



## A Comparative Study of Educational Leadership Preparation Approaches with Emphasis on Standardization and Professionalism

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 10 June 2023 Revised: 30 November 2023 Accepted: 25 April 2024 Online: 19 December 2024	This research aims to explore the methods and approaches to selecting and preparing educational leaders in schools of Britain, France, Singapore and USA to provide recommendations for educational management policymakers. The method of this research is qualitatively comparative, and the countries were selected using a purposeful sampling method based on criteria such as superior education systems and educational leadership preparation programs. The findings indicate that the methods and approaches to selecting and preparing educational leaders in the selected countries share similarities in two areas: Preparation of educational leaders through pre-service training programs and the requirement of obtaining a professional qualification certificate. Additionally, the findings reveal discrepancies among the selected countries. For instance, while obtaining a professional school management qualification is essential for appointments in all selected countries, this requirement is not mandatory in primary schools in France. Another finding of the research indicates that in the Britain and USA, the selection and appointment process is the responsibility of the school board, while in Singapore and France, this process is carried out by the regional education council. Based on the findings, it is recommended that policymaking institutions in the educational management systems of developing countries redefine the selection, preparation, and appointment of educational leaders and design a pre-service training program.
KEYWORDS Appointment Educational Leadership Professionalism Selection	

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## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, educational organizations consider the key to their success to be the enhancement of competencies and capabilities of human resources, especially at the management levels. No system can achieve its goals without competent, compassionate, and experienced management. The importance of effective management is so significant that some thinkers have designated the current century as the era of management and today's world as the world of managers (Nakhaei, Ahanchian & Karami, 2018). Therefore, attracting and selecting talented leaders has gained the attention of educational policymakers (Babullah et al., 2024).

While almost all school leaders begin their careers as teachers, teaching qualifications and experience alone are insufficient to prepare educational leaders for today's world. In fact, leadership preparation is an ethical commitment that enables professionals to transition from classroom teaching to school leadership. The skills required for effective school leadership are not only developed through preliminary activities focused on leadership capacities and knowledge acquisition, but are also learned through opportunities and professional experiences (Bush, 2008). Evidence shows that school leaders who are untrained and unprepared for their roles face significant challenges in adapting to leadership. Appointing school leaders without preparation is a dangerous gamble, as the real losers are the students. In such circumstances, providing comprehensive educational programs for new leaders is considered vital (Bush, 2018). The lack of talented and professional leaders is regarded as one of the reasons for students' academic decline (Gurmu, 2020).

In the 1980s, almost no country had a systematic framework and standards for the professional development and preparation of school leaders. Thus, appointing teachers to administrative or management positions without prior preparation was very common. However, today, preparation and development programs for school leaders have become a global industry. Some developed countries implement programs that require future school leaders to participate in and complete pre-service courses before appointment. Singapore is one of the countries that mandated the requirement of obtaining a leadership qualification certificate in the form of an educational diploma in 1984. In the UK, there is a statutory national professional qualification for school management. Although this program was introduced in 1997, it became mandatory in 2009 for all first-time head teachers. In Canada, all aspiring leaders must complete the management qualification program before being appointed as a principal or vice-principal, and in Malta, all future administrators must hold a diploma in educational management (Bush, 2008). In the United States, where school leadership preparation has a long history, candidates can become school

principals if they have a master's degree in educational administration, at least three years of teaching experience, participate in pre-service preparation courses, and pass the relevant exams (Akbasli, Sahin, & Gül, 2017). In Finland, candidates, in addition to teaching experience, must obtain the necessary credentials for management positions through participation in preparation courses (Sholeh, Windasari, & Widodo, 2023).

In Iran, foundational documents such as the "2025 Vision Document" and the "Fundamental Transformation Document of the Education System" emphasize the fundamental role of school leaders in improving student outcomes. In this regard, the Ministry of Education has approved the "Regulations for the Selection and Appointment of Educational Leaders" to institutionalize meritocracy (Ministry of Education, 2021). Furthermore, the geographical dispersion of schools and the existence of cultural, social, ethnic, and linguistic differences have increased the importance of preparing educational leaders in Iran's diverse educational system. Thus, the focus of policymakers in Iran's educational system on "training effective educational leaders" can be considered one of the persistent concerns over the past century. The ongoing need for "effective educational leaders" has drawn the attention of Iranian policymakers and researchers to learn from international experiences. The current researchers aim to revisit this topic in light of global developments in the new millennium.

