



A Comparative Study of Succession System of Educational Leaders in Japan, Singapore, Finland and the United States of America: Providing Guidelines for Iran's Educational System

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 19 February 2022 Revised: 21 April 2022 Accepted: 28 June 2022 Online: 18 August 2022</p>	<p>Identification of talented people for educational organizations management and fostering them is one of the common challenges of educational system of developed and developing countries. The purpose of present research was to investigate succession system of educational leaders in four successful educational systems of Japan, Singapore, Finland and the United States of America from a comparative perspective. The research and data collection methods were qualitative -based on George Bereday's approach- and documentary respectively. The findings indicated existence of seven similarities among selected countries in components such as: Difficulty of finding a suitable candidate, lack of a formal succession system, importance of teaching experience, role of in-service courses, evaluation of previous behavioral and professional performances, and role of Local Boards of Education. Also, the findings revealed difference between four countries in five components related to succession system. For example, while in Japan and Singapore seniority is the most important factor in the succession process of managers, Finland and USA do not necessarily follow it. Also, offering the opportunity to potential external candidates to replace the current managers - through conducting interviews and examining scientific and professional resumes - is more common in Finland and USA. Another important finding is the distinctive role of cultural factors in the succession process of Japan and Singapore, while in Finland and USA, the personal efficacy of the manager's potential successors is considered.</p>
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1. Introduction

During the last two decades the idea of transmission experiences of current managers to future administrators and use of a mechanism namely "succession system" and its management and planning has been the focus of many researchers in the field of management science. The output of this is to provide definitions, determination of dimensions and components, presentation of models and distinguish the theoretical boundaries of the concept of "succession" by different researchers. Despite the growth of the concept of succession - in the theoretical aspect - and the emphasis of various experts in behavioral, organizational and management sciences on the need to establish a succession system to identify and train future managers, not much action has been taken in practice and especially in social organizations - such as educational organizations (Bengtson, 2010; Fink, 2011; Fink & Brayman 2004; Hargreaves & Fink 2006; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). In fact, one of the challenges of succession in many educational systems of the world is the rapid change of managers at different levels - schools, districts, regions, province and national. At the micro level that is school management, Fink & Brayman (2004) showed that frequent changes of principals may negatively affect the school atmosphere and student learning and turn into a crisis in school life. The experience of one of Iran's former ministers of education also points to the negative effect of continuous and quick change of administrators at different levels in implementation of macro policies of the educational system (Fani, 2019a).

Another challenge is that formal leadership succession planning is not a common practice in many educational systems (Bengtson, Parylo & Zepeda, 2010; Fink, 2005, 2011). For this reason, in one of the most recent studies Cieminski (2018) points out the lack of research related to the issue of succession in educational organizations even in advanced countries - such as the USA and Western European countries. To explain the imbalance and distance between theory and practice, we can point to complexity of the subject of succession in the educational system. The complexity of succession system refers to the fact that educational leadership is strongly influenced by environmental/social factors, personality characteristics of principals, internal factors (teachers, students, ...) and momentary situations (unpredictable incidents and events every day of the school) that make very difficult to transfer current principal's experiences to the next successors. Fani (2020b) highlighted that how the lack of succession relationship in different management levels of the Iran's Ministry of Education has caused the repetition of various executive and educational plans and programs as well as repetition of previous experiences and failures.

Meanwhile, the organizational structure of educational system is also very important, which means that centralized and decentralized educational systems can facilitate or stop succession

process in different ways. For example, while in Iran's centralized educational system, there is generally no opportunity to identify and train potential future managers, and mainly, many non-educational factors -such as political influence, social relationships based on family relationships, or to some extent personal and professional characteristics- are effective in the selection of managers (Abdolahi, 2013; Sadeghinia, Salehi & Moghadamzadeh, 2017; Sadat Fadavi, 2019); the decentralized educational system of countries -such as USA- does not have a definite and specific system or program for the training and succession of educational leaders. To put it better and according to the organizational structure, educational systems can be divided into two groups of centralized (countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and Japan) and decentralized (Western European countries, USA, and Canada). In the first group, it is possible to determine succession system's characteristics to some extent because there are mechanisms and brief plans; while in the second group, the succession system does not follow specific organizational procedures.

