



Original Article (Mixed)

Antecedents and consequences of professional competence of school administrators with emphasis on environmental sustainability and sustainable development

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Abstract

The aim of the present research is to investigate the antecedents and consequences of professional competence of school managers with an emphasis on environmental sustainability and sustainable development. The research method is applicable in terms of purpose, and mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of implementation. The statistical population of this research in the qualitative section included experts and professors in the field of education in Tehran, who were sampled purposefully; and in the quantitative section, school managers in Tehran who were selected through random-stratified sampling for the validation of the research model. In the qualitative part of the research, data and information were collected through interviews with experts and professors in the field of education, and then the model of professional competence of school managers as a key driver of sustainable development was validated based on a questionnaire. MAXQDA 18 and PLS-Smart 3 software were used for data analysis. The research findings indicated that the model of professional competence of managers includes competence-building skills, managerial competencies, ethical competencies and professional behavior, manager development, social indicators of managers, establishment of work groups for performance improvement and green competence, attitude competencies, knowledge competencies, educational competencies, commercialization competencies of knowledge, skills and technology, work ethic, consumption pattern improvement, participation in development, and moving towards national empowerment, leading to the realization of work ethic results, consumption pattern improvement, participation in development, movement towards national empowerment, diversity management, and enhancing the relationship between humans and nature.

Keywords:

professional competence, environmental sustainability, sustainable development, school principals.

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Extended abstract

Introduction

Performance sustainability is a relatively new concept defined as a process that focuses on all five dimensions of sustainability performance (economic, governance, social, ethical, and environmental) (Atstsaury et al, 2024). Serious action has not been taken to address environmental pollution, especially in the field of human resource development and professional development (Hustler & McIntyre, 2024). With growing public concerns about the long-term consequences of environmental issues and climate change, and its negative impact on the growth and development of societies, particularly in less developed countries, proactive and innovative measures have been taken to embrace environmental responsibilities and professional competencies.

Previous research findings in the area of the current research topic indicate that the perspectives of past researchers on the subject of professional development of managers as a key factor in sustainable development have been different. Some have approached the issue of professional development with an organizational perspective and organizational requirements, while others have looked at it from an individual and personal perspective, seeking the missing link in individual requirements such as a sense of responsibility and environmental attitudes. And as it was mentioned before, some researchers consider organizational requirements and organizational mandates sufficient to change employee behavior. However, another group of researchers has examined both individual and organizational factors but have not provided a model and have not focused on future trends and factors that create sustainable development. Unfortunately, in their research findings, they have also not considered the characteristics of the education sector. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore the antecedents and consequences of professional competence of school managers with an emphasis on environmental sustainability and sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

Professional competencies include skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This means that it is not easy to say that one factor is part of knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Some other experts have also identified other elements of professional competencies; factors such as motivation, self-awareness, personal factors, values, beliefs, and other factors that play a significant role in job success. In the past decade, various models and frameworks have been proposed for measuring competencies, and these models often differ in the information they gather. Some models emphasize generic abilities and qualitative characteristics of individuals, while another group of models focuses on specific technical skills for the job. Some models have attempted to present in a comprehensive approach, by considering job roles, job behaviors, and knowledge-skill-ability, present a combination of individual competencies and job competency areas. Today, there are various models and frameworks for competencies, but it can be said that most of them are somewhat based on these factors (Sancar et al, 2021):

a) Cluster of knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, beliefs, values, and desires, b) Related to the essential part of the job sector, c) Related to superior performance or effectiveness, d) Related to accepted observable and measurable standards, e) Related to strategic direction, f) Improvable through education and training.

Research Methodology:

The present research is considered applicable in terms of its objective type. It has a mixed nature (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of data collection method. Therefore, the approach of this research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (mixed). The statistical population in the qualitative section includes experts and educators in the field of



education, considering the diversity of the statistical population and the fact that the size of such a population is not countable and estimable, purposive sampling method was used. Using theoretical sampling method, interviews were conducted with 20 experts and educators in the field of education in Tehran. In this study, a total of 20 experts and educators in the field of education were gradually selected. To validate the research model, the statistical population in the quantitative section includes high school managers in Tehran with a history of management in high schools and executive and research activities in the field of education. In the quantitative section, the Cochran formula with a five percent error level was used, and a sample size of 384 individuals was determined and selected using simple random sampling method.

Data analysis in this research was conducted at two levels, qualitative and quantitative. To identify the antecedents and consequences of professional competency of managers in this research, content analysis using MAXQDA 18 software was employed. For testing the research model, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique using PLS-Smart 3 statistical software was used, and the results indicated a good fit of the model.

Research Findings:

Initial coding and data categorization were carried out to identify the criteria and sub-criteria for developing the model of professional competency of school managers as an effective and key driver of sustainable development. After combining the initial codes, 61 codes were identified, which were transformed into 13 sub-categories. Structural Equation Modeling was used to examine the identified sub-categories. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normality of the data. Since the significance level for the research variables is less than 0.05, it is concluded that the collected data for the research variables is non-normal. Therefore, Partial Least Squares (PLS) method was used to examine the research model due to the non-normality of the data. In order to validate the professional competence of school principals as an effective and key driver of sustainable development, the proposed conceptual model was investigated through structural equation modelling, and the partial least squares method was used to estimate the model.

The obtained results show that each of the research constructs have acceptable fit indices. All factor loadings are significant at (0.01) level.

Conclusion:

Based on the research findings and the proposed model, professional competency of school managers as an effective and key driver of sustainable development includes empowering skill competencies, managerial competencies, ethical competencies and professional behavior, manager development, social indicators of managers, establishment of workgroups for performance improvement and green competency, attitude competencies, knowledge competencies, educational competencies, commercialization competencies of knowledge-skills and technology, work ethic, consumption pattern improvement, participation in development, and moving towards national empowerment, which lead to achieving the results of work ethic, consumption pattern improvement, and participation in development.

According to the statistical findings of t statistics, attitude competencies, knowledge competencies, skill competencies, managerial competencies, educational competencies, ethical competencies and professional behavior, commercialization competencies of knowledge-skills and technology, manager development, social indicators of managers, establishment of workgroups for performance improvement, green competency, intervention factors, and consequences are positive and significant at the 0.01 level.