Identification of Performance Standards for Male High School Principals in Mashhad

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Abstract

Today, the success of organizations and institutions requires effective and efficient management; among them, management in education and schools, as the formal institutions of education, holds a special place because they directly shape the future of society by nurturing students and preparing them to face global challenges. The effectiveness of educational management on the one hand, and the ability to monitor the activities of principals on the other, necessitate access to performance standards in this area. Given the lack of a formulated standard for school principals and the significance and status of high schools, the aim of this research is to identify the performance standards for high school principals. The research method is grounded theory (specifically, the Straussian approach), and the data collection tool is a semi-structured interview. The statistical population includes all high school principals in the districts of Mashhad. Ten prominent principals were purposefully selected as a sample using the snowball method. After open coding the transcribed interviews and axial coding, 27 components of the performance standards for school principals were identified. Finally, with categorization, these components were classified into five dimensions: human relations, managerial tasks, principals' vision and attitude, school growth and progress, and principals' personal needs. The importance of human relations in high school management was defined as the main category, and other components were defined in relation to it. Ultimately, a model of performance standards for high school principals was obtained.

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Introduction:

The transformations of the current century have impacted the needs of both internal and external audiences in the education system. Among them, schools have been sub-systems whose quality and effectiveness demonstrate how they respond to the expectations of education stakeholders. Achieving educational and curricular goals, strategies, and correct responses to the expectations of education stakeholders is not possible without the presence of experienced and innovative managers and leaders (Chendi Yolanda, 2023; Ghoorchian & Mahmoodi, 2004). For example, Yolanda (2023) and Mirkamali (2022) emphasize the role of managerial knowledge and skill in enhancing educational systems' efficiency and credibility.

If educational managers possess sufficient knowledge and skills, the educational system will also benefit from effectiveness, efficiency, and credibility. A principal must possess specific characteristics, abilities, and skills to confidently entrust children and adolescents to their hands (Cruickshank, 2017; Mirkamali, 2022; Pakistan task group & International British Council Consultants, 2024). In all management-based professions, preparing managers to fulfill their roles and improving their effectiveness in the learning environment is essential based on related standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019). Therefore, investing in the quality enhancement of educational staff, particularly educational managers, through standardization, will significantly impact the quality and efficiency of the educational system (Gorchani et al., 2023; Khanifar et al., 2008). A standard is a level of quality considered acceptable by people (Oxford University, 2020). Although some doubt the possibility of formulating standards for human resources and believe standardization hinders societal progress and destroys individual creativity and innovation, countries like the United States, Australia, Indonesia, and Russia have formed special committees to standardize human resources, including educational managers and leaders (Khanifar et al., 2008).

In the United States, the "Technology Standards for School Administrators Forum," the "Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium," and the "National Policy Board for Educational Administration" have been formulating standards for school administrators since 1996, which have since been updated with some modifications (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Technology Standards for School Administrators, 2001). Various states in the U.S., such as Missouri, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, New Jersey, Florida, and Chicago, have each introduced their standards for school administrators based on the six ISLLC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). In Australia, the Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, aiming to standardize the educational system, identified standards for school principals based on three leadership needs: vision and values, knowledge and understanding, and personal and social skills. Principals apply these three leadership needs in five areas of their professional activities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011). These five areas include leading teaching and learning, developing self and others, leading improvement, innovation and change, leading the management of the school, and engaging and working with the community, which are periodically updated (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019). The province of Alberta in Canada has also identified seven dimensions of its school leaders and examined ways to advance their progress (Alberta Education, 2009). The Northern Ireland Regional Education Unit, after defining five key areas for school leadership standards, formulated standards of understanding and skills required to achieve them (The National Standards for School Leadership, 2008). The Department for Education in the United Kingdom (National Leaders of Education (NLE) Standards, 2020) also formulated "National Standards for Educational Leaders." In 2024, the government of Pakistan, in collaboration with the British Council, formulated national standards for its school principals (Pakistan task group & International British Council Consultants, 2024).