Since in Iran, the concept of succession in educational organizations' management (especially schools) has not received much attention from the policy makers and planners of the educational system, naturally, attention to the experiences of both groups of countries with centralized and decentralized systems can contain invaluable experiences and lessons. According to these explanations, two countries of Singapore and Japan were selected among the first group, and Finland and USA from the second group. Considering this brief introduction, the main purpose of research was to investigate the succession system of educational leaders in four successful educational systems of Japan, Singapore, Finland, and USA from a comparative perspective. The secondary objectives are:

- Identification of similar characteristics of succession process systems in selected countries.
- Identification of different characteristics of succession process systems in selected countries

2. Research Method

In terms of nature, degree of variables' control, purpose, and research method, this study was a qualitative, non-experimental, applied and comparative research respectively. The research population includes all countries of the world (N=197) and research sample includes the countries of Japan, Singapore, Finland and the USA (n=4). The selection strategy of countries was "different social systems, similar educational outputs" (Madandar Arani & Kakia, 2018). The meaning of difference in social systems is the dissimilarity of selected countries in social systems - such as culture, religion, politics, economy, etc., while educational output (succession process) are similar.

The regional comparative method is a useful tool for collecting data at the macro level of observation and analysis (country, state, province, and district) (Bray & Thomas, 1995). After selection of countries, the identification of reliable and relevant databases was considered by the researchers to collect data. In fact, the first step of comparative researchers is to identify and determine the bibliographic and full-text databases that have the most coverage of the subject under study. According to the preliminary investigations of the principal researcher (at the stage of drafting the proposal), the information bases were divided to two groups i.e. Iranian groups (SID, IRANDOC, HUMAN SCIENCE PORTAL, NOORMAGS, MAGIRAN) and non-Iranian databases (GOOGLE SCHOLAR, EBSCO, ERIC). Two methods of agreement and difference of John Stuart Mill and the regional approach of George F. Bereday were used to analyze the data.

3. Findings

The presentation of the results is done according to Brady's four-step approach:

First Phase) Description

Considering the regional method, in this section organizational structure of the educational system and method of selecting school principals and education departments' administrators of the four selected countries are presented:

1. Japan

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is responsible and the main supervisor of education in Japan. This ministry is responsible for the establishment of public and private educational institutions and determination of budget and financial aid to schools. The Japanese education system follows a centralized system and MEXT sets guidelines for the national curriculum for all academic grades. Compulsory education includes primary education (6-year period) and middle secondary education (3-year period) and a total of 9 years (Nuffic, 2010). Among OECD member countries, Japan is the only country where the number of male teachers is slightly higher than female teachers. In 2019, 52% of teachers at all educational levels were male, while in OECD countries the average rate is around 30% (OECD, 2021). Despite the relatively centralized structure, since the 1990s, the policy makers of the Japan education system have emphasized increasing the power and authority of administrators and reducing centralization (Yamamoto, Enomoto, & Yamaguchi, 2016). For this reason, although school principals and heads of education departments are appointed by superiors -at the regional, provincial and national levels- but the main emphasis is on selecting principals who have knowledge of the school's social

environment and leadership skills (Osugi, 2014). For example, a Japanese government policy report -published in the middle of the last decade- mentions three characteristics that school leaders are expected to have: Leadership ability to communicate with school staff; Presentation & clarification of future vision and mission of the school, and; Communication skills to build partnerships with the local community (Central Council of Education, 2015).

2. Singapore

In Singapore, most schools are public controlled and funded by the Ministry of Education. Also, the curriculum and assessment system -to better develop the thought and learning skills needed in the future- are determined under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Tan, Koh, & Choy, 2016). In Singapore, primary education lasts 6 years and is compulsory, free for children aged 6 to 12, and secondary education is 4 or 5 years, depending on the chosen path (Nuffic, 2016). Also, 65% of school teachers are women - with an average age of 43 years. In addition, 52% of school principals are also female. More than 90% of managers have participated in management training courses (OECD, 2013). In Singapore, principal salaries are high to attract strong candidates for school management. As part of the rigorous selection process for principals, candidates are evaluated through an assessment center—which provides a set of exercises and observable behaviors related to the core competencies of a school leader. Candidates with management potential then participate in a six-month program run by the National Institute of Education. At the end of this program, candidate will be selected who have administration readiness and ability to adopt with school climate (UNESCO, no date).

3. Finland

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for formulating educational policies and the Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for implementing these policies (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). In this country, education is free and compulsory for pupils aged 7 to 16. Elementary education is provided in two parts - for grades 1 to 6 and grades 7 to 9 - and secondary education - for grades 10 to 12. Within the framework of the national curriculum, local authorities and schools are free to decide on each subject. Also, 77% of teachers and 49% of school managers are female. The average age of school principals in Finland is 50 years. In addition, more than 80% of managers have participated in in-service management training courses (Paronen, & Lappi, 2018). In this country, the conditions for selecting managers are based on their experience as teachers and their amount of participation in educational management courses (Lahtero, Ahtiainen, & Lang, 2019).

4. USA

In this country, most children enter the general education system at the age of five or six. For children aged 6 to 16 (or 18), education is compulsory. They usually attend a 12-year course of primary and secondary education (Shaughnessy, & Code, 2015). 54% of school principals in this country are women. In terms of work experience, in 2017-2018, about 37 percent of public school administrators had 3 years or less experience as principals, 36 percent had 4 to 9 years, 24 percent had 10 to 19 years, and 4 percent had 20 years of management experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). In addition, 62% of principals had a master's degree and 11% had a doctorate (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, p 3). There are usually different policies for the selection of principals in different states, but mainly public announcements through local newspapers and conducting interviews with candidates are considered.

Second Phase) Interpretation

In this phase, results of data analysis are presented for each country based on effects and roles of social systems in selection and succession process:

1. Japan

In Japan, educational leadership and its related components -for example, the selection and appointment of managers and succession system- like the educational system are strongly influenced by the cultural system. Japanese culture has always had many exchanges with Chinese culture and has been exposed to the cultural influence of ancient China. Also, the influence of Western culture on Japan began during the Meiji era, although now Japanese culture has found its own unique form (Chang, 2015). Thus, educational leadership in Japan, on the one hand, influenced by Chinese culture, supports age seniority, professional experience, teamwork, and collaborative management (Miller, 2011), and on the other hand, influenced by western culture insists on characteristics such as autonomy, responsibility, individual creativity and expertise of managers and their successors (Chen, Chang & Sato, 2017).

2. Singapore

For more than two decades, the success of Singapore's education system - achieving high scores in international tests such as the TIMSS & PISA - has been evident to many researchers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; OECD, 2011). However, the influence and role of social factors in this success is less mentioned. A centralized political system, a city-state, low population and limit geographical space have resulted in the formation of a small but strong educational system. For this reason, some researchers believe that without a doubt, the small size of the educational system

contributes to its high performance, effective leadership, and emergence of innovations. In this sense, Singapore is consistent with the hypothesis that the world's best-performing education systems are mostly small ones (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Barber et al., 2010). In fact, effective factors in educational system of Singapore is conceptualized by three interrelated levels: Macro level (social, cultural, economical, political), Organizational level (school and class), and family level (parents) (Dimook, 2012). At the macro-societal level, the Singapore government has established meritocracy as a core value determining professional growth in organizations (Ho, 2003). In particular, academic merit—measured through achievement in examinations—is the basis of socioeconomic status and reward. As a small and compact society, in Singapore the government is able to exert a high degree of control over education, the economy, and society—through a powerful elite bureaucracy and a one-party political system (Dimock & Tan, 2013). As a result, educational policies are largely driven by economic instrumentalism—efficiency and effectiveness—rather than ideology or political doctrine. At the institutional level, schools follow a largely traditional academic curriculum. Also, the main emphasis of the curriculum is on teaching basic subjects - such as mathematics, science & English. Since nowadays Singapore is a rich country, schools' buildings, facilities and materials have high quality. Thus, since 1965, the ruling one-party government has adopted English as the language of education and trade, increasing Singapore's educational success internationally. At the family level, the growing population of 5 million people on a very small island with no raw materials, with increasing income levels and with an emphasis on meritocracy, has shown a strong desire for children's educational development. In this way, participation in extracurricular classes and the active participation of parents in the teaching-learning process has become a behavioral habit among Singaporean parents and pupils (Hogan et al., 2009). These social factors have automatically influenced the process of managers' selection and appointing their successors. The influence of Chinese culture combined with strong government policies has created a slow process of professional growth - based on seniority and meritocracy - in the educational leaders' succession process.

3. Finland

While this country does not have a single-party and powerful political system like Singapore, it is similar to it in dimensions such as the country's small size, low student population, power of economic and emphasis on role of educational system in social development. Finland, with a population of about 550,000 students in formal general education (grades 1-12), has performed brilliantly in international tests - such as TIMSS and PIRLS - (Andrews, Ryve, Hemmi, & Sayers, 2014, Clausnitzer, 2021). In fact, Finland is one of the countries that have been able to

transform an education system with average performance into a successful system during the last three decades. In this country, all teachers are required to have a master's degree before entering this profession. Also, compared to other professional courses, professional training courses for teachers are very detailed, strict and selective. After selecting the teacher, if she/he does not show a strong performance, it is the responsibility of the school principal to decide on her/his continuation and the way of activity (Colagrossi, 2018). Understanding this concept means insight about important role of educational leadership in the successful education system of Finland, which is not measured solely by the seniority of the principals and their successors.

