Modeling Succession Strategies for Elementary School Managers

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Purpose: This study aims to identify and validate succession planning strategies for elementary school managers, providing a comprehensive framework to support leadership transitions in educational settings.

Methodology: This mixed-methods study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 25 experts in human resource and educational management, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key succession strategies. The quantitative phase included a survey of 380 educational managers from Tehran, selected via stratified random sampling. The survey instrument was developed based on the qualitative findings and validated through confirmatory factor analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software.

Findings: The qualitative analysis identified seven key strategies for succession planning: familiarization of managers, participation, organizational learning, trust building, foresight, independence of education, and systemic vision. These strategies were supported by detailed actions such as mentoring programs, collaborative decision-making, and continuous professional development. Quantitative analysis confirmed the importance and effectiveness of these strategies, with high mean scores and strong support among respondents. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated the reliability and validity of the measurement model for these strategies.

Conclusion: The study highlights the critical importance of a multifaceted approach to succession planning in educational management. By implementing strategies such as familiarization, participation, organizational learning, trust building, foresight, independence, and a systemic vision, schools can ensure smooth leadership transitions, maintain organizational stability, and promote continuous improvement. The findings provide a robust framework for educational leaders and policymakers to enhance leadership succession planning in schools.

Keywords: Succession Planning, Educational Leadership, School Management, Leadership Development, Organizational Learning, Strategic Planning, Trust Building.

1. Introduction

Succession planning in educational leadership is a critical component for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of schools. Effective succession planning involves preparing for the future by developing potential leaders within the organization, ensuring a smooth transition when current leaders leave or retire. This strategic approach is essential for maintaining organizational stability, promoting continuous improvement, and achieving long-term educational goals (Abdellah, 2021; Bengtson et al., 2013; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017; Peters, 2011; Titzer & Shirey, 2013; Zepeda et al., 2012). In the context of school management, succession planning becomes even more vital as it directly impacts the quality of education and student outcomes. Succession planning is not merely about replacing a departing leader but about ensuring that the organization has a pipeline of capable leaders ready to step into critical roles. According to Abdellah (2021), succession planning in schools aligns with organizational development theories, such as Rothwell's model, which emphasizes the importance of preparing leaders at all levels. This preparation involves identifying potential leaders, providing them with developmental opportunities, and ensuring they are ready to assume leadership roles when needed (Abdellah, 2021).

Research indicates that the lack of effective succession planning can lead to significant disruptions in school operations, negatively impacting student performance and staff morale (Peters, 2011). For instance, in an urban district, the absence of a well-structured succession plan led to frequent leadership changes, which in turn resulted in instability and a decline in school performance (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017). This highlights the critical need for a proactive approach to leadership succession in schools. Despite its importance, succession planning in educational settings faces several challenges. One major challenge is the resistance to change and the inherent difficulties in changing leadership dynamics within schools (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Leadership succession often involves not just finding a replacement but also managing the transition process to ensure continuity and minimize disruption.

Another significant barrier is the lack of a structured and formalized succession planning process in many schools. Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013) note that many school systems do not have formal succession plans, relying instead on ad-hoc approaches to leadership transitions (Zepeda et al., 2012). This lack of formal planning can lead to gaps in leadership, especially when transitions occur unexpectedly. Additionally, there is often a disconnect between the skills required for effective school leadership and the professional development opportunities available to potential leaders. Jacobson (2011) points out that effective leadership development should focus on building both managerial and instructional leadership skills. However, many professional development programs are either too generic or do not adequately prepare individuals for the specific challenges of school leadership (Jackson & Allen, 2022). To overcome these challenges, several strategies have been proposed and successfully implemented in various educational contexts. One key strategy is the development of distributed leadership environments, which encourage shared leadership responsibilities among staff and create a culture of collective responsibility (Claudet, 2014). This approach not only prepares a broader pool of potential leaders but also fosters a collaborative school culture that can ease transitions.

