

## Exploring the Characteristics of Successful Principals of Elementary Schools in Mashhad: A Case Study

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### Introduction

This study was conducted to explore and describes the characteristics and practices used by successful school principals in Mashhad city.

### Method

The qualitative case study method was adopted. Participants included four principals of successful elementary schools in Mashhad city. In order to collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. To analyze data, Strauss and Corbin's open and axial coding technique was used.

### Results

Findings showed that the most important personal and professional characteristics of the principals included: playing the role of leader, constructive relationships with the staff, principals' command of school affairs, principals' self-development (attempts for professional learning), and achievement of administrative success. Furthermore, the participating principals often made use of the following for managing their schools: planning and goal setting strategies, division of labor, teacher co-operation and involvement in school affairs, creating a friendly and positive climate at school, utilizing parents and colleagues' potentials, encouragement and appreciation of teachers, supervising and evaluating teachers' performance, concerning on improving students learning, improving teaching through teachers' professional learning and development, focusing on students' life

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skills and conflict management. In doing this, they also faced important challenges include concerning financing school expenses, high workload pressures, the high number of students, and poor class management. This is while some prominent features of successful managers in international experiences include defining the mission, vision, and values of the school, concerning student and support, equality and cultural accountability, the participation of the local community, attention to the curriculum, and the use of a competent teacher were not observed in this study.

### **Discussion**

In general, according to the findings of this study, playing a leadership role, constructive human relationships with staff, principal control over school affairs, principal self-development (striving for professional learning), administrative success, planning and goal setting, division of labor, cooperation and participation of teachers in school affairs, creating a friendly and calm climate of school, utilizing the capacities of parents and teachers in school, encouraging and appreciating teachers, monitoring and evaluating teachers' performance, concerns about improving students' learning, improving education through learning and developing teachers' professions, students' life skills, conflict management, concerns about school funding, high levels of administrative workload, large number of students, and poor classroom management are also international experiences that are consistent with the characteristics of studied successful principals in this research. While, there are some differences between these principals and international experiences in cases such as defining mission, vision and values of school, continuous supervision of programs by the principal, support and altruism, creating equal educational opportunities, employing capable teachers, equality and cultural accountability, attention to the curriculum and local community participation.

**Keywords:** Successful principal; elementary schools; personal and professional characteristics; managerial strategies; school administration challenges

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