4. USA

The United States of America is one of the world's leading educational systems with more than 50 million students in 130,930 schools (Riser-Kositsky, 2022). The results of TIMSS 2019 show that the pupils of this country have obtained higher average scores than most of the participating countries in Grades 4 & 8 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Despite the existence of the Ministry of Education, each state is responsible for its education and schools are managed by local administrations. States are divided into educational districts, in which "District Educational Administrator" and "District Educational Board" are responsible for educational affairs, including the selection of principals. Also, in the academic year 2017-2018, the percentage of public school teachers who had a master's degree (specialist in educational subjects) or a doctorate degree was 58%. During the same period, about 90% of public school teachers had a teaching certificate or an advanced professional certificate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Naturally, the leadership of this educated workforce requires a strong educational leadership. For this reason, to get the position of school principal in most states, having a master's degree in the field of educational administration is required (Brown, Connors-Tadros, & Horowitz, 2014).

Third Phase) Juxtaposition

In this phase, the data related to the methods of selecting managers - and usual procedures for selection of their successors - in the selected countries are examined. The main point that should be considered here is the relationship between educational leadership and succession system. In fact, the method of managers' selection and succession method are two sides of the same coin. In other words, methods of principals' selection in different levels and educational leaders learning suggested lack of formal succession process. In a brief explanation, it should be said that Japanese managers generally have a degree in educational sciences or more than twenty years of teaching experience. Also, school leadership in Japan follows a "top-down" model, and teachers - as the

future potential leaders - are generally under pressure for student success - high test scores -, active parental involvement, and continuous professional development (Cisse, & Okato, 2009). Recent research by Yokota (2021) states four major characteristics of educational leadership in Japan as follows: 1) Recruitment and selection of school principals is too dependent on seniority, although there have been ambitious—but unsuccessful—reforms to attract principals from the private sector; 2) Professional learning opportunities are inconsistent and undifferentiated, 3) Principals have limited autonomy in making decisions about personnel and financial issues, and 4) Development of evaluation systems designed to evaluate the performance of principals is separate from the teacher evaluation system.

Regardless of the size of the education system, there is an increasing diversity in the types of schools in Singapore. Due to this diversity, three common career paths for educational leadership are teaching experience, having expertise and gaining a leadership position (MOE, 2003). Typically, after a few years of teaching, teachers with management potential are encouraged to pursue a leadership path. Although these teachers must aspire to the position, deciding on a leadership career path is not an individual decision. Unlike the promotion and succession practices in other organizations, the decision for a "leadership post" in schools is a very deliberate and calculated decision, with a careful monitoring and selection process by senior leaders and the teacher's own willingness and readiness - after observing her/his behavior and performance. Therefore, the succession process is a systemic process rather than an individual decision (Dimmock & Tan, 2013). In fact, Singaporean teachers are evaluated by senior leaders at every stage of their career development. Regular monitoring and evaluation of all teachers - especially those who appear to have leadership potential - is carried out by school principals, regional and district superintendents of education or senior management in the Ministry of Education. Interactions resulting from the small size of the education system ensure that these senior leaders use common criteria to identify and select potential school leaders across the country. This intensive system also allows senior leaders to easily share their observations and evaluations of teachers with high leadership potential. In addition, the behavior and performance of teachers with high leadership potential and teachers who make "serious mistakes" are fully considered by senior principals to prevent the appointment of weak or average - but eager - teachers to leadership positions through scrutiny and exchange of evaluations (Walker & Kwan, 2012). Singapore also offers two levels of formal programs for the preparation and succession of educational leaders: First, the mid-level leadership program, designed for heads of district departments and headquarters offices, and second, the program for schools' deputies who aspire to become principals. However, all formal leadership

training takes place in a government-run teacher training institution –National Institute of Education (NIE) (Lim, 2007; Ng, 2008a).