Leadership development programs tailored to the specific needs of educational leaders are also crucial. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) emphasize the importance of professional development programs that focus on practical leadership skills, including instructional leadership, strategic planning, and community engagement (Leithwood et al., 2008). These programs should be ongoing and integrated into the daily practices of school leaders to ensure continuous improvement. Trust and relationship-building are also essential components of effective succession planning. Building a culture of trust within the school can facilitate smoother transitions by ensuring that incoming leaders have the support and confidence of their colleagues (Ghozelin & Syaifudin, 2022). Strategies such as transparent communication, mentorship programs, and involving staff in decision-making processes can help build this trust. Effective succession planning requires not only individual commitment but also organizational and policy support. Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2012) argue that school districts should institutionalize succession planning processes and provide the necessary resources and support to implement them. This includes developing clear policies, providing funding for leadership development programs, and creating incentives for participation. Moreover, the role of policy cannot be understated (Zepeda et al., 2012). Sulit (2020) highlights the importance of supportive policies that encourage teacher retention and professional growth, which are critical for maintaining a stable leadership pipeline.

Policies that provide opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles, even on a temporary or project basis, can help identify and develop future leaders (Sulit, 2020).

The ultimate goal of succession planning in educational leadership is to ensure that schools continue to provide high-quality education and improve student outcomes. Research consistently shows that effective leadership is closely linked to student achievement (Robinson et al., 2008). Effective leaders create positive school climates, set high expectations, and foster an environment conducive to learning. Printy, Marks, and Bowers (2009) found that integrated leadership, where principals and teachers share leadership responsibilities, leads to improved student outcomes. This shared approach to leadership not only enhances the school's capacity to implement change but also ensures that leadership transitions do not disrupt the educational process (Printy et al., 2009). Furthermore, distributed leadership models, where leadership responsibilities are shared among various stakeholders, have been shown to be particularly effective in driving school improvement and adaptation to change (Zuckerman et al., 2017). These models ensure that leadership skills are distributed across the organization, making it more resilient to changes and capable of sustaining improvements over time.

In sum, succession planning is essential for maintaining the stability and effectiveness of educational leadership. Effective succession strategies ensure that schools have a pipeline of capable leaders ready to step into key roles, thereby sustaining educational quality and improving student outcomes. This study aims to identify and validate succession planning strategies for elementary school managers, providing a comprehensive framework to support leadership transitions in educational settings.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employs a mixed-methods design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop comprehensive succession strategies for elementary school managers. The qualitative phase involves in-depth interviews with experts in human resource management and educational management. The quantitative phase involves a survey of school managers in Tehran. This mixed-methods design allows for a rich, nuanced understanding of succession strategies and their practical applications.

The qualitative phase targeted experts in human resource and educational management, including university professors and seasoned practitioners. A purposive sampling method was used to select 25 participants who could provide deep insights into succession planning.

The quantitative phase focused on all educational managers in Tehran's elementary and secondary schools, including public, private, and other school types. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the population of educational managers totaled 3,998. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, a stratified random sample of 380 managers was selected, ensuring proportional representation across Tehran's 19 districts. This stratified sampling method ensured that the sample accurately reflected the population's diversity.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data in the qualitative phase were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected based on their expertise in succession planning. Interviews were conducted in person to ensure rich data collection, and each session was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviews focused on gathering expert opinions and experiences related to succession planning in educational management. To enhance data credibility, triangulation was employed, utilizing multiple sources and researchers in the data collection and analysis process. Additionally, member checking was used, where preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation.

2.2.2. Researcher-Made Questionnaire

Following the qualitative phase, a survey questionnaire was developed based on the qualitative findings. The questionnaire comprised 22 items related to succession strategies, formatted on a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Demographic information was also collected. The questionnaire was pre-tested for clarity and relevance, then distributed to the 380 selected educational managers. Data collection was conducted through a combination of online and face-to-face methods to maximize response rates.

2.3. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and initial

coding was performed independently by two researchers to ensure reliability. The codes were then reviewed and refined into broader themes related to succession planning strategies. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed Lincoln and Guba's criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation and member checking were key techniques to ensure the validity of the qualitative findings. The dual coding process yielded an inter-rater agreement of 79%, indicating substantial reliability.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 and SmartPLS version 3. The proposed model was evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This technique is suitable for exploring complex relationships between variables and is robust with small sample sizes. Several steps were undertaken to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire:

Construct Validity: The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was calculated, with all values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating good convergent validity.