## **2. Research Literature**

This section briefly examines the findings of international researchers as well as those of Iranian researchers. Brauckmann, Pashiardis & Arlestig (2023) concluded that given the close relationship between context and leadership, core preparation programs should be guided by a deeper examination of contextual factors. Murphy (2020) investigate perceptions of novice leaders in Ireland and found that although the professional development policy and preparedness of school leaders are on the agenda of the Irish educational system, and these policies have had positive impacts on student academic progress, they still do not fully address the needs of school leaders. Gurmu (2020) investigate the status of primary school leaders in Ethiopia and found that the duration of training for educational leaders in primary schools is short and lacks depth. Although this training helps trainee managers familiarize themselves with school leadership, it does not contribute to their professionalization.

In Iran, attention to the training of educational leaders has become a research tradition over the past few decades. For example, Adli (2023) through a comparative study of the appointment policies of educational leaders in Switzerland, Finland, Singapore, and South Korea,

concluded that the appointment policies for educational leaders in the selected countries share similarities in three components: the necessity of having teaching experience, management experience, and success in entrance examinations for candidates for school management positions. The findings also revealed that the appointment policies of leaders in the selected countries differ in four areas. While in Switzerland and Finland a master's degree in educational management, participation in in-service training courses, and obtaining a teaching competency certificate are significant, in Singapore and South Korea there is an emphasis on providing a project regarding school goals and strategic plans. Kameri et al (2021) identified the dimensions, components, and indicators forming a model for the professional development of vocational school managers, which include intellectual abilities, managerial abilities, functional management skills, interpersonal skills, and methodological skills. Isfahani, Soleimani, Tourani & Sabbahi (2019) designed and validated a model for the professional development of school administrators and concluded that the professional development of administrators consists of eight components: organizational, policy-making, economic, cultural-value, social, individual, and technological. Nouradseddigh, Noh Ibrahim, Arasteh & Zinabadi (2018) identified the components of professional development for private school managers and concluded that talented managers' professional development could be summarized in three components: creating opportunities for career development, creating opportunities for personal development, and encouraging managers to improve themselves. In summary, the focus of most Iranian researchers has been on examining professional development methods for school leaders and in-service training. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What similarities exist between the educational systems of the USA, UK, Singapore, and France in the selection process and preparation programs for educational leaders?
- What differences exist between the educational systems of the USA, UK, Singapore, and France in the selection process and preparation programs for educational leaders?

### **3. Research Method**

The present research employs a qualitative comparative method, utilizing the strategy of "different social systems with similar educational outcomes" (Madandar Arani & Kakia, 2018). The term "differences in social systems" refers to the dissimilarities among selected countries in aspects such as culture, religion, politics, and economy, while the educational outcome (the variable under study) remains similar. Data collection was conducted through a documentary (library-based) approach, involving a systematic review of scientific articles in both Persian and English published

in databases such as Science Direct, Scopus, Google Scholar, Magiran, Noormags, and Jihad University. The search utilized keywords such as educational leadership readiness, assessment of leader preparedness, quality of leader preparation programs, impact of leader readiness, evaluation of leadership preparation programs, research and evaluation in educational leadership preparation, and selection and appointment of school leaders. Data analysis was performed using the agreement and difference methods proposed by John Stuart Mill and George F. Bereday's regional approach.

#### **4. Findings**

##### *Stage1) Description*

##### *Britain*

The *Britain* education system consists of three educational stages: primary education (ages 5-11), secondary education (Ages 11-18), and higher education. This structure is consistent across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, whereas Scotland has a different educational system. Attendance is compulsory for children aged 5-16. Most students aged 17 and above continue their education in further education institutions. The education system in England is divided into public (state) and independent sectors. Independent schools receive funding through tuition and are not governed by the state system. While most schools in England are state-funded and free, some are selective and require entrance exams (Fouladi, Sarmadi & Esmaeili, 2016). In the UK, the National Professional Qualification for Headship was established in 1997 to align the characteristics of leaders with school management. Since 2004, new principals have been expected to hold necessary qualifications, although this requirement was temporary. Since 2009, only those who participated in the professional qualification courses could be appointed as school principals. The professional qualification program includes pre-service training offered prior to candidate appointments, aiming to enhance knowledge and professional development of school managers (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2023).