Most principals of primary and secondary schools usually move between schools every five to seven years (Dimmock & Tan, 2013). As a result, they can use their previous experiences to better decide what is appropriate for new learning environments. Another feature that is evident in the succession process in Singapore's education system is the strong connection and alignment between school administrators and teachers based on a socio-cultural solidarity (Hargreaves, 2011). Indeed, in addition to the traditional forms of structural and administrative communication, there is a distinct Asian cultural characteristic that compels leaders and teachers in Singaporean schools to follow a form of vertical binding. In fact, the interactions between the leader and teacher - which are conceptualized in the form of "leader-teacher compact" - have provided the right context for the implementation of the curriculum and promotion of students' learning. These "compacts" provide the necessary social capital for school leaders to guide teachers while teachers support their leaders (Dimmock, 2012; Law, 2009). Also, this cultural agreement provides the necessary background for identifying the potential successors of the manager and transferring experiences with managerial value.

In Finland, school principals have a very good social status. School management candidates must be qualified to teach in the schools where they are applying. For managers, it is not only necessary to have a master's degree, but also a teaching qualification. Also, candidates must have a certificate in educational administration or must have completed an educational leadership program, which includes a 25-credit Certificate in Educational Administration (Eurydice, 2013). Although there is no specific criteria for work experience, managers who are selected on a permanent basis must have administrative experience. As a rule, selected principals are usually experienced teachers, although it has become increasingly common to use psychological tests in addition to interviews to compare candidates (Taipale, 2012). Initially, principals are appointed for a trial period of six months (Eurydice, 2013). We should also mention the role of local education boards in the selection and succession process. It seems that the local model in Finland is more effective than the centralized models, because the local boards of education know the needs of schools better and can consult with parents, teachers and other stakeholders in the process of choosing a principal (Huber & Hiltman, 2010). In schools affiliated with municipalities, the process of choosing a principal is done as follows: A vacant position is opened by the school board - after announcement of the retirement or departure of current principal. The Department of Education advertises the vacant job position in the regional main gazette, in the national teacher magazine or

on the job center website. Applications are accepted during a certain period. Then the program of each candidate is compared with each other. Applications are ranked based on applicants' academic experience and educational level. Interviews are held by school principals (interview group) and they try to decide on the most suitable candidate. In some cases, the president of school board, members of the board of education conducts this process (Tihverainen, 2009). In this way, it seems that there is no formal mechanism or a specific succession system in the Finnish education system.

The educational system of USA has a long history in training school principals and has been the pioneer of many other educational systems (Lewis & Scott, 2020). In the United States, there is a wide variation among states in how they approach the issue of school leadership succession. While some states still leave the future of school leadership up to chance, others are building partnerships between departments of education, universities, educational districts, and schools to ensure that leadership positions are not left vacant (Wilson, 2009; Parylo, 2012). The application process for the position of school principal begins with publication of vacant positions in the educational district. Then the main candidates for these positions refer to the educational district. Of course, the selection method varies between states and educational regions, but it is usually done by completing a questionnaire or test, letters of recommendation from previous schools or the university from which the candidate graduated, evaluation of each candidate's documents, and an interview. Through these methods, it is determined whether the candidate - according to her/his experience and qualification - can meet the needs of educational region or district. Usually, school principals must take courses related to educational sciences and have teaching experiences in schools (Brown, Connors-Tadros, & Horowitz, 2014). In some states, passing a written exam and interview is required. Also, candidates must have special conditions determined by the Board of Education.

As a consequence of these evaluations, the district board of education selects the school principal from among the applicants (Ikemoto, & Chiang, 2019). The elected principal is appointed for a certain period of time, but in order to continue the management, she/he must constantly follow new developments in the field of school management and improve her/his professional capabilities. Thus, it is clear that there is no fixed and organized succession system in this country (Akbaşlı, Şahin, & Gül, 2017). Of course, district administrators fully understand the important role that the current school principal plays in the development and hiring of the next leader. This role begins before management candidates are identified. In fact, some educational districts tie this role to the evaluation of current leader, so that the current managers who get high marks in the field of succession and introduction of desirable candidates will have more job opportunities to continue

their management or be promoted to higher positions. Of course, some educational districts teach current managers the competencies and skills they need to search and identify future talents (Ikemoto & Chiang, 2019). However, one should pay attention to the fact that there is a lot of variation in the succession process between US states and educational districts. Table No. 1 shows the different models of principal succession:

Table 1. Common models of managerial succession in the United States of America

Models	Description
Bureaucratic rotation	Regular and traditional changes of school principals at regular intervals
Irregular rotation	Change of manager without specifying the exact date
Internal, non-rotating	Whereby most appointments are made internally by the Board of Education, although there is little expectation or pressure to rotate people in management positions.
Free market model	The board of directors agrees with the selection of the succession of principal from inside or outside the organization, as well as volunteers from outside the field of education.