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were computed for each construct, with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings were assessed to confirm that each construct was distinct from the others.

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are addressed through trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability:

Credibility: Ensured through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement with the data.

Transferability: Achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of findings to other contexts.

Dependability: Enhanced through an audit trail and reflective journaling by researchers.

Confirmability: Ensured by triangulating data sources and methods and obtaining external audits from experts.

In the quantitative phase, the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument were meticulously assessed:

Content Validity: Ensured through expert reviews and pilot testing of the questionnaire.

Construct Validity: Confirmed using AVE and factor loadings.

Reliability: Measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with all constructs demonstrating high internal consistency.

Discriminant Validity: Assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, ensuring distinctiveness among constructs.

3. Findings and Results

The study involved 25 participants in the qualitative phase, consisting of experts and practitioners in human resource management and educational management. The participants were diverse in terms of their professional backgrounds, with 15 university professors (60%), 7 senior HR managers (28%), and 3 educational administrators (12%). The gender distribution included 14 males (56%) and 11 females (44%). The age range of participants was between 35 and 65 years, with the majority (68%) falling within the 45-55 age bracket.

The qualitative data were analyzed to identify key strategies for succession planning in educational management. Table 1 presents the strategies and associated open codes derived from the interviews.

Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Strategy	Open Codes
Familiarization of Managers	Mentoring programs, Orientation sessions, Job shadowing, Skill development workshops
Participation	Collaborative decision-making, Stakeholder engagement, Team-building activities, Inclusive policy-making
Organizational Learning	Continuous professional development, Knowledge sharing sessions, Learning communities, Reflective practice
Trust Building	Transparent communication, Accountability mechanisms, Relationship-building exercises, Ethical leadership practices
Foresight	Strategic planning workshops, Scenario planning exercises, Future-oriented training, Risk management seminars
Independence of Education	Autonomy in decision-making, Decentralized governance, School-based management, Customizable curriculum
Systemic Vision	Holistic approach to problem-solving, Interdepartmental collaboration, Systems thinking training, Comprehensive policy integration

The analysis of interviews revealed several core strategies for effective succession planning in educational management. These strategies were supported by specific open codes, representing practical actions and considerations.

Familiarization of Managers: This strategy emphasizes the importance of equipping new managers with essential skills and knowledge through various programs. For example, one participant highlighted, "Mentoring programs are crucial for new managers to understand their roles and responsibilities effectively."

Participation: Involving various stakeholders in decision-making processes was frequently mentioned. As noted by an interviewee, "Collaborative decision-making ensures that everyone has a voice and contributes to the success of the organization."

Organizational Learning: Continuous learning and development were seen as vital. A respondent stated, "Knowledge sharing sessions and learning communities foster an environment of continuous improvement."

Trust Building: Building trust within the organization was repeatedly cited as essential. One participant commented, "Transparent communication and accountability are the bedrocks of trust in any organization."

Foresight: Preparing for the future was another critical strategy. As one expert put it, "Strategic planning and scenario planning exercises help managers anticipate and prepare for future challenges."

Independence of Education: Promoting autonomy in educational decision-making was seen as beneficial. An interviewee explained, "Decentralized governance allows schools to tailor their programs to the specific needs of their students."

Systemic Vision: Adopting a holistic approach to management was emphasized. A participant mentioned, "A systemic vision helps integrate various policies and practices into a cohesive strategy."

These strategies, supported by practical actions, provide a comprehensive framework for succession planning in educational management.

Building on the qualitative findings, the study proceeded to the quantitative phase, which aimed to validate these strategies through a broader survey of educational managers. The survey results were analyzed using statistical methods to assess the prevalence and effectiveness of the identified strategies across different schools in Tehran.