##### *France*

France is governed by a republic with a focus on social traditions, strengthening its citizens' cultural identity through its educational structure. The French education system is based on two main pillars: stability and dynamism. It provides an environment where students can develop their personalities. Primary education in France is compulsory and free for all students aged 3 to 11, rooted in a policy of decentralization. The secondary education system emphasizes equal

opportunities for all, promoting justice, diversity, and providing free educational and career guidance (Salimi & Vali-Olahi, 2017). In France, the training and appointment of educational leaders are managed by a centralized system. The Ministry of Education is responsible for selecting, training, and appointing educational managers nationwide. A framework titled "Laws Related to the Selection, Employment, and Preparation of School Managers and Local Educational Institutions" coordinates this process across various regions. Although primary school principals in France generally do not undergo pre-service training, since 1989, a regional pre-service training course has been designed and implemented. This course includes topics such as the school system and structure, parent communication, educational leadership, and the school's role in society. Candidates for these courses are selected and trained based on specific frameworks to prepare them for effective school management (Armand, Ghasemi-Rad, & Mazaheri, 2015).

*Iran:*

For the first time, in 1969, the "Center for Management Training" established by the "Organization of Administrative and Employment Affairs of Iran" to train managers for government organizations, including the Ministry of Education. In 1972, the first long-term course was approved for a master degree at this center. Subsequently, long-term courses ranging from associate's degrees to doctorates in various management fields, including educational management, were conducted (Abdollahi, 2014). In the early 2000s, the Supreme Council of Education emphasized in decree 673 those candidates for school management must participate in administrative training programs or competency assessments. In 2007, the "Civil Service Management Law" was communicated by the government to various ministries. Chapter nine of this law, titled "Employment of Employees and Managers," mandated all executive agencies to develop training programs for their employees (Abdollahi, 2014, p. 9). In 2013, a program for training future managers of executive bodies was approved during the 165th session of the High Administrative Council. Concurrently, in response to global educational developments and the significance of the role of school leaders, development-oriented programs aligned with Iran's higher education policies were introduced or implemented. Notable programs include the "Manager Selection and Appointment Plan," the "System for Assessing the Professional Competence of School Managers," the "Human Resources Ranking System," and the "School Improvement Program." One of these programs entitled "*Tadbir*," (Thought Plan) aims to enhance the academic level and managerial knowledge of school managers and has been executed based on higher education documents since 2014. This plan seeks to assist managers in continuously improving

processes and engaging human resources. Additionally, according to a law enacted by the Ministry of Education, all school managers are required to complete in-service training courses in "educational management" (Monidari et al., 2023).

Despite these legal measures, it should be noted that in Iran's educational system, the selection of primary school managers is conducted centrally, with the "Committee for Selecting School Managers" responsible for this task in educational regions or areas. However, despite the approval of high-level documents, the existing clauses in the Ministry of Education's regulations leave room for subjective approaches in the selection of school managers. Furthermore, the requirement to pass competency evaluation tests and undergo training courses is not explicitly stated in the regulations. Typically, the content of the training courses for managers in Iran includes topics such as familiarization with educational laws and regulations, the educational philosophy of Islam, knowledge and skills in school management, as well as computer and foreign language skills. Despite some efforts by the Ministry of Education, such as conducting in-service training courses to empower managers, factors like the poor quality of training programs, inadequate resources, and financial and motivational issues have undermined the effectiveness of these courses (Monidari et al., 2023, p. 34).

### *Singapore*

Singapore has a centralized education system with the Ministry of Education directly controlling all schools. However, each school operates independently. Preschool education is optional for children aged five to six, while primary and secondary education is compulsory for all citizens. In Singapore's educational system, there are three career paths: teaching, senior specialist, and leadership. The school leadership path leads candidates to the pinnacle of their profession. Teachers demonstrating leadership potential can expect to advance to higher positions (Lim, 2006). Singapore is recognized for its strong focus on preparing school leaders, seeing effective leadership as crucial to development. In Singaporean society, school leadership requires specific competencies, and educational leaders must participate in the "Leaders and Educational Programs" (Jayapragas, 2016).

### *USA*

Education has become a fundamental factor in the advancement of the United States, characterized by a large, decentralized system of schools overseen by 509 educational agencies serving approximately 53.1 million public school students and 5.5 million private school students.

Education typically starts with kindergarten (for children aged 4-6) and includes elementary (Grades 1-3), middle school (Grades 4-8), and high school (Grades 9-12). The organizational structure of educational levels in each region depends on local demographic conditions, historical context, and local priorities. The U.S. has a long history of training school leaders, being a pioneer in this area. The Department of Education plays a supervisory role, while states are directly responsible for educational matters. States are divided into school districts where a "district superintendent" and "school board" oversee education. In most states, a master's degree in educational management is required to become a school principal, along with completing training programs and having teaching experience. Candidates must usually possess a school leadership certification, often requiring three years of teaching experience, completion of an accredited training program, and passing an exam. Additional requirements may be set by the school board or educational district (Huber, 2004).

