The Effect of Authentic Leadership Style on The Performance of School Principals

Akbar Karimi Dastgerdi[1], Abbas Abbaspour[2], Mostafa Nik Nami[3], Ali Delavar[4]

Abstract

To determine the effect of authentic leadership style on the performance of principals of schools, this research was conducted using an exploratory mixed method. In the first phase that is, qualitative section, 13 experts of educational leadership were purposefully selected in Isfahan province and a semi-structured interview was conducted till theoretical saturation. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The main categories of authentic leadership were identified in seven themes of awareness, honesty, trust, and accurate assessment, supporter, transformational and training. In the second phase, a 24-item questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was administered. The tools' face and content validity were confirmed by experts. In total 120 questionnaires were completed and analyzed. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. In analyzing data structural equation method and exploratory factor analysis by PLS software were used and the effects of the observed variables on the existing variables were investigated. The findings reveal that; authentic leadership has a positive effect on the performance of school principals. Therefore, the results of the conceptual model were analyzed through the analysis of the path of authentic leadership and the performance of school principals.

1. Ph.d Student of Educational Leadership, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran
akbarkarimidastgerdi@gmail.com
2. Professor of management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran
3. Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran
4. Professor of Statistics, Research Methodology, and Psychometrics, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Introduction

Educational system is considered as one of the most complex and largest social systems. It is necessary to change and innovate in this system due to its multiple roles and mission in the current world and in Iranian society and removing the obstacles to this change. In this regard, the role of leadership in the education system, especially in schools, is an important and influential role. The best pillar of the organization is the leader, who can encourage the high performance of the employees or reduce it with his/her behavior, and ultimately the success or failure of the organization (Zhang et al 2021).

In parallel with positive psychology and in addition to discussions related to leadership, the authentic leadership was raised as a positive leadership style. One of the most important duties of a leader is decision-making and the type of decision-making plays an important role in the leader's decisions. Authentic leadership in education system is defined as ethical leadership practices and spiritual and moral literacy in a way related to school leaders, therefore, the work of reforming the moral, spiritual, immaterial, transformative, value-oriented, and authenticity fields of educational leadership has intensified significantly in recent years (Novitasari et al 2020).

Theorists suggest that educational leadership are inspirational values, moral and spiritual activities and authentic educational leaders must connect head, heart and hands in their work because leadership is essentially professional ethics. It is a style of leadership that is based on conscious values, skillful action and knowledge-based. This leadership refers to ways that go beyond the usual procedural context of organizational management. Authentic leadership style means a pure form of leadership; This behavior of leadership has a hopeful, open, thoughtful and creative response to social conditions and it contrasts with the more traditional dual definition of management and leadership practices, which is now obsolete and the research literature has been replaced by effective main methods, an integrated picture of leadership and management that is more relevant to current times, leadership is aware of values, a leadership behavior that holistically recognizes the legitimate needs of teachers, groups, communities, and cultures, rather than only addressing the organizational perspectives that are the usual focus of most leadership literature (Basaran and Kirak, 2020).

Authentic leadership is the result of self-awareness and sensitivity towards others and is usually understood as being true to themselves. One of the distinctive features of this theory is that it formally confirms the role of values in the impact and influence of leadership behavior (Feng, 2006).

Leadership acts as the central core and mastermind in every organization and this element is of particular importance in educational units. In addition to common features with other

official organizations, education system has its own characteristics that require its own special conditions for management and administration. Business institutions, especially education, as organizations that work in the education of today's generation of the country, should benefit from the latest technologies and new theories of organization and management to respond quickly to the needs of their customers, i.e. learners, their parents and society.

In transferring the updated experiences and needs to the educational areas, it seems vital to provide constructive and research proposals and plans. In various studies, the authentic leadership variable has been investigated with other variables such as the mood of the organization, innovation, and organizational agility and in some researches, they have presented a model for authentic leadership including Abdullahi's (2016) research, which has designed a model of authentic leadership in higher education with a qualitative approach, which finally pointed to four organizing themes of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and extra-organizational to achieve the comprehensive theme of authentic academic leadership.

