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# An analysis of professional learning standards in Iranian secondary schools (case study: Kurdistan province) based on Learning Forward

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the professional learning standards in Iranian secondary schools (case study: Kurdistan province). This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population includes all schools in Kurdistan province, which consist of 101 schools. According to the Cochran formula, 12 schools were selected as the sample size through multi-stage cluster sampling. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. This 47-item questionnaire was designed by researchers to measure professional learning standards in schools in three main areas: conditions for the success of the professional learning program, processes of transforming the professional learning program, and comprehensive and accurate content. According to the research results, the subscale of equity and justice in the conditions for the success of the professional learning program is in a desirable state, while the collaborative culture is in the worst state. The drivers of educational equity are in the best desirable state, and the educational plans are in the worst state in the domain of the processes of transforming the professional learning program. Regarding the area of comprehensive and accurate content in schools, the curriculum, planning, and teaching are reported to be in the best desirable state, while the professional expertise of teachers is in the worst state. Finally, the results indicate that the average status of professional learning in schools is at a moderate level.

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**Introduction:**

In the process of education, the teacher is considered the main pillar and fundamental factor, and achieving the goals of the education system is not possible without capable and professionally competent teachers (Mirahmadi, Khorasani, Abolghasemi, & Mehri, 2019). Accordingly, teacher learning has been one of the most debated research areas in recent decades (Stevenson, 2023; Qeymiri, 2022; Hallinger, Tran, & Truong, 2021; Proudfoot & Boyd, 2022; Hossein Qolizadeh, Emrahi, & Alfar, 2020; Ferd, Perr, Allen, & Marjan, (2020). Ali Akbari and Malmir (2017) claim that these studies have demonstrated the importance of teachers' attitudes, attention, and awareness in professional development and have examined how teachers apply what they know in their teaching experiences through learning activities.

Additionally, teachers differ from each other in terms of learning patterns they acquire during their professional learning period. If teacher learning is supported and promoted by the educational environment, and the effective factors on it are identified, the opportunities provided to advance models of teaching practices and learning will also improve teachers' professional development (Shaw, 2010).

Hansbol, Courtrup, Wiberg, and Christensen (2016) describe the formal definition of learning as "the process of relatively permanent change in behavior based on a person's interactive experience with their surrounding environment." Thus, learning is an important form of personal adaptation. Teacher learning also refers to "the process of increasing participation in teaching practice and, through this participation, the process of becoming a student in teaching and about it." Professional development is also defined as "the processes and activities designed to enhance educators' knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes to improve student teaching in turn" (Pinar, Bardakci, & Arslan, 2021). Professional learning for teachers is one of the key drivers for creating exemplary schools (Stricker, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2018). Professional learning suggests new perspectives that are carried out in social and innovative ways through collaboration and sharing of professional knowledge and teaching methods as well as reflection on those methods (Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

Professional learning enables teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills, and methods necessary for effective teaching, supporting their peers, contributing to the collective improvement of the profession, and gaining the trust, status, and self-efficacy to perform their work with a high degree of professionalism.

While choosing a teaching career and initial teacher education are crucial to ensuring that new teachers are competent and prepared for their jobs, initial preparation alone cannot equip teachers for all the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Therefore, continued professional learning is vital for teachers to renew, develop, and expand their knowledge to align with research, tools, practices, and student needs (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021). In this context, professional learning standards support participation, management, research, and professional learning. These standards specify that the purpose of professional learning is to develop teachers' knowledge, skills, and teaching methods to help enhance student learning. They also guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning and enable the continuous and nationwide implementation of a professional learning system. For teachers, the standards have multiple goals, including creating a common language for education professionals, providing a specific benchmark for professional competency, developing and promoting professional learning, supporting long-term professional growth, offering a framework for initial teacher training, trial pathways, management and programs, and ultimately ensuring and increasing trust and public confidence in the teaching profession (House, Benton, Green, Gilbert, & Vandervoort, 2017).

Professional learning standards are organized to support system-level and process support. The goal of these standards is to support goal setting, resource allocation, monitoring progress, etc., which regions or

schools must engage in to create effective professional learning conditions. The standards of this system call for professional learning goals that are primarily designed to meet teacher and student outcomes as part of a long-term strategic plan, data-driven decision-making based on local analysis, and the allocation of appropriate resources necessary to sustain this work over time (Mills, Rosenberg, & Green, 2017).

Professional learning standards are inherently forward-looking as they lead to continuous improvement in teachers' practice. Regarding the set of professional learning standards, it is expected: What should students know and be able to do? What should adults know to support student learning? What conditions ensure that adults acquire these essential skills and knowledge? As standards have evolved and their use in schools has increased over time, there is also a growing understanding that professional learning should be considered an integral part of all teachers' ongoing work, rather than a one-off and superficial endeavor. If teachers work as hard as they can every day and give everything they have to their students, the only thing that will close the learning gap is when teachers themselves acquire the knowledge, skills, and subject expertise essential to help them.

The only way for teachers to gain this expertise has always been through continuous and effective professional learning (Hirsch, 2022).

Ultimately, it can be said that the effectiveness and efficiency of professional learning also require attention to factors such as a supportive learning environment, leadership with an emphasis on learning, and the intertwining of the learning process and practice (Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcomb, & Fuller, 2012).

According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, learning in teachers should occur in a social environment. According to him, learning happens in two successive levels. First, the learner must learn from individuals like their mentor or colleague, and then learning occurs within the individual (Niki Collins, 2017). Ty and Omar (2019) presented a model for professional learning designed for the school environment.

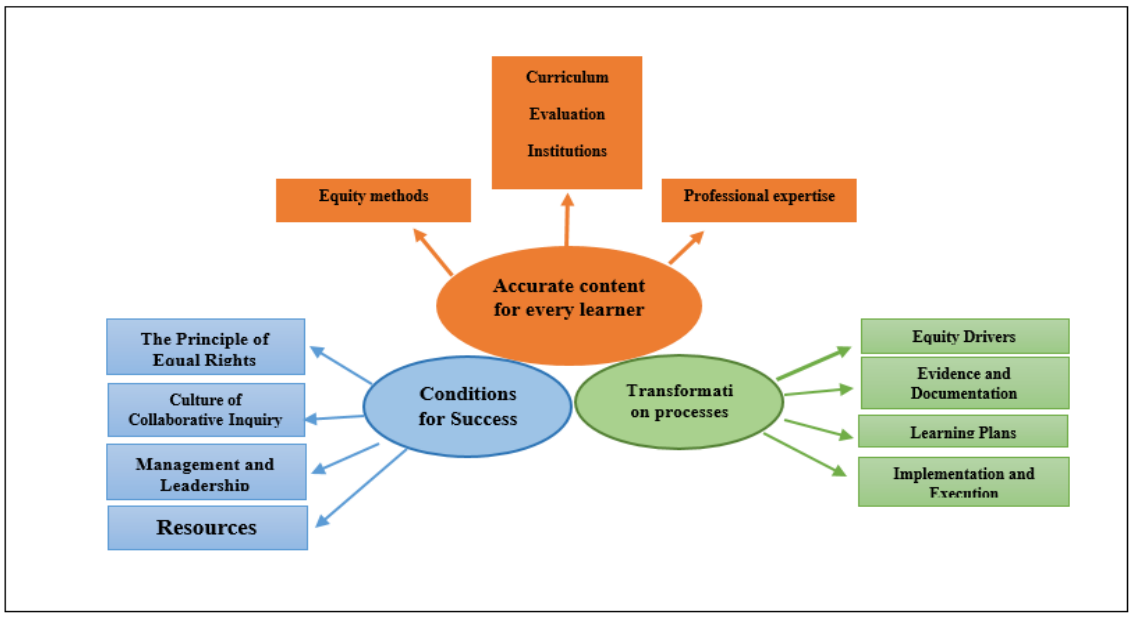
This model consists of two main dimensions: organizational factors and non-organizational factors. Organizational factors include four components: norms and visions of managers and their support, structured support, and organizational understanding and trust. Non-organizational factors include collaborative learning, collective research, reciprocal and reflective dialogue, and external support systems.

Various studies have also indicated that engaging teachers in professional learning activities positively impacts their knowledge, attitudes, and skills, resulting in improved quality of teaching and student learning (Desimone, 2011; Parsons & Beauchamp, 2011).

Therefore, professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to perform their duties differently, learn new skills, and create effective teaching methods directly related to the school's growth and improvement (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Consequently, the primary focus of professional learning and human resource development is the effort to change staff behavior to achieve significant individual and organizational goals by providing the necessary skills and behaviors to staff (Werner & DeSimone, 2012).

Given the impactful role of teachers as the main agents of education, who achieve the executive and supreme goals of the educational system and, due to their superior role, must fully represent the desired characteristics and qualities of any educational system, attention to the principles of their professional learning is essential. Considering the researcher's 17 years of teaching experience in all educational levels, it seems that professional learning is less emphasized in the central office and school executives. If professional learning is given attention, teachers and students will benefit the most. Learning will be more effective and enjoyable for students, and teachers will have the necessary expertise in teaching. Therefore, attention to principles such as their professional learning is essential. In this regard, we face the question of what principles and standards should teachers' professional learning follow? Given the current educational system in Iran, there is no standard and universal principle regarding professional learning in schools.

Consequently, this research aims to answer the question of the status of professional learning standards in secondary schools based on the Learning Forward model.




**Research Background:**

Professional learning for teachers has been continuously examined, but we must ask, "Why is professional learning for teachers important?" There are several significant reasons to consider: First and foremost, it is essential for teachers to develop themselves both academically and generally to understand what is happening around them. Secondly, the learning processes of teachers will have a positive impact on students, as they will also learn new things.

If teachers demonstrate that they are engaged in an active learning process, students will also try to learn more enthusiastically. In other words, it enhances students' learning capabilities and their academic and social progress (Vermont, 2014). Moreover, teachers' self-confidence and awareness of their role in society are increased, and they may form healthier bonds with their students for better mutual understanding because both groups have gone through the same processes (Wall and Hall, 2016). Thomson, Kreidlt, and Redman (2020), in their study titled "Developing a Model for Professional Learning of Teachers to Sustain Improvement in Teaching Practice," found that a process model of professional learning exhibits five interrelated characteristics that help improve teaching practice. These characteristics include building trust and professional relationships, a solid foundation of relevant and accessible subject matter, sustained duration, opportunities for teachers to reflect on their performance, and personalized support to meet individual learning needs of teachers. Finally, educational policymakers may develop an appropriate roadmap for skillful teaching and systematic learning to make both students and teachers more successful (Pinar et al., 2021).

**Research Methodology:**

This research is applied in terms of its objective.

Additionally, based on the data collection method, it is descriptive-survey in nature. The statistical population of the research includes all schools in Kurdistan Province, which, according to statistics from the Kurdistan Province Department of Education, totals 101 schools. Accordingly, using the Cochran formula, 12 schools were selected as the sample size through a multi-stage cluster sampling method. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. Based on theoretical foundations and multiple research results, a 47-question questionnaire was developed by researchers to assess professional learning standards in schools. Questions were posed in three main areas: conditions for the success of professional learning programs, processes of transformation in professional learning programs, and precise and inclusive content. The sub-scales for each area are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Initial Standards of Professional Learning in Schools**

| Area | Sub-Scale | Number of Questions |
|---|---|---|
| **Conditions for Success** | **Equity and Justice** | **4** |
| | **Collaborative Culture** | **4** |
| | **Leadership** | **5** |
| | **Resources** | **4** |
| **Transformation Processes** | **Equity Drivers in Education** | **3** |
| | **Evidence and Documentation** | **4** |
| | **Educational Plans** | **2** |
| | **Implementation** | **3** |
| **Precise and Inclusive Content** | **Curriculum, Planning, and Instruction** | **3** |
| | **Student Capacity** | **3** |
| | **Teachers' Professional Expertise** | **8** |
| | **Specialized Learning for Students** | **4** |

This questionnaire was designed using the Likert scale to determine the distribution of respondents with various attitudes towards professional learning standards in schools. The questions had options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

To ensure validity, face validity was used, and the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in educational management, curriculum planning, and educational assessment, as well as experienced principals and teachers with doctoral degrees. Ultimately, 47 questions were accepted. For reliability, the questionnaire was initially distributed among 40 teachers, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 was obtained, indicating the questions' reliability. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 22 software.

**Findings:**

Table 2 presents the specifications of the schools studied**.**

**Table 2: Specifications of the Schools Studied**

| School Name | Area | Number of Teachers | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School** | **1** | **15** | **70** |
| **Gifted Girls School** | **1** | **12** | **150** |
| **Imam Shafii Boys Trustee School** | **1** | **13** | **150** |
| **Gifted Boys School** | **1** | **13** | **150** |
| **Abrar Girls Trustee School** | **1** | **13** | **150** |
| **Namdar Moradi Girls Trustee School** | **1** | **13** | **150** |
| **Imam Ghazali Boys Trustee School** | **1** | **12** | **150** |
| **Sediqin Girls Trustee School** | **1** | **12** | **150** |
| **Shahid Bahonar Boys Trustee School** | **1** | **12** | **130** |
| **Martyrs Boys School** | **1** | **12** | **130** |
| **Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School** | **1** | **12** | **100** |
| **Farhang Boys School** | **1** | **10** | **120** |

Based on the results in Table 2, there are 2 non-profit schools, 6 trustee schools, 2 gifted schools, 1 martyrs school, and 1 state school.

**General Status of Secondary Schools:**

**Question 1: What is the status of the conditions for the success of the professional learning**

**program in secondary schools in Kurdistan Province?**

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Conditions for the Success of the Professional Learning Program**

| Area | Sub-Scale | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conditions for Success | Equity and Justice | 3.90 | 0.586 |
| | Collaborative Culture | 2.07 | 0.494 |
| | Leadership | 3.34 | 0.691 |
| | Resources | 3.35 | 0.571 |

As shown in the table above, the mean for the Equity and Justice" area is 3.90 with a standard deviation of 0.586 in the sample group (mean ± standard deviation = 3.90 ± 0.59); the mean for "Collaborative Culture" is 2.07 with a standard deviation of 0.494; the mean for "Leadership" is 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.691; and the mean for "Resources" is 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.571.

**Table 4: One-Sample t-Test for Assessing the Conditions for the Success of the Learning Program**

| Variables / Criteria | Test Value = 3 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | t-Statistic | Degrees of Freedom | Significance Level | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Equity | 11.951 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.90417 | 0.7528 | 1.0556 |
| Collaborative Culture | -14.420 | 59 | 0.001 | -0.92083 | -1.0486 | -0.7930 |
| Leadership | 3.882 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.34667 | 0.1680 | 0.5254 |
| Resources | 4.743 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.35000 | 0.2023 | 0.4977 |

From the table above, it is clear that regarding the criteria of equity (equal access to learning for all students in school, creating opportunities for academic success for all students, and examining academic achievement gaps among students) and resources (providing the necessary time and financial resources for professional learning for teachers and students, prioritizing resources fairly, and school administrators' supervision of resource use), the collaborative culture status is inadequate (the capacity and conditions for collaboration among students are not adequately provided, teachers do not share successful teaching methods with each other, and teachers do not have the necessary time for planning together to enhance student learning).

**Question 2: What is the status of the conditions for the transformation processes of the professional learning program in secondary schools in Kurdistan Province?**

**Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Conditions for Transformation Processes**

| Area | Sub-Scale | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transformation Processes | Equity Drivers in Education | 3.71 | 0.59 |
| | Evidence and Documentation | 2.58 | 0.70 |
| | Educational Plans | 2.31 | 0.58 |
| | Implementation | 3.62 | 0.65 |

As shown in the table above, the mean score for "Equity Drivers in Education" in the sample group is 3.71 with a standard deviation of 0.59, the mean for "Evidence and Documentation" is 2.58 with a standard deviation of 0.70, the mean for "Educational Plans" is 2.31 with a standard deviation of 0.58, and the mean for "Implementation" is 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.65.

It is worth mentioning that the school principal has created a compelling and inclusive shared vision

among the educational staff for professional learning in the school. The individual and collective capacities of teachers are supported, there are always discussions and conversations about teachers' professional learning in the school, and principals encourage the shared responsibility of all staff and teachers to achieve the school's goals. There is also an expectation of high performance from all colleagues and teachers in the school.

**Table 6: One-Sample t-Test for Assessing the Conditions for Transformation Processes**

| Variables / Criteria | Test Value = 3 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | t-Statistic | Degrees of Freedom | Significance Level | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Equity Drivers in Education | 2.248 | 59 | 0.028 | 0.17222 | 0.0189 | 0.3255 |
| Evidence and Documentation | -4.607 | 59 | 0.001 | -0.41667 | -0.5976 | -0.2357 |
| Educational Plans | -9.095 | 59 | 0.001 | -0.68333 | -0.8337 | -0.5330 |
| Implementation | 7.405 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.6222 | 0.4541 | 0.7904 |

From the table above, it is clear that the status of equity drivers and implementation is favorable (teachers' pay attention to identifying and addressing their educational weaknesses, and they seek opportunities to increase their knowledge and deepen their understanding of the subjects they teach).

However, the status of evidence and documentation, as well as educational plans, is inadequate (school administrators perform poorly in collecting evidence from various sources to better assess student learning, and there is inadequate use of evidence and data for planning and monitoring student learning.

The impact of professional learning on students and teachers is not adequately examined).

**Question 3: What is the status of the conditions for precise and inclusive content in secondary schools in Kurdistan Province?**

**Table 7: Mean and Standard Deviation of Conditions for Precise and Inclusive Content**

| Area | Sub-Scale | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Precise and Inclusive Content | Curriculum, Planning, and Instruction | 4 | 0.53 |
| | Student Capacity | 3.43 | 0.46 |
| | Teachers' Professional Expertise | 2.95 | 0.58 |
| | Specialized Learning for Students | 3.37 | 0.69 |

As shown in the table above, the mean score for “Curriculum, Planning, and Instruction” in the sample group is 4.00 with a standard deviation of 0.53, the mean for “Student Capacity” is 3.43 with a standard deviation of 0.46, the mean for “Teachers' Professional Expertise” is 2.95 with a standard deviation of 0.58, and the mean for “Specialized Learning for Students” is 3.37 with a standard deviation of 0.69.

**Table 8: One-Sample t-Test for Assessing the Conditions for Precise and Inclusive Content**

| | Test Value = 3 |
|---|---|

| Variables Criteria | t-Statistic | Degrees of Freedom | Significance Level | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Curriculum, Planning, and Instruction | 14.574 | 59 | 0.001 | 1 | 0.8627 | 1.1373 |
| Student Capacity | 7.370 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.43889 | 0.3197 | 0.5580 |
| Teachers' Professional Expertise | -0.576 | 59 | 0.567 | -0.04375 | -0.1958 | 0.1083 |
| Specialized Learning for Students | 4.175 | 59 | 0.001 | 0.37500 | 0.1953 | 0.5547 |

In analyzing the table above, it can be noted that the status is favorable in terms of curriculum, student capacity, and specialized learning (high-quality curriculum and necessary educational materials are provided for student learning, continuous and ongoing assessment and evaluation of student learning is conducted, and teachers understand and effectively convey the curriculum to students). However, the status is unfavorable in terms of teachers' professional expertise (greater attention can be given to the development of teachers' professional expertise within the school, standards should be defined for professional expertise development, there should be more emphasis on cohesion and coordination in professional learning, and time should be allocated for discussions on what teachers have learned from their professional development experiences. For teachers' professional development, it is suggested that the educational staff of the school provide opportunities for everyone to practice and apply newly acquired skills).

**Table 9: Mean and Standard Deviation of Professional Learning Status in Schools**

| School Name | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School | 3.72 | 0.180 |
| Gifted Girls School | 3.71 | 0.083 |
| Imam Shafii Boys Trustee School | 3.60 | 0.123 |
| Gifted Boys School | 3.57 | 0.100 |
| Abrar Girls Trustee School | 3.55 | 0.098 |
| Namdar Moradi Girls Trustee School | 3.43 | 0.072 |
| Imam Ghazali Boys Trustee School | 3.20 | 0.229 |
| Sediqin Girls Trustee School | 3 | 0.124 |
| Shahid Bahonar Boys Trustee School | 2.71 | 0.160 |
| Martyrs Boys School | 2.63 | 0.190 |
| Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School | 2.46 | 0.051 |
| Farhang Boys School | 2.43 | 0.158 |
| Overall | 3.17 | 0.496 |

From Table 9, we can see the mean status of professional learning in each school that participated in this study. Based on the results, Sepahrianians Non-Profit Girls School has the highest mean score of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.180, while Farhang Boys School has the lowest mean score of 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.158. The overall mean score for all schools is 3.17 with a standard deviation of 0.496.

**Table 10: Mean and Standard Deviation of Professional Learning Sub-Scales in Schools**

| School Name | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 |
|---|---|---|---|

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gifted Girls School** | **3.78** | **0.105** | **3.57** | **0.149** | **3.73** | **0.127** |
| **Abrar Girls Trustee School** | **3.67** | **0.053** | **3.40** | **0.231** | **3.53** | **0.150** |
| **Namdar Moradi Girls Trustee School** | **3.41** | **0.118** | **3.27** | **0.260** | **3.57** | **0.072** |
| **Sepehre Irianians Non-Profit Girls School** | **3.74** | **0.252** | **3.37** | **0.217** | **3.93** | **0.164** |
| **Sediqin Girls Trustee School** | **3.02** | **0.067** | **2.80** | **0.126** | **3.10** | **0.227** |
| **Gifted Boys School** | **3.53** | **0.083** | **3.38** | **0.292** | **3.72** | **0.200** |
| **Imam Shafii Boys Trustee School** | **3.54** | **0.128** | **3.32** | **0.160** | **3.84** | **0.169** |
| **Imam Ghazali Boys Trustee School** | **3.20** | **0.135** | **3.00** | **0.386** | **3.33** | **0.258** |
| **Martyrs Boys School** | **2.73** | **0.245** | **2.55** | **0.192** | **2.59** | **0.244** |
| **Shahid Bahonar Boys Trustee School** | **2.69** | **0.271** | **2.45** | **0.225** | **2.91** | **0.199** |
| **Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School** | **2.46** | **0.064** | **2.07** | **0.037** | **2.73** | **0.107** |
| **Farhang Boys School** | **2.39** | **0.296** | **2.18** | **0.149** | **2.64** | **0.165** |
| **Overall** | **3.18** | **0.514** | **2.95** | **0.540** | **3.30** | **0.500** |

Based on the results in Table 10, it can be said that in the area of professional learning program success, the Gifted Girls School has the highest mean of 3.78 (with a standard deviation of 0.105) and Farhang Boys School has the lowest mean of 2.39 (with a standard deviation of 0.296). In the second area, transformation processes of the professional learning program, the Gifted Girls School also has the highest mean of 3.57 (with a standard deviation of 0.149) and Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School has the lowest mean of 2.07 (with a standard deviation of 0.037). Lastly, in the area of precise and inclusive content, Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School has the highest mean of 3.93 (with a standard deviation of 0.164) and Martyrs Boys School has the lowest mean of 2.59 (with a standard deviation of 0.244).

**Table 11: Mean and Standard Deviation of Professional Learning Conditions in Schools**

**Part 1:**

| School Name | Equity and Justice | Collaborative Culture | Leadership | Resources | Equity Drivers | Evidence and Documentation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gifted Girls School** | **4.45** | **2.85** | **3.84** | **3.95** | **3.73** | **3.4** |
| **Abrar Girls Trustee School** | **4.45** | **2.40** | **4.04** | **3.70** | **3.93** | **3.30** |
| **Namdar Moradi Girls Trustee School** | **4.20** | **2.10** | **3.60** | **3.70** | **3.53** | **2.95** |
| **Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School** | **4.50** | **2.55** | **4.20** | **3.60** | **3.40** | **3.10** |
| **Sediqin Girls Trustee School** | **3.80** | **1.85** | **3.12** | **3.30** | **2.80** | **2.60** |
| **Gifted Boys School** | **4.50** | **1.90** | **3.80** | **3.85** | **3.67** | **3.05** |
| **Imam Shafii Boys Trustee School** | **4.00** | **2.50** | **3.76** | **3.85** | **3.47** | **2.95** |
| **Imam Ghazali Boys Trustee School** | **3.80** | **1.90** | **3.60** | **3.40** | **3.33** | **2.40** |
| **Martyrs Boys School** | **3.45** | **1.70** | **2.88** | **2.85** | **2.73** | **1.95** |
| **Shahid Bahonar Boys Trustee School** | **3.45** | **1.90** | **2.72** | **2.70** | **2.60** | **1.95** |
| **Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School** | **3.10** | **1.80** | **2.36** | **2.60** | **2.53** | **1.50** |
| **Farhang Boys School** | **3.15** | **1.50** | **2.24** | **2.70** | **2.33** | **1.85** |
| **Overall** | **3.90** | **2.08** | **3.35** | **3.35** | **3.17** | **2.58** |

**Part 2:**

| School Name | Educational Plans | Implementation | Curriculum, Planning, and Instruction | Student Capacity | Teachers' Professional Expertise | Specialized Learning for Students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gifted Girls School** | **2.80** | **4.13** | **4.53** | **3.53** | **3.45** | **3.85** |
| **Abrar Girls Trustee School** | **2.80** | **4.40** | **4** | **3.53** | **3.28** | **3.70** |
| **Namdar Moradi Girls Trustee School** | **2.50** | **3.93** | **4.33** | **3.40** | **3.25** | **3.75** |
| **Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School** | **2.70** | **4.13** | **4.40** | **3.93** | **3.70** | **4.05** |
| **Sediqin Girls Trustee School** | **2.70** | **3.53** | **4.47** | **3.27** | **2.65** | **2.85** |
| **Gifted Boys School** | **2.60** | **4.07** | **3.73** | **3.93** | **3.50** | **4** |
| **Imam Shafii Boys Trustee School** | **2.60** | **4.13** | **4.53** | **3.80** | **3.53** | **4** |
| **Imam Ghazali Boys Trustee School** | **2.30** | **3.93** | **3.93** | **3.53** | **2.85** | **3.70** |
| **Martyrs Boys School** | **2.30** | **3.33** | **3.20** | **3.20** | **2.23** | **2.40** |
| **Shahid Bahonar Boys Trustee School** | **1.90** | **3.33** | **3.80** | **2.93** | **2.63** | **2.80** |
| **Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys School** | **1.40** | **2.80** | **3.67** | **3.13** | **2.25** | **2.70** |
| **Farhang Boys School** | **1.80** | **2.73** | **3.40** | **3.07** | **2.18** | **2.70** |
| **Overall** | **1.32** | **3.62** | **4** | **3.44** | **2.96** | **3.37** |

**Case Study 1: Sepehr e Irianians Non-Profit Girls School**

Sepehr Iranian High School achieved averages of 3.7, 3.3, and 3.9 in three areas, ranking among the top schools in the professional learning program. What stands out is that all students have equal access to learning, and teachers implement and share successful teaching methods in the classroom. The principal has created compelling and inclusive expectations for professional learning among educational staff, and financial resources are allocated equitably based on the school's priorities. Teachers implement evidence-based learning plans, and the professional learning process is supported by the administrators. It is noteworthy that this school has a management team instead of a single principal. In the area of curriculum planning and education, teachers understand the curriculum well and effectively transfer it to students.

For the school and its management team, having teachers with professional development in their specialized field is very important. Additionally, teachers have sufficient mastery of instructional design patterns and apply them effectively.

**Case Study 2: Girls' Gifted School**

This school achieved averages of 3.7, 3.5, and 3.7 in three areas. The school has performed exceptionally well in providing conditions for the success of the professional learning program. Opportunities for professional development have been provided for colleagues and teachers, and academic success gaps among students are assessed. School staff are responsible for improving learning for all students.

The principal supports the individual and collective capacities of teachers. In the second area, which covers the processes of the professional learning program, the professional learning achievements for students and teachers are reviewed by management and executive staff, and various resources are used to effectively evaluate teachers' professional progress on student learning. The scientific level and work experience of teachers are highly regarded for being part of this school. Teachers employ innovative teaching methods for effective learning.

**Case Study 3: Imam Shafi'i Boys' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 3.5, 3.8, and 3.3 in three areas. Professional development opportunities

have been provided for colleagues in this school, and all students have equal access to learning at the school.

The school principal expects high performance from all colleagues and teachers in the school; Also, in this school, teachers' pay attention to identifying their educational weaknesses and addressing them, which is discussed in the teachers' council meetings. Teachers seek to create opportunities to increase knowledge and a deep understanding of the subjects they teach.

The connection of students with their families and the community is considered by the school's executive and administrative staff as well as teachers, and cohesion and coordination in learning are prioritized by the management and executive staff.

**Case Study 4: Boys' Gifted School**

This school achieved averages of 3.5, 3.3, and 3.7 in three main areas. This school provides an environment for academic success for all students; Additionally, opportunities are created for colleagues and teachers by the management and executive staff.

Collaboration and participation among students can be more emphasized. The school supports the individual and collective capabilities of teachers.

Teachers pay attention to identifying and addressing their educational weaknesses. In this school, the connection of students with their families is considered, and the professional development of teachers is highly regarded, with teachers required to meet defined professional standards to be part of the school.

**Case Study 5: Abrar Girls' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 3.6, 3.4, and 3.5 in three main areas. The school performed very well in equity and justice as well as leadership. In the area of transformation processes, it has implemented excellent educational programs. The school makes good use of the students' capacities and the professional expertise of teachers, with one of the criteria for teacher participation being sufficient expertise and experience.

**Case Study 6: Namdar Moradi Girls' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 3.4, 3.2, and 3.5 in three areas. The school has well provided an environment for academic success for all students and opportunities for professional development for colleagues and teachers. The school principal has created a compelling and inclusive shared vision among educational staff for professional learning in the school. Teachers focus on identifying and addressing their educational weaknesses. The familial and social backgrounds of students are considered, and the connection of students with families and the community is strengthened.

**Case Study 7: Imam Ghazali Boys' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 3.2, 3, and 3.3 in three areas. The school performed well in the areas of conditions for success and the professional learning program (Area 1), as well as precise and inclusive curriculum content planning and teaching (Area 2).

However, in Area 2, which involves the processes of the professional learning program transformation, it performed weaker compared to selected schools. It seems that teachers need to pay more attention to identifying and addressing their educational weaknesses and to strengthening the collaborative culture within the school. Additionally, teachers' proficiency in instructional design patterns could be effective in specialized student learning.

**Case Study 8: Sedighin Girls' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 3, 2.8, and 3.1 in three areas. The school performed well in the areas of conditions for success and the professional learning program (Area 1), as well as precise and inclusive curriculum content planning and teaching (Area 2).

However, in Area 2, which involves the processes of the professional learning program transformation, it performed weaker compared to selected schools. If the school principal creates a compelling and inclusive shared vision for professional learning among the educational staff, it could better utilize teachers' capacities. Also, if teachers gain more proficiency in designing instructional patterns, it will be more effective in specialized student learning. It seems that the school has underutilized the potential of the parents.

**Case Study 9: Shaheed Bahonar Boys' Charitable Trust School**

This school achieved averages of 2.6, 2.4, and 2.9 in three areas. The school has performed well in the area of precise and inclusive curriculum content planning and teaching, providing a high-quality curriculum and necessary educational materials for student learning.

Also, students' abilities have been utilized, and professional consistency and coordination in learning have been emphasized. However, in Area 2, which involves the processes of the professional learning program transformation, it seems teachers need to collaborate more with their colleagues and enhance this collaboration. Various resources should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' professional development on student learning.

**Case Study 10: Shahed Boys' School**

This school achieved averages of 2.7, 2.5, and 2.5 in three areas. The school performed well in Areas 1 and 3; however, in the area of the professional learning program transformation processes, it can perform better. For instance, using evidence and data for planning and monitoring student learning. Teachers should collaborate with their colleagues and foster a collaborative culture in the school. Also, learning objectives should be set in a connected and written manner, and teachers should implement evidence-based learning plans.

**Case Study 11: Bozorgmehr Non-Profit Boys' School**

This school achieved averages of 2.4, 2, and 2.7 in three areas. The school performed better in Areas 1 and 3 compared to Area 2, which involves the processes of the professional learning program transformation. It is noteworthy that because this school is relatively new compared to the reviewed schools, it might need more time to improve in the examined areas. Some factors that can help improve Area 2 include creating a collaborative culture in the school where teachers collaborate more with their colleagues. The impact of professional learning on students and teachers should be evaluated, and various resources should be used to assess the effectiveness of teachers' professional development on student learning.

**Case Study 12: Farhang Boys' School**

This school achieved averages of 2.3, 2.1, and 2.6 in three areas. In this school, focusing on Areas 1 and 2 can help improve professional learning. For instance, teachers should share successful teaching methods with each other and examine academic success gaps among students. The school principal should create a compelling and inclusive shared vision for professional learning among the educational staff and support both the individual and collective capacities of teachers. The principal should expect high performance from colleagues and teachers in the school. The culture of professional learning should be maintained and supported, and learning objectives should be set in a connected and written manner.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the professional learning standards in Iranian secondary schools based on Learning Forward (case study: Kurdistan Province). According to the research results, the overall status of secondary schools in the province can be described as follows:

In the area of conditions for the success of the professional learning program, which includes four subscales of equity and justice, collaborative culture, leadership, and resources, the subscale of equity and justice has a higher than average score, indicating a more favorable status. It seems that in this area, the conditions for academic success for students have been provided, the academic achievement gaps have been favorably reviewed, and the conditions for professional development of teachers have also been adequately provided. This finding aligns with the model presented by Tay and Umar (2019) regarding collaborative culture. Similarly, Hargreaves et al. (2012) have also emphasized the leadership factor in professional learning.

In explaining this finding, it can be said that equity and justice are tools and mechanisms that lead to the flourishing of creative thoughts and provide an environment for nurturing this capability equally for everyone. As a result, equity and justice imply that everyone can receive education according to their mental abilities and innate talents. As Mohammadi Mehr, Khosravi, Shahmoradi, and Sheikhi (2019) stated, creating a stress-free learning environment, helping students achieve growth and development, applying educational rules and regulations equally for everyone, and providing the conditions for acquiring

skills and readiness for the job market are factors of educational equity and justice, which, along with collaborative culture, leadership, and resources, provide a foundation for the success of the professional learning program.

Regarding leadership, two main elements can be highlighted: interaction and action, which have profound impacts on the success of the professional learning program (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016).

In the area of professional learning program transformation processes, which include four subscales of educational equity drivers, evidence and documentation, educational plans, and implementation, the subscale of implementation has shown a more favorable performance. This means that school administrators understand and apply change management theories satisfactorily, involve others in the feedback process, and support and pay attention to the professional learning culture in the school.

This finding aligns with the research by Thomson et al. (2020) regarding planning and implementing educational plans.

Explaining this finding, it can be said that transformation in the professional learning program means that when we evaluate and rethink our foundational learning and create change in our mental structures by diagnosing and judging our assumptions, learning occurs. The focus is on everything we know, including experiences, beliefs, values, and knowledge, to bring about change and improvement in individual actions (Newman, 2012).

In this study, the professional learning program transformation processes were examined in four areas, including educational equity drivers, evidence and documentation, educational plans, and implementation, where the implementation dimension performed better. This finding aligns with the organizational factors of Tay and Umar's (2019) model. Additionally, referring to the logical pattern of professional learning communities based on the Castel program theory, improvement in education and increased learning can be achieved by considering factors such as teams (teachers and administrators), expectations, necessary facilities, weekly schedules, holding meetings and their frequency, standards, following programs and guidelines, professional collaboration and cooperation, providing sufficient support and expertise for the team from the administrators, exchanging educational ideas, involving students, modifying classroom activities by teachers, promoting a collaborative culture, sharing decision-making among teachers and executive staff, and ultimately reflective dialogue (Adley, 2014). Paying attention to these factors can lead to the development of standards for professional learning in schools.

Moreover, the status of precise and inclusive curriculum conditions in secondary schools of the province, assessed in four subscales including curriculum, planning and teaching, student capacity, teacher professional expertise, and specialized learning for students, showed that the curriculum, planning, and teaching subscale had a more favorable status compared to other subscales. This means that schools provide high-quality curricula and necessary educational materials for student learning, continually assess and evaluate student learning, and teachers understand and effectively transfer the curriculum to students. This finding aligns with the factors influenced by professional learning, i.e., knowledge, attitude, and skills, and consequently better teaching quality, as suggested by Desimone (2011) and Parsons & Beauchamp (2011).

In explaining this finding, it can be said that the curriculum is among the important causes of improving educational quality, creating a balance between students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills with the latest scientific achievements and job market needs. Therefore, it should be noted that curricula, planning, and teaching are tools for providing opportunities for the development and strengthening of various personal and professional awareness and skills (Farang & Ghasemzadeh Alishahi, 2016). Thus, for raising the level of professional learning, attention to the content of curricula, teaching methods, and how to plan in schools is very important and essential. It is also necessary for schools to engage in both internal and external coherent planning and evaluation regarding education, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide appropriate solutions for improving educational quality.

In this study, 12 schools were examined, and the analysis of these schools is as follows:

The exemplary school (sample study) for the girls' gifted high school has performed very well in the area of conditions for the success of the professional learning program. Although it also performed favorably in the areas of professional learning program

transformation processes and precise and inclusive content compared to other schools, it excelled in the equity and justice scale, meaning that students have equal access to learning, and conditions for academic success have been provided for all of them.

What can help further enhance this school is strengthening the educational plan subdomain. This means that teachers should implement evidence-based learning plans and set related and written learning objectives. Additionally, it is worth noting that schools such as Abrar, Shaheed Namdar Moradi, Sepehr Iranian, Sedighin, Imam Ghazali, Boys' Shahed District 1, and Bahonar have performed better in educational equity compared to other subdomains (scales), and collaborative culture has received the lowest score among the 12 scales. To enhance the professional learning of these schools, it is necessary for administrators and executive staff to provide capacity and opportunities for student collaboration.

Additionally, all school staff should take responsibility for improving student learning, and administrators and executive staff should provide the necessary time and opportunities for greater teacher interaction. It is worth mentioning that these schools have performed satisfactorily in other scales, with the best performance related to the conditions for the success of the professional learning program and the equity and justice scale.

**The 12 Schools Examined**

The 12 schools examined performed well in the scales of equity and justice, leadership, curriculum resources, planning and teaching, and specialized learning for students, but did not achieve high average scores in the scales of evidence and documentation, educational plans, and teacher professional expertise.

To enhance these schools in these areas, attention should be paid to the following points:

- School administrators and executive staff should prioritize the professional development of teachers and establish defined professional standards and action plans.
- Provide teachers with the time and conditions needed to share their professional development experiences with one another.
- Develop learning objectives in schools, design steps to achieve these objectives, and evaluate the level of achievement at specific intervals.
- Administrators should collect evidence and documentation from various sources to better assess student learning.
- Analyze the impact of professional learning on students and teachers in teachers' council meetings and specialized working groups.
- Pay attention to evaluating the effectiveness of teachers' professional progress through observation tools, surveys, and discussions with administrators and executive staff.

Based on the reviews conducted, it appears that various factors can play a role in enhancing professional learning in schools. A closer examination reveals that schools that select their teachers themselves have higher scores in professional learning indices, while schools that do not have the authority to select teachers performed weaker. Additionally, principals who believe in a collaborative culture and have been able to create conditions in the school where teachers can share successful teaching methods with each other, and where all school staff take responsibility for improving student learning, have achieved favorable performance in enhancing professional learning indices.

Successful principals in these schools have been able to utilize the capacities of executive staff, teachers, parents, and the students themselves; they have also established a shared vision among staff and strived towards achieving these goals with the effort of all executive staff in the school. Schools that have excelled in the area of professional learning have had principals with years of management experience, known for their good reputation in education, who have prioritized consistency and coordination in professional expertise for learning.

They have also provided conditions where all students have equal access to learning, assessed the academic success gaps among students, and taken effective measures to address these issues.

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