Source: White et al., 2006

Also, Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs (2005) mention the factors that influence the succession of educational leaders, factors that seem to be not limited to the USA society (Table 2).

Table 2: Effective Factors in succession of educational leadership in USA

Factor	Description
Place	In remote locations, it is more difficult to attract qualified people to fill school leadership positions
School size	Too small or big schools are low attractive and less importance options for candidates
Hidden topics	In some cases, candidates are less inclined to apply because they know what's going on inside the system.
Local politics	Local politics hinder the effective selection process

Source: Barty & et al., 2005

Fourth Phase) Comparison

The results of the data analysis reveal existence of similarities and differences between selected countries regarding the succession system of educational leaders (Table 3). The first common similarity between educational systems of selected countries in this research is the difficulty of finding competent candidate for management positions in educational organizations, so many researchers have repeatedly pointed out that many people are not eager to be school leaders, and therefore finding qualified candidates has become a fundamental challenge (Bush 2008; Normore 2004; Roza 2003; Walker&Kwan 2009). In none of the countries under study, there are no

procedures and guidelines to force current managers to find and train their successors. The third similarity between these countries refers to the role of teaching experience. In fact, the idea of training successors or hiring and selection of people for leadership in educational organizations without having a teaching experience is generally impossible. The fourth similarity refers to the role of education of management candidates. In the four selected countries, one of the criteria for choosing a manager is to have educational and in-service training courses' certificates related to educational leadership. On this basis and naturally, one of the components of succession planning is attention to the appropriateness of scientific and professional qualifications for the training of future leaders of schools and educational organizations. The fifth similarity is to examine the behavioral and professional performance of future leaders through internal and external evaluations. In all four selected countries, one of the components of succession education is the training of people with leadership power in terms of how to relate to the four main groups of school managers, teachers, students and parents. The last component of succession process can be seen as the role of social and cultural factors on the structure of the educational system - as a whole - and possible characteristics of educational leaders. In all four countries, expectations from current and future leaders are made in the framework of understanding the realities governing social systems.

Table 3. Similarities and differences of the effective components of succession system in selected countries

Component	Japan	Singapore	Finland	USA
Difficulty of finding appropriate candidate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of formal succession system	✓	✓	✓	✓
Importance of teaching experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓
Role of in-service courses	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation of previous behavioral and professional performance of candidate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Role of local boards of education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Role of social and cultural factors	✓	✓	✓	✓
Role of age and seniority	✓	✓	-	-
Examination, questionnaire, interview	-	-	✓	✓
External candidates	-	-	✓	✓
Role of educational certificates	-	-	✓	✓

The differences between the four selected countries in the process of succession of educational leaders can be started from the last similarity mentioned. The educational system of

Japan and Singapore are similar in terms of being influenced by Chinese culture. This similarity has caused the current managers to pay special attention to the role of factors such as government policies, culture and collective spirit, popularity among colleagues and professional performance in identifying and introducing their possible successors. On the contrary, in Finland and USA, the role of political factors and the influence of characteristics such as independence, individual creativity, and professional qualifications are more evident in the process of training successors for leadership positions. The second difference refers to the role of age and seniority in selecting people for educational leadership. While in all four countries, it is more likely to choose people with higher length of experience for educational leadership, in Japan and Singapore, special emphasis is placed on meeting this condition. Based on this, the succession system in Japan and Singapore follow the pattern that people enter the education system as less experienced teachers at the beginning. During the next two decades, they go through the slow process of professional growth - as teachers with medium and high experience. Then the senior teachers with successful performance are selected as deputy - by the current managers - and are under their supervision and guidance until retirement. As soon as the current manager leaves the job - regardless of reasons such as retirement, illness and death - one of the more successful deputies is appointed as the new principal (Figure 1). It is a customary practice, institutionalized and consistent with the cultural and professional structure in both Japanese and Singaporean societies.