### *Stage 2) Interpretation*

#### *Britain*

In *Britain*, the Department for Education sets national educational policies. At the regional level, educational institutions have authority that includes representation from all stakeholders. Overall, the English education system is characterized by a decentralized structure. The central government, local authorities, churches, and other voluntary organizations, as well as educational institutions' boards and staff, share responsibilities. Before the 1980s, training and professional development for school leaders were very scattered. Currently, the Department for Education centrally determines educational policies and provides training programs for school leaders; 52 institutions offer professional development and preparation programs across ten geographic regions (Aravena, 2016). In England, school leaders are recognized as effective and efficient individuals. Similar to other developed countries, England aims to improve the quality of education nationwide by using national standards for selecting school leaders. Candidates for these roles must participate in an educational program that includes both theory and practice to enhance their management skills. This program leads to the National Professional Qualification for Headship, managed by the National College for School Leadership. These programs offer robust methods for professional design and development grounded in evidence and expert guidance, reflecting a comprehensive occupational framework. Providers of these programs emphasize a wide range of training types, including in-person, peer-led, online, individual, and work-based learning. Necessary

preparations for these trainings include on-the-job leadership training, support from coaches or mentors, access to high-quality resources, up-to-date research and evidence, professional development by recognized individuals and peers, and opportunities for structured assessment (Department for Education, 2017, 2020).

### *France*

In France, student success is considered a result of effective school leadership. The Ministry of Education is responsible for training and appointing school administrators according to a framework known as the "Laws Regarding the Appointment of School Leaders." This process is organized in coordination with various regions. Aspiring leaders must participate in training courses ranging from 70 to 80 hours over two years. After completing the training and passing the examination, they may be appointed as school leaders. The appointment process differs for primary and secondary school leaders, with secondary school leaders having more authority and responsibilities compared to their primary counterparts (Saglam, Geçer, & Bag, 2017).

### *Iran*

The modern education system in Iran has a history of over a century. In the early decades, the educational systems of countries like France were influential among Iranian politicians. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s changed various aspects of the educational system, including the methods of selecting educational and school managers. Major documents guiding the education system, such as the 2025 Vision Document and the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, emphasize the importance of training school leaders (Eelzami et al., 2021). The Ministry of Education approved the "Selection and Appointment of School Managers" regulation in 2021 to institutionalize meritocracy in the selection, appointment, and retention processes of school managers (Ministry of Education, 2021). The Fundamental Transformation of Education Document describes the leadership and management system of education as one that is transformative, efficient, effective, and excellence-seeking, relying on superior human resources with outstanding capabilities within the Islamic Republic of Iran's context. It emphasizes being learning, justice-oriented, participatory, faithful, morally virtuous, committed to good deeds, striving for excellence, revolutionary, future-oriented, wise, trustworthy, insightful, and appreciative of rights (Eelzami et al., 2021, p. 15).

### *Singapore*

From 1824 to 1945, Singapore was a British colony and adopted the British educational system. During this period, management, supervision, evaluation, selection, and training of staff were the responsibility of the schools themselves. After gaining independence from British rule in 1945, the government centralized and strictly controlled the education sector. Singapore's current educational system emphasizes meritocratic policies with a strong focus on success and efficiency (Jayapragas, 2016). The education system is highly competitive, exerting significant pressure on schools, teachers, and students. Since the late 1980s, there have been calls for decentralization. School leaders are seeking greater responsibility at the school level to introduce initiatives and respond flexibly to changes. Starting in the early 1990s, more autonomy requests were granted. In 1997, the concept of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" was introduced, highlighting the school leader's key role in transitioning from a results-oriented approach to a process-oriented and learning-centered one.

### *USA*

The United States is recognized as a pioneer in the training of school leaders. Since 1994, most states have adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, calling for a shift in the preparation and practices of school leaders from management to leadership (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). The U.S. was one of the first countries to implement pre-service leadership preparation programs. These programs include eleven proposed standards: 1. the school leader is responsible for promoting the success of all students through effective learning approaches. 2. The school leaders foster a school culture and curriculum that supports student learning and professional development. 3. The school leaders manage organizational actions and resources to create an effective learning environment. 4. The school leaders collaborate with families and community members to address diverse needs and mobilize resources for student growth. 5. The school leader's helps students succeed through honest, fair, and ethical actions. 6. The school leaders use their understanding of political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts to support student achievements. 7. The school leaders promote the success and well-being of each student by fostering family and stakeholder participation. 8. The school leaders ensure effective and efficient management to enhance social and academic learning. 9. The school leaders promote student success through adherence to ethical principles and professional norms. 10. The school leaders ensures the development of a fair and accountable school culture to enhance student success. 11. The school leaders guarantee a culture of continuous improvement within the school.

