

THE CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCIES OF GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION LEADERS IN UZBEKISTAN

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This article examines the current condition and future prospects of developing social competencies among general secondary education leaders in Uzbekistan. As global educational paradigms shift toward more human-centered and collaborative approaches, the role of school leadership is expanding beyond administrative functions to include strong social, emotional, and communicative competencies. The study analyzes the key components of social competence—such as empathy, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity—and their relevance in school leadership. Through a combination of theoretical review and empirical observation, the research highlights the strengths and gaps in the existing leadership preparation programs in Uzbekistan. The findings show that while many school principals and administrators possess technical and organizational skills, there is a notable lack of structured training in social competencies, which limits their effectiveness in managing pedagogical teams, engaging with parents, and fostering a positive school climate. The article also presents comparative insights from international models where social-emotional learning and leadership are integrated into educational policy and practice. Based on these insights, several recommendations are proposed for Uzbekistan's education system, including the development of targeted professional development programs, mentorship systems, and context-specific competency frameworks. Ultimately, the paper argues that strengthening social competencies among school leaders is essential for ensuring sustainable educational quality, teacher motivation, and inclusive school environments.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, educational leadership, social competence, school principals, communication skills, educational reform, professional development, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, inclusive education.

Introduction

In the modern era of rapid educational transformation, the role of school leaders has evolved significantly, especially within the context of general secondary education. Leadership is no longer confined to administrative tasks and regulatory compliance; rather, it encompasses the ability to manage human relationships, build trust, foster collaboration, and create psychologically safe and inclusive environments. These requirements underscore the growing importance of social competencies—a set of interpersonal, emotional, and communicative skills that enable leaders to effectively engage with teachers, students, parents, and the broader educational community. In Uzbekistan, ongoing educational reforms emphasize the decentralization of school governance, greater autonomy for school principals, and the need for innovative, student-centered approaches to teaching and learning. While these policy shifts are commendable, their successful implementation largely depends on the social and emotional readiness of school leaders. However, despite recognition of the need for strong leadership, the professional development of principals and other educational administrators continues to focus predominantly on

administrative and organizational skills, often neglecting the essential social dimensions of leadership. Globally, countries such as Finland, Canada, and Singapore have integrated social-emotional learning and leadership development into their national education strategies. These models demonstrate that school leaders who possess high levels of social competence are more successful in building strong school cultures, motivating staff, resolving conflicts constructively, and maintaining high levels of teacher and student engagement. This paper aims to explore the current state of social competencies among school leaders in Uzbekistan's general secondary education system, identify existing gaps, and propose strategic directions for development. By combining theoretical analysis with empirical evidence, the study seeks to provide a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering socially competent educational leadership in the Uzbek context.

Topicality of the Study

In the 21st century, the success of educational institutions depends not only on the quality of teaching and learning processes but also on the effectiveness of school leadership. The role of school leaders has become increasingly complex, requiring them to navigate a dynamic environment marked by educational reforms, social transformation, and increasing expectations from society. In this context, social competencies—which include emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, empathy, and conflict resolution—have become essential components of effective educational leadership. In Uzbekistan, the modernization of the education system is one of the national priorities, as reflected in strategic documents such as the National Development Strategy and the Presidential Decree on improving the quality of general secondary education. However, while these reforms place strong emphasis on innovation, decentralization, and professional responsibility, they often underestimate the **human factor** in educational leadership. Many school principals and administrators continue to be selected and evaluated based primarily on technical qualifications and administrative experience, rather than their ability to build strong, trust-based relationships with staff, students, and parents.