McMahon and Torrance (2023), in an article titled "Standards for School Management and Leadership," discuss efforts made by individuals and countries in this field. Searches conducted in Iranian internal information databases reveal that few research articles directly address the topic of performance and professional standards for school principals; research that has generally been conducted a long time ago. Ghoorchian and Mahmoodi (2004), Khanifar, Jandighi, and Abdolhosseini (2008), and Halimi and Fathi Azar (2017) conducted studies to identify performance standards for school principals.

Additionally, Mehdi Zirak and others (2009) examined professional standards for university presidents. Officially, in 2002, the Ministry of Education established a "Quality Improvement and Standards Office" to prepare and formulate standard indicators for human resources in education and apply quality improvement and productivity enhancement methods according to these standards and adapt them based on internal experiences. In March 2004, this office held its first and only conference, where various views on standardization in education were discussed. Out of 160 accepted articles at this conference, 35 were published in a book titled "Standards and Standardization in Education," with about seven articles addressing educational management and human resources standards directly or indirectly. Interestingly, a review of historical documents reveals standards for education in the theories of Islamic scholars of the 3rd and 4th centuries. Among them, Ibn Sahnun and the Ikhwan al-Safa pioneers in setting criteria and indicators for students, teachers, and even the educational system (Beheshti et al., 2021).

Examinations show that in practice, schools in Iran are traditionally managed by individuals with teaching backgrounds who lack specialization in educational management or administration. In addition, reality shows that the regulations and guidelines for the performance of educational managers are vague and do not meet the needs of the education system and are subject to personal interpretation in implementation. The deficiencies and problems related to school principals in Iran stem from the fact that, despite the existence of approved job descriptions for educational managers and a performance evaluation system for school principals, there are no clear "performance assessment standards" or "performance competencies" for evaluating educational managers' performance in the country. The management of human resources in the educational system lacks an appropriate model for standardizing the performance of educational managers (Gholami et al., 2013; Ghoorchian & Mahmoodi, 2004). Therefore, formulating performance and professional standards for school principals is essential to enhance the quality level of school principals and provide a clear professional perspective.

This research addresses the issue of what the performance standards for male high school principals in the second stage in Mashhad are. Despite global examples of standardized managerial performance standards, such as those by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2019), there is an apparent gap in Iran. Specifically, there is a lack of unified frameworks for assessing managerial competencies, inadequate training programs tailored to the unique challenges of Iranian schools, and an over-reliance on traditional administrative approaches that do not align with modern educational demands. The regulations and guidelines for the performance of educational managers are vague and do not meet the needs of the education system. This lack of clarity and effectiveness underscores the necessity of identifying specific performance standards.

Research Questions:

What are the components of the performance standards for high school principals in Mashhad?

Methodology:

This study employed the Glaserian approach to grounded theory, chosen for its alignment with the exploratory nature of the research. Unlike the Straussian approach, which emphasizes structured frameworks and model development, the Glaserian method focuses on emergent theory derived directly from the data, allowing for flexibility and a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach was deemed most appropriate for identifying performance standards for high school principals in Mashhad, where no predefined framework existed.

Research Field and Participants

The study was conducted among male high school principals in Mashhad's second educational stage. The participants were selected based on purposeful and snowball sampling methods, ensuring the inclusion of experienced and high-performing principals. The criteria for selection included:

- Over 20 years of experience in education.
- Positive performance evaluations by the Department of Education.
- Strong reputation for leadership within their schools.
- High levels of staff and community satisfaction with their performance (Patton, 2002).