### *Stage 3) Juxtaposition*

In Iran, the Ministry of Education issued a regulation in 2021 regarding the selection and appointment of school managers, which stipulates that a competency certificate is issued for a five-year period for school leaders. According to this regulation, Volunteers for management must have the following three conditions and qualifications:

#### *a) General*

- Possessing religious, moral, and behavioral qualifications;
- Should be marriage
- Possessing personality traits such as good character, self-confidence, a spirit of participation, group activities, and the ability to communicate and interact constructively with others, popularity, acceptance, and good reputation among colleagues, and excellence in traits such as legalism, belief in God, religiosity, and revolutionary social commitment;
- Possessing complete mental health and the physical ability necessary to properly perform duties and missions.

#### *b) Specialized*

- To obtain a management position in schools with a student population of more than two hundred and fifty people and educational complexes, it is mandatory to have at least a master's degree related to management and at least 8 years of experience (education), three of which must be as a deputy in the desired academic course.
- A candidate for appointment to any of the management or deputy positions in a school must be an official employee of education, with the exception of directors or deputies of non-governmental schools and directors of non-governmental educational centers.
- At the time of appointment, it is mandatory for school directors to have at least 4 years of service until retirement.

#### *c) Professional*

- Professional ethics (constructive human relations, discipline, law-abiding, responsibility and accountability, trustworthiness and honesty, protecting the dignity of teachers, respecting the dignity of audiences and stakeholders)
- Professional knowledge (familiarity with relevant laws and regulations, familiarity with higher-level documents, familiarity with policy-making and legislative authorities in the field of education, familiarity with the philosophy of Islamic education and training, familiarity with management and leadership knowledge, familiarity with IT skills and a foreign language)
- Capabilities and skills (ability to plan, coordinate, organize, make decisions, monitor and evaluate, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, ability to carry out and advance

group and team work and encourage and encourage, ability to continuously improve oneself and employees, research, ability to create educational and training opportunities, ability to apply and develop new technologies, skill in using the required systems, strengthening motivation for continuous learning, ability to attract the participation of factors (participant and effective in education, especially of students, teachers, family, media, and cultural, social, and economic institutions).

In the U.S., school principal positions are widely advertised through newspapers, job websites, online hiring systems, and social media. The selection process is primarily two-tiered: First, teachers must have a relevant university degree as a prerequisite. Generally, teachers applying for a leadership position as a “principal” must have a master’s degree in “education,” “educational leadership,” “educational administration,” or similar. In addition, applicants must hold a certificate (valid in the relevant state or region). To obtain these certificates, they must have completed relevant courses, have professional experience, and often pass a special test or interview with an assessment center (Lee & Mao, 2020). As Brauckmann, Pashiardis & Arlestig, (2023) stated that human resource managers and supervisors use different criteria to select supervisors from among candidates, with human resource managers preferring professional experience – usually defined as years of teaching experience – while supervisors focus on leadership competencies. The content of principal training courses includes topics such as an introduction to educational management and leadership, curriculum, school rules, finances, personal management, research methods, physical school management, human behavior and relations, educational organizations and management, and educational psychology.

Singapore was one of the first countries to require a certificate of leadership qualification for school leaders in the form of a Diploma in Education in July 1984. In 2001, the Diploma in Educational Management was replaced by the Educational Leadership Programme (Ho & Koh, 2017). Candidates for the post of head-teacher are invited for an interview on the recommendation of the district superintendent. The main criteria for selecting school leaders are their academic achievement, teaching experience and evaluation report. School leaders must have at least a master’s degree. The final decision on appointment is made by the Council of Education. The content of school leader preparation programs includes topics such as strategic planning, application of new technology in learning management, human capital and learning, and leadership in the new millennium (National Institute of Education, 2013).