Momeni (2011) developed a model of authentic leadership based on Allameh Tabatabai's perspective, an Iranian Islamic philosopher that the researcher first compares the theory of authentic leadership with other leadership theories based on critical analysis and examines the effectiveness of this theory in comparison with other proposed theories, after that, the researcher using the theory of Allameh Tabatabai and with the foundation data approach states that the success of self-awareness and self-regulation requires both the fields of present knowledge and acquisition science (including experimental science) and finally, the obtained theory is examined and compared with the aforementioned theory

But in the meantime, leadership in the educational system and schools has a different position than leadership in other organizations. Leadership in any group such as education system and especially schools has not been so challenging and at the same time thought-provoking. It should be accepted that the relationship between teachers and staff is unique and this is because teachers willingly accept the power and management of leaders because of the trust they have in them and whenever they want, they can disrupt or damage this relationship. On the other hand, teachers can do their work with love and spend much more time and energy than what is expected and formulated by the standards. This is what should be called as the missing link in education and leadership should seek to discover and find it (Ismail et al,2019).

Based on these definitions and statements and since education system is the driving engine of a society and is a place whose mission is to transform

human beings into human capital; In fact, the main mission of education system is to create and produce developed human beings. What is more important in the realization of this mission is authentic leadership in relation to education and schools. Authentic leadership in schools is the soul and heart of an educational institution, without it, the educational organization becomes a place of impropriety, imitator and extravagance. Contrary to what they have said, many deficiencies in educational systems originate from bad leadership. Although, so far, effective and significant actions have been taken regarding leadership in terms of growth but this is important from a theoretical point of view, it still needs research. The obvious reason for that is the lack of a leadership model, especially in primary schools as the basic institution and shapers of society. Because the seeds of commitment, piety, responsibility, creativity, love, etc. are sown in the elementary school, and this period actually requires visionary leadership (Srivastava et al, 2022).

However, despite the importance of authentic leadership of primary school principals and based on what has been said, it seems that there is still a deep research gap in this field. And it can be expected to repair a part of this mentioned gap through the calculation of the appropriate educational model in the country's primary schools. Based on this, this research aims to design and investigate the effect of authentic

leadership model on the performance of principals of elementary schools in Isfahan city.

Literature Review

Below is a review of the most relevant research conducted on authentic leadership in schools:

Badri and Badri (2015) conducted a study titled predicting innovation capabilities based on authentic leadership style in education. One of the operational goals and its solutions in the fundamental transformation document of education is to establish a system of creativity and innovation in education in line with comprehensive upbringing and spiritual and moral growth. On the other hand; Authentic leadership is one of the new theories proposed to inspire and use the psychological capacity of subordinates and create innovation capabilities. (Zare et al, 2017) They have done research on the relationship between authentic leadership and job performance. The findings of the research showed that there is a direct and significant relationship with a value of /395 at the 1% error level of authentic leadership and job performance among the statistical samples of this research. Sephovand, et al., (2017) have conducted research on the analysis of authentic leadership identity indicators in order to improve human resources and according to the results obtained and the sampling conducted, it has led to the identification of the identity indicators of authentic leadership and the improvement of human resources and the analysis of the dominance of the

indicators of authentic identity in the improvement of human resources. These indicators are: self-awareness, self-disclosure, self-exaltation and self-sacrifice, leadership reputation, leadership modeling, self-efficacy, self-love, and self-relationship.

Priya et al (2016) in a study investigated the effect of authentic leadership on academic optimism through the moderating role of affective commitment. Since the actions affect the performance of the school; they examined the effective role of comprehensive education in strengthening the relationship between effective commitment and academic optimism. results showed that significant support for the hypotheses of this study. The results of their research showed that effective commitment partially mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and academic optimism and comprehensiveness of education moderates the relationship between affective commitment and academic optimism. This study provides new foundations for improving overall school performance and teacher performance.

