



## **The Role of Self-Development on Job Performance of School Principals: Cases From Secondary School Principals In Isfahan**

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### Abstract

The present study analyses the link between self-development and job performance of secondary school principals in Isfahan. The study is applied in terms of purpose and done by a qualitative-quantitative combined method. In the qualitative section, we use the thematic analysis strategy and in the quantitative section, we test the proposed research model through structural equation modelling. The statistical population included all secondary school principals in Isfahan, Iran (n = 323), of whom 175 were selected via stratified sampling method. The data were collected via interviews and a validated researcher-made self-development questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.85. Moreover, Paterson's (1989) standard job performance questionnaire was applied. The qualitative findings show 3 main categories with 16 sub-categories for the self-development variable and the quantitative findings indicate that school principals' self-development correlates with their job performance (correlation coefficient = 0.68). The structural equations modeling of principals' self-development and job performance with approved fit indices revealed that self-development affects job performance (impact coefficient = 0.749). The results of stepwise regression indicated that individual and organizational components can predict 40% of principal's job performance. The present study shows that self-improvement through individual and organizational components affect the job performance of school principals. So school principals will definitely have better job performance if they can evaluate themselves, control their behaviors, gain self-awareness, and stay motivated by setting goals and planning.

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## Introduction

The education department, as the highest educational institution, requires human resources with high job performance to achieve its goals and missions and maintain survival and progress and continuous improvement in educational decisions (Yektaei, Alipour, Khosravi & Bazrafshan, 2015). In fact, given the importance of education in the world today, the department requires managers and employees who have a deep sense of meaning and purpose in work and deep correlation of employees with each other, to be able to perform with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, participate in the activities of the organization, help their colleagues, and make innovative proposals to improve their organization and work unit. Job performance goal is to advance organizational performance and achieve set goals (Masadeh, 2017). The survival and continuity of the activities of organizations and institutions depends on the performance of employees and is invested in various organizations to improve the performance (Goodarzi & Mazari, 2019). Currently, one of the most important problems of organizations is the low levels of job performance of employees, which causes irreparable damage to the organization (Arabfaizabadi, Karimzadeh, Shahrakipoor & Nastizaei, 2014) because the low employees' performance and the lack of appropriate staff to provide services, will cause many problems in today's competitive environment (Abbasi, 2017). This is doubly important at the managerial level of the education department, especially at the level of school principals.

School principals' development is regarded as one of the important contributing factors to the enhancement and effectiveness of schools. Extensive research has shown that successful schools are run by successful leaders. However, the

basic role of school principals has become more complex and difficult during the fundamental and turbulent changes and challenges that schools currently face (Mestry & Grobler, 2004). These changes include executive reforms, redefined curricula, new approaches, career development opportunities, wider dimensions of information, and the entry of more people into the decision-making process. School principals have faced many challenges in their attempts to cope with these changes (Mushaandja, 2013). Challenges faced by school principals include managing schools with limited resources and different needs, diverse and undisciplined learners or teachers, the development of a culture of participatory management, and the fulfillment of different expectations (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, & Culture, 2001). Therefore, the improvement of school principals is an inevitable necessity so that professional and more developed school principals can guide schools, as fundamental social organizations, toward professional and specialized educational organizations, and thus lay the foundation for the growth and development of the society.

The improvement, development, and empowerment of a manager and leader typically occur through three mechanisms: formal training, job assignments, and self-development. While formal training has been cited as an important factor in leadership development processes, it is a costly process and tends to result in a temporary closure of worksites and limited training transfer. Accordingly, modern organizations have focused more on self-development processes (Boyce, Zaccaro & Wisecarver, 2010, cited in Mazari, 2013). Reichard and Johnson (2011) highlight the development of leaders and managers, especially self-development as opposed to other development approaches that require substantial budgets.

Therefore, instead of focusing on leader development programs in a specific competency, organizational strategies should focus more on enhancing and supporting leadership self-development (Peadler, Burgoyne, & Boydel, 2001).

Several studies show that leadership self-development is a useful tool for sustainable development and growth of managers through a flexible and cost-effective process that can guarantee effective customer response, cause better organizational performance (Boyce, Zaccaro & Wisecarver, 2010; Ellinger, 2004; Boyce, 2004; Nesbit & King, 2013), and improve mental readiness and agility (Madigan, 2016). On the other hand, managers' performance and ways to improve performance have always been a challenge for organizations, as it affects the efficiency and effectiveness of actions within the realm of their management. School principals, as managers of the most fundamental social organizations, are no exception to this rule. By the same token, the challenge of their performance and ways to improve performance are among the most significant issues in the field of educational management and leadership. Accordingly, we have focused on school principals' self-development and their job performance in this research study. Our primary purpose is to analyze the key contributors to principals' self-development and to probe the role of self-development on the job performance of school principals.

### **Theoretical foundations**

#### **Job Performance**

Many organizations have adhered to the concept of job performance because of the high importance of productivity. Job performance is the expected value of a given organization resulting from separate behavioral events that individuals perform over a period of time (Newman, 2004). Job

performance is the outcome yielded after completion of work and indicates the degree of accomplishment of a specific job, compliance with organizational rules, and fulfillment of expectations or obligations for each employee (Campbell, 1990). In this case, the output of the organization's performance can be reviewed to assess the achievement of organizational goals and prevent possible damage. It is because job performance evaluation reveals the quantity, quality, and losses at a job. High efficiency indicates the high level of performance of the organization, and job performance represents the outcome of an employee's activity, including efficiency, usefulness, and effectiveness (Yeh, 2012). Performance is the sum of behaviors that people display in their job. Performance systems have five components including performance planning, performance review, performance appraisal, and performance reward (Baqi Nasrabadi & Behzadnia, 2020). The performance appraisal aims to determine who needs training, who needs to be promoted, and who needs to step aside. In addition, the human resource management perspective points out that the ethical climate is a fair window into understanding ethical situations in the organization. According to the human resource management literature, the system improves ethical behaviors among employees and it can establish ethical management (Malam, Daji & Ladan, 2019).

#### **Self-development**

Self-development is a planned process based on various and progressive dimensions used by people to improve performance and achieve developmental goals. It is a continuous process that occurs within executive tasks and organizational training (Goodarzi and Mazari, 2019). Self-development measures are organized to address specific individual goals and needs (Annis, 2016). It is an approach in which human beings are

introduced as beings with the ability of self-thinking, self-awareness, and self-motivation beings that can understand self-value, self-esteem, and self-initiation. Humans have an internal control center and can strengthen it, and thus show responsibility and self-commitment concerning past and future actions. Further, they can combine these characteristics to create a tendency to self-development (Pourkarimi & Mazari, 2017).

As a new approach to the development of management, self-development was designed by Pidler et al. (2001) to engage managers in the development of managerial skills. In western countries the self-development of managers in has become a well-known strategy; there are also several models that managers can use to improve the quality of continuous education and improvement (Shirbagi, Zebardast & Amani, 2016). In McLean et al.'s study (2007), self-development is emphasized from two perspectives. The first is self-concept, which is a conscious belief in oneself that can be described and evaluated. The second perspective concerns the life story and consists of individual experiences and the internalization of these experiences. Therefore, self-development is not specific to a certain period; rather, the growth of managers' abilities and capacities is formed over time and at a slow speed (Shirbagi et al., 2016).

#### Research background

In a study entitled "Leader self-development as organizational strategy", Reichard and Johnson (2011) described the structure of leadership self-development and the processes that can be used under this strategy in the organization. Orvis and Leffler (2011) examined the impact of the contextual factor of workplace support for self-development and five individual characteristics (e.g., openness to experience). The results showed that people who had high levels of individual

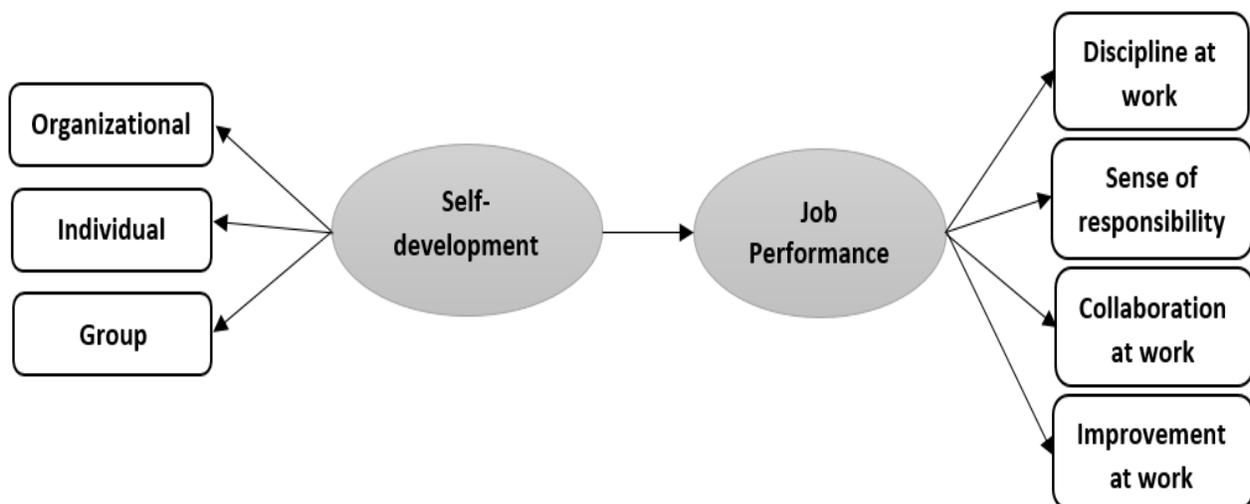
characteristics deemed less need for support in the workplace and were more willing to participate voluntarily in self-development. The results of Shirbagi et al.'s (2016) study on varying contributors to principals' leadership self-development in (boys and girls) secondary schools confirmed the direct effect of motivational factors and self-regulatory skills on the tendency of leadership self-development in school principals. It also revealed that school principals differ significantly in terms of inclination to the leadership self-development according to gender (male and female principals) and managerial experience (novice versus experienced). In his study concerning the relationship between principals' self-development and their performance, Mazari (2013) confirmed the impact of self-development characteristics and qualities on the performance.

In their research entitled "The mediating role of self-development in the relationship between transformational leadership and human capital agility: The case study of school principals in Rey", Pourkarimi et al. (2016) both confirmed the effect of self-development characteristics and qualities on performance and demonstrated the effect of self-directed learning, as one of the dimensions and mechanisms of self-development on the human capital. Their research also showed that self-development is positively and significantly associated with the index-oriented and literature-based performance of school principals. Abili et al. (2014) examined the links between self-development and performance. They studied self-development at three levels, showing the effect of the two levels of superior traits and basic knowledge on performance. Goodarzi et al. (2017) examined the mediating role of self-development in the relationship between self-awareness and job performance. Using descriptive correlation and

structural equation modeling, they concluded that self-awareness could lead to a better job performance by affecting self-development.

Since the literature on human capital and its improvement is based on education and learning, therefore, attention to new approaches and processes of teaching and learning, including self-development process, will be able to introduce a new perspective on improving the human capital of organizations. On the other hand, although the concept of self-development has a rich research and practical history in the individual education field,

but considerable attention has not been paid to it in the context of human resource development, which has made it more necessary to pay attention to the development of human resources in organization. Therefore, based on the studies conducted in the field of self-development and job performance of managers and using expert opinions collected via interviews, we used the model depicted in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. The research conceptual model**

In this study, the following research questions are investigated:

- 1- What factors can affect self-development of school principals?
- 2- Can self-development components predict job performance of school principals?

### **Research Methods**

This study is applied in terms of purpose. We drew on an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze the data. The content analysis strategy was employed in the

qualitative phase. In the quantitative phase, a descriptive-correlational approach was adopted that used structural equation modeling. In the qualitative approach, in order to determine an appropriate sample size, purposive sampling method was used in which 50 experts were selected as the sample size. In the quantitative section, the statistical population included 323 secondary school principals in Isfahan of whom a total of 175 people, determined using Cochran's formula, were selected via stratified sampling method.

Data were collected through library search and field study. Two questionnaires were used based on the research objectives and time constraints. The first one was a researcher-made questionnaire that collected information about the SD of school principals. Our extensive search of the literature failed to show a standard tool for the SD of school principals. Hence, we developed a questionnaire by building on the associated theories and references as well as thematic analyses on the results of our semi-structured interviews with experts. The questionnaire was first administered as a pilot study among members of the study population. Subsequently, the results were evaluated using factor analysis. As such, the SD questionnaire was finalized with 62 items. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to be 0.85, which indicates the acceptable reliability.

The second questionnaire was Paterson's (1989) job performance questionnaire, which has two forms. The first one assesses the performance of managers while the other evaluates employees' performance. In this study, the 15-item managerial version which includes the four dimensions of discipline at work, the sense of responsibility at work, cooperation at work, and improvement at work was used. The items are on a 5-point Likert scale, and the questionnaire's total score may range from 0 to 60. Slight adaptations were made to this

instrument to be used at the level of school principals. Moreover, we used face and construct validities as measures to assess the validity of the questionnaire. To determine its reliability, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained.

### **Findings**

The findings of the research are reviewed based on the questions framework and the results are expressed based on the question process.

#### ***Question 1: What factors can affect self-development of school principals?***

In order to develop the research theoretical foundations, first, the characteristics of self-development and the factors affecting it were enumerated in scientific sources. Then, by conducting in-depth exploratory interviews with experts, an attempt was made to extract other features and factors, especially with an emphasis on school principals. Finally, after combining the results of the interviews and the scientific sources, the researchers obtained 3 main themes, namely, *individual*, *group*, and *organizational*. These major themes, which emerged upon the interviews held with experts, constitute three contributing factors to the self-development of secondary school principals in Isfahan. Table 1 summarizes the categories and characteristics of the main themes:

**Table 1. Sub-categories and shaping the main themes**

Main themes	Categories	
<b>Individual</b>	Intellectual character	Value-orientedness, decisiveness
	Judgmental character	Planning and systematizing, developing a prospect, prospective personality, perfectionism, responsibility, conscientiousness
	Intuitiveness	Adaptability, personal experiences, internal assessment, creative thinking, attention to internal capabilities, self-awareness, research spirit, internal control center
	Extraversion	Being social, favoring transformation, emotional state, risk-taking, personal learning
	Internal motivation	Modeling, motivation for competency, self-healing, self-belief, self-assessment, self-actualization, self-efficacy, responsibility, desire to progress, target setting
	External motivation	Performance-based rewards, challenging job, salary and benefits
	Attitude	Optimism, cognitive trust, job satisfaction, understanding professional mission, belief in social responsibilities, commitment
<b>Group</b>	Duties of the group leader	Team-building skills, creating synergy, facilitator role, leader role, monitoring role, enthusiasm
	Group characteristics	A climate of trust and empathy, knowledge sharing, diversity of team members, group cohesion, group structure, group culture
<b>Organizational</b>	Innovative organizational climate, organizational learning, perceived organizational support, organizational policies, organizational leadership, organic organizational structure, organizational culture	

## **2- Can self-development components predict job performance of school principals?**

Our analyses built on the two indices of skewness and elongation to test the normal distribution of the data related to research variables. The sign of a normal distribution is that the related values fall within the range between -1 to +1 or -1.5 to +1.5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The results show that the research variables are in the acceptable range in terms of skewness and elongation. Accordingly, the research data is acknowledged to have a normal distribution.

## *Correlation between variables*

Before examining the impact of principals' self-development on job performance, it is first necessary to test the correlation between these two variables. The results from the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient indicate that school principals' leadership self-development has a positive and significant relationship with job performance at the alpha level of 0.01 (correlation coefficient = 0.71). Among the factors affecting job performance, moreover, the individual performance had the strongest relationship with the sense of responsibility at work (correlation coefficient = 0.69)

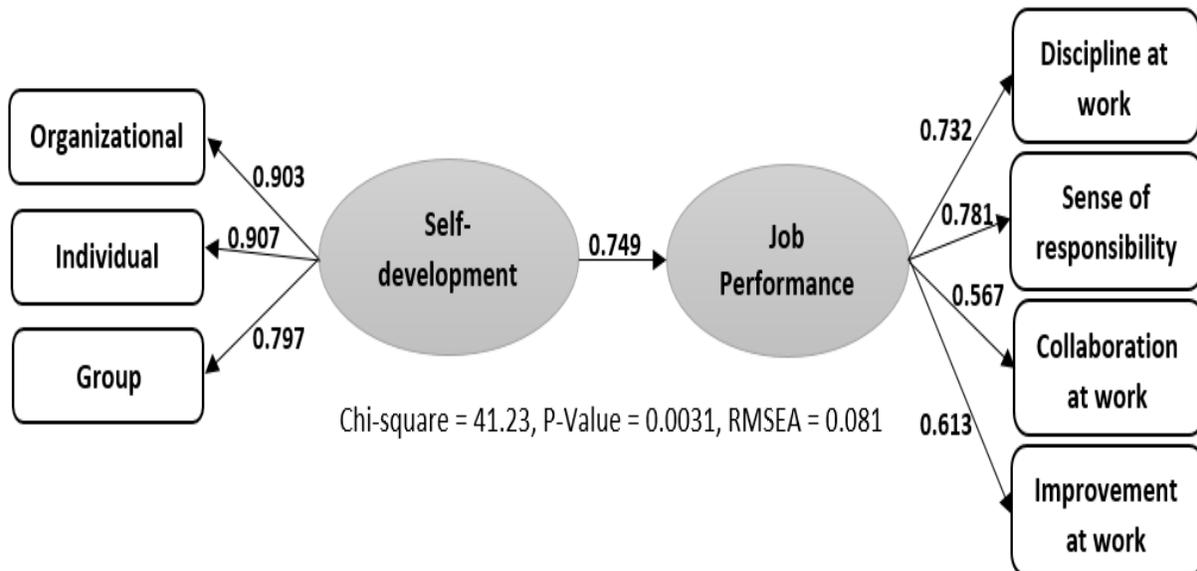
**Table 2. Correlation coefficients of principals’ self-development and job performance**

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Principals’ self-development	1								
2	Individual	0.81	1							
3	Organizational	0.65	0.49	1						
4	Group	0.78	0.62	0.59	1					
5	Job performance	0.68	0.65	0.51	0.57	1				
6	Discipline at work	0.62	0.56	0.58	0.49	0.55	1			
7	Sense of responsibility at work	0.69	0.66	0.67	0.34	0.51		1		
8	Collaboration at work	0.64	0.61	0.48	0.52	0.55	0.60	0.59	1	
9	Improvements at work	0.57	0.56	0.43	0.46	0.35	0.51	0.49	0.52	1

**Structural equation modeling**

The results of structural equation modeling concerning the effect of principals’ self-development on their job performance are displayed in Figure 2. After removing the covariance errors, the examination of the fitness indicators such as the ratio of chi-square to the freedom degree (CMIN/DF = 2.75), Goodness Fit

Index (GFI = 0.96), Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.99), Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.081), Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.97), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.91) show that the model has a relatively good fit with the data. Our findings indicate that principals’ self-development was effective on job performance with a path coefficient value of  $\gamma = 0.749$ .



**Figure 2. Structural equations modeling of principals’ self-development and job performance (path coefficients)**

The results of the t-test to examine the significance of the relationships between variables indicate that the t-test value for the relationship between leadership self-development and job performance

is 8.29, which is greater than the value of 1.96 at the error level of 0.05. Hence, the relationship is significant. Other values of the t-test at the error level of 0.05 are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Calculated t-values in the structural model of principals’ self-development and their job performance**

Paths	Principals’ self-development	Paths	Job performance
Organizational dimension	14.23*	Discipline at work	18.13*
Individual dimension	16.87*	Responsibility at work	14.67*
Group dimension	14.18*	Cooperation at work	12.66*
		Improvement at work	11.46*

\* level of significance = 0.05

In the last step, stepwise regression was used to examine the predictability of the job performance variable by principals’ self-development and its components. The results showed that the components of principals’ self-development (individual, organizational, and group) have a

significant correlation with job performance. Considering the obtained coefficient of determination (Table 4), it can be postulated that the self-development components of principals predict 45% of job performance.

**Table 4. Stepwise regression results of principals’ self-development and job performance**

Predictive variable	Statistical indices				
	R (multiple correlation)	R2 (determination coefficient)	Regression coefficients		
			1	2	3
Individual	0.55	0.31	$\beta = 0.55$ $t = 9.67$		
Individual and organizational	0.63	0.40	$\beta = 0.38$ $t = 6.13$	$\beta = 0.31$ $t = 5.51$	
Individual, organizational, and group	0.67	0.45	$\beta = 0.29$ $t = 3.11$	$\beta = 0.27$ $t = 4.19$	$\beta = 0.21$ $t = 3.33$

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The thrust of this research was directed towards investigating the role of secondary school principals’ self-development on their job performance. While Reichard and Johnson (2011), Orvis and Leffler (2011), and Shirbagi et al. (2015)

have emphasized the role and importance of managers’ self-development in organizations, this study has focused on principals’ self-development and its enhancement in schools. The traits and knowledge resulting from the self-development efforts of school principals, as highlighted by

Pourkarimi et al. (2016), could lead to further creativity and innovation of principals and their improved organizational power.

In this study, the structural equations modeling, as Mazari (2013), Pourkarimi, et al. (2016), Pourkarimi et al. (2017), Abili et al. (2014), and Goodarzi et al. (2019) emphasized, revealed that the school principals' self-development was contributory to their job performance with a path coefficient of  $\gamma = 0.749$ . In addition, the results of stepwise regression showed that the components of school principals' self-development, including individual, group, and organizational dimensions, had a significant correlation with their job performance. Directing attention to the individual level, as Mazari (2013) and Goodarzi et al. (2019) have maintained, has a more serious role than job performance in the self-development of school principals. Another important point is that schools have an important function in the tendency and persistence of people to self-based behaviors, including the self-development. Accordingly, individual, organizational, and group levels play an important role in promoting the self-development of principals in schools and, in turn, their organizational performance. In other words, any action taken to improve the self-development of principals in schools has a significant impact on their job performance, and to improve the job performance of school principals through self-development education and learning, it is necessary to consider the individual, organizational, and group levels.

This being said, we can conclude that self-development can increase the job performance of school principals and guide them to the desired level. Given the fact that the self-development of principals was not at a high level, it seems necessary to expose them to self-development training activities so that they can increase their job

performance and provide a growth trend in schools. Attention to each of the individual, group, and organizational components in school principals can affect many people. In fact, this process can be seen as a systematic and interactional cycle, where the other staff can be affected and increase their professional and organizational performance at schools. It is because the role of the manager is vital and substantial in any organization.

This role has attained more prominence in schools where it is seen to have a higher value and importance. Informed and capable managers are not assumed to be very effective unless they can first lead and guide themselves before they can be a guide to others. Therefore, if schools' principals can evaluate themselves, control their behaviors, get to know themselves better, and maintain their motivation by setting goals and planning, they will definitely have better job performance.

The present study, like all studies, has faced limitations. One of the limitations that the researcher could control was that the present study was conducted on high school principals in Isfahan and this sample can not be a representative for the statistical population. Among the limitations that the researcher could not control are: Time constraints and busyness and lack of patience of the respondents; lack of cooperation of some respondents with the attitude that their response will affect the performance of teachers and assistants; lack of familiarity of some the respondents with the concepts presented in the questionnaire and spending time to explain and interpret the concepts and words; lack of proper interaction with the principals due to Coronavirus conditions.

Based on the research results and also considering the limitations of the research, the following practical and research suggestions can be

effective in improving and enhancing the research variables of the statistical population:

- School principals should pay more attention to individual and organizational components because in the present study, the impact of these two components on the job performance of school principals was determined.

- The present study concluded a direct relationship between self-development and job performance of school principals, therefore it is recommended that the Ministry of Education hold self-development courses for school principals.

- Considering the positive and significant effect of individual self-development on the job performance of school principals, school principals should start self-development from their own. So school principals are recommended to increase their internal motivation for their development and career advancement.

- Considering the positive and significant effect of organizational self-development on the job performance of school principals, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education shift organizational conditions toward individual development.

- In this study, only high school principals were examined. Therefore, future researchers are recommended to do similar research for middle school principals.

- Researchers are recommended to do this research in other organizations.

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#### **Ethical considerations**

During the implementation of this research and the preparation of the article, all national laws and principles of professional ethics related to the subject of research, including the rights of

statistical community, organizations and institutions, as well as authors and writers have been observed. Adherence to the principles of research ethics in the present study was observed and consent forms were consciously completed by all statistical community.

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#### **Conflict of interest**

According to the authors of the present article, there was no conflict of interest.

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