

Identification of Strategies, Contexts, and Intervening Factors for Developing Coaching Leadership for Primary School Principals in Tehran

Maral. Masoudi¹, Fatemeh. Hamidifar^{2*}, Abbas. Khorshidi³, Yalda. Delgoshaei²

¹ PhD Student, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Management and Higher Education, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

² Assistant Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Management and Higher Education, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

³ Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Management and Higher Education, Islamshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: fatemehamidifar@gmail.com

Article Info

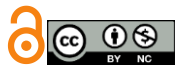
Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Masoudi, M. H., Hamidifar, F., Khorshidi, A., & Delgoshaei, Y. (2023). Identification of Strategies, Contexts, and Intervening Factors for Developing Coaching Leadership for Primary School Principals in Tehran. *International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior*, 3(4), 195-202.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijimob.3.4.22>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The primary objective of this study was to identify the strategies, contexts, and intervening factors that influence the development of coaching leadership for primary school principals in Tehran.

Methodology: This qualitative research utilized a content analysis approach, applying thematic analysis to interview data collected from 16 experts in the field of education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed using MaxQDA-V2020 software. The study involved purposive non-random sampling, with participants selected based on their extensive experience and knowledge of educational leadership. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes, which were organized into six dimensions.

Findings: The study identified several critical factors influencing coaching leadership. Causal conditions included influence, creativity, responsibility, and cooperation, which directly impact the central phenomenon of coaching leadership. Strategies for enhancing leadership were categorized into professional growth, networking, and organizational support. Contextual factors were divided into general societal context, specialized context, and developmental perspective. Environmental conditions highlighted the importance of managers' self-management skills, their ability to manage others, and their effectiveness within the organizational environment. The outcomes of effective coaching leadership included the creation of respect, mutual trust, and inspirational leadership.

Conclusion:

The research provides a structured model for developing coaching leadership in primary school principals, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies and supportive environments. By addressing these factors, educational institutions

can foster more effective leadership, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and improving student outcomes.

Keywords: *Professional Development, Organizational Support, Leadership, Coaching*

1 Introduction

The role of school principals has undergone significant changes in recent years. These changes have arisen not only due to social and cultural transformations but also because of new educational needs and societal expectations from the educational system. In the past, school principals were primarily seen as building managers, with their main duties including overseeing daily school activities and managing physical resources. However, today, this role has shifted toward that of a purposeful and strategic educational manager who must possess enhanced capabilities in various educational, managerial, and social domains (Acton, 2021; Nuswantoro et al., 2023). School principals now need to act as educational leaders, with a special focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. They must collaborate with teachers and assist them in creating a conducive learning environment. Classroom teachers, being in direct contact with students, have a significant impact on students' academic and social progress. In this regard, principals should provide teachers with the necessary support and resources to ensure their best performance (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Thessin, 2023).

Additionally, researchers have highlighted the important and indirect role that school principals play in influencing student outcomes. This influence may be exerted through the development of effective educational policies, providing professional opportunities for teachers, and fostering a positive and supportive school culture. Principals should seek ways to increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning and help them achieve their academic goals (Sahlin, 2023). However, one of the major challenges in this area is the time required for principals to positively impact school performance. On average, it takes about five years for a school principal to make a positive impact on school performance and student progress. This lengthy period suggests that principals should consider long-term and sustainable strategies and gradually implement necessary changes (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). Statistics indicate that approximately 50% of school principals do not remain in their positions beyond their third year of leadership. This lack of stability can negatively affect student progress, as frequent changes in school leadership can lead to a lack of continuity in educational policies and programs. Therefore, retaining experienced and capable principals in schools is

one of the key factors in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the educational system (Acton, 2021).

School principals in the 21st century face complex challenges that require a deep understanding of their role and effective tools for leadership in the current educational environment. According to Atasoy (2020), the coaching process is considered a key tool in helping individuals and organizations transition to positive changes. This process not only helps develop individual skills but also empowers organizations to achieve educational goals (Atasoy, 2020). The role of leaders in fostering progress and stability in schools is vital and key to their success. Transformational leaders must be well aware of how they can inspire others by taking actions aligned with shared values (Agirdag & Muijs, 2023). According to Nuswantoro et al. (2023), these leaders can serve as examples of success for their followers by creating innovative initiatives, fostering trust, and strengthening relationships among team members (Nuswantoro et al., 2023). These strategies not only contribute to creating a positive school culture but also effectively support students' academic and social development. Furthermore, for the success of schools, particularly in the context of student learning, it is essential that school principals possess the necessary skills and knowledge for effective leadership in educational settings (Tamaddoni & Hoseinkhlezadeh, 2024). Based on research by Ismaya et al. (2023), effective leadership plays a fundamental role in the overall success of schools (Ismaya et al., 2023). Similarly, Kalkay (2020) emphasizes that the quality of educational leadership can have a direct and positive impact on student performance and progress. There is a clear message: to improve the quality of education and enhance student performance, we need leaders who can not only implement effective strategies but also create conditions for positive and sustainable transformations in the educational system (Kelkay, 2020).

