism	Pragmatism, pragmatic approach
	Honesty and Respect	Honest in behavior and speech, respecting people
	Responsibility and Duty Awareness	Responsibility, accepting primary responsibilities in important tasks, requesting and accepting responsibility for own actions, fulfilling duties and responsibilities aligned with goals, duty awareness
	Realism	Expecting resistance from subordinates
	Patience	Having patience
	Eloquence	Clear presentation of performance expectations, expressing ideas
	Decisiveness	Avoiding emotional decision-making, manager's control over self, work, and emotions during decision-making, ability to communicate needs and why they must be met, having courage, decisiveness, endurance
	Independence	Independence
	Self-Awareness	Developing self-awareness, self-awareness, self-knowledge, complete understanding of own weaknesses, strengths, desires, and needs
	Ethics	Ethics, professional ethics, ethical conduct, impact of managers' views on the ethical climate, significant role of created ethical climate
	Creativity and Innovation	Creativity, innovation, initiative, belief in change and innovation, ability to present innovative theories, innovative solutions, innovative approach
	Non-Bias and Criticism	Criticism receptiveness, fostering a critical and self-critical spirit, critical thinking, ability to appreciate good work and critique poor work
	Confidence and Decisiveness	Confidence, self-confidence
Interpersonal Skills	Team Building and Networking	Teamwork, fostering team thinking, team building, group capabilities, team skills, building an effective team, encouraging teamwork, group work, networking, participatory willingness, involving employees in decision-making, creating a healthy and constructive environment for teacher participation in educational decisions
	Consultation and Advising	Consulting



		Knowledge of Negotiation Techniques and Meeting Management	Skilled in negotiation and conducting deals, negotiation ability, negotiation power, meeting management, managing and directing meetings
		Trust Building	Understanding others' viewpoints, trusting own employees
		Conflict Management in the Workplace	Resolving and managing conflicts, conflict management, controlling conflicts
		Communication	Effective communication, communication skills, establishing communication, having strong verbal communication skills, establishing appropriate communication, communication knowledge, continuous and effective communication, fostering empathy and harmony, friendly and intimate relations, having effective relationships, social skills, communication ability, interpersonal communication, transparent communication
		Participative Management	Involving employees in decision-making, full understanding of effective and participatory decision-making skills
		Stress Management	Stress management, controlling and managing stress and pressures
		Persuasion and Influence	Negotiation and persuasion, power of justification and convincing
Work Compete	ncies	Understanding and Analyzing Organizational Goals	The role and place of headquarters in achieving the goals of the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, creating a better, conducive, and healthy environment for achieving educational goals, persistence in achieving goals, offering guidance in achieving goals, committing employees and groups to follow managerial or organizational goals, providing appropriate freedom of action to individuals in their work to achieve goals
		Future Orientation	Having a future-oriented outlook, future-oriented, analyzing past trends and forecasting the future, having the capability to plan for the upcoming future, proactively dealing with future events and shaping the future, building the future by studying and reviewing the course of evolution from past to present, future-oriented thinking and strategic thinking
		Goal-Oriented and Program-Centric	Strategic policy-making, developing appropriate programs, having strategic programs on the agenda, full understanding of scenario writing, promoting and encouraging a specific vision focused on related goals, goal-oriented, inclination towards targeted response to events, employing a program to ensure the delivery of professional services (using an appropriate quality control system) with optimal quality and in accordance with professional standards and regulations, clarity and transparency of goals, focusing on improving educational quality as the core of programs and actions
		Time Management	Time management, seizing the opportunity
		Change Management	Belief in change management, being changeable in self-management, change management, ability to maintain affairs based on a scheduled timetable and achieving them in the stipulated time, ability to change management methods, ability to manage changes, timely and rapid
		Issue-Centric	Problem-solving, issue-centric, identifying problems, managing and solving issues and problems appropriately, problem-solving ability, choosing alternative solutions to problems and understanding the interrelationships between activities and their potential outcomes, skill and ability in problem-solving
		Rule Compliance	Exercising powers according to law, paying attention to the set of dos and don'ts, adhering to the law
		Crisis Management	Skill in managing critical situations, ability to moderate pressures
		Knowledge Management	Knowledge management
		Community Orientation	Acting based on community needs, interacting and collaborating with higher education and the business sector, paying attention to community needs and considering them in own programs, creating gradual changes aligned with community changes
		Global Mindset	Economic, political, and social perspective at the international level, avoiding superficiality in dealing with national and international events, elevating the view from the national level to the supra-national and international level, international thinking, political credibility, monitoring global developments, having a global perspective
		Aspiring for Excellence	Learning and personal development, acquiring and applying organizational knowledge, participating in training courses, seminars, conferences, continuously updating own knowledge and information, providing and developing a learning environment, facilitating personal growth and flourishing of self and employees, continuous learning, pursuing professional knowledge and skill enhancement, encouraging further education, manager's possession of necessary knowledge, optimal use of knowledge, skills, and abilities, raising the academic, skill, and expertise level, skills and habits of balanced learning
		Experiential Learning	Necessary experience, having managerial experience, having sufficient experience, manager's possession of necessary experience, experience in work environments and society, gaining extensive experiences in various fields, reviewing past processes, acquiring professional experience and transferring it, reviewing the past, recognizing the present, and predicting the future
		Research/Exploration	Involving employees in decision-making, full understanding of effective and participatory decision-making skills, analytical and research power, researching on issues, research reading, research willingness
General M Ability	Managerial	Planning	Possessing knowledge, experience, and skill to act correctly in planning for the upcoming future, planning, having a strategic outlook and planning, planning