The relevance of this topic is further reinforced by the increasing need to create supportive school environments where collaboration, inclusiveness, and psychological safety are prioritized. Without sufficient social competencies, school leaders may face difficulties in motivating teachers, managing conflicts, building effective teams, and sustaining a positive school culture. Moreover, as the global education agenda shifts towards whole-child development and inclusive schooling, the demand for socially competent leadership is more urgent than ever. Thus, studying the current level of social competencies among general secondary education leaders in Uzbekistan, identifying existing barriers, and exploring strategies for development is not only timely but also essential for ensuring the success of ongoing educational reforms. The findings of such research can help inform policy decisions, improve leadership training programs, and contribute to the creation of a more resilient and human-centered education system.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the growing importance of social competencies in the professional activities of school leaders in Uzbekistan's general secondary education system. As education becomes more learner-centered and relationship-driven, the role of the school leader evolves from that of a mere administrator to a mentor, facilitator, and mediator capable of fostering a healthy and inclusive school climate. This transformation, however, is not without its challenges—particularly in a system where leadership development has traditionally prioritized administrative efficiency over emotional and social intelligence. The data suggest that while

school leaders in Uzbekistan are often well-versed in regulatory frameworks, curriculum standards, and organizational logistics, they are frequently underprepared for the human dimensions of leadership. Many school principals report difficulties in building trust with staff, mediating interpersonal conflicts, or engaging parents in a meaningful and empathetic manner. These shortcomings are not necessarily due to a lack of motivation, but rather reflect the absence of structured training programs focused on communication, emotional regulation, and relationship-building. Furthermore, the study reveals that existing professional development programs for educational administrators tend to focus heavily on compliance, performance metrics, and procedural knowledge, while offering limited or no coverage of soft skills essential to effective leadership. This disconnect has implications for the overall school climate, as leaders lacking in social competence may unintentionally foster environments marked by low morale, resistance to change, and weakened collaboration.

In contrast, countries with more developed education systems have recognized the centrality of social-emotional learning in leadership. In Finland, for instance, school leaders receive specialized training in coaching, empathy, and collaborative leadership. In Canada, mentorship programs pair new principals with experienced leaders to help develop social awareness and conflict resolution strategies. These approaches have yielded positive outcomes, including improved teacher retention, stronger school cultures, and better student performance. For Uzbekistan, the implications are clear: the sustainable improvement of educational quality is not possible without addressing the social and emotional readiness of school leaders. In addition to administrative reforms and curriculum updates, there is a need for systemic investment in leadership development programs that integrate modules on social intelligence, ethical leadership, emotional resilience, and interpersonal communication. Moreover, the digital transformation of education—accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic—has added a new layer of complexity to school leadership. Leading in virtual or hybrid environments demands advanced communication skills, digital empathy, and the ability to build social cohesion in non-traditional settings. School leaders must be equipped to manage remote teams, support teachers' well-being from a distance, and maintain student engagement through virtual platforms. In conclusion, strengthening social competencies among educational leaders in Uzbekistan is both a practical necessity and a strategic investment in the future of education. Without this foundation, even the most progressive reforms may fall short of their intended impact. Thus, future leadership training models should be reoriented to develop the full range of competencies required for effective, human-centered, and socially responsive school leadership.

Conclusion

The development of social competencies among school leaders has emerged as a key priority for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of educational reforms in Uzbekistan. As the responsibilities of school administrators expand to include not only managerial tasks but also interpersonal and emotional leadership, the ability to communicate effectively, manage relationships, and resolve conflicts constructively becomes increasingly essential. This study has shown that while many school leaders possess strong organizational and technical skills, there is a noticeable gap in their training and preparedness in terms of social and emotional competencies. This gap poses challenges in fostering positive school climates, maintaining teacher motivation, engaging parents, and building collaborative school cultures. Moreover, the limited attention to social competencies in current leadership development programs suggests an urgent need for reform in how educational leaders are trained and supported.

International experience provides valuable lessons. In countries where social-emotional leadership development is systematically integrated into policy and practice, school leaders demonstrate higher levels of engagement, resilience, and adaptability. These examples underscore the potential benefits of adopting similar approaches in the Uzbek context—tailored, of course, to local cultural and institutional realities. In order to build a future-ready and inclusive education system, Uzbekistan must prioritize the development of holistic leadership models that integrate social competencies alongside technical expertise. This includes investing in ongoing professional development programs, mentorship networks, and assessment tools that help identify and strengthen the social dimensions of school leadership. Ultimately, educational change is driven by people—not just by systems or policies. Strengthening the social competencies of school leaders will enable them to inspire their teams, support teacher well-being, enhance student outcomes, and build schools that are not only well-managed, but also caring, inclusive, and community-oriented.

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