A total of 10 principals participated in the study, with interviews continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

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Table 1 Interviewees' Characteristics

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Row	Age	Education	Years of Work	Years of Management	Management Experiences
1	52	PhD Candidate in Educational Management	30	25	Deputy Director General, District Manager, Principal of Exemplary Public School, Principal of Public School, Principal of Private School
2	48	Bachelor's Degree in Educational Sciences	29	7	Principal of Public School
3	48	Bachelor's Degree in Management	29	27	District Supervisor, Deputy District Manager, Principal of Shahed School, Principal of Public School
4	52	Bachelor's Degree in Management and Planning	31	24	Principal of Public School, Principal of Technical School
5	48	Bachelor's Degree in Educational Management	29	8	Principal of Public School
6	46	Master's Degree in Geography	27	4	Principal of Exemplary Public School
7	46	Bachelor's Degree in Theology	26	2	Principal of Gifted Students School
8	49	PhD Candidate in Literature	29	10	Principal of Public School
9	44	Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education	20	5	Principal of Private School
10	47	Bachelor's Degree in History	29	12	Principal of Public School

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, chosen for their ability to elicit rich, detailed insights while allowing participants to express their perspectives freely. This method ensured a comprehensive exploration of the principals' experiences and practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using grounded theory techniques, beginning with open coding to identify initial concepts. Axial coding was then employed to group these concepts into broader categories, followed by selective coding to integrate and refine the emerging themes. A constant comparison method was applied throughout to ensure consistency and depth in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Validation of Findings

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, the following strategies were employed:

- **Member Checking:** Participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcriptions and preliminary findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- **Peer Review:** Independent researcher evaluated the coding and categorization processes to ensure rigor.

By adopting this systematic and rigorous methodology, the study provides a grounded and context-specific understanding of performance standards for high school principals.

Findings:

After conducting 15 hours of interviews, 300 pages of text concerning performance standards were obtained.

Open Coding:

The open coding stage aimed to uncover the fundamental concepts and themes emerging from the participants' experiences. This initial phase of analysis involved a meticulous review of interview transcripts, assigning labels to meaningful segments of text to

reflect the essence of the participants' statements. The process yielded 670 initial codes, capturing diverse perspectives on high school principals' roles and challenges. These codes were grouped into key areas, providing the foundation for further analysis.

Key Areas Identified

Table 2 provides a summary of key codes identified during the open coding stage, including their frequency and representative examples from the data, along with the corresponding interviewee.

Table 2 A Summary of Key Codes Identified During The Open Coding Stage

Code	Frequency	Example Statement	Interviewee
Patience and tolerance	21 times	*"Principals must remain calm and composed, even in challenges."*	Interviewee 3
Risk-taking	14 times	*"Sometimes adhering to rules doesn't work; you must take risks."*	Interviewee 5
Creativity and innovation	13 times	*"To keep the school dynamic, creativity is crucial despite constraints."*	Interviewee 8
Fairness in decision-making	12 times	*"Equity in decisions prevents student dropouts."*	Interviewee 4
Community engagement in budgeting	10 times	*"Our funding heavily relies on public contributions."*	Interviewee 2

Summary of Open Coding

These initial codes provided a comprehensive foundation for subsequent stages of analysis. By capturing a wide range of insights, the open coding phase allowed for a deep exploration of the participants' lived experiences. The emerging codes were systematically compared and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data, laying the groundwork for axial coding, where broader categories were developed to better understand the interconnections among these concepts.

The following section discusses the axial coding process and how these initial codes were organized into broader themes and categories.

Axial Coding:

In this stage, the open codes were systematically grouped into higher-level categories based on their conceptual similarities. The objective was to reduce the initial codes into a manageable set of explanatory categories, linking them wherever possible. Each axial code was defined based on the underlying concepts and enriched with examples from the interviews. As an example, the path to accessing the axial code "Budget Acquisition" is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 Path to Access Axial Codes for Budget Acquisition

Interviewee Number	Interviewee Statement	Open Code	Axial Code
5	*Most of our funding relies on parental contributions and public participation.*	Attracting Public Participation	
5	*Some of the funding also comes from extracurricular classes held during the year, with approximately 27% to 30% being allocated to high schools as per regulations.*	Acquiring Resources from Extracurricular Activities	
3	*The truth about school funding sources is either through state funding deposited into the school's account, public participation, or donations from philanthropists.*	Ways to Acquire Resources	**Budget Acquisition**
3	*Currently, about 90% to 100% of the budget must be provided through public participation and donors because the Ministry of Education provides nothing anymore.*	Utilizing Public Contributions	