In Britain, the recruitment and appointment process is carried out at school level. The governing bodies appoint a group that includes parents. In this country, the selection process is carried out in the schools themselves. A shortlist of candidates is usually presented before

interviews and teachers must apply for the position of school leader. During the application process, the candidates' academic background and their current skills and expertise in the profession are taken into account. Since the abilities and needs of each candidate are different, the duration of the candidates' management in the program may also vary. Candidates continue the program for periods ranging from 4 to 12 months, depending on their needs. The program is divided into 4 phases: in the first phase, all candidates must complete 180 hours of training, of which 60 hours are practical studies. The aim is basic training in school leadership, rules and regulations, in the second phase, candidates participate in studies related to educational activities. The aim of this module is to develop teaching methods and techniques. In module 3, candidates learn about human resources and how to manage these resources efficiently. In module 4, skills are acquired in school financial management and school human resource development. School leadership, familiarity with laws and regulations, development of teaching methods and techniques, human resources, how to manage human resources efficiently, financial management, and school human resource development constitute the content of school educational leader preparation programs in England (Saglam, Geçer, & Bag, 2017).

In France, there is a significant difference between primary and secondary schools. There is no formal qualification scheme for managing primary schools; however, secondary school leaders are expected to complete a comprehensive training program. In France, local authorities select educational leaders for primary schools, and candidates are required to have two years of teaching experience. Teachers with two years of experience are pre-evaluated by an "educational supervisor," and if accepted, their documents are sent to the regional interview board. This board, consisting of a regional educational supervisor, a national supervisor, and a school principal, assesses the applications and calls candidates for interviews. Teachers who have previously been invited for an interview or have at least one year of management experience in a school are exempt from re-interviewing for three years. However, if candidates have previously applied and were not accepted, they must reapply. The selected principal is usually appointed for one year, and if local authorities agree, they may be reappointed for another year. The appointment of secondary school leaders is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (Saglam, Geçer, & Bag, 2017, p. 34). Applicants must be at least 30 years old and have a minimum of five years of teaching experience. The preparation process for educational leaders is designed in several stages to ensure the selection and training of individuals with the necessary qualifications. In the first stage, candidates participate in a four-hour written exam designed to assess their academic and analytical abilities. After succeeding in this stage, candidates enter the interview process, aimed at evaluating their

managerial skills, communication abilities, and problem-solving capabilities. Candidates who pass these stages enter a six-month professional qualification program. This program includes group theoretical training and internships in public and private schools. The goal of this program is to create a link between theoretical concepts and practical experience so that candidates can gain a deeper understanding of school management. After successfully completing this program, candidates are appointed as deputy principals and enter a two-year training program. During this program, they receive training under the supervision of experienced managers in areas such as school organization, human resource management, legal and financial issues, and strategic planning. This step-by-step process is designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and practical experience of educational leaders, enabling them to perform effectively in future managerial roles (Bush, 2018).

*Stage 4) Comparison*

Considering the described and interpreted stages, in this section, the data are placed side by side and compared simultaneously.

Table 1: Juxtaposition of components related to the process of selecting and appointing school principals.

Country	Process
USA	Announcement of requirements by states through newspapers
	Registration of candidates and submission and review of documents
	Conducting a written exam and in-person interview and announcing the names of accepted candidates
	Introducing accepted candidates to undergo pre-service preparation courses at educational centers
	Granting a professional qualification certificate to school leaders to candidates who successfully complete the school leadership preparation program
Britain	Selection and appointment of principals by the school governing bodies
	Application submission by candidates for the school leadership position
	Document review and examination of candidates' academic, professional records, and skills
	Accepted candidates participate in a written exam
	Inviting successful candidates of the written exam for a specialized interview
	Successful candidates participate in 4 to 12-month courses

Country	Process
	Granting a professional qualification certificate to successful candidates
Singapore	Introduction of individuals for management roles by the regional supervisor
	Evaluation of candidates based on academic progress, teaching experience, and evaluation reports
	Holding at least a master's degree
	Final decisions made by the Education Council
	Accepted candidates participate in relevant training courses
France	Submission of a resume by the candidate
	If accepted, participation in a 4-hour written exam
	Conducting in-person interviews with accepted candidates
	Participating in a six-month preparation course
	Having at least 30 years of service, 5 years of teaching experience for secondary school management, and 2 years of teaching experience for primary school management is among the main requirements

As shown in Table 1, the countries studied have a defined structure for the selection and appointment of their educational leaders. In all these countries, after completing the selection process, all candidates must participate in a pre-service training program and obtain a school management qualification certificate after completing these courses. In the countries studied, holding a master's degree in educational management is one of the main priorities for selecting future educational leaders. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the selection and appointment process is the responsibility of the school governing bodies, while in Singapore and France, this process is carried out by the Education Council of the regions or the Ministry of Education.

Table 2: Juxtaposition of School Leadership Preparation Programs

Country	Type of Program	School Leadership Preparation Program
USA	Pre-service training program	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards
Britain	Pre-service training program	National Professional Qualification for School Leadership
Singapore	Pre-service training program	Leaders in Training Program

France	Pre-service training program	Comprehensive School Leadership Training Program
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As shown in Table 2, the countries under study prepare school educational leaders through pre-service training programs, and all these countries have a specific type of program with a defined and pre-designed structure for the training and preparation of their educational leaders.

Table 3: Juxtaposition of the Curriculum Content for School Leadership Preparation

Country	Curriculum Content
USA	- Introduction to educational management and leadership
	- School laws
	- Financial matters
	- Personnel management
	- Research-based teaching methods
	- School physical management
	- Human behavior and relationships
	- Educational organizations and management
Britain	- Educational psychology
	- School leadership
	- Familiarization with laws and regulations
	- Development of teaching methods and techniques
	- Human resources
	- Efficient management of human resources
	- Financial management
Singapore	- School human resource development
	- Managing competitive learning in school organizations
	- Strategic marketing selection
	- Implementing new technologies in learning management
	- Achieving the highest standards in education and learning
France	- Building human capital and learning
	- Leadership for the new millennium
	- Management
	- Budgeting
	- School laws
	- School techniques
	- Teacher evaluation
	- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Guiding conferences and employee groups	
- Performance assessment	
- Youth psychology	

Examining the content of the school leadership preparation curriculum shows that the countries studied have both similarities and differences. For instance, in the United States, England, Singapore, and France, there is training in school management and leadership. In addition, familiarization with school laws is included in the curriculum in the United States, England, and France. Educational psychology is taught in France and the United States. Financial management education is of particular importance in almost all countries studied. Human relationships are also taught in these countries.

## **5. Conclusion**

The first finding of this research indicates that the position of educational leaders in Iranian schools poses a fundamental challenge in the professionalization of educational management. Unlike countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore, where school management is defined as a specialized profession, in Iran, this role is largely confined to administrative and mechanical duties. This fundamental difference highlights the significant gap in the management system of Iranian schools compared to the requirements of professionalism in educational management.

One of the foundational aspects of the professionalization of educational leaders is possessing professional competencies, which include a set of managerial skills, specialized knowledge in various educational fields, and leadership qualifications. Having a degree relevant to educational management is considered a fundamental requirement for professional competency. For example, in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore, a master's degree in educational management and school leadership is a primary prerequisite for holding managerial positions in schools. This approach ensures the desired level of knowledge and skills necessary to lead schools and address managerial and educational challenges. In contrast, in Iran, having a master's degree in management is specified as the main criterion for appointing school leaders. This requirement reflects a non-specialized approach to school management. School management, as a complex profession, necessitates a range of knowledge and skills that go beyond general management aspects. The lack of a requirement for a degree related to educational management in Iran has primarily led to decreased effectiveness of school leaders in enhancing educational quality and implementing necessary changes. Studies have shown that approximately 88% of current school leaders in Iran do not meet the established criteria for selecting and appointing educational leaders. This issue signifies a disregard for specialized competencies and even a failure to fully implement existing criteria. Assigning managerial responsibilities to individuals lacking the

necessary expertise in the field of educational management and school leadership is not only scientifically unjustifiable but also undermines the efficiency of the educational system. These findings align with the research of Gurmu, (2020), Murphy (2020), Bush (2018), and Huber (2004).

The second finding of the research indicates the significance of years of service as one of the essential requirements for professionalization in holding the position of school management. Years of service are a key criterion in the selection and appointment process for educational leaders, playing an important role in evaluating individuals' qualifications for these positions. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore, the requirement for years of service is limited to 3 to 5 years. These countries place greater emphasis on professional competencies, specialized knowledge, and educational leadership capabilities, avoiding reliance on mere executive experience. In contrast, the Iranian educational system stipulates a minimum of 8 years of service as a requirement for school management. This requirement, which emphasizes seniority, often replaces specialized and managerial criteria. Such an approach has led to the phenomenon known as "gerontocracy," where seniority takes precedence over technical and specialized competencies. This situation frequently results in traditional and ineffective management patterns, diminishing educational leaders' ability to manage complex challenges. The findings of the present research underscore the necessity of reviewing the requirements for selecting educational leaders in Iran. Emphasizing managerial and educational leadership competencies as the main criteria could improve the quality of school management and increase the effectiveness of the educational system. These results align with studies by Babullah et al. (2024); Brauckmann, Pashiardis & Arlestig (2023); Monidari et al. (2023) and Okoko (2020).

