



Original Article (Qualitative)

Identifying the Underlying Factors and Challenges of Irresponsible and Non-Meritocratic Appointments in Education

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to identify the underlying factors and challenges in irresponsible and away from meritocratic appointments in education. The present study was applicable in terms of its purpose, and qualitative in terms of the method of data collection, which was conducted by content analysis. The research population included human resources department employees and middle managers of education in Semnan city, and 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted using a non-probability method with a theoretical saturation technique in the findings. The data were coded with MAXQDA 2020 software, and the results of data analysis led to the identification of 47 basic themes and 7 organizing themes in the context of the underlying factors in irresponsible and away from meritocratic appointments in education, which were classified into 4 overarching themes: management in the shadow of politics; organizational belonging bottlenecks; the conflict between economy and educational strategy; and fundamental structural faults; and 105 basic themes and 9 organizing themes were identified in the context of challenges in irresponsible appointments and away from meritocracy in education, which were classified into 4 comprehensive themes: managerial and organizational crises in the education system; social and cultural crisis in education; inequality crisis in education; and quality crisis in education. Considering the identification of the underlying factors and challenges in irresponsible appointments and away from meritocracy in education in this study, implementing the solutions presented in it can facilitate and bring about the realization of the appointment of competent people in education.

Keywords:

Appointment, irresponsible, lack of meritocratic, education

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Extended abstract

Introduction

In today's world, where societies are changing and progressing at an unprecedented pace, human resources are the main pillar and capital of an organization (Nabavi, 2019). The most important factor in the sustainability of any system is the competence of its officials (Ortogoli Farahani et al., 2023). Therefore, appointing managers based on merit is one of the main challenges for policymakers (Rezaei Yazdeli et al., 2023) to identify, attract and retain the most competent managers as a competitive advantage, because meritocracy helps to recognize and reward real performance and, with equal opportunities for all (Suryani et al., 2024), increases employee participation, satisfaction and retention (Budhwar et al., 2019). It also leads to ensuring social justice, increasing motivation, dynamism, creativity and mobility of managers, reducing administrative and financial corruption, increasing organizational productivity and optimal budget consumption, and developing human capital (Yarmohammadi et al., 2024). In appointment based on meritocracy, hard work and achievements or personal abilities of the individual lead to wealth, employment and power; and excellence strengthens the reward of talents regardless of social status or personal connections (Hyder & Khan, 2024). Education, in terms of the nature of activity (Jafari, 2024), is one of the most important pillars of any social system and the basis of the cultural, social, economic and political development of any society (Ghadimi Yardoghdi & Hafezian, 2020), and in this, the manager has a very sensitive and significant role in it (Haseli & Ebrahimiān, 2021) so that they can fulfill the missions of educational systems (Soltani et al, 2024). Therefore, the education system must seek competent, capable, and knowledgeable managers in order to transform the structure of educational organizations and make the most of capital, technology, and human resources (Ghaedri Zefareh et al, 2023). Failure to appoint qualified managers leads to the selection of inefficient human resources that lack the necessary qualifications and skills, which imposes heavy costs on the organization, lacks productivity, and a sharp decline (NgaAssia & Okon Effanga, 2021), and will have irreparable consequences such as loss of employee motivation and public dissatisfaction, wasting potential talents, and consequently reducing efficiency and effectiveness (Ortogoli Farahani et al., 2023). Considering the extent, complexity, and importance of the education organization and its impact on other organizations, and also considering that education is one of the most important pillars of any social system; responsible appointment of managers based on meritocracy is one of the important and challenging issues, and since identifying the underlying factors and existing challenges is the most sensitive and important measure, the outcome of which is to improve the effectiveness of the organization and can play an effective role in making the right policies in this field; therefore, the present study sought to identify the underlying factors and challenges in irresponsible appointments and away from meritocracy in the education organization.

Theoretical foundations of the study

Meritocracy: Meritocracy is a system that provides conditions for the leadership and management of capable and elite individuals. Meritocracy is a model that is based on five bases of managerial competence, such as knowledge, ability, motivation, value, and management style (Schroder, 1989). Meritocracy is a social system in which the highest power and social status are entrusted to individuals with the greatest ability. Meritocracy is a social system in which advancement in society is based on individual abilities and merits, not derived from family, wealth, or social background (Imbroscio, 2016).