Interviewee Number	Interviewee Statement	Open Code	Axial Code
8	*I approached teachers whose salaries weren't a concern for them since they had other income sources. For instance, I shared a case of a student whose mother hadn't eaten meat for four months.*	Using Skilled Teachers to Help Needy Students	
8	*I intended to bring a sheep I was supposed to give to my relatives, and I gave it to the school instead.*	Utilizing All School Capacities to Address Issues	
8	*The only money I have comes from the school's cafeteria, where the student collected half for himself and gave the other half to me. I have a total of 86 Tomans.*	Leveraging School Resources for Revenue Generation	
2	*Right now, I am willing to make all classrooms smart by the beginning of the school year. However, if the teacher, for example, does not utilize the technology, what's the point?*	Enhancing and Expanding Facilities Based on Needs and Staff Capacity	
4	*Sometimes, assistance is provided only due to the principal's interaction, determining whether this task will be completed.*	Principal Interaction as a Resource Attraction Strategy	

Table 4 provides a detailed mapping of open codes to axial codes, offering a transparent view of the coding process.

Table 4 Mapping Open Codes to Axial Codes

Axial Code	Definition	Open Codes (4 cases)	Examples
Decision-Making	Utilizing participatory and collective approaches in making school decisions	Consulting Others, Participatory Decision-Making, Consensus Building, Considering Stakeholder Input	*"Even for painting the school, I consult others."* *(Interviewee 5)*
Planning	Setting objectives and creating strategies to achieve them	Annual Operational Planning, Explaining Plans, Setting Priorities, Evaluating Outcomes	*"We need to explain plans to parents and students."* *(Interviewee 6)*
Budget Acquisition	Methods for securing financial resources for schools	Attracting Public Participation, Utilizing Public Contributions, Engaging Donors, Applying for Grants	*"Public participation provides 90% of our budget."* *(Interviewee 3)*
Motivation	Boosting productivity and effectiveness among staff and students	Encouraging Teachers, Recognizing Efforts, Fostering Team Spirit, Celebrating Achievements	*"The principal must inspire unmotivated teachers."* *(Interviewee 2)*
Motive	The internal drive or reasons behind actions and decisions	Personal Goals, Leadership Aspirations, Making a Difference, Commitment to Vision	*"A principal should genuinely care about making a difference."* *(Interviewee 7)*
Effective Communication with Teachers and Staff	Building positive relationships and valuing staff contributions	Staff Motivation, Valuing Contributions, Encouraging Collaboration, Providing Feedback	*"When my colleagues feel valued, they work passionately."* *(Interviewee 9)*
Effective Communication with Parents	Building trust and active participation from parents	Transparent Communication, Engaging Parents, Addressing Concerns, Sharing School Updates	*"Parents were initially afraid to come to school due to financial concerns."* *(Interviewee 4)*
Effective Communication with Students	Establishing fair and just relationships with students	Promoting Equity, Understanding Student Needs, Providing Guidance, Building Trust	*"Lack of fairness could change a student's future."* *(Interviewee 5)*