The third finding of research emphasizes the importance of preparing school managers. Preparing educational leaders has been recognized as another fundamental pillar in professional advancement. However, in the regulations regarding the selection and appointment of educational leaders in Iran, this issue has not been comprehensively and thoroughly addressed. Currently, Iran lacks a systematic and structured program for preparing school educational leaders. Effective preparation processes for educational managers require the use of complex educational methods that align with the requirements of this profession. Relying solely on the transfer of theoretical concepts, providing study resources, or requiring the production of articles cannot adequately foster the vital and essential management and leadership skills in potential managers. For effective school leadership preparation, standardized processes are needed that combine theory with practical experiences and real simulations in school environments. This approach can help educational managers develop a deeper understanding of their responsibilities and apply

management and leadership skills in practice. In contrast to Iran, countries such as Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and France have positioned the preparation of school educational managers as one of the fundamental elements of their professional development. These countries have integrated systematic, ongoing, and necessary preparation processes for educational leaders into the path of managerial professional competency, often emphasizing the importance of acquiring practical experiences alongside theoretical training. Various studies in this field have highlighted the significance of such approaches in developing managerial and leadership skills, demonstrating that these efforts lead to significant improvements in the performance of educational systems. Overall, these international experiences underscore the importance of designing comprehensive and practical programs to prepare educational leaders that equip future managers to face complex educational and managerial challenges. These programs should not only include theoretical training but also provide experiential opportunities and supervision in real school environments to enable managers to acquire essential managerial and leadership skills in practice. The findings of this research in this area are consistent with the studies of Bush (2018); Dickens et al. (2021); Gurmü (2020); Murphy (2020); Okoko (2020) and Weinstein, Azar, & Flessa (2018).

The fourth finding of this research highlights the importance of pre-service training programs for school managers. These programs emphasize providing educational and experiential opportunities before appointing managers, comprehensively preparing them to face managerial and leadership challenges in schools. This approach underscores the importance of pre-service processes that include theoretical and practical training, supervised internships, and continuous evaluation. Educational managers in the countries examined benefit from pre-service training programs; in contrast, the Iranian educational system primarily emphasizes in-service professional development, which typically begins formally after managers are appointed. This approach has limited focus on empowering educational managers at a specific time after their appointment and, since it does not facilitate real experience and continuous feedback, significantly reduces their opportunity to enhance management and leadership skills effectively. This situation leads new educational managers to enter their responsibilities in schools without comprehensive and experiential preparations. Since the complex conditions and various challenges they face in educational environments have not been simulated for them in advance, their actual performance is adversely affected. The lack of a comprehensive and structured system for pre-service preparation in Iran poses serious challenges to the professionalization of educational managers and significantly diminishes its impact. This gap not only jeopardizes the quality of school management

but also deprives managers of essential opportunities to cultivate vital skills and gain practical experiences before entering leadership roles. Therefore, to improve managers' performance and enhance the quality of the educational system, it is essential to seriously design and implement pre-service training programs so that managers can enter the school leadership process fully equipped and confident.

Thus, it is crucial that the preparation of school educational leaders be designed and implemented as a pre-service process. Given the key role of educational leaders in achieving the educational objectives of the Ministry of Education, the regulations for selecting and appointing educational leaders in schools aim to institutionalize meritocracy in this process. However, this regulation merely references professional qualifications and the selection of educational leaders through examinations, neglecting the design of pre-service training programs. In many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, preparation is considered a prerequisite for school management; thus, it is necessary for Iran as well to establish effective mechanisms for training and preparing educational leaders before their appointment. The findings of this research in this area are consistent with the studies of Dickens et al. (2021) and Weinstein, Azar& Flessa (2018). Based on the experiences of the selected countries, the following recommendations are provided for policymakers and educational management planners in Iran:

- Redefine the methods for selecting, preparing, and appointing educational leaders in schools.
- Design a pre-service training program for educational leaders in schools.
- Create a systematic standard framework for the professional development and preparation of educational leaders.
- Focus on the preparation of educational leaders.
- Establish connections between the selection, preparation, and appointment of educational leaders.
- Develop a professional competency program for the professional development of educational leaders.
- Create targeted training sessions for the professional development of educational leaders.
- Prepare a school-centered program for the professional development of educational leaders.
- Give special attention to professional development, ensuring that it is a continuous process for educational leaders in schools, with programs establishing closer links between preparing and training educational leaders in schools.
- Establish mechanisms for the annual performance evaluation of educational leaders.
- Design a specialized curriculum for training and preparing educational leaders based on the latest findings in educational management and leadership worldwide.

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