Research Methodology

The present study was applicable in terms of purpose, and qualitative in terms of data collection and thematic analysis strategy. The research participants included human resources department employees and middle managers of education in Semnan city in the period 2024, and 14 participants were selected using a non-probability method and considering the theoretical saturation technique in the findings. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. The research data was validated using participant feedback methods and the use of external observers. The data obtained were coded using the content analysis method and MAXQDA 2020 software.

Research findings

Based on the results obtained, the set of reasons that the interviewees mentioned regarding the factors that cause irresponsible and away from meritocratic appointments in the education organization; based on the type of conceptualization, they were classified into four overarching themes: management in the shadow of politics (hidden influence, blocked roads of talent); organizational belonging bottlenecks (inner shadows, invisible walls); conflict between economy and educational strategy (shadows of recession, unclear path of evaluation); and fundamental structural faults (silent structures). Also, the reasons that the interviewees mentioned regarding the challenges arising from irresponsible and away from meritocratic appointments in the education organization; based on the type of conceptualization, they were classified into four overarching themes: managerial and organizational crises (the mask of politics on the face of education, paralyzing bureaucracy in the path of education, strategic holes in the maze of sectional decisions, and stalled wheels: inefficiency in the allocation and utilization of resources), social and cultural crisis (solidarity crisis: a toxic and insecure atmosphere in education, lost light: a crisis of solidarity and motivation in education), inequality crisis (educational system imprisoned by inequality, a curtain on the future of the country), and quality crisis (silent damages in the education system.)

Discussion and Conclusion

The first finding of the research indicated that non-meritocracy appointments in the education organization arise from four root causes in the formation of meritocracy. These sources include: management in the shadow of politics, which is associated with concepts such as hidden influence and blocking the path of talent development, which is consistent with the studies of Akhtar & Abdullah (2023), Alqudah et al., (2022), Farhadinejad et al., (2022), and Michael et al., (2023), which have proposed political interference, party relations, and political influence as effective factors in non-merit-based appointments.

Another identified factor is the conflict between the economy and educational strategy, which is crystallized by the shadows of resource stagnation and ambiguity in the competency assessment system, which is consistent with the studies of Jamjoom (2023), Lashkari & Siah Mansouri (2023), and Mehralizadeh & Chenari (2024). Each of these factors is conducive to the dominance of individual tastes, political preferences, relationship-orientedness, and the neglect of meritocracy in management processes. Accordingly, it is suggested that in order to strengthen merit-based selection, measures such as designing a transparent and legal system for evaluating the competence of managers, establishing multi-level evaluation structures, curbing political and group influence in appointments, institutionalizing a culture of organizational belonging through training, career counseling, and creating professional growth paths should be put on the agenda of policymakers. Also, reviewing resource allocation, clarifying selection criteria, and dealing with traditional and inefficient structures



are other key strategies for reforming the appointment process in education. The first challenge in irresponsible appointments and away from meritocracy in education was the managerial and organizational challenge (the mask of politics on the face of education, paralyzing bureaucracy in the path of education and training, strategic holes in the maze of sectional decisions, and stalled wheels: inefficiency in the allocation and utilization of resources). According to the interviewees, in most of the appointments in the education organization, the qualifications and competence of the individuals are not taken into account and political thinking and political loyalty are key factors in these appointments. The results of this section are in line with the studies of Alqudah et al., (2022), Jamjoom (2023), Akhtar & Abdullah (2023), Michael et al., (2023), Baroun (2024), Elyasinajad (2016), Farhadinejad et al., (2022), Jafarpoor et al., (2023), and Zebardast et al., (2022).

The second challenge of education in irresponsible appointments and non-meritocracy was the social and cultural challenge in education (crisis of solidarity: toxic and insecure atmosphere in education, lost light: crisis of solidarity and motivation in education). Irresponsible appointments and non-meritocracy in the organization have provided a platform for deep conflicts and instability within the organization. The third challenge that arose in irresponsible appointments and non-meritocracy in education was the challenge of inequality in education (education system in the prison of inequality, obscurity on the future of the country). By intensifying injustice, irresponsible appointments in education reduce job opportunities and expand social inequality. The quality challenge in education (silent damages in the education system) was the fourth challenge in irresponsible and non-meritocratic appointments in education. Irresponsible and non-meritocratic appointments in education, through incorrect decision-making and ineffective policies, cause silent damages in the education system and exacerbate educational isolation.