

Research Paper: Factors Affecting Professional Competency of Iranian Preschool Administrators Based on Crisis Management Approach



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ABSTRACT

Background: Children's inability to protect themselves, shows the importance of crisis management in preschool period. Preschool administrators can help them with the risk prevention during crisis. We aimed to investigate the professional competencies of preschool administrators based on crisis management approach.

Materials and Methods: The study participants included 387 preschool administrators in Tehran, Iran, selected by multi-stage cluster sampling method. The surveying tool was a questionnaire designed based on the Child Care Director Self-Assessment instrument (North Carolina Institute, 2015), which has 76 items covering 11 different competency areas. The obtained data were analyzed in SPSS (Version 21) by performing descriptive tests and inferential statistics like the Kruskal-Wallis test and the stepwise linear regression method.

Results: The results showed a significant difference between professional competency of preschool administrators in terms of age, management experience and educational level ($P < 0.001$). Also, regression results revealed that management experience and educational level can predict professional competency for crisis management, but age could not predict the variation in professional competency ($P > 0.05$).

Conclusion: Administrators who are more professionally competent in terms of technical, human, and perceptual skills are more qualified for the preschool management, but age variables can not predict eligibility.

1. Introduction

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ince its creation, man has been involved in education, as it plays an important role among social institutions [1, 2]. Preschool is the first stage of education system aimed

to prepare children for primary schools [1, 3-6]. Thousands of children and teenagers spend their golden life in schools. Since students are unable to protect themselves from incidents, governments must develop prevention programs, coping skills and crisis control plans at national, regional, provincial and local levels. Even orga-

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nizations such as business firms and service providers, hospitals, universities and schools need a comprehensive plan, tailored to their activities in critical incidents [7].

Harmful events, regardless of their severity, lead to various stress response in students like fear, anger, guilt, depression, recalling annoying images, memory loss, difficulty in concentration and learning. These issues can seriously interfere with learning, and complicate normal activities in school. School is where children spend most of their time and much of the learning takes place. Children learn to solve many problems, and receive necessary support through communicating with teachers and administrators. Managers play a critical role in education, and their supportive role is more prominent in the time of crisis [8].

Preschool administrators should prioritize the vulnerability of preschool centers (structural and administrative problems), implement general education (preparedness for crisis in preschool centers), hold periodic meetings with parents and crisis management experts, etc. Crisis manager is the coordinator between service providers and policy makers, and must develop necessary skills in his/her organization [9]. In the event of an earthquake, much help is needed for rescue and relief of preschool children. Therefore, establishing a comprehensive crisis management program is necessary to reduce the risk endangering these children [10].

Studies show that the crisis management determines the extent of damage and not the crisis itself. In fact, inappropriate planning and management of the crisis increases the extent of damages [11]. For this reason, crisis planning and management have become more important than ever. Considering this, in this paper we aimed to investigate the factors related to professional competence of preschool administrators in Iran, based on crisis management approach.

2. Materials and Methods

This study examined preschool administrators' professional competencies based on crisis management approach and, statistical population consisted of all preschool administrators in Tehran, Iran (N=780) in 2017. Using multistage cluster sampling method, 380 preschool administrators were selected as statistical sample from the four regions (north, south, west, and east) of Tehran. For surveying, we used the Child Care Director Self-Assessment instrument presented by North Carolina Institute in 2015 [12].

It has 76 items covering 11 different competency areas (educational knowledge and skills, organizational skills, staff management, technology, educational programming, safety and compliance, communication and managing relationships, parental and family support, financial management, professional contributions, and personal management) rated based on a 5-point Likert-type scale. All Persian translated items were matched with the crisis management approach. The content validity of the tool was approved in consultation with 10 experts. To analyze the collected data, first descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, percentage, standard deviation) were presented. Since the data was non-normally distributed, the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was used, and stepwise linear regression was used to predict the components.

3. Results

Of 387 preschool administrators who participated in the study, 373(96.4%) were females and 11(2.8%) were males. Most participants (64%) had BA or lower educational degree. Of all participants, 39.1% aged between 30 and 40 years, and the lowest age frequency (12.5%) belonged to the group of 50 years and older (Table 1). The Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was used to determine managers' characteristics in terms of age, management experience and educational level. The results are presented in Table 2 which shows a significant difference between managers with respect to age, management experience and educational level.

The mean scores indicate that professional competence of the administrators with over 20 years of management experience was significantly higher than the competence of the other participants. Since the P was less than the critical value (0.05), there was a significant difference between the professional competences of administrators in terms of management experience. Also, the favorable professional competence was observed in the age group of 41-50 years (mean=216.67) and in those with master's degree (mean=220.80).

Regression model

In order to explore the relation between professional competence of the administrators (X) and demographic characteristics (age, management experience and educational level) (y), stepwise linear regression was used. Measures of model adequacy are presented in Table 3.

The correlation (R) between independent variables and dependent variable is 0.315 and coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.09. This indicates that 9% of the

Table 1. Participants' demographic data

Group	Range	Percent
Age (y)	20-30	18.1
	31-40	39.1
	41-50	27.6
	50≤	12.5
Management experience (y)	>20	13.2
	15-20	26.2
	6-10	34.3
	<5	26.2
Educational level	High school diploma	6
	Associate degree	4.7
	Bachelor's degree	64.6
	Master's degree	23.2
	PhD	1.6

changes between professional competence of the administrators are related to age, management experience and educational level. Also, considering the F-value with 99% confidence, the regression model is not only significant, but also at least one independent variable is effective in predicting the dependent variable. Regression coefficients are presented in Table 4. Based on the results, management experience and educational level have a significant relationship with professional competence of preschool

administrators, as the predictors, with 99% confidence ($P < 0.05$). Age had no significant relationship with professional competence ($P > 0.05$).

4. Discussion

Findings show that the higher the preschool administrators' management experience and level of education, the greater professional competency they will have for

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis Test results

Variable	Range	Mean	F	df	Sig.
Management experience (y)	<5	135.76	29.89	3	0.000
	6-10	197.20			
	15-20	203.05			
	>20	218.90			
Age (y)	20-30	154.74	15.92	3	0.001
	31-40	184.97			
	41-50	216.67			
	50≤	215.48			
Educational level	High school diploma	133.93	16.64	3	0.001
	Associate degree	143.14			
	Bachelor's degree	186.78			
	Master's degree	220.80			

Table 3. Correlation between administrators' professional competence and demographic characteristics

R	R ²	SD	F	Sig.
0.315	0.09	63.68	9.40	0.000

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Table 4. Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Standard Error	Beta		
Constant	246.40	22.95		10.73	0.000
Age	3.79	4.43	0.05	0.87	0.383
Educational level	19.25	4.45	0.21	4.31	0.000
Management experience	-13.73	3.98	-0.20	-3.45	0.001

Dependent variable: Professional competence of preschool administrators

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crisis management. The professional competency of administrators with management experience of more than 20 years were higher, and those with less than 5 years of experience had less professional competency.

Therefore, it can be predicted that preschool administrators with higher experience and level of education can better handle the crisis. Age had no effect on their professional competency. The results of this study is consistent with the findings of Javanmard [13] and Levenson et al. [14] who reported a positive correlation between managerial competence and management experience.

In general, the competencies and skills required for preschool administrators include educational knowledge, organizational skills, staff management skills, use of technology, educational programming, safety and compliance training, communication and relationship management, parental and family support, financial management, professional contributions, and personal management skills.

There are also many commonalities between the competencies of preschool administrators and managers of other organizations; although, the attention of management experts has focused on the technical, human, and perceptual skills. This indicates that these skills (technical, human, perceptual) are not enough to handle crisis management in preschools. Management of educational organizations has certain features that are less common in other organizations; features such as unique organizational relationships, different clients, dealing with teachers as professional people during the crisis, and different beneficiaries (parents, students, and teachers). Such fea-

tures require specific competencies and skills in organization management.

Therefore, specific personality characteristics are required for educational leadership. An administrator must have the ability to solve preschool problems, and in facing a crisis, characteristics such as participation, flexibility, proper decision making, accountability, empathy and sympathy, creativity, criticality, responsibility, etc., are necessary. Hence, with more work experience and higher level of education, the abundance and perfection of such features in an administrator is more probable [15].

5. Conclusion

We found that the higher the managerial experience and level of education of preschool administrators, the more competent they are to manage the crisis. Managers with more qualification in the aspects of crisis management approach are more competent for the management of preschools to prevent any harm to children in the event of a crisis. Holding workshops through in-service training based on scientific need assessment and the application of new educational approaches for administrators of preschools, can improve their professional competency in this regard.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The current study has been approved by the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran by considering the following codes and ethical

standards (IR.USWR.REC.1396.89). The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages (Code No.14); The participants were guaranteed confidentiality (Code No.25); The participants were allowed to leave the study whenever they wish, and if desired, the results of the research would be available to them (Code NO.27).

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Conflict of interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliation with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials dismissed in this manuscript.

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