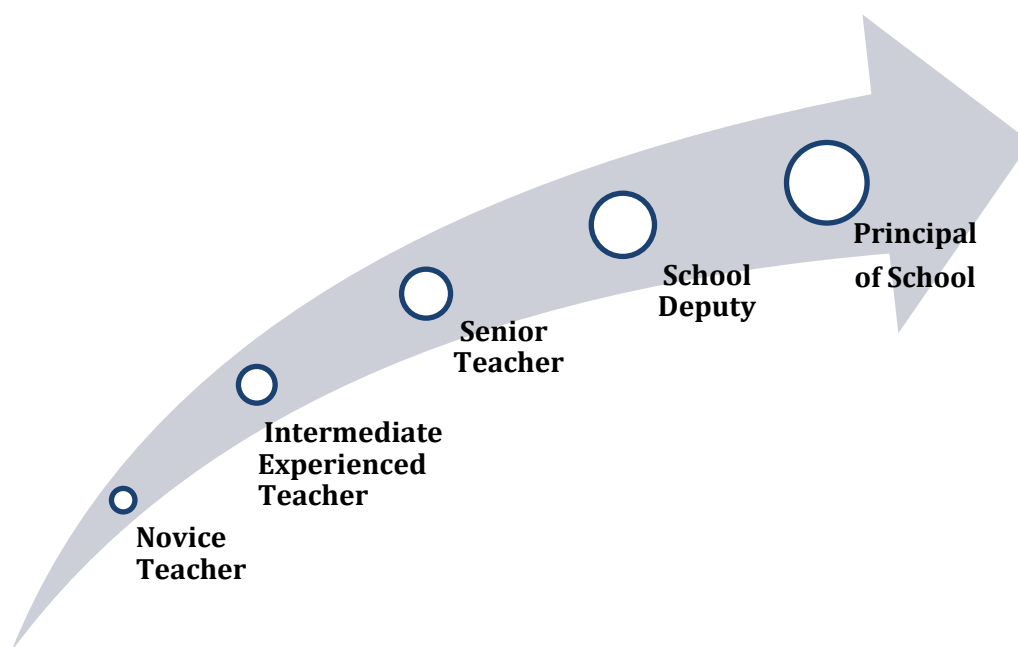


Figure 1. Succession process in educational systems of Japan & Singapore

Unlike Japan and Singapore, where the succession system follows a long and slow process, in Finland and USA, the selection of educational leaders has a variety of time. Thus, in Finland and USA, although the majority of educational leaders are teachers who have teaching and management experiences, the way is open for potential candidates - who have expertise in various fields of educational sciences -. Also, regardless of teaching and managerial experiences, it is important to complete forms containing various questions, conduct interviews and review scientific and professional resumes in choosing a successor for the current leader (Figure 2).