Feng (2019) investigated the use of authentic leadership to create a supportive learning environment for students. It is the moral mission of school leaders to bring school stakeholders together to provide an environment that supports authentic student learning. The results of the research show that the principal has an

educational goal and a core value that is reflected in her leadership and can continue to do the right thing, show a high degree of moral self-discipline and positive psychological capital and have a desire for transparency in information and fair decision-making. Caring for teachers and establishing intimate interpersonal relationships with school stakeholders and its recognition by school teachers also created the motive power of groups that encourage students to truly learn this common goal.

Supriadi et al (2020) examined the relationship between authentic leadership and job involvement levels of teachers. The results reveal that authentic leadership style and psychological capital has a positive and significant effect on innovative work behavior. Psychological capital as a mediator for the relationship between authentic leadership style and innovative work behavior. The findings propose a new model to foster innovative work behavior between authentic leadership practice and psychological capital.

Authentic leadership focuses on the true authenticity of leaders and leadership. This desire for authenticity, which may be due to recent developments in society and business ethics, has been discussed to some extent in accordance with other active approaches such as transformational leadership. Due to the relatively new nature of the approach, there is no accepted definition of authentic leadership. Instead, researchers examine

accuracy in two approaches: (a) practical approach and (b) theoretical approach. This practical approach is described by Sims (2003) and George (2007).

George (2000), outlined the five dimensions of authentic leadership: (a) They understand their purpose; b) have strong values about doing the right thing, (c) have reliable relationships, (d) They show self-discipline and live up to their values and (e) they follow their passion and heart for what they do. By doing these five practices, the leader can become authentic for her/his followers. In the theoretical approach there are four main components (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and moral inner perspective). The definition of authentic leadership is the focal point for turning this theory into practice. Collectively, these components represent the core structure of authentic leadership, each of which has a unique contribution to the whole. Furthermore, each component is formed by a person's thoughts as well as behaviors. Authentic leadership is defined as a pattern of leader behavior that contributes to the development and promotion of positive psychological capacities, as well as creating a positive moral environment, to foster greater self-awareness, an internal moral perspective, and balanced information processing (MacTaggart, 2019).

Before we examine how authentic leadership is defined, let's first examine the three main hypotheses from which authentic leadership stems: 1. Authentic leadership grows from two specific institutions of literature. Positive psychology is a subset of psychology that focuses on optimal human functioning and emphasizes human abilities even human frailties act as a powerful influence in shaping the interpretation of authenticity in the concept of leadership. Additionally, many consider authentic leadership to be an extension of transformational leadership that attempts to further differentiate between positive and negative traits (Gardner et al, 2021). 2. These literary institutions put authentic leadership as the basis of ethics. A hypothesis that does not appear in the original definitions of originality on which it is based. 3. researchers believe that authentic leadership acts as a "root" that influences all theories of social leadership by providing a context in ethics; Therefore, a principal may practice authentic transformational leadership, authentic servant leadership, or authentic relational leadership (Yavuz, 2020)

Authentic leadership is leadership with presence that transcends the situation. This means that it is even possible for leaders who are tasked with leading authentic leaders to become their followers, because these people recognize the abilities before them and allow themselves to be influenced by such leaders who may even be at a lower organizational level. Authentic leaders are experienced by their followers as genuine and natural leaders who are honest, ethical, and trustworthy. As

leaders, they become a way of authenticating others and becoming powerful role models for followers. Because they are able to embrace a strength-based vulnerability, they want to be more transparent, open, and revealing, and in doing so, they have evoked a higher level of self-confidence. Followers then feel more comfortable, embrace and endorse authentic values. These important consequences in relation to results and performance show that the authenticity of leadership effectiveness increases. As the ethical behavior of an authentic leader is infused into organizational norms and relationships, interpersonal trust between the leader and followers increases (Wulffers.2017).

Job Performance: Job performance shows the quantity and quality of work done by a group or individual, emphasizing whether this task is done effectively or not. Job performance has been described as the behaviors determined by the employee performance evaluation system and those tasks that are included in the employee job description. Employee job performance refers to behaviