



Role of Middle School Managers in Educational Development based on Students' Skill-Based Approach and Job Readiness

Alireza Sousaraei¹, Ali-Akbar Amin-Bidokhti², and Sakineh Jafari³

1. PhD Student in Educational Management, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran. Email: alirezassousaraei@gmail.com
2. Full Professor, Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran. Email: a.aminbeidokhti@semnan.ac.ir
3. Corresponding Author: Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran. Email: sjafari.105@semnan.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 26 February 2026
Received in revised form 24 April 2026
Accepted 4 June 2026
Available online 1 July 2026

Keywords:

future job readiness, educational transformation, middle-level school managers, skill-based approach

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the role of middle school principals in educational development through students' skill-based learning and job readiness. A qualitative grounded theory approach was adopted. The population comprised middle-level managers, including educational and executive deputies and educational group leaders, in schools and the Semnan City Education Office. Using purposive, criterion-based sampling and theoretical saturation, 15 participants completed semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. The findings identified "middle-level managers as key actors in skill-based educational transformation and future employability" as the core category. Causal conditions included the need to reconsider education in response to mismatches between traditional schooling and contemporary skill requirements, labor market changes, discrepancies between policy documents and school realities, and changing educational expectations among the new generation. Intervening conditions comprised managerial support, professional competencies, resource constraints, workload pressures, implementation facilitators and barriers, and external stakeholder participation. Contextual conditions included schools' organizational structures, rules, norms, culture, and human resources. In response, middle-level managers adopted strategies such as redesigning skill-based teaching and learning, empowering teachers, networking with stakeholders, optimizing educational spaces, and integrating skill-based activities into school curricula. These strategies were associated with stronger human and social capital through developing skilled, active students at individual, organizational, and societal levels. Overall, the findings suggest that skill-based education aligned with future employability depends substantially on middle-level managers' proactive, mediating role. Empowering these managers is therefore essential to educational system restructuring and bridging the gap between schooling and changing employment requirements in contemporary educational and employment contexts..

Cite this article: Sousaraei, A. , aminbeidokhti, A. and jafari, S. (2026). Role of Middle School Managers in Educational Development based on Students' Skill-Based Approach and Job Readiness. *School Administration*, 14(2), 24-43. doi: 10.22034/jsa.2026.145379.2643



© The Author(s) retain the copyright.

Publisher: University of Kurdistan.

DOI: 10.22034/jsa.2026.145379.2643

Introduction

Educational systems worldwide are facing new challenges driven by rapid technological advancements, evolving job structures, and increasing uncertainty in the labor market (Goulart et al., 2022). In this context, education is no longer limited to the transmission of theoretical knowledge; it must also foster cognitive, social, and adaptive skills that prepare students for lifelong learning, and sustainable employment in a complex and unpredictable future (Nazari et al., 2022). Consequently, there is growing emphasis on shifting from knowledge-focused to skill-focused education, in which the development of individual, social, and professional competencies is considered an important educational priority (Singh & Agarwal, 2024; Birami Erdy et al., 2019).

A skill-based approach to education can be understood as an approach that places greater emphasis on students' ability to develop, integrate, and apply knowledge and competencies in authentic and changing contexts rather than on the acquisition of knowledge alone. From this perspective, learning involves the development of transferable competencies that support students' ability to respond to problems, collaborate with others, communicate effectively, adapt to changing circumstances, and apply what they learn beyond the immediate classroom context. Such an approach therefore connects educational processes with the broader development of transferable competencies that support students' continued learning and their ability to participate effectively in changing social and occupational contexts (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022).

Implementing this transformation requires a comprehensive reevaluation of school structures, curricula, teaching strategies, and management practices to ensure that competency development guides educational decisions (Haseli & Ebrahimian, 2021). In the present study, educational development is consequently viewed at the school level as a process of improving educational practices, instructional conditions, curriculum implementation, and organizational arrangements in ways that strengthen students' learning and competency development. This school-level perspective is important because educational transformation is not achieved through policy formulation alone; it also depends on how educational changes are interpreted, coordinated, and enacted within individual schools. Because these changes must ultimately be enacted within schools, school leadership becomes an important mechanism through which educational transformation can be translated into practice. School leadership plays a pivotal role in translating transformative educational policies into practice, particularly through middle-level school managers, who occupy a strategic position due to their continuous interaction with teachers, students, and daily instructional activities. They are essential for guiding, interpreting, and sustaining educational changes (Stone & Stone, 2024). Research on school middle leadership similarly indicates that middle leaders can influence teacher practice, professional learning, school reform, and school improvement, although the nature and extent of these responsibilities vary across educational contexts (Lipscombe et al., 2023). A systematic review of school middle leadership has identified middle leaders as actors who can influence teacher practice, team development, school reform, and professional learning, while research specifically examining instructional middle leadership has emphasized their role in shaping instructional practices and school-level improvement processes (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022). Through initiatives such as redesigning school-based programs, promoting active and problem-based teaching methods, supporting competency-based assessments, and fostering partnerships with external labor-market organizations, these managers can facilitate the implementation of skill-centered education at the school level (Lipscombe et al., 2023).

Within school-level of educational management, middle-level managers—such as vice principals for academic, administrative, and student affairs—occupy a critical position. They

are not only central to decision-making related to school programs but also serve as a bridge between senior leaders and operational staff, facilitating the flow of information and increasing the flexibility of administrative hierarchies (Tang et al., 2022; Keykha et al., 2022). The intermediary position of middle-level managers is theoretically important because they operate at the intersection of organizational leadership, instructional practice, and school-level implementation. Rather than functioning only as administrative coordinators, middle leaders can translate organizational priorities into practices that are meaningful to teachers and students and can adapt broader reform requirements to the specific conditions of their schools. A systematic review of school middle leadership found that middle leaders can directly and indirectly influence teacher practice, team development, school reform, and professional learning, while a more recent review characterized middle leaders as important conduits between different organizational levels within schools (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2025).

Given the broad scope of their responsibilities and the complexity of their tasks, the effectiveness of middle-level managers is important for effective school functioning and school improvement. They oversee school operations, coordinate with teachers to foster innovation, and work to enhance school performance (Pourazaran et al., 2023). From the perspective of educational development, these responsibilities become particularly significant when schools are expected to implement changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student development simultaneously. The literature suggests that the responsibilities and influence of middle leaders vary according to organizational and contextual conditions, indicating that their contribution to school improvement cannot be understood independently of the structures, resources, professional learning opportunities, and authority available to them (Lipscombe et al., 2023).

Research indicates that middle-level managers can influence school effectiveness and student learning processes, highlighting their potential contribution to school improvement. To lead educational organizations effectively, these managers require a combination of competencies and skills, including program management, team leadership, and problem-solving (Liu, 2023). Accordingly, the role of middle-level managers in the present study extends beyond maintaining routine school operations. Their relevance to skill-based educational development lies in their capacity to coordinate teachers, support instructional innovation, facilitate the implementation of competency-oriented practices, and connect school-level educational processes with changing expectations for students' future learning and employment. This perspective provides a conceptual link between middle-level leadership and the broader process of skill-based educational transformation examined in the present study.

Skill-focused education emphasizes practical experience and the application of abilities such as reading, writing, communication, and information literacy, thereby enhancing learners' competencies, adaptability, and overall value. In today's era of constant innovation and economic change, relying solely on traditional academic credentials is insufficient; students must develop modern, transferable skills that align with the evolving demands of the global labor market (Shahid-Ali, 2025). In secondary education, these competencies are commonly discussed in relation to problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and the capacity for continuous learning. A scoping review of 82 studies on 21st-century skills in secondary education confirms that these skills are increasingly examined in relation to their implementation, educational effects, and assessment, while also identifying continuing challenges in their effective implementation in secondary schools (Kain et al., 2024).

The skill-based approach is also closely connected with students' preparation for future educational and occupational transitions. Future job readiness during secondary education involves more than knowledge about particular occupations; it includes opportunities for

students to explore occupational interests, develop informed expectations about their futures, acquire knowledge of the world of work, and engage in experiences that support future career planning. The OECD (2021) emphasizes that career guidance should begin before the age of 15 and that students should have opportunities throughout secondary education to explore occupational interests, interact with professionals, and critically reflect on their future career pathways. This relationship is particularly relevant at the middle-school level because early adolescence represents an important period for the development of career awareness, adaptability, and decision-making. A systematic review of career interventions for middle-school students, based on 21 studies selected from 417 identified records, found positive outcomes particularly in career decision-making and career adaptability and emphasized the importance of integrating career-related educational programs into middle-school curricula (Wang & Wang, 2025).

Within this context, students' readiness for future work should be understood as a multidimensional construct rather than simply as the possession of occupational knowledge or a specific technical skill. Career-readiness research in secondary education emphasizes students' capacity to explore and think about their future work, obtain information about occupations, develop informed expectations, and gain experiences that help them understand the relationship between education and working life. Longitudinal evidence synthesized by the OECD identifies multiple indicators of teenage future job readiness and shows that how young people explore, experience, and think about their potential futures in work during secondary education is associated with more favorable employment outcomes in adulthood (Mann et al., 2020; OECD, 2021).

Despite this, research indicates that many students, even after completing their formal education, are insufficiently prepared to enter the workforce and often experience uncertainty when choosing future career paths (Bhat & Stevens, 2021). This challenge largely stems from inadequate readiness to cope with rapid and unpredictable changes in the labor market, as well as a significant gap between the skills acquired in school and the practical competencies demanded by real-world jobs. As a result, current school-based education often falls short of meeting the requirements and expectations of today's work environments (Haghani et al., 2022). This gap can be conceptualized as a mismatch between the competencies developed through schooling and the transferable competencies required for successful participation in changing work environments. Contemporary frameworks of employability skills identify competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, literacy, digital skills, and adaptability as transferable across occupational and educational contexts. Such competencies are therefore relevant to the development of students' future job readiness because they enable learners to apply knowledge and respond to unfamiliar tasks and changing demands rather than relying exclusively on occupation-specific knowledge (OECD, 2024; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). For middle-school students, however, readiness for future work should not be interpreted as immediate preparation for entry into a particular occupation. Rather, it concerns the early development of the knowledge, transferable skills, self-awareness, adaptability, and career-related understanding that enable students to make informed educational and occupational decisions and to navigate later transitions into further education and employment. This distinction is particularly important at the middle-school level, where students are still developing their career interests and educational aspirations (Wang & Wang, 2025).

In the Iranian context, however, the development of students' skills and preparation for future educational and occupational pathways remain important challenges. Evidence suggests that Iran's current educational system has not provided sufficient attention to skill development and career guidance, leaving significant gaps and weaknesses in these areas (Hakimzadeh et

al., 2024). Although reforms have been implemented in recent decades to strengthen the link between education and the labor market, assessments of graduate employment outcomes and employer satisfaction indicate that these efforts have not fully achieved their intended impact. Many graduates still lack the essential competencies required by the labor market and often struggle to access available employment opportunities (Haghani et al., 2022). This situation presents a serious challenge for Iran's educational system, which is tasked with preparing the workforce needed across economic, industrial, service, and agricultural sectors, and has contributed to rising graduate unemployment (Dertoomi et al., 2017). These challenges suggest that strengthening the relationship between schooling and future employment in Iran cannot be addressed solely through changes in national educational policies or curriculum documents. It also requires attention to the organizational and managerial processes through which educational reforms are interpreted and implemented at the school level. From this perspective, examining the role of school-level managers becomes particularly important because the implementation of skill-based and career-oriented educational practices ultimately depends on how schools organize learning opportunities, support teachers, coordinate educational activities, and respond to students' developmental and future-oriented needs.

In this context, the role of middle-level school leaders in implementing skill-based education and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is increasingly important. Ndayeni (2024) emphasizes that managing teaching and learning is one of the primary responsibilities of middle-level leaders, while Bufalino (2025) identifies them as important actors in creating and maintaining conditions that support effective learning. Aaltonen (2025) outlines four core roles for effective middle-level leaders: curriculum leadership, management of teaching and learning processes, development of teaching teams, and leadership of improvement initiatives, emphasizing the need for structured support from senior leadership. Similarly, Liu (2023) shows that middle-level managers can contribute to teacher performance and the implementation of educational initiatives, thereby supporting school improvement and student progress. Taken together, these studies indicate that middle-level managers contribute to educational development through instructional, organizational, and change-oriented functions rather than through administrative coordination alone. Recent systematic evidence further supports this view, identifying middle leaders as important bridges between organizational levels who can support teachers' professional learning, facilitate school reform, and influence teaching and learning practices (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2025). These leadership functions are particularly relevant to skill-based educational transformation because effective implementation requires not only curricular change but also coordinated support for teachers, instructional innovation, career-related learning, and the development of students' transferable competencies. In this regard, Kanthimathi and William (2025) and Shahid-Ali (2025) highlight the importance of skill-based education in addressing the mismatch between educational outcomes and labor-market requirements, while Maree and Magere (2023) demonstrate the contribution of career counseling to students' self-awareness, occupational adaptability, and informed decision-making. Mousavi et al. (2022) similarly emphasize the importance of school resources, career awareness, specialized counseling, and teacher training in strengthening career guidance. Collectively, these findings suggest that skill-based educational transformation depends on coordinated school-level action, positioning middle-level managers as potential facilitators who can connect instructional practices, teacher support, student development, and career-related activities within the broader educational process.