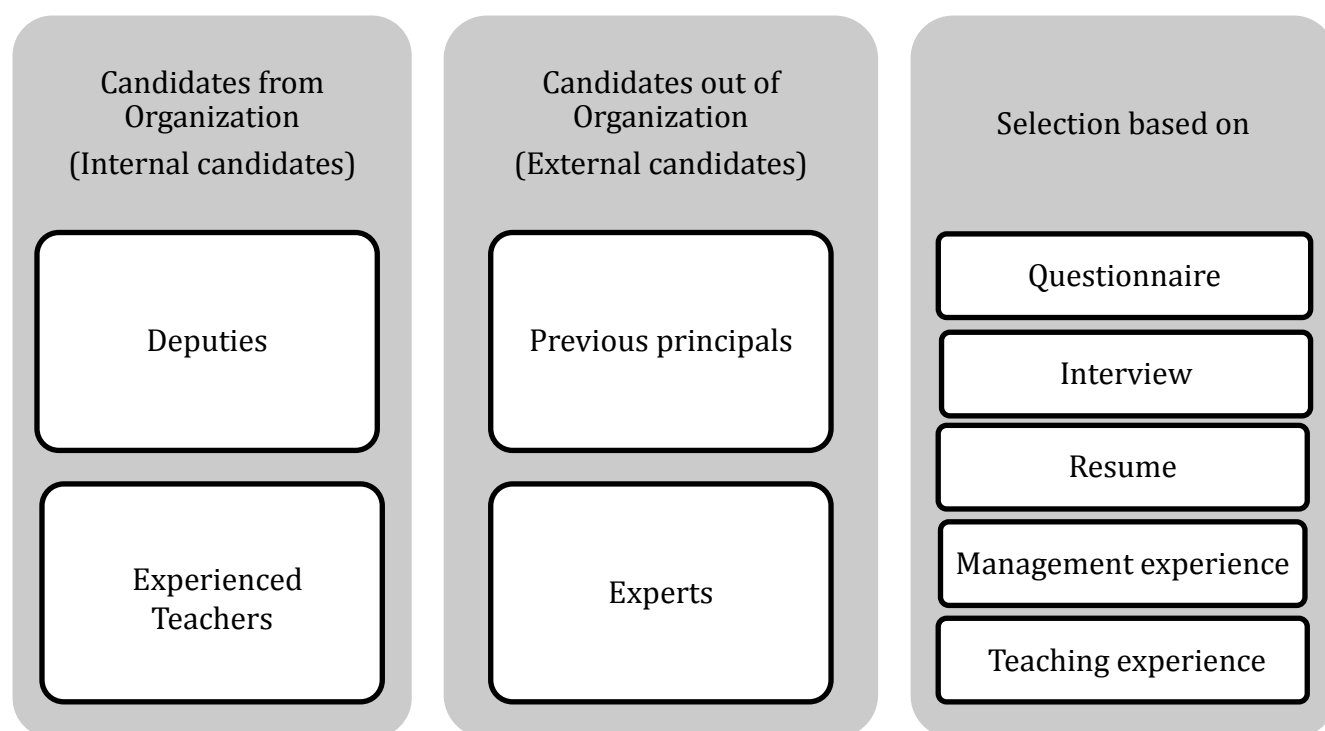


Figure 2. Succession process in the educational systems of Finland and USA

4. Conclusion

Iran's educational system with about 105 thousand schools, fifty thousand principals and hundreds of managers - at different organizational levels - is facing the challenge of choosing competent managers. Although there is a specific legal regulation for the selection of principals, the current principals, teachers' council or parents do not have a role in the selection of school principal. The elected principals must be among the employees of the Ministry of Education, have a teaching experience and be selected and appointed by the heads of education departments - at

different organizational levels. Therefore, in practice, there is no specific and formal succession system for identifying, training and appointing principals. The first finding of current research reveal that there is no organization, program or legal procedure for the succession of educational leaders in the selected countries. This finding is consistent with research findings of Cieminski (2018); Fink (2005, 2001); Fink, & Brayman (2004); Parylo (2012) and White (2006). The second finding indicated that in Japan and Singapore there is a cultural tradition based on identifying, training and preparing possible successors of the manager within educational organizations (schools). The main component of this cultural tradition is following age seniority and slow professional growth to reach managerial positions. This finding has already been observed in numerous studies related to Far East Asian countries (Huber & Hiltman 2010; Taipale 2012; Walker & Kawan 2009; Ikemoto, & Chiang, 2019).

This research also indicated that in all the selected countries, the important components of succession of educational leadership include teaching experience, attendance at in-service training courses, and the previous behavioral and professional performance of the management candidate. In addition, the findings of the research revealed that the diversity in succession practices in Finland and USA is more than in Japan and Singapore. This finding is in line with previous research findings (Akbaşlı, Şahin, & Gül, 2017; Brown, Connors-Tadros, & Horowitz, 2014; Chen, Cheng, & Sato, 2017; Lahtero, Ahtiainen, & Lång, 2019; Lewis & Scott, 2020; Lim, 2007; Ng, 2008). The researchers' conclusion from findings is that in Japan and Singapore, the influence of cultural tradition and structure of professional growth has ruled out the need to establish a succession planning organization or a formal program for it, while Iran's educational system lacks this cultural tradition. Also, in Finland and USA, factors such as strict monitoring of the process of appointing managers - through examining the scientific and professional records of candidates, the lack of negative influence of political factors and essential role of education's boards - have ruled out the establishment of a formal succession system. In the process of succession of leaders, the policy makers of the Iran education system have either failed to reduce the impact of negative factors or have not been able to strengthen positive variables. According to the experiences of the selected countries, the following suggestions are provided for policy makers and planners of educational management in Iran:

- The succession of educational leaders should be planned wisely and professionally and as an integral part of the process of improving the status of educational organizations - at different levels of schools, regions, cities, provinces and the country.

- Considering the young structure of Iran's population, the foster succession program should be approved by the Supreme Council of Education (SCE) in a formal, definite and legal framework.
- Identification, training and introduction of talented candidate for future leadership should be considered in the succession plan as part of the duties of current principals.
- Succession system as well as educational leadership should pay special attention to successful managers leaving the service - for reasons other than retirement and illness - and take into account the necessary measures to reduce the possible damage of the lack of competent successors.
- Succession should not necessarily be limited to seniority. Nevertheless, attention to the two components of teaching experience and participating in in-service training courses should be done more and according to the facilities and limitations of each educational district.
- The role of political factors in the process of succession and selection of managers should be reduced and more emphasis should be placed on the role of professional experience and scientific qualifications.

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