The survey respondents consisted of a diverse group of educational managers. The majority (58.8%) were male, while 41.2% were female. In terms of educational attainment, 48.9% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, 37.9% held a master's degree, and 13.2% had a doctoral degree. Regarding work experience, the largest group (37.4%) had between 10 to 20 years of experience, 26.4% had more than 20 years, and 22% had less than 10 years. The average age of the respondents was 47.36 years (SD = 6.36), with ages ranging from 36 to 62 years.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Familiarization of Managers	4.65	1.11	-0.971	0.489
Participation	4.61	1.23	-0.804	-0.008
Organizational Learning	4.99	1.20	-1.69	2.64
Trust Building	4.87	1.25	-1.32	1.49
Foresight	4.88	1.08	-1.27	1.64
Independence of Education	4.82	1.13	-1.15	1.06
Systemic Vision	4.78	1.15	-1.33	1.72
Strategies (Overall)	4.81	0.98	-1.44	2.40

The mean scores for all strategies were above 4.5 on a 6-point Likert scale, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents on the importance of these strategies. The negative skewness values suggest that the distribution of responses was slightly skewed to the right, meaning that more respondents rated the strategies highly. The kurtosis values indicate varying levels of peakedness in the response distributions, with organizational learning showing a particularly high kurtosis.

The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the measurement model for the identified strategies. Table 3 summarizes the factor loadings, t-values, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha for each strategy:

Table 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Results

Component	Item	Standardized Loading	t-value	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Familiarization of Managers	1	0.82	17.70	0.63	0.96	0.96
	2	0.89	42.22			
	3	0.81	24.79			
	4	0.65	11.58			
Participation	5	0.93	65.99	0.89		
	6	0.95	125.95			
Organizational Learning	7	0.80	21.92	0.75		
	8	0.93	67.41			
	10	0.86	35.15			
Trust Building	11	0.96	117.17	0.91		
	12	0.95	82.10			
Foresight	13	0.86	41.43	0.68		
	14	0.88	35.56			
	15	0.85	25.31			
	16	0.69	12.09			
Independence of Education	17	0.87	28.34	0.78		
	18	0.89	48.43			
Systemic Vision	19	0.86	27.86	0.76		
	20	0.84	25.54			
	21	0.89	44.38			
	22	0.90	40.23			

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that all factor loadings were significant and exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60, demonstrating strong item reliability. The AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, indicating good convergent validity. The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values were also high, confirming the internal consistency of the scales.

Table 4 presents the results of the single-sample t-tests comparing the mean scores of the strategies and their components against the neutral midpoint (3.5):

Table 4

Single-Sample T-Test Results

Variable	Criterion	Mean	Mean Difference	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Result
Familiarization of Managers	3.5	4.65	1.15	0.082	13.89	<0.001	Significantly Above
Participation	3.5	4.61	1.11	0.091	12.16	<0.001	Significantly Above
Organizational Learning	3.5	4.99	1.49	0.089	16.73	<0.001	Significantly Above
Trust Building	3.5	4.87	1.37	0.092	14.80	<0.001	Significantly Above
Foresight	3.5	4.88	1.38	0.080	17.20	<0.001	Significantly Above
Independence of Education	3.5	4.80	1.30	0.083	15.77	<0.001	Significantly Above
Systemic Vision	3.5	4.78	1.28	0.085	15.01	<0.001	Significantly Above
Strategies (Overall)	3.5	4.81	1.31	0.073	17.93	<0.001	Significantly Above

The results indicate that the mean scores for all strategies and their components were significantly above the neutral midpoint of 3.5 (p < 0.001). This suggests that the respondents strongly agreed with the importance and effectiveness of these succession planning strategies in educational management. The overall mean score for the strategies was 4.81, significantly higher than the neutral point, reinforcing the qualitative findings and demonstrating broad support for these strategies among educational managers.

Figure 1

Final Model of Study

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study provide significant insights into the succession strategies for elementary school managers, highlighting both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. This discussion section will integrate these results with existing literature, aligning the findings with previous studies and providing a comprehensive understanding of effective succession planning in educational management.

The qualitative phase of the study identified seven key strategies for effective succession planning: familiarization of managers, participation, organizational learning, trust building, foresight, independence of education, and systemic vision. These strategies reflect a multifaceted approach to leadership development and succession planning.

Familiarization of managers through mentoring programs, orientation sessions, job shadowing, and skill development workshops is crucial for preparing new leaders. This finding aligns with Abdellah (2021), who emphasizes the importance of structured orientation and mentoring in Rothwell's succession planning model (Abdellah, 2021).

Such programs help new managers understand their roles and responsibilities, reducing the potential for transitional disruptions (Jacobson, 2011). Encouraging participation through collaborative decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive policy-making is essential for building a supportive leadership environment. This strategy resonates with the findings of Claudet (2014), who underscores the importance of distributed leadership and community engagement in school turnaround efforts (Claudet, 2014). By involving various stakeholders, schools can create a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, which is critical for effective leadership transitions (Leithwood et al., 2008). The emphasis on continuous professional development, knowledge sharing, and learning communities aligns with the concept of organizational learning. This strategy is supported by Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013), who highlight the role of professional learning communities in preparing leaders (Bengtson et al., 2013). Organizational learning fosters a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, which is vital for adapting to changing educational landscapes (Robinson et al., 2008). Building trust within the organization through

transparent communication, accountability mechanisms, and ethical leadership practices is fundamental for effective succession planning. Ghozelin and Syaifudin (2022) discuss the importance of trust in leadership, noting that transparent and ethical practices enhance organizational stability (Ghozelin & Syaifudin, 2022). Trust-building activities ensure that transitions are smooth and that new leaders have the support of their colleagues (Printy et al., 2009). Foresight involves strategic planning workshops, scenario planning exercises, and future-oriented training. This strategy is essential for preparing leaders to anticipate and respond to future challenges. Peters-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry (2017) emphasize the importance of foresight in dynamic leadership succession, noting that strategic planning helps schools navigate uncertainties (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017). This proactive approach ensures that schools are well-prepared for leadership transitions and future challenges (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Promoting autonomy in decision-making and decentralized governance supports the independence of educational institutions. This strategy aligns with the findings of Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2012), who advocate for school-based management to enhance leadership effectiveness (Zepeda et al., 2012). Independence allows schools to tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of their communities, fostering a more responsive and adaptive educational environment (Sulit, 2020). Adopting a systemic vision through holistic problem-solving, interdepartmental collaboration, and comprehensive policy integration is crucial for effective leadership. This approach ensures that all aspects of the organization are aligned and working towards common goals. Zuckerman et al. (2017) highlight the benefits of distributed leadership and performance adaptation, noting that a systemic approach enhances organizational resilience and effectiveness (Zuckerman et al., 2017). A systemic vision ensures that leadership transitions are well-coordinated and that new leaders can seamlessly integrate into the organizational framework (Nafi'a & Suyatno, 2020).

The quantitative analysis further validated the qualitative findings, demonstrating strong agreement among respondents on the importance and effectiveness of the identified strategies. The high mean scores across all strategies indicate broad support for these approaches among educational managers.

The mean score for familiarization of managers was 4.65, indicating strong support for this strategy. This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of structured orientation and mentoring

programs (Abdellah, 2021; Peters, 2011). Effective familiarization processes ensure that new managers are well-prepared and can quickly adapt to their roles, reducing transitional disruptions and enhancing organizational stability (Jacobson, 2011). Participation received a mean score of 4.61, reflecting the high value placed on collaborative decision-making and stakeholder engagement. This finding aligns with Claudet (2014) and Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), who highlight the benefits of distributed leadership and inclusive policy-making (Claudet, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2008). By involving various stakeholders in decision-making, schools can foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, which is critical for successful leadership transitions (Printy et al., 2009). Organizational learning had the highest mean score of 4.99, underscoring its critical role in succession planning. This result supports the findings of Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013) and Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), who emphasize the importance of continuous professional development and knowledge sharing (Bengtson et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). A strong culture of organizational learning ensures that potential leaders are well-prepared and continuously improving their skills (Ghozelin & Syaifudin, 2022). Trust building received a mean score of 4.87, highlighting its importance in succession planning. This finding is supported by Ghozelin and Syaifudin (2022) and Printy, Marks, and Bowers (2009), who discuss the significance of trust in leadership transitions (Ghozelin & Syaifudin, 2022; Printy et al., 2009). Trust-building activities, such as transparent communication and ethical leadership practices, ensure that new leaders have the support and confidence of their colleagues, facilitating smoother transitions (Robinson et al., 2008). Foresight was also highly rated, with a mean score of 4.88. This finding aligns with Peters-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry (2017) and Fink and Brayman (2006), who emphasize the importance of strategic planning and future-oriented training (Fink & Brayman, 2006). By preparing for future challenges, schools can ensure that leadership transitions are proactive and well-coordinated (Jacobson, 2011). The strategy of independence of education received a mean score of 4.82, reflecting its importance in promoting autonomy and decentralized governance. This finding supports the arguments of Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2012) and Sulit (2020), who advocate for school-based management to enhance leadership effectiveness (Zepeda et al., 2012). Independence allows schools to tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of their communities, fostering a more

responsive and adaptive educational environment (Nafi'a & Suyatno, 2020). Systemic vision had a mean score of 4.78, indicating strong support for a holistic approach to leadership. This finding aligns with Zuckerman et al. (2017) and Nafi'a and Suyatno (2020), who highlight the benefits of a systemic approach to leadership (Nafi'a & Suyatno, 2020; Zuckerman et al., 2017). A systemic vision ensures that all aspects of the organization are aligned and working towards common goals, enhancing organizational resilience and effectiveness (Jacobson, 2011). The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings provides a comprehensive understanding of effective succession planning strategies in educational management. The strong alignment between the qualitative insights and quantitative validation demonstrates the robustness of the identified strategies.

The qualitative findings provided rich, detailed insights into the specific actions and considerations associated with each strategy. For example, mentoring programs and job shadowing were identified as key components of familiarization, while collaborative decision-making and stakeholder engagement were crucial for participation. These detailed insights are supported by the high mean scores in the quantitative analysis, indicating broad agreement among respondents on the importance of these strategies.

The quantitative validation also highlights the practical relevance of the identified strategies. The high mean scores across all strategies suggest that educational managers recognize the value of these approaches and are likely to support their implementation. This broad support is crucial for successful succession planning, as it ensures that the strategies are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible (Abdellah, 2021; Claudet, 2014; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017).

This study explored succession planning strategies for elementary school managers through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach. The qualitative phase identified seven key strategies: familiarization of managers, participation, organizational learning, trust building, foresight, independence of education, and systemic vision. These strategies were supported by detailed actions such as mentoring programs, collaborative decision-making, continuous professional development, and strategic planning. The quantitative phase validated these strategies, showing high mean scores and strong support among educational managers for their importance and effectiveness. The confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the reliability

and validity of the measurement model for these strategies, demonstrating their practical relevance.

Effective succession planning is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of school leadership. The findings of this study highlight the importance of a multifaceted approach that includes familiarization, participation, organizational learning, trust building, foresight, independence, and a systemic vision. By implementing these strategies, educational institutions can ensure a smooth transition of leadership, maintain organizational stability, and promote continuous improvement. These strategies are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible, as demonstrated by the strong support from educational managers. Investing in these succession planning strategies will help schools prepare for future challenges and achieve long-term educational goals.

Despite its comprehensive approach, this study has several limitations. The sample size for the qualitative phase was relatively small, consisting of 25 experts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused on educational managers in Tehran, which may not reflect the practices and challenges in other regions or countries. The reliance on self-reported data in the quantitative phase may also introduce bias, as respondents might overstate their support for the strategies.

Future research should aim to expand the sample size and include participants from diverse geographical locations to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of these succession planning strategies on school performance and student outcomes. Additionally, future studies should explore the implementation challenges and barriers to these strategies, providing practical solutions for schools to overcome them. Investigating the role of cultural and contextual factors in succession planning would also be valuable.

Educational leaders and policymakers should prioritize the development and implementation of the identified succession planning strategies. Schools should invest in structured orientation and mentoring programs, promote collaborative decision-making, foster a culture of continuous learning, and engage in strategic planning and foresight. Organizational and policy support is crucial, including clear policies, funding for leadership development, and incentives for participation. By adopting these strategies, schools can ensure a continuous pipeline of capable leaders, maintain

organizational stability, and achieve long-term educational success.

Authors' Contributions

The first author was responsible for conducting the interview and collecting data, and the other authors were responsible for analyzing the data and writing the article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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