Overall, these studies indicate that traditional education is inadequate for meeting the skill requirements of the modern labor market, and a transition to skill-based education is essential to prepare students effectively (Kanthimathi & William, 2025). Achieving this transformation requires attention to the roles, competencies, and performance of middle-level school managers.

Research exploring how these managers can guide skill-based education and improve teaching and learning quality is therefore crucial. However, the existing literature provides limited understanding of how middle-level managers enact and coordinate skill-based educational transformation at the school level and how these processes are connected to students' Future Job Readiness. This gap is particularly important in contexts where educational reforms seek to strengthen the connection between schooling, competency development, and the labor market.

However, a significant gap persists between school curricula and the skills required by the labor market, leaving students underprepared for effective workforce entry. This gap should not be viewed only as a curriculum problem. The implementation of competency-oriented education depends on the capacity of schools to translate curricular expectations into classroom practices, learning experiences, assessment processes, and opportunities for students to develop and apply transferable skills. Consequently, the organizational and leadership conditions within schools may influence whether skill-based educational reforms remain at the level of policy and curriculum or become embedded in everyday educational practice (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022).

Implementing a skill-based transformation cannot rely solely on high-level policymaking; it requires effective leadership and management at the school level, where middle-level managers play a decisive role. Serving as a bridge between policy and practice, they guide teachers, organize educational processes, foster a culture of innovation, and align learning with the real needs of students and society, thus advancing skill-based education. Their contribution is particularly important because the implementation of skill-based education requires coordination across several dimensions of school practice, including curriculum implementation, instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, professional learning, student support, assessment, and career-related activities. Middle leaders are positioned to connect these dimensions because they work across organizational levels and can facilitate the translation of school improvement priorities into practices within teaching teams and classrooms (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2025). Yet, the lack of clear frameworks, specialized training, and sufficient authority limits their effectiveness, highlighting the urgent need to clarify and empower the role of middle-level managers. The existing literature therefore provides a basis for examining middle-level leadership as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than reducing it to a set of administrative duties. In particular, there is a need to understand how middle-level managers interpret educational reforms, what conditions enable or constrain their actions, which strategies they use to support skill-based educational practices, and how these processes may contribute to students' preparation for future educational and occupational transitions. Such an understanding is especially valuable in contexts where the relationship between school-based education, skill development, and labor-market requirements remains problematic. Accordingly, the main research question of this study is: How do middle-level school managers contribute to skill-based educational transformation and students' future job readiness, and what conditions, strategies, and interactions shape this process? Investigating this question can provide a scientific foundation for improving school-level policies and practices and increasing students' preparedness for successful entry into the workforce.

Within the framework of the issues under investigation, the researchers examined six main questions based on a grounded theory paradigm: 1) What central phenomenon emerges regarding the role of middle-level school managers in skill-based educational transformation and students' Future Job Readiness? 2) What causal conditions contribute to the emergence of this central phenomenon? 3) What contextual conditions shape this phenomenon, and what actions and interactions characterize its development? 4) What intervening conditions affect the

role of middle-level managers in this transformation? 5) What strategies do middle-level school managers use to address these conditions? 6) What are the consequences of these strategies for skill-based educational transformation and students' Future Job Readiness? These questions provide a precise framework for identifying the structural, managerial, and professional factors that shape the role of middle-level managers and for analyzing how they perform this role in skill-based educational transformation and the development of students' future job readiness, thereby guiding the research toward practical, evidence-based solutions.

Methodology

Given that this study aimed to examine the role of middle-level school managers in skill-based educational transformation and students' job readiness, a qualitative approach using grounded theory methodology was adopted. Specifically, the study followed the systematic approach to grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin, which was selected for its structured procedures for open, axial, and selective coding and its suitability for identifying the core category and examining the relationships among causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Participants

The target population included educational deputies, executive deputies, head teachers of schools in Semnan, and related personnel from the General Department of Education. Participants ($n = 15$) were selected via purposive, criterion-based sampling until theoretical saturation was reached: 6 female, 9 male; 4 BA, 8 MA, 3 PhD; 5 instructional group leaders, 5 educational, 5 administrative–executive vice-principals. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least five years of experience in the educational system and direct involvement in managing or guiding skill-based educational programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing students' job readiness. Participants were also required to be willing and able to engage in interviews and provide accurate, detailed, and reliable information. Theoretical saturation was assessed throughout data collection and analysis through constant comparison of interview data and emerging categories. Specifically, no new codes emerged from the final two interviews, indicating that the data were sufficient to support the development of the main analytical categories for the purposes of this study.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with the initial interview guide developed based on the main research questions and a review of the literature on the role of middle-level managers in skill-based educational transformation and job readiness. The interview questions were drawn from three primary sources: previous domestic and international research on educational transformation and school leadership, key concepts derived from the study's theoretical framework, and the specific objectives of the research.

Each participant completed one semi-structured interview session lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. The interview guide was developed in alignment with the study's six main research questions and the grounded theory paradigm. It explored the central phenomenon concerning middle-level school managers' roles in skill-based educational transformation and students' future job readiness, the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions influencing this phenomenon, the strategies adopted by managers, and the consequences of these strategies. Illustrative questions used to guide the interviews included: (1) In your experience, what is the role of middle-level school managers in promoting skill-based education and preparing students for future employment? (2) What factors or conditions facilitate or hinder middle-level managers' efforts in this area? (3) What strategies can middle-level managers use to address these conditions, and what outcomes may result from these strategies?

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, following the three stages of grounded theory: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, Guba and Lincoln's (1982) criteria were applied. Credibility was addressed through member checking, in which summaries of preliminary findings and identified themes were shared with five participants for validation or revision, and their feedback was incorporated into the final analysis. Transferability was enhanced by consulting three experts in Islamic education and the sociology of religion to assess the relevance of the concepts and themes within the Iranian educational and cultural context. Dependability was ensured through detailed documentation of all analytical procedures to allow replication of the study. Confirmability was achieved by having a co-researcher independently review the coding and categorization to ensure neutrality in the analysis.

Findings

In this research, data analysis was conducted using qualitative coding approach to extract key concepts related to the role of middle managers in educational development based on skill-based approach and job readiness. The raw data were first separated by open coding to primary concepts, then were classified by axial coding in meaningful categories such as management actions, contextual conditions and executive challenges and finally, by selective coding, the main categories were identified as effective mechanisms of managers, executive strategies and skill-based consequences. This multi-stage process allows for deep analysis of the role of middle managers and provide a systematic framework for improving students' skill-based approach and job readiness.

1) Core Category

The core category is the main theme of the research, extracted from the heart of the data and provides an abstract and fundamental concept for directing the analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In this research, the core category includes role of middle-level managers as key actors in educational development. It shows that middle managers play a mediator role in training and employment, leadership, mediation and networking roles, reconstruction of mental models of school actors in transition from knowledge-based to skill-based and institutionalize skills and continuous improvement according to future career paths ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Core category of role of middle managers in educational development based on students' skill-based approach and job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Role playing of middle-level managers as key actors in educational development	Mediating role in aligning education and employment	Changing the approach from theoretical training to skill-based, focusing on job competencies and transferable skills, redefinition of school's mission and designing individual career paths for academic and career guidance in accordance with the actual conditions of students
	Facilitative, mediating, and networking roles	Conversion of educational policy to action; management of change; supervision over skill programs; bridge between senior leaders and teachers; leadership distribution; coaching and networking for skill training; negotiation with stakeholders; persuasion of stakeholders including senior managers, teachers and parents; building professional learning networks in schools; building professional learning networks out of school.
	Reconstructing school actors' mental models	Restructuring attitudes toward skilled jobs; promoting the paradigm of career success and entrepreneurship;

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
	in transition from knowledge-based to skill-based	symbolic leadership; successful presentation of successful skills patterns
	Institutionalization of skill competencies and continuous improvement in proportion to future career paths	Institutionalize the effectiveness of skill-based programs, getting feedback from work environment and organizational learning based on documenting successful experiences and learned lessons
Example of interviewees' answers	Interviewee (5) stated: "If middle managers can match skill programs with student's real conditions, school can turn into a student's entry into career paths." Interviewee (3) stated: "Matching skills programs with real conditions of students changes the role of school from an educational institution to the practical platform for students entering the workforce." Interviewee (6) stated: "We have to change this mindset in family and colleagues, that just being a doctor and an engineer is no reason for success, sometimes a skilled technician would be better than a job-less bachelor's degree educated."	

2) Causal Conditions

Causal conditions include events and actions affecting the occurrence, growth and development of phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In the present study, the causal conditions that lead to attention to the intermediating role of managers as key actors in educational development based on skill-based approach and career future include a radical revision of the educational system in order to aligning learners' skills with the changing requirements of educational and job environments which are classified in four main axes and the results are reported in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Causal conditions effective on the role of middle managers in educational development of students and students' job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Fundamental revision of educational system to align learners' skills with the changing requirements of educational and vocational environments	Discordance of traditional educational system with contemporary skill and skills needs	Lack of alignment of educational content with actual needs of labor market; overcoming the theoretical approaches on education and weakness in developing functional skills; Discordance of curriculum with real needs of life and labor markets; lack of opportunities for practical and functional application of trainings in class and school; lack of practical experience and skill-based training in schools; lack of conformity of training and job opportunities with global market requirements.
	Structural changes in labor market and its socio-economic consequences on educational system	Transformation of the structure of jobs and gradual decline of traditional jobs against the emergence of new professions; increasing the need of labor market to technical, cognitive and human skills; globalization of job competition space and increasing expectations from the competencies of labor; changes in educational policy at the same time with social and technological changes of the society; increasing parents' and students' demands for skill-based and applied training; mounting pressure of industrial and economic institutions to train labor to enter the market.
	Conflict between requirements of upstream requirements and school administrative facts	Notification and emphasis of national development documents (such as the document of fundamental change) as binding frameworks of educational changes; instructions and ministerial skill-based circulars in order to implement the curriculum in

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
		schools; practices of school performance indicators as pressure tools to promote graduates' status.
	Changing learning patterns and educational expectations of new generation in social and technological changes	The desire of the generation of Z and alpha depends on experiential, project and technology-based learning, waiting for personalization of learning path and personal development, the young generation's attention to meaningfulness and social status of job as a stimulus to change in school skill-based programs.
Example of interviewees' answers	Interviewee (4) stated: "The lack of skill-based training and the focus on evidence makes the students not have the skills necessary to enter the market."	
	Interviewee (7) stated: "School approach to evaluation is purely based on scores and testing, not preparing students to face real challenges will aggravate the market needs."	
	Interviewee (10) stated: Students' preference to learn practical skills indicates that their exam-based educational approach prevents the development of applied skills required for employment.	

3) Contextual Conditions

Contextual conditions include environmental, social, and structural features that provide the necessary adaptations to realize the role of middle-level managers in educational development of students and job preparation (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). These contextual factors provide the necessary prerequisites for developing skills training and play a key role in improving the quality and effectiveness of skill-based schools. According to the results of organizational, cultural and human factors, the most important contextual factors in the role of middle managers for educational development are skill-based. The results of this part of the study are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Contextual conditions of the role of middle managers in skill-based education development of students and students' job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
	Structure and rules of the school	Decentralization of decision-making and increasing the authority of middle managers; hierarchical reduction and upgrading the flexibility of schools; increasing formal authority of managers and access to physical and financial facilities; removing employment and administrative limitations to attract foreign skilled coaches.
Organizational, cultural and human contexts	Organizational internal and external norms and attitudes	Changing the traditional attitude of education and reducing the priority of score on skills, reducing the resistance against innovation in schools; increasing teachers and students' readiness to skill-based learning ;reduction of certificate-based culture in society; to strengthen trust and cooperation among teachers and teachers and managers; change attitudes of senior managers of the region/province to skill-based and vocational training.
	Property and human resources	Teachers with multiple and lateral skills (programming, carpentry, mechanical, graphic design, technical coaching, etc.); the presence of skilled workers and training instructors familiar with the local labor market; teachers with technical-professional qualifications or accredited industrial certificates and volunteer workshops outside the formal hours
Example of interviewees' answers	Interviewee (2) stated: "The bureaucratic structure has limitations that impede the maneuvers of the middle managers in the implementation of skill-based ideas."	
	Interviewee (11) stated: "Collaborative cultures facilitate cooperation, whereas hierarchical culture creates resistance and prevents managers from introducing futuristic job-related ideas.	

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
	Interviewee (9) stated: “The combination of young and experienced teachers provides an effective field for skill-based teaching; young people know new technology and new software, and they transfer their traditional skills and work safety.”	

4) Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions involves forces and conditions that play an active role in realizing the educational development of students and their job readiness. These factors are applied by schools, upstream policies, new technologies, and cultural and economic environments and act as a mediator or facilitator in the interaction between principals, teachers and students. In addition, the obstacles and executive problems as Intervening factors create challenges in the path of fulfillment of a skill-based educational programs that their management is necessary for the success of educational development. This includes the axes of support and administrative and administrative integrity, professional competencies, resource constraints and administrative infrastructure, work pressure and job burnout and stakeholders’ participation ([Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Intervening conditions affecting the role of middle managers in skill-based education development of students and students’ job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open coding
Facilitators and administrative/managerial barriers to the role of middle managers in skill-based training and future career	Administrative-organizational coordination in the levels of both schools and the upstream	The amount of support or resistance of senior managers at the school and region level; Stability or instability of educational policies and executive priorities; constraints arising from the centralized rules and structure of educational system; the extent of coordination or conflict between education policies, vocational training of and needs of labor market; transparency and justice in resource allocation between schools
	Professional and executive competencies of middle managers	The level of leadership skills and guidance of change in the middle managers; the extent of cooperation, acceptance and motivation of teachers in the implementation of skill-based training.
	Limited resources and infrastructure to implement skill-based training	Limitations of financial resources, time and equipment, lack of skilled manpower, lack of standard content and skill-based curriculum frameworks
	Work pressure and job burnout of middle managers	Work pressure and burnout of teachers and managers; weakness of motivational and spiritual mechanisms (material and spiritual)
	Level of participation and contribution of external stakeholders	The rate of participation and companionship of local businesses and industries with school; the participation or resistance of parents to educational changes; the effect of local media and cyberspace on acceptance and discourse of skill-based education.
Example of interviewees' answers	In this context, interviewee (1) stated: “If the middle managers are untrained, not even the best policies are not implemented in school.” Interviewee (13) stated: “Sometimes the directive of education says the skill, and the financial directive, states that only formal exams costs can be paid.” Interviewee (14) stated: “The lack of inadequate equipment and budget hinders attention to the skill learning and attention to the career future of students.” Interviewee (15) stated: “With the high volume of editing and administrative meetings, there is no time to design and implement skill projects.”	

5) Strategies

In order to improve students' skill-based education and job readiness, a set of key strategies has been developed and implemented by middle managers. Based on data-based theory framework, strategies are measures taken in response to causal and contextual conditions and in other Intervening factors and guiding the process of formation and implementation of educational development (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In order to promote the role of middle managers for educational and vocational training, a set of key strategies has been identified. These strategies include decisions, programs and organized actions that are designed and implemented to improve the quality of skills training, increasing the effectiveness of teaching-learning process and reinforcing the relationship with the labor market. The use of intelligent actions and strategic actions of middle managers include redesigning skill-based teaching-learning processes; enabling teachers and networking with stakeholders; optimizing training spaces for skills; providing financial resources and required equipment and formal integration of skill-based activities in the school program are among the most important strategies ([Table 5](#)).

Table 5. Middle managers' strategies to reduce the educational gap and reinforce students' skill-based approach and job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Smart actions and strategic actions of middle managers	Redesigning skill-based teaching-learning processes	Redesigning the content of the curriculum and integrating theory by practice; implementation of project-based learning and experiential learning; developing flexible learning paths and modular courses; design of authentic assessment based on work and performance; implementation of an individual skill program for each student to graduation.
	Enabling teachers and networking with stakeholders	Organizing workshops and vocational training of teachers; formation of cooperation networks with industry and non-profit organizations; creation of training opportunities and interaction with professional professionals; to identify and nurture students' skills; culture of innovation and encouragement of creative activities in school; establishment of skill-based council with teachers, students, parents and industry.
	Optimizing training spaces for skill activities	Redesign and optimum use of unused spaces for workshops and temporary laboratories with minimal cost
	Providing financial resources and required equipment	Showing students in festivals and exhibitions to attract financial support; the formation of volunteer parent groups to provide the materials to the workshops; finance workshop and workshop equipment through cooperation with municipality and donors.
	Formal integration in school program	Formalization of skill-based activities by recording in formal systems and giving incentives to teachers and students
Example interviewees' answers	of	Interviewee (3) stated: "we can transform the old school warehouse with a few tables and simple tools to a carpenter's workshop, the cost is low, but it has a wonderful education impact." Interviewee (4) stated: "By project-oriented education, students are actively involved, and they have real expertise." Interviewee (8) stated: "It can be done via the help of parents with technical skills such as carpenters or mechanics; they provide early materials and sometimes conduct practical classes."

6) Consequences

The outcomes of the activities of the middle managers in the realization of educational development based on skill-based education and student's job readiness were divided into three

main categories: individual and formative outcomes for students, organizational and professional outcomes for school and employees and social, economic and systemic consequences (Table 6).

Table 6. Consequences of the activities of the middle managers in the realization of skill-based education development of students and students' job readiness

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Social and human capital increase through graduated and active students	Individual and formative outcomes for students	Increasing job skills and meta-action; self-esteem and self-efficacy; development of professional identity and ability to choose academic career and informed career
	Organizational and professional implications for school and staff	Improving the quality of teaching and teaching-learning; development of teachers and middle managers' roles; creating innovation culture and reducing resistance against change; sustainable development with industry and community; modeling of schools and managers for other schools.
	Social, economic and systemic consequences in society	Reducing the gap of education and employment; increasing employment and local economic productivity; promoting social responsibility; reducing unemployment and retraining; changing the attitudes of society to school as a producer of human capital
Example of interviewees' answers	Interviewee (2) stated: "practical skills increase self-confidence, more realistic understanding of the future, and the meaning of school for students." Interviewee (12) stated: "Students of higher education tend to attract jobs faster, have higher productivity, and the social costs of unemployment decrease." Interviewee (8) stated: "Graduates working in the same area, local economic productivity increases and the social costs of unemployment and migration are reduced."	

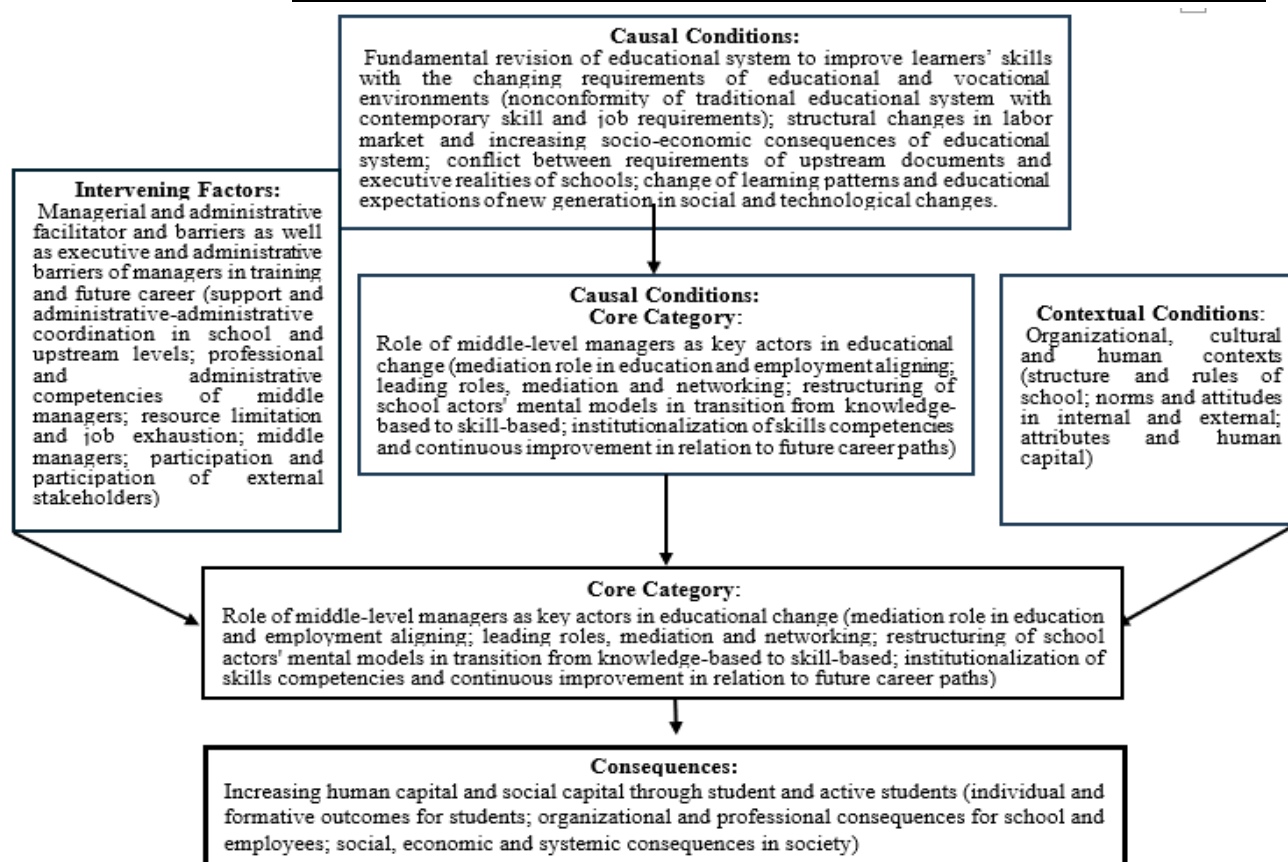


Figure 1. Factors, outcomes and role strategies of middle managers in skill-based education development and job readiness of students: Grounded Theory Approach

Discussion and Conclusion

In studying the role of middle school managers in skill-based education development of students and preparing students for future career, data analysis represents the status of these managers as the facilitator of educational transformation. The central phenomenon of this transformation is the transition from traditional certificate-based teaching to the skill-based approach that aligns the education with the needs of the future work market. Middle managers with the guidance of the link of training with employment, role of leadership and mediation between policy makers, teachers and stakeholders, changing attitudes and mental models and performing evaluation and continuous improvement provides the ground for achieving this evolution. These findings are consistent with global reports, including the global economic forum and emphasizes that by 2030, transformational skills, such as critical thinking and cooperation will be essential for workforce and middle-level managers play a key role in achieving these goals (Highfield & Woods, 2025).

The causal conditions that act as causal agents of the central phenomenon are mainly due to environmental pressures that enable the middle managers to act. These pressures include rapid developments in the labor market, such as the emergence of new jobs based on technology and the elimination of traditional jobs, and dissatisfaction with the current educational system that focuses on theoretical education, leading to graduates' unemployment without applied skills. Examples of these pressures are nonconformity of traditional educational system with contemporary skill needs, structural changes in labor market and socio-economic consequences, conflict between requirements of upstream documents and executive realities of schools, and changing learning patterns and educational expectations of new generation in social and technological changes. The findings of the interviews indicate that teachers and managers consider this dissatisfaction as the main motivation; the mismatch of training with the market reduces the trust in formal education and leads the middle managers to play the role of leadership and direction to create collective vision. These findings are consistent with Cashman et al.'s (2023) report regarding progress, which emphasizes that developing countries require a systematic review of the coordination of training with future job requirements, and the middle managers in this process have a key mediator role.

The contextual conditions include organizational, cultural and human factors governing the school which in the structure and rules of the school, norms and attitudes of internal and external, and the characteristics and human capital, the context of the occurrence of skill-based development. The hierarchical and centralized structures limit the authority of middle-level managers, but at the same time provide opportunities for local flexibility, where teachers and students readiness and physical and economic facilities are crucial factors. Traditional certificate-based culture creates resistance to innovation, but the middle managers manage these challenges by strengthening the collaborative culture. The findings of research show that in schools with cooperative culture, middle managers can better reduce resistance and lead to skill-based training. These results are consistent with the UNESCO report on the middle-layer training and the OECD Framework of Future Education and Skills 2030 (Taguma & Barrera, 2019), suggesting that middle-level managers are accelerating the progress toward SDG4 (Sustainable Development Goals) by providing local insights and creating dynamic learning environments (Torres, 2022).

Intervening conditions, including facilitators and administrative and directorial barriers of role of middle-level managers that can play a facilitator or a deterrent role in the skill-based development. The support or indifference of senior management, the bureaucratic rules and the shortage of resources such as budget, equipment and human resources can reduce the speed of change, but the ability of middle managers, including training leadership skills and familiarity

with job needs, can compensate these barriers. The findings of the interviews indicate that teachers' perceptions and stability of policies facilitate the development and the middle managers with the management of these factors lead to training, justice and justice. Global evidence also confirms the importance of this role: Research suggests that middle-level managers can play an important role in implementing organizational change and translating strategic goals into practice. In the education sector, UNESCO emphasizes that middle-tier personnel contribute to policy implementation and adaptation to local needs, while inadequate support and resources remain significant challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Aldridge & McLure, 2024).

Strategies and intelligent actions of middle managers as strategic answers to skill-based development, including redesigning skill-based teaching-learning processes, empowerment of teachers and developing cooperation networks with stakeholders, optimizing educational spaces for skills, providing financial resources and required equipment, and formal integration of skill-based activities in the school's program. These measures will not only apply training to market needs, but also empower teachers and strengthen the interaction of schools with the external environment. The findings of the interviews indicate that middle managers by culture and encouragement of innovation reduce fear of change and transform the teaching-learning process. These measures align with the OECD Framework of Future Education and Skills (2030) (Taguma & Barrera, 2019) and focus on transformative competencies such as critical thinking, cooperation and digital skills to prepare students for the world of 2030. Furthermore, Manyika et al.'s report (2017) shows that targeted training of middle managers will convert them to organizational success drivers and integrate new technologies, such as digital learning, link training to market needs.

The development of skill-based education guided by middle managers has considerable multilevel consequences. At the individual level, students reinforce their professional skills, self-confidence and motivation, their professional identity forms, and the ability to make informed decisions in the academic and career path is enhanced, which will help to improve their perceptions of their future career. At the educational and organizational level, schools act as professional learning entities, the quality of teaching-learning is promoted, the role of teachers and middle-level managers is transformed and the culture of innovation and cooperation with the external stakeholders develops. At the social and economic level, these changes lead to a decrease in education and employment gap, increase economic productivity and employment of graduates, promote social responsibility and reduce costs associated with unemployment and retraining and it changes the attitude of society to school as a human capital producer. The results of the interviews indicate that this transformation increases the satisfaction of the stakeholders, but in the absence of coordination, it can lead to low performance and fragmentation. These results are consistent with global reports (UNESCO, 2025) and (Fish et al., 2025) emphasizing that focusing on the middle layer and enabling middle managers is key to the success of educational development and contributing to efforts to reduce youth unemployment.

The findings of this research show that middle managers play a central, dynamic and multi-faceted role in leading educational development from the traditional and certificate-based model to the skill-based training in line with the needs of future work market, especially in the 2030 horizon. These managers go beyond the intermediate role in the bureaucratic hierarchy as the strategic change agents and social engineers in the educational ecosystem. They are at the intersection of causal pressures, including rapid changes in economic, and labor markets, changing expectations of students and parents and major educational policies, and contextual constraints including hierarchical structures, restricted resources, and traditional culture. Interventional conditions, including management support volatility, conflict of policies and

stakeholders' resistance, moderate the path of evolution. In the face of these complexities, successful middle managers use a set of strategic, communication and organizational strategies: redesign of curriculum development, establishing cooperation networks with industry and society, implementing pilot projects, creative interpretation of laws and strengthening participatory culture. These measures enable translation of major educational objectives in the practical measures in the school context. The consequence of this role is beyond the technical skills of students; including the formation of job-skill identity and agency in students, enabling teachers to become a learning organization with rich social capital and active participation in local economic and social development. Therefore, the realization of higher education and assurance of future career is subject to recognition, empowerment and systematic support of middle managers as key players in designing and guiding the development in schools.

Based on the findings of this study, the development of students' skills and future job readiness should not be addressed through isolated interventions or generic curriculum reforms. The findings suggest that skill-based educational development depends on the capacity of middle-level managers to coordinate instructional, organizational, and career-related processes within schools. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed based on the mechanisms and conditions identified in this study:

1. Establish a middle-management transformation role rather than limiting middle managers to administrative coordination. School systems should formally define middle-level managers as coordinators of skill-based educational development and provide them with sufficient decision-making authority, access to relevant information, and responsibility for coordinating curriculum implementation, teacher collaboration, student support, and career-related activities. Rather than providing generic leadership training, professional development should focus on the specific capabilities required to translate skill-based educational goals into school-level practices, including change management, instructional coordination, problem-solving, and the use of evidence for school improvement.

2. Create school-level mechanisms for integrating theoretical learning with authentic skill development. Curriculum and teaching should be organized in ways that provide students with repeated opportunities to apply knowledge to authentic problems rather than treating practical skills as an additional component of the curriculum. Middle-level managers can coordinate project-based and experiential learning across teaching teams, encourage interdisciplinary activities, and facilitate the integration of communication, problem-solving, collaboration, digital literacy, and adaptability into regular classroom practices. The emphasis should therefore be on embedding transferable skills within existing learning processes rather than simply adding separate skill-development courses.

3. Develop structured school-community and school-workplace partnerships. Partnerships with local businesses, professional organizations, community institutions, and other relevant stakeholders should be organized as sustained educational relationships rather than occasional external activities. Middle-level managers can coordinate these partnerships to provide students with exposure to real-world problems, workplace practices, mentoring, project opportunities, and career-related experiences. Such partnerships should be aligned with students' developmental needs and should contribute to career awareness and future job readiness rather than functioning merely as sources of financial or material support.

4. Link resource allocation to opportunities for authentic learning. Resource optimization should be approached in terms of how available school resources can expand students' opportunities to practice and demonstrate transferable skills. Schools can identify underused spaces and existing facilities that can be converted into flexible learning environments, practical workshops, project spaces, or collaborative learning areas. Middle-level managers can play a

coordinating role in identifying these opportunities and aligning available financial, technological, and human resources with the school's skill-development priorities.

5. Establish feedback mechanisms that connect educational practice with students' developing future job readiness. Assessment should extend beyond measuring students' academic knowledge and include evidence of their ability to communicate, collaborate, solve problems, adapt to new situations, apply knowledge, and reflect on future educational and occupational pathways. Schools should systematically collect feedback from students, teachers, counselors, and relevant external stakeholders and use this information to identify weaknesses in skill-based practices. This process would enable middle-level managers to adjust instructional activities, teacher support, career-related programs, and school–community partnerships in response to emerging needs rather than relying solely on predetermined plans.

Overall, the findings indicate that improving students' future job readiness requires a coordinated school-level process rather than a collection of separate interventions. The distinctive contribution of middle-level managers lies in their capacity to connect these processes: translating educational priorities into instructional practices, coordinating teachers and resources, facilitating relationships with external stakeholders, and ensuring that students have opportunities to develop and apply transferable skills. Therefore, policies aimed at strengthening skill-based education should focus not only on curriculum content but also on the organizational conditions and middle-level leadership processes through which such reforms are enacted within schools.

Ethical considerations

Ethical and confidentiality considerations have been observed in compiling this article.

Gratitude and financial support

The researchers express their gratitude to all the respected participants in this study who made this research possible by giving their time and sincere cooperation. It should be noted that this research was conducted independently and without receiving any financial support from domestic or foreign institutions or organizations.

Conflict of interest

According to the authors, there are no conflicts of interest in this article.

References

- Aaltonen, E. (2025). Key Roles of Educational Middle Leaders. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education* (IJCDSE), 16(1), 5034- 5052. [DOI: 10.20533/ijcdse.2042.6364.2025.0623](https://doi.org/10.20533/ijcdse.2042.6364.2025.0623)
- Aldridge, J. M., & McLure, F. I. (2024). Preparing schools for educational change: Barriers and supports—A systematic literature review. *Leadership and Policy in schools*, 23(3), 486-511.
- Bhat, C. S., & Stevens, M. M. (2021). College and career readiness group interventions for early high school students. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 46(1), 20-31. [DOI:10.1080/01933922.2020.1856250](https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2020.1856250)
- Birami Erdy, M., Torani, H., Khalkhali, A., Shakibaei, Z., & Kazempour, E. (2019). Providing appropriate knowledge management model to improve the quality of learning Students. *School Administration*, 7(3), 22-1. [in Persian] [DOI:10.34785/J010.1398.112](https://doi.org/10.34785/J010.1398.112)
- Bufoalino, G. (2025). Leading schools from the Middle. Middle leadership in a context of distributed leadership. *Formazione & insegnamento*, 15(3), 151-161. https://doi.org/10.7346/fei-XV-03-17_11

- Cashman, D., & Rackard, S. (2023). Learning through clinical extramural studies: an observational study. *Irish Veterinary Journal*, 76(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13620-023-00238-9>
- Dertoomi, A., Salimifar, M., & Malekolsadati, S. (2017). *Education–job mismatch in the Iranian labor market. Regional Economics and Development*, 24(14), 68–94. <https://doi.org/10.22067/erd.v24i14.66945>
- Fish, N., Bertone, S., & Van Gramberg, B. (2026). Improving student engagement in employability development: recognizing and reducing affective and behavioral barriers. *Studies in Higher Education*, 51(1), 181–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2025.2461271>
- Goulart, V. G., Liboni, L. B., & Cezarino, L. O. (2022). Balancing skills in the digital transformation era: The future of jobs and the role of higher education. *Industry and Higher Education*, 36(2), 118–127. DOI:10.1177/09504222211029796
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. *ECTJ*, 30(4), 233–252. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02765185>
- Haghani, M., Kalantar-Harmzi, A., Zare-Bahramabadi, M., & Salimi-Bajestani, H. (2022). *Identification of strategies for designing the process of students' career development. Research in Educational Systems*, 16(58), 114–128. [in Persian] <https://ensani.ir/fa/article/528937/>
- Hakimzadeh, R., Javadipour, M., Salehi, K., & Khademi, M. (2024). *Developing a curriculum framework for academic–career guidance in Iran's education system. New Approaches to Educational Studies*, 19(1), 149–192. [in Persian] [10.22108/nea.2024.141687.2037](https://doi.org/10.22108/nea.2024.141687.2037)
- Haseli, SSH., & Ebrahimian, F. (2021). *The impact of educational managers on the environment of the educational system in secondary schools. Modern Research in Education*, 2(1), 12–20. [in Persian] <https://esjournal.ir/fa/paper.php?pid=24>
- Highfield, C., Webber, M., & Woods, R. (2025). Indigenous student voice: the astute witnesses of schooling. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 52(1), 563–582. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00730-3>
- <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2023.2171439>
- Kain, C., Koschmieder, C., Matischek-Jauk, M., & Bergner, S. (2024). Mapping the landscape: A scoping review of 21st century skills literature in secondary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 151, 104739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104739>
- Kanthimathi, S., & William, B. (2025). Skill based education on emerging careers to empower the students. *African Journal of Biomedical Research*, 28(1s), 1655–1663. <https://doi.org/10.53555/AJBR.v28i1S.6489>
- Keykha, A., Rahmani, P., & Ezati, M. (2022). Identifying the Competencies of School Principals for Effective Leadership in Schools. *School Administration*, 10(3), 110–132. [in Persian] doi.org/10.34785/J010.2022.034
- Lipscombe, K., Harris, J., Tindall-Ford, S., & Groth, S. (2025). School middle leadership: a systematic review revisited 2020–2024. *Educational management administration & leadership*, 17411432251362970. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251362970>
- Lipscombe, K., Tindall-Ford, S., & Lamanna, J. (2023). School middle leadership: A systematic review. *Educational management administration & leadership*, 51(2), 270–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220983328>
- Liu, X. (2023). The role of middle-level leaders in improving schooling. *Journal of Educational Research Progress*, 3(1), 64–75. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55375/joerp.2023.3.8>
- Mann, A., Denis, V., & Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 241. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e1503534-en>

- Manyika, J., Lund, S., Chui, M., Bughin, J., Woetzel, J., Batra, P., ... & Sanghvi, S. (2017). Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills, and wages.
- Maree, J. G., & Magere, G. M. (2023). The influence of group career construction counselling on Tanzanian high school students' career decision-making difficulties. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 28(1), 2190809. DOI:10.1080/02673843.2023.2190809
- Mousavi, Z., Sabahi-Zadeh, M., Nami, K., & Parsapour, A. (2022). A conceptual model for career guidance of elementary students based on individual talents. *Islamic Lifestyle with Emphasis on Health*, 6(3), 473–480. [in Persian] <https://www.sid.ir/paper/1115561>
- Nazari, D., Seydi, M-S., & Hojatkah, M. (2022). *Career school: Identifying the determinants of schools with high standards of career development*. *Culture of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 13(52), 201–232. [in Persian] <https://doi.org/10.22054/qccpc.2022.63632.2796>
- Ndayeni, J. (2024). Leading From the Middle: The Leadership Role of Middle Leaders on the Management of Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Research in Education and Sustainable Development*. 4(11), 10-31. DOI:10.5281/zenodo.14173111
- OECD. (2021). *Indicators of teenage career readiness: Guidance for policy makers*. OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 43. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/6a80e0cc-en>
- Pourazaran, Sh., Navidi, A; Faghih-Aram, B., Barzegar, N., & Kiyoumars, F. (2023). *Components of empowering middle-level managers in Iran's education system: A qualitative study*. *Family and Research*, 20(3), 25–47. [in Persian] <http://qjfr.ir/article-1-2297-fa.html>
- Shahid-Ali, P. S. (2025). Skill-Based Education and its impact on lifelong learning and career advancement. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*. 10(4), 2165-2456. DOI:10.38124/ijisrt/25apr935
- Singh, S., & Agarwal, S. (2024). Empowering individuals for a sustainable tomorrow: Role of life skills development. *Journal of Ecophysiology and Occupational Health*, 24(2), 211-219. <https://doi.org/10.18311/jeoh/2024/35800>
- Corbin, J. M., Strauss, A. L., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (Vol. 3). Thousand Oaks, CA: sage.
- Stone, P., & Stone, R. (2024). Professional development leadership: the importance of middle leaders. *Professional development in education*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2383442>
- Taguma, M., & Barrera, M. (2019). OECD future of education and skills 2030: Curriculum analysis. *Dispon. Su Httpswww.Oecd.Orgeducation2030-Proj. --Learn. Pdf*.
- Tang, J., Bryant, D. A., & Walker, A. D. (2022). School middle leaders as instructional leaders: Building the knowledge base of instruction-oriented middle leadership. *Journal of educational administration*, 60(5), 511-526. DOI: 10.1108/jea-01-2022-0018
- Torres, A., Kearney, K. B., Berlingo, L., & Brady, M. P. (2022). “What ELSE about this job?” Teaching Job Decision-Making to College Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 34(4), 673-692. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-021-09820-x>
- Tushar, H., & Sooraksa, N. (2023). Global employability skills in the 21st century workplace: A semi-systematic literature review. *Heliyon*, 9(11), e21023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e21023>
- Wang, D., & Wang, G. (2025). Improving career readiness in middle school students: a systematic review of intervention approaches. *Frontiers in psychology*, 16, 1582195. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1582195>