	Coordination	Coordination, coordinating training and development activities with organizational strategies, ability to coordinate relationships, creating a more coordinated workforce at management levels
	Organizing	Organizing, ability to organize tasks
Professional/Advanced Management Skills	Decision-Making	Organizational decision-making, decision-making, making the best decisions, decision-making based on data and information analysis, decision-making competency, making decisions based on expertly performed tasks, making calculated and expert decisions, involving executive forces and experts in decisions, decision-making, making effective decisions, making timely decisions, decision-making, responsibility for decisions, using statistics for decision-making, making correct decisions, decision-making ability
	Control, Monitoring, and Evaluation	Evaluating and monitoring performance to correct and improve performance, control, monitoring, and guiding affairs, conducting evaluations and monitoring, reducing monitoring, ability to apply appropriate control for important details
	Guidance and Leadership	Modern management and leadership methods (transformational leadership), leadership, self-management and leadership, having leadership experiences before accepting responsibility, guidance and leadership
	Perceptual Skills	Perceptual skills, conceptual thinking, managerial ability in understanding abstract ideas
	Systematic Thinking	Having a systematic perspective, systematic thinking, multi-dimensional thinking, holistic and systematic thinking, paying attention to all people, members, and aspects of the issue, comprehensive view
	Analytical Skill	Diagnostic skills, ability to apply preventative activities, dissecting the environment, diagnostic skill, pathologizing and providing a complete description of conditions, specifying doable tasks in a situation, ability to identify complex situations, taking advantage of situations, identifying essential variables in a situation, predicting environmental changes, understanding a changing environment, showing ability in pioneering changes and being ahead of environmental changes in planning and resource allocation and timely decision-making
	Strategic Thinking	Strategic thinking, strategic planning
	Advanced Specialty	Environmental science, cultural management knowledge, cultural knowledge, social
	Knowledge	knowledge, legal knowledge, economic knowledge, possessing knowledge in the political approach, professional knowledge, general knowledge, political insight, social insight, cultural insight, economic insight, possessing information and awareness about the environment and its importance and how to use it
Resource Management	Optimal Human Resource Management	Ensuring employees understand their tasks and supervising and completing them, knowing own people, having expectations consistent with assigned tasks from subordinates, ability to create morale and cheerfulness among subordinates, using a system of encouragement, task division, developing others, influencing others, paying attention to the capacity and ability of individuals in performing tasks, creating motivation for individual participation in the field of education, speaking with employees in their own language, supporting and accompanying employees, sincerely listening to employees' opinions, helping to improve employee performance, creating motivation in employees, enhancing the sense of responsibility in employees, motivating employees, valuing the welfare of employees and subordinates, meritocracy
Specialized Knowledge	Technology Knowledge	Awareness of technological advancements, procedures, and standards related to own work area, encouraging subordinates to be aware of technological advancements, procedures, and standards related to their work area, technology and technology factors, skill in using information and communication technologies, information and communication technology skills, possessing the art of using information and communication technologies, using information and communication technologies, technology knowledge, ability to use modern devices, media, and technologies suitable for work, ICDL skill, enhancing and improving technology-related skills, awareness of websites and databases related to the work area
	Administrative Knowledge, Laws, and Regulations	Administrative affairs, familiarity with approved resolutions, regulations related to the field of education, continuous awareness of changes and transformations in the profession (including new opinions about auditing principles and regulations and related laws), awareness of laws of civil service management and other laws and upper-level documents of education, skill in budget planning and forecasting, understanding the expectations and requirements of the system, sufficient mastery of related laws, regulations, and directives in the work area
	Pedagogical Knowledge	Educational management knowledge, education and training knowledge, updated knowledge in the work area, educational planning, curriculum planning, evaluation, having expertise, knowledge and mastery in the field of education, principles and strategies of modern and effective education, influence from constructivist psychology, knowledge and skills in the field of social psychology and educational psychology, possessing knowledge and skills in the field of psychology, methods and models of educational supervision, familiarity with knowledge and dimensions of pedagogy
Success Enabling	Organizational Culture	Strengthening a desirable and strong organizational culture, manager's ability to understand organizational beliefs and values and comply with them, shared values
	Managerial Stability	Stability and continuity in management
	Result Orientation	Achieving positive results



Delegation of Authority and Decentralization

Vision of Excellence, Independence, and Transformation for Education

Delegating authority to subordinates, inclination towards decentralization, manager's ability in delegating and devolving power

Executing job activities more effectively and at a standard level, rethinking human resources and attracting people with transformative views, knowledge and ability to interact and communicate with external organizations, attracting private financial resources, distancing from government support and dominance, paying attention to ethnicities and cultural differences, developing social justice, entrepreneurship

Based on the findings of Table 1, the most important dimensions and components of the professional competencies of middle managers in the headquarters area are as follows:

Personal Skills Interpersonal Skills Work Competencies Global Mindset Aspiring for Excellence General Managerial Ability

Professional/Advanced Management Skills

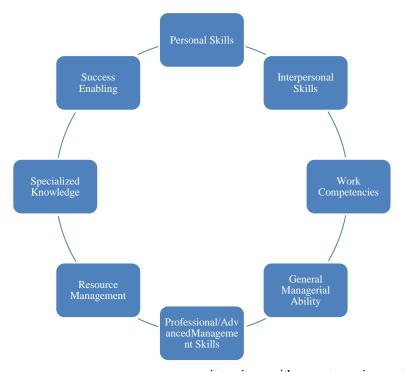
Resource Management

Specialized Knowledge

Success Enabling

Therefore, the designed model for the professional competencies of middle managers in the headquarters area of education is as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Simple Model of Dimensions



4 Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to develop a model for the professional competencies of middle managers in the educational administration headquarters. Thus, the research aimed to assist the Ministry of Education in selecting and appointing middle managers for headquarters by identifying their professional competencies and modeling them. For this purpose, through document review of theoretical foundations and related documents, as well as

interviews with experts, various categories were identified and reorganized into 10 main categories including Personal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Work Competencies, Global Mindset, Aspiration for Excellence, General Managerial Ability, Professional/Advanced Management Skills, Resource Management, Specialized Knowledge, and Success Enabling. These categories were ultimately organized into a geometric model. The results of this study align with prior studies (Astereki et al., 2022; Bafadal et al., 2019; Godarzi & Soltani, 2017; Goktepe et al., 2018; Jamshidi Kohsari et al., 2016; Javidan et al., 2018; Jonni,



2019; Kamarei et al., 2021; Ko, 2012; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Liang et al., 2018; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; Panahi et al., 2018; Piri et al., 2020; Poorkarimi et al., 2017; Poorkarimi & Sedaghat, 2014; Shabani et al., 2018; Shukhratovich, 2022; Shum et al., 2018; Steyn & Van Staden, 2018; Taslimi et al., 2013; Testa & Sipe, 2012; Wong & Lee, 2017; Zahedi & Sheikh, 2010). In explaining the results, it should be noted that the professional competency of managers is one of the main concepts and topics in the education management system, playing a significant role in school administration. Today, schools need high-quality and professional managers more than anything else. One such quality relates to their personal competencies. The higher the level of managers' personal development and individual capabilities, such as in social intelligence and personal and interpersonal interactions, the better they can handle school challenges (Miltner et al., 2015). Therefore, developing personal capabilities plays a significant role in their career success. Additionally, in the area of job skills, when managers become proficient in their field, this proficiency will have a positive outcome in their job. Empowering managers in their professional and job fields makes many job challenges solvable for managers (Osipov & Girfanova, 2021). Furthermore, management has moved beyond traditional approaches, and managers with a global mindset are better able to handle school problems. A global mindset helps them think beyond the school and make full use of their mental capacity (Hogan & Benson, 2009).

In summary, it should be said that the results of this research, by identifying dimensions for the professional development of teachers, can be utilized in the education system. Professional development of managers in any educational system leads to its efficiency and can resolve many challenges within and between schools.

Limitations of this research include the time constraints imposed by university and academic regulations; the research's focus on headquarters managers and their professional competencies; limitations in applying the results to non-headquarters, regional, and school-level managers; and that the research results are derived from the opinions of experts, and the presented model also focuses on this aspect. Thus, aligning the results with upper-level documents and related legal texts is necessary and will be required in practice. It is recommended that research be conducted on the existing gaps and challenges related to the competencies required by headquarters managers of the education system. This would involve diagnosing the current situation and defining the starting point for training and

developing individuals. The development and approval of regulations and guidelines necessary to facilitate and expedite the empowerment of headquarters managers of education to achieve desired competencies should be implemented. Another suggestion is that the empowerment of managers be carried out continuously and not intermittently. Furthermore, attention should be given to the living conditions of managers so that they can use their maximum capacity for school management.

Authors' Contributions

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

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

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

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