The most powerful coaching models are those that not only address a teacher's instructional methods but also consider the beliefs they hold about their students, their learning, and themselves (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020). Such coaching models, whether inquiry-based or cognitive, develop teachers' cognitive skills through discourse and the application of knowledge in teaching. Therefore, a leadership development intervention that is gaining popularity, supported by studies linking this practice to

positive outcomes such as personal growth, behavioral change, and job performance (Day et al., 2020), is leadership coaching (Nazari et al., 2018). However, scholars argue that this practice, with its comprehensive scientific understanding (Khalili, 2016), requires rigorous studies to examine its theoretical framework (Shabani et al., 2021) and its impact on leaders (Abdollahi & Najafi, 2019). We aim to address this gap by providing further evidence of its efficacy and insights into its impact mechanisms through a mixed-method research design. An important issue facing all policymakers is how we can resolve the challenges so that followers and managers can fully benefit from and align with the coaching leadership model. And how can leaders encourage stakeholders, considering leadership components such as influencing people, guiding and coordinating activities, eliciting voluntary participation, fostering enthusiastic efforts, communication, and aligning efforts toward achieving common goals, to positively impact employee outcomes through the coaching leadership model? And how does the coaching leadership model contribute to the advancement, transformation, growth, and excellence of leadership in the workplace? Considering the above, this research aims to answer the question: What are the strategies, contexts, and intervening factors for developing coaching leadership for primary school principals in Tehran?

2 Methods and Materials

The research method was applied in terms of purpose, qualitative in terms of data type, and content analysis in

terms of nature. The statistical population included all primary school principals in Tehran who had sufficient and comprehensive awareness of the subject. The qualitative measurement tool was semi-structured interviews with experts. In individual interviews with interviewees, preliminary questions derived from the research topic, model, and objectives were used. In addition to the main questions, other subsidiary questions were posed alongside each main question to understand the participants' experiences during the interview. After necessary arrangements, the researcher attended the interviewee's workplace and recorded the conversations using a voice recorder with the interviewee's permission to extract codes. This process was conducted after each interview, and the researcher found that no new codes were added to the previous codes after the 15th interview. It is worth noting that the interview duration ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, and the interview process was conducted in mid-spring of 2023. The data analysis method was thematic analysis, including basic, organizing, and overarching themes using Maxqda-V2020 software.

3 Findings and Results

To identify the factors influencing the development of coaching leadership for primary school principals in Tehran, thematic analysis of interview texts was conducted using MaxQDA-V2020 software. The checklist of results from the thematic analysis of interview texts is presented as follows:

Table 1

Results of Open and Axial Coding Along with Subcategories

Main Category	Primary Categories	Subcategories
Central Phenomenon (Coaching Leadership)	Efficiency and Communications	Enhancing subordinates' performance, helping employees identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, impacting organizational outcomes, building relationships with a wide range of important individuals
	Specialized Perspective	Illuminating blind spots and improving small habits, identifying critical patterns, accelerating subordinates' performance
	Emotional Intelligence	Better understanding of situations through self-awareness, possessing social awareness skills to deepen empathy, having skills to identify core values and beliefs
Causal Conditions (Coaching Leadership)	Influence and Creativity	Acting as a mentor, being creative and innovative, creating new values, persuading others, empathizing with students, colleagues, and teachers
	Influence and Responsibility	Having a charismatic personality, possessing the power to motivate, positive thinking towards issues, having a sense of responsibility towards issues
	Participation and Cooperation	Making activities participatory, fostering constructive communication and interaction, team building among colleagues, having a team spirit
Context (Coaching Leadership)	General Societal Context	Existence of a favorable trust environment in society, culture of participation and collectivism, strong organizational dependencies, common organizational interests
	Specialized Context	Level of managers' perspectives and vision in coaching leadership policy-making, necessity of shifting managers' perspectives from short-term to long-term, understanding, acceptance, and support from stakeholders, diverse communication tools and connections