Axial Code	Definition	Open Codes (4 cases)	Examples
Effective Communication with Education Dept.	Interacting with the education department to influence decisions and gain support	Demanding Support, Opposing Incorrect Directives, Aligning Goals, Reporting Progress	*"Interaction helps achieve work independence." (Interviewee 4)*
Effective Communication with External Environment	Leveraging social institutions and external resources	Networking with Institutions, Outreach Programs, Building Partnerships, Promoting School Achievements	*"We take students to universities to broaden their horizons." (Interviewee 1)*
Control	Monitoring and evaluating staff and school performance	Conducting Evaluations, Continuous Feedback, Reviewing Procedures, Monitoring Goals	*"We conduct evaluations every three months." (Interviewee 1)*
Coordination	Aligning efforts of all stakeholders towards common goals	Organizing Meetings, Harmonizing Efforts, Sharing Responsibilities, Clarifying Roles	*"Meetings ensure everyone's input is considered." (Interviewee 3)*
Research	Conducting studies to identify and address school shortcomings	Identifying Weaknesses, Evaluating Strategies, Analyzing Data, Proposing Solutions	*"Principals must gather data from different groups to succeed." (Interviewee 4)*
Crisis Management	Handling unexpected events and conflicts effectively	Resolving Conflicts, Managing Emergencies, Maintaining Calm, Providing Immediate Solutions	*"Daily crises include student fights and injuries." (Interviewee 2)*
Creativity	Implementing innovative solutions in school management	Developing Unique Strategies, Fostering Innovation, Encouraging Out-of-the-Box Thinking, Experimenting with Ideas	*"Creativity means doing things no one has thought of before." (Interviewee 10)*
Problem-Solving	Addressing challenges comprehensively and innovatively	Addressing Root Issues, Innovative Approaches, Overcoming Barriers, Finding Practical Solutions	*"We increased our success rate without additional classes." (Interviewee 8)*
Risk-Taking	Making bold decisions when necessary	Stepping Beyond Norms, Challenging Expectations, Exploring Uncharted Paths, Making Tough Calls	*"Risk-taking is stepping beyond standard boundaries." (Interviewee 9)*
Human Resource Training	Enhancing staff skills through training sessions and workshops	Conducting Workshops, In-Service Training, Developing Curricula, Facilitating Knowledge Sharing	*"Staff meetings should include discussions on new teaching methods." (Interviewee 1)*
Knowledge Management	Sharing and utilizing experiences among school staff	Experience Sharing, Learning from Other Schools, Documenting Best Practices, Encouraging Peer Learning	*"We learn from the experiences of other schools." (Interviewee 7)*
Knowledge and Awareness	Staying informed about administrative, educational, and social issues	Staying Updated, Multidisciplinary Knowledge, Following Trends, Seeking Professional Development	*"A principal should be familiar with all scientific and ideological areas." (Interviewee 9)*
Holistic Thinking	Considering all dimensions of education and management	Integrating Perspectives, Comprehensive Analysis, Balancing Priorities, Understanding Contexts	*"Understanding psychological and sociological aspects is crucial." (Interviewee 1)*
Organization	Establishing order and structure in school operations	Task Delegation, Structural Clarity, Creating Timelines, Monitoring Workflow	*"The vice-principal and counselor have specific responsibilities." (Interviewee 10)*

Axial Code	Definition	Open Codes (4 cases)	Examples
Counseling	Providing general guidance to students, parents, and staff	Offering Guidance, Referring Complex Cases, Supporting Emotional Needs, Building Confidence	*"Principals should guide but refer complex cases to specialists." (Interviewee 3)*
School Environment and Atmosphere	Creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere for students and staff	Respecting Thoughts, Building Belonging, Promoting Collaboration, Ensuring Safety	*"Respecting thoughts creates a sense of belonging." (Interviewee 1)*
Personal Characteristics	Traits such as tolerance, intelligence, and courage essential for principals	Demonstrating Patience, Building Trust, Showing Empathy, Exhibiting Resilience	*"Physical health and teamwork skills are key." (Interviewee 1)*
Responsibility	Demonstrating commitment and accountability in school management	Commitment to Tasks, Accountability to Stakeholders, Fulfilling Promises, Accepting Feedback	*"Students monitored my work through suggestion boxes." (Interviewee 4)*

This comprehensive mapping provided the foundation for selective coding, where these categories were further organized into broader dimensions to form a cohesive framework.

Selective Coding:

In the selective coding stage, the 27 axial codes were organized into five overarching dimensions: Human Relations, Vision and Attitude, Managerial Tasks, Growth and Development, and Personal Needs. Among these, Human Relations was identified as the core category, as it serves as the foundation for effective school management and influences all other dimensions.

Core Category: Human Relations

Human Relations was chosen as the core category due to its central role in facilitating successful interactions with key stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and the education department. This dimension not only underpins the effectiveness of other managerial and developmental tasks but also fosters trust, collaboration, and a supportive environment essential for achieving school objectives.

Dimensions and Their Connections

1. **Human Relations:**
   o Encompasses communication with students, teachers and staff, parents, and the education department.
   o Provides the foundation for building relationships that enable collaboration, trust, and shared goals.

2. **Vision and Attitude:**
   o Reflects the principal's ability to think systematically, solve problems, and take responsibility.
   o Strong vision and ethical leadership enhance the quality of human interactions and decision-making processes.

3. **Managerial Tasks:**
   o Includes essential operational responsibilities such as planning, decision-making, budget acquisition, and crisis management.
   o Relies heavily on effective communication and coordination to ensure successful execution.

4. **Growth and Development:**
   o Focuses on fostering a supportive and innovative environment for students, staff, and the broader school community.
   o Emphasizes the importance of creativity, research, and risk-taking in driving continuous improvement.

5. **Personal Needs:**
   o Highlights the principal's individual motivations, experiences, and personal characteristics.
   o Strong human relations help principals address their personal needs, such as resilience and motivation, while maintaining balance in their roles.

Mapping Axial Codes to Dimensions

Table 5 Mapping Axial Codes to Selective Coding (Dimensions)

Selective Coding (Dimensions)	Axial Codes
Human Relations	Communication with Students, Communication with Teachers and Staff, Communication with Parents, Communication with the Education Dept.
Vision and Attitude	Systematic Thinking, Problem-Solving, Responsibility
Managerial Tasks	Budget Acquisition, Motivation, Planning, Decision-Making, Control, Coordination, Organization, Counseling, Crisis Management
Growth and Development	School Environment and Atmosphere, Human Resource Training, Research, Creativity, Risk-Taking, Knowledge Management, External Environment Communication
Personal Needs	Experience, Knowledge and Awareness, Motive, Personal Characteristics

Integration and Theoretical Framework

Human Relations serves as the central element connecting all dimensions, ensuring cohesion and alignment in school management. For example:

- **Managerial Tasks** depend on clear and effective communication channels to facilitate planning, coordination, and decision-making.
- **Growth and Development** is driven by strong relationships that encourage collaboration and innovation among stakeholders.
- **Vision and Attitude** influence the approach to building trust and fostering shared goals within the school community.
- **Personal Needs** are met through supportive relationships that enhance resilience and leadership effectiveness.

Interactions Between Components and the Core Category

The relationships between the core category, Human Relations, and other components can be categorized as follows:

1. **Contextual Factors:** Some components act as contextual factors that establish the foundation for human relations. These include dimensions of Vision and Attitude and Personal Needs, encompassing:
   - Systematic Thinking
   - Problem-Solving
   - Responsibility
   - Experience
   - Knowledge and Awareness
   - Motive
   - Personal Characteristics

2. **Influenced Components:** Certain components are influenced by human relations. These include:
   - **Managerial Tasks:** Budget Acquisition, Motivation, Crisis Management
   - **Growth and Development:** Creativity, Risk-Taking, Knowledge Management, External Environment Communication

3. **Influential Components:** Some components actively influence human relations. These include:
   - **Managerial Tasks:** Planning, Decision-Making, Counseling, Organization
   - **Growth and Development:** Research, Human Resource Training

4. **Bidirectional Components:** Certain components have a bidirectional relationship with human relations, meaning they are both influenced by and influence this dimension. These include:
   - Coordination (as the central aspect of human relations, facilitating all interactions)
   - School Environment and Atmosphere
   - Control

This integrated framework underscores the dynamic interplay between human relations and other dimensions, highlighting its central role in shaping effective school management.

Performance Standards for School Principals

Based on the findings of this study and the coding analysis, the performance standards for school principals were categorized into five key dimensions. These standards are as follows:

1. Human Relations

- **Communication with Students:** Establishing fair interactions, building trust, and guiding students toward growth and learning.
- **Communication with Teachers and Staff:** Motivating staff, fostering collaboration, and providing constructive feedback.
- **Communication with Parents:** Building trust through transparent communication and involving parents in the educational process.
- **Communication with the Education Department:** Coordinating to secure resources and gain necessary support.

2. Vision and Attitude

- **Systematic Thinking:** Adopting a comprehensive view of school issues and understanding the interconnections between components.
- **Problem-Solving:** Identifying and analyzing managerial challenges effectively.
- **Responsibility:** Demonstrating commitment to managerial tasks and accountability to stakeholders.

3. Managerial Tasks

- **Budget Acquisition:** Identifying and securing financial resources through public participation and collaboration with benefactors.
- **Planning:** Designing short-term and long-term goals and developing actionable strategies.
- **Decision-Making:** Making participatory and evidence-based decisions.
- **Control and Evaluation:** Continuously monitoring staff performance and school processes.
- **Coordination:** Aligning efforts of all stakeholders to achieve common goals.
- **Counseling:** Providing guidance to students, teachers, and parents on educational and personal issues.

- **Crisis Management:** Managing critical situations effectively and offering immediate solutions.

4. Growth and Development

- **School Environment and Atmosphere:** Creating a positive and motivating environment for learning and collaboration.
- **Human Resource Training:** Enhancing staff skills through continuous professional development.
- **Research:** Using data and research to improve managerial processes.
- **Creativity:** Employing innovative solutions to address challenges.
- **Risk-Taking:** Making bold decisions and accepting responsibility for them.
- **Knowledge Management:** Sharing experiences and utilizing best practices.
- **External Environment Communication:** Building effective interactions with organizations and resources outside the school.

5. Personal Needs

- **Experience:** Leveraging past experiences for effective decision-making.
- **Knowledge and Awareness:** Staying updated in educational, managerial, and social domains.
- **Motive:** Maintaining enthusiasm and passion for school management.
- **Personal Characteristics:** Demonstrating tolerance, intelligence, courage, and adaptability.

These standards highlight the comprehensive and multidimensional role of school principals, emphasizing Human Relations as the core category.

Discussion and Conclusion:

According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), professional and performance standards define the nature and quality of the work performed by individuals in that profession. The findings of this research aimed to clarify and specify these standards within their context by accurately coding data from interviews. Khanifar et al. (2008) also defined performance standards for principals as "the competencies and abilities required for effective performance in the workplace," which

aligns with the final categorization and selective coding followed in this study.

The research compared the obtained standards with those from countries like Australia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019) and the United States (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) and found several points of alignment:

1. The standards are defined broadly to avoid stifling individual and organizational creativity and innovation.

They emphasize social skills, personal characteristics, and leadership elements.

The standards are limited and precisely defined.

Moreover, the standards are articulated in simple language, are open to feedback and evaluation, have been considered by all interviewees, and are flexible and implementable.

Despite achieving these results, it seemed necessary to uncover the relationships among the findings to attain a cohesive set of performance standards for principals. Therefore, a modeling process based on grounded theory was undertaken, aiming to provide general evaluation indicators for these standards.

Discussion and Conclusion
Key Findings and Their Implications

This study identified five key dimensions of performance standards for school principals: Human Relations, Vision and Attitude, Managerial Tasks, Growth and Development, and Personal Needs. Among these, Human Relations emerged as the core category, highlighting its central role in facilitating effective interactions with students, teachers, parents, and the education department.

The emphasis on Human Relations underscores its impact on other dimensions of school management. Effective communication fosters trust, collaboration, and alignment among stakeholders, which are essential for achieving organizational goals. These standards provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating and improving the performance of school principals. Practically, they can inform the design of professional development programs and performance appraisal systems tailored to the needs of school leaders.

Comparison with International Standards

The findings of this study align with several internationally recognized standards for school leadership, including:

1. **Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles** (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019)**:**
   o Focuses on educational leadership, self and others' development, and community leadership.
   o Aligns with the "Managerial Tasks" and "Growth and Development" dimensions in this study.

2. **Educational Leadership Policy Standards** (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008)**:**
   o Emphasizes school culture, community collaboration, and ethical practices.
   o Shares common ground with the "Human Relations" and "Vision and Attitude" dimensions identified here.

3. **Professional Standards for Educational Leaders** (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015)**:**
   o Includes areas such as equity, mission, learning, and professional ethics.
   o Aligns with "Vision and Attitude" and "Personal Needs," particularly in its emphasis on resilience and motivation.

4. **National Standards for School Heads Pakistan** (Pakistan task group & International British Council Consultants, 2024)**:**
   o Focuses on resource management, community engagement, and professional development.
   o Reflects similarities with "Growth and Development" and "Managerial Tasks."

5. **National Leaders of Education (NLE) Standards** (National Leaders of Education (NLE) Standards, 2020)**:**
   o Highlights problem-solving, building capacity, and professional credibility.

o Overlaps with "Vision and Attitude" and "Managerial Tasks."

6. **The National Standards for School Leadership** (The National Standards for School Leadership, 2008)**:**
   o Emphasizes strategic leadership, learning, and community involvement.
   o Aligns closely with "Human Relations" and "Growth and Development."

Key Differences

While there is significant overlap with international standards, this study identifies several unique aspects:

1. **Human Relations as the Core Dimension:**
   o Unlike many international frameworks that emphasize leadership and strategy, this study identifies Human Relations as the central dimension, reflecting the cultural importance of interpersonal relationships in the local context.

2. **Inclusion of Personal Needs:**
   o This study incorporates personal motivations, resilience, and characteristics, emphasizing the holistic nature of school leadership.

3. **Focus on Crisis Management:**
   o Highlighting crisis management reflects the challenges faced by school principals in resource-constrained environments, which is less emphasized in many international standards.

Reasons for Differences

- **Cultural Context:** Interpersonal relationships play a significant role in organizational success in the local setting, influencing the prioritization of Human Relations.
- **Resource Constraints:** The emphasis on crisis management and personal needs reflects the unique challenges of managing schools with limited resources.
- **Educational Structures:** Local policies and educational structures shape the roles and responsibilities of school principals differently than in other contexts.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integration into Training Programs:**
   o The identified standards should be incorporated into training and development programs for aspiring and current school principals to enhance their leadership capabilities.

2. **Policy Implications:**
   o Educational policymakers should consider these standards when designing performance evaluation systems to ensure alignment with the multifaceted roles of school leaders.

3. **Further Research:**
   o Future studies could explore the applicability of these standards in different educational contexts or compare their effectiveness across various cultural settings.

In conclusion, this study provides a robust framework for understanding and improving the performance of school principals. By emphasizing Human Relations as the central dimension, it offers a unique perspective that complements existing international standards while addressing the specific needs of local educational systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Practical Recommendations

- **For Educational Policymakers:**
  o Integrate the identified performance standards into the training and evaluation frameworks for school principals.
  o Emphasize the development of Human Relations and crisis management skills in leadership training programs.

- **For School Principals:**
  o Engage in workshops and professional development sessions

to strengthen interpersonal skills and foster collaboration.

o Leverage peer learning by sharing experiences with successful school leaders.

2. Research Recommendations

- **Future Studies:**
  o Conduct further research on the impact of Human Relations on school success in diverse cultural settings.
  o Explore quantitative methods to measure the influence of each identified dimension on school performance.
- **Expanding the Scope:**
  o Apply these standards to other educational leadership roles, such as vice-principals or department heads.
  o Undertake comparative studies to evaluate how these standards align with or differ from international benchmarks.

These recommendations aim to enhance the practical application of the identified standards and encourage further exploration in the field of educational leadership.

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