Strategies for Enhancing Coaching Leadership	Developmental Perspective	Managers' foresight, creating hope among colleagues and students, creating individual and organizational goals, determining organizational policies and directions
	Professional Growth and Development of Managers	Greater independence and autonomy for managers, creating a positive and professional organizational environment, fostering a critical and receptive environment, managerial support for improvement programs, creating a suitable platform for managers' development
	Networking	Sharing experiences, ability to create networking among colleagues and teachers, ability to create networking among students, establishing communication networks with charities
Environmental Conditions (Intervening)	Organizational and External Supports	Drafting supportive laws and regulations, reviewing past laws and regulations, establishing norms for decision-making based on maximum consensus, creating coordination and attracting participation from influential agencies and institutions, utilizing each other's experiences to advance work
	Managers' Self-Management Skills	Self-management, possessing a spirit of self-development, possessing a spirit of self-criticism
	Managers' Management Skills over Others	Planning and organizing school activities, classroom and school management, identifying and solving school issues, decision-making ability in organizational matters
Outcomes of Coaching Leadership	Management Ability in the Organizational Environment	Considering the different needs and expectations of society, interrelatedness, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral issues in coaching leadership, development of information and communication technology
	Creating a Sense of Respect	Feeling respected and useful, encouraging and honoring others, mutual respect, sufficient appreciation of other members and colleagues
	Building Mutual Trust	Having honesty, building trust, creating a sense of value among colleagues
	Being a Role Model and Inspirational	Being a role model for managers, sincerity and humility in behavior, being accepted by others, possessing a charismatic personality

Regarding the discovery and identification of the main category that forms the core of the paradigmatic model and organizes other related elements, it should be noted that the researcher, in order to achieve a theory grounded in data regarding the real characteristics of the main phenomenon, which is the design of a coaching leadership model for primary school principals (case study: Tehran's educational system), interviewed key informants with valuable experiences related to the research topic and inquired about their experiences and perspectives on this matter. During the data collection process, concepts and statements gradually accumulated until the tenth interview, when summarizing and reviewing the statements led to the main category of designing a coaching leadership model for primary school principals (case study: Tehran's educational system). After that, subsequent questions were formulated and continued around this theme, and by the thirteenth interview, theoretical saturation of the data was somewhat confirmed, but to ensure this and fill conceptual gaps in the model, interviews continued until the sixteenth interview. Ultimately, the categories were placed within 14 main categories within the six dimensions of the paradigmatic model as follows: Causal Conditions (3 categories), Central Phenomenon (2 categories), Strategies for Enhancing Coaching Leadership for Primary School Principals (3 categories), Contextual Factors for Coaching Leadership for Primary School Principals (3 categories), Environmental Conditions (3 categories), Outcomes of Coaching Leadership for Primary School Principals (3 categories).

3.1 Causal Conditions

Causal conditions for coaching leadership for primary school principals include factors that directly lead to the central phenomenon of coaching leadership. The causal conditions for coaching leadership for primary school principals consist of three main categories: 1) Influence and Creativity with subcategories: acting as a mentor, being creative and innovative, creating new values, persuading others, and empathizing with students, colleagues, and teachers; 2) Influence and Responsibility with subcategories: possessing a charismatic personality, having the power to motivate, positive thinking towards issues, and having a sense of responsibility towards issues; and 3) Participation and Cooperation with subcategories: making activities participatory, fostering constructive communication and interaction, team building among colleagues, and having a team spirit.

3.2 Central Phenomenon

Among the components examined for policy development is attention to the dimensions of the coaching leadership model for primary school principals. In this regard, for the first dimension, 1) Efficiency and Communications with subcategories: enhancing subordinates' performance, helping employees identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, impacting organizational outcomes, and building relationships with a wide range of important individuals were extracted. For the

second dimension, 2) Specialized Perspective with subcategories: illuminating blind spots and improving small habits, identifying critical patterns, and accelerating subordinates' performance were extracted. Finally, for the third dimension, 3) Emotional Intelligence with subcategories: better understanding of situations through self-awareness, possessing social awareness skills to deepen empathy, and having skills to identify core values and beliefs were determined.

3.3 Strategies

The study identified several strategies essential for the enhancement of coaching leadership among primary school principals. These strategies were categorized into three main areas: 1) Professional growth and development of managers, 2) Networking, and 3) Organizational and external supports. Each area includes specific subcategories that outline the practical approaches necessary for effective coaching leadership.

3.4 Environmental Conditions (Intervening Factors)

The phenomenon of coaching leadership for primary school principals arises in specific environmental conditions. Unlike the contextual factors of coaching leadership, environmental conditions have a mediated impact on the central phenomenon through strategies for enhancing coaching leadership. In the present study, the environmental conditions consisted of three main categories: 1) Managers' Self-Management Skills with subcategories: self-management, possessing a spirit of self-development, and possessing a spirit of self-criticism; 2) Managers' Management Skills over Others with subcategories: planning and organizing school activities, classroom and school management, identifying and solving school issues, and decision-making ability in organizational matters; and 3) Management Ability in the Organizational Environment with conceptual statements: considering the different needs and expectations of society, interrelatedness, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral issues in coaching leadership, and development of information and communication technology.

3.5 Outcomes

If the factors and conditions mentioned in the model function effectively, it is expected that achievements and results will be obtained. The outcomes of coaching

leadership for primary school principals in the present study are classified into three general categories: 1) Creating a Sense of Respect (feeling respected and useful, encouraging and honoring others, mutual respect, sufficient appreciation of other members and colleagues); 2) Building Mutual Trust (having honesty, building trust, creating a sense of value among colleagues); 3) Being a Role Model and Inspirational (being a role model for managers, sincerity and humility in behavior, being accepted by others, possessing a charismatic personality).

3.6 Contextual Factors

Contextual factors for coaching leadership for primary school principals refer to the immediate and related factors that affect the coaching leadership process for primary school principals. In fact, any change in the contextual factors of coaching leadership for primary school principals will directly impact the central phenomenon, strategies for enhancing coaching leadership for primary school principals, and the outcomes of coaching leadership for primary school principals. In the present study, contextual factors for coaching leadership for primary school principals were identified within three main categories: General Societal Context, Specialized Context, and Developmental Perspective.

General Societal Context: As one of the contextual factors for coaching leadership for primary school principals, it includes subcategories: existence of a favorable trust environment in society, culture of participation and collectivism, strong organizational dependencies, and common organizational interests.

Specialized Context: A contextual feature that emerges from within coaching leadership for primary school principals, and itself has subcategories: level of managers' perspectives and vision in coaching leadership policy-making, necessity of shifting managers' perspectives from short-term to long-term, understanding, acceptance, and support from stakeholders, diverse communication tools, and connections.

Developmental Perspective: Another contextual feature that emerges from within coaching leadership for primary school principals, and itself has subcategories: managers' foresight, creating hope among colleagues and students, creating individual and organizational goals, determining organizational policies and directions.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the strategies, contexts, and intervening factors for developing coaching leadership for primary school principals in Tehran. The most important results of the research, after a thorough review of the literature and previous internal and external studies and conducting interviews with experts and scholars, led to the development of a model that includes various components.

In this study, contextual factors for coaching leadership for primary school principals were identified within three main categories: General Societal Context, Specialized Context, and Developmental Perspective; as discussed, these include various subcategories like the existence of a favorable trust environment in society, culture of participation and collectivism, strong organizational dependencies, and common organizational interests. Similarly, the specialized context includes the level of managers' perspectives and vision in coaching leadership policy-making, the necessity of shifting managers' perspectives from short-term to long-term, understanding, acceptance, and support from stakeholders, diverse communication tools, and connections. The developmental perspective includes managers' foresight, creating hope among colleagues and students, creating individual and organizational goals, determining organizational policies and directions. Consistent with the findings of Woodward and Thoma (2021), this study highlights the importance of coaching leadership in organizations (Woodward & Thoma, 2021). Moreover, concerns about the sustainability of changes brought about by formal leader development programs have led to a tendency toward leader-owned development in organizations. This study assists organizations that aim to develop their leaders using leader-owned development programs by providing additional evidence for the effectiveness of coaching leadership. For example, given the large effect sizes found in this study for leadership self-efficacy and its positive relationship with change-oriented leadership behavior, coaching is a potentially valuable intervention to help leaders tasked with leading organizational change.

Causal Conditions for coaching leadership for primary school principals include factors that directly lead to the central phenomenon of coaching leadership. These causal conditions consist of three main categories: Influence and Creativity with subcategories such as acting as a mentor, being creative and innovative, creating new values, persuading others, and empathizing with students, colleagues, and teachers. Influence and Responsibility with subcategories such as possessing a charismatic personality,

having the power to motivate, positive thinking towards issues, and having a sense of responsibility towards issues. Participation and Cooperation with subcategories such as making activities participatory, fostering constructive communication and interaction, team building among colleagues, and having a team spirit. Similarly, Ellinger and Ellinger (2021) identified key characteristics of coaching, including a supportive relationship, setting personal development goals, achieving these goals through a focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal issues, and helping the coach develop and become more effective with the tools, skills, and opportunities they need, by providing them with support (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2021). Through the application of these common elements, the coach becomes a supportive and competent intellectual partner for the coach, encouraging reflective questioning, self-reflection, and challenging assumptions to enable the coach to understand the available information and use their personal learning to make sustainable positive changes (Granlund & Mellström, 2019).

Among the components examined for policy development is attention to the characteristics of the coaching leadership model for primary school principals. In this regard, for the first dimension, Efficiency and Communications, the following subcategories were extracted: enhancing subordinates' performance, helping employees identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, impacting organizational outcomes, and building relationships with a wide range of important individuals. For the second dimension, Specialized Perspective, the following subcategories were extracted: illuminating blind spots and improving small habits, identifying critical patterns, and accelerating subordinates' performance. Finally, for the third dimension, Emotional Intelligence, the following subcategories were determined: better understanding of situations through self-awareness, possessing social awareness skills to deepen empathy, and having skills to identify core values and beliefs. Consistent with the results of the present study, Romana (2020) shows that managers should take care of and utilize opportunities for their own advancement and act not only as creators of their employees' development (Romana, 2020). Employers should consider that the development environment includes both managers and employees.

The phenomenon of coaching leadership for primary school principals arises in specific environmental conditions. Unlike the contextual factors of coaching leadership, environmental conditions have a mediated impact on the central phenomenon through strategies for

enhancing coaching leadership. In the present study, environmental conditions consisted of three main categories: Managers' Self-Management Skills with subcategories such as self-management, possessing a spirit of self-development, and possessing a spirit of self-criticism. Managers' Management Skills over Others with subcategories such as planning and organizing school activities, classroom and school management, identifying and solving school issues, and decision-making ability in organizational matters. Management Ability in the Organizational Environment with conceptual statements such as considering the different needs and expectations of society, interrelatedness, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral issues in coaching leadership, and development of information and communication technology. Consistent with the findings of the present study, Leaders should personally know their team members at the individual level, empower teams to work independently, and create a safe and open environment for diversity at the team level. Adopting a qualitative methodology, this study understands how coaching leadership facilitates the use of power. This nuanced approach contributes to the literature and enhances our understanding of the role of leadership in optimizing strengths in a professional context.

This study has the following practical implications based on its empirical results. First, as a result of the empirical analysis of this study, it was found that coaching leadership positively contributes to creative performance. This impact helps increase creative performance through close supervisory interactions, with coaching leadership providing material and psychological support to employees. Therefore, an organization should be aware of the positive impacts of leadership and establish systematic selection and training programs for developing and strengthening managers' coaching leadership capabilities. Specifically, we suggest that an organization create an effective selection system based on coaching tools to hire managers who already have external coaching capabilities and promote employees who are potential coaches from within (Thessin, 2023). Moreover, organizations can also offer or support formal training and educational programs to help managers become effective coaches. For example, organizations can use external professional coaching institutions to help managers become accredited coaches (Cox & Mullen, 2023). Overall, we also found that leaders are required to adopt appropriate leadership styles and strategies to develop managerial skills to enhance their organization's efficiency. Second, the organization should facilitate a coaching culture and

stimulate the leader to engage in various coaching behaviors. For example, the organization can support managers' coaching-related behaviors, such as guiding, facilitating, and inspiring coaching activities, which increase employees' sense of belonging to the organization and psychological safety, enabling them to continue their creative work.

This research was conducted within a specific timeframe, and the codes and components extracted are within this timeframe. It is possible that in another study at different times, considering the changing conditions of science and the momentary development of science and technology, better and more codes and categories may emerge. Since the sample of participants was accessible and non-randomly selected, generalizing the results should be done with caution. This research had a geographical limitation and was only focused on a specific sample of primary school principals in Tehran's educational system. Therefore, generalizing the results to other geographical areas and cultures faces limitations.

Based on the obtained results regarding causal conditions, it is recommended that worthy colleagues be identified for coaching leadership training, motivation be created, and employees be assisted in recognizing their strengths, weaknesses, and interests to impact organizational outcomes. Based on the results of the central phenomenon examination, it is recommended to educational planners and human resources managers of Tehran's educational system to enhance coaching leadership for primary school principals through the use of charismatic and employee-oriented non-bureaucratic leadership indicators to achieve educational excellence during the early stages of children's lives. Based on the results of the discussion on contextual conditions, it is recommended that efforts be made to enhance coaching leadership by creating a favorable trust environment in society, a culture of participation and collectivism, strong organizational dependencies, and common organizational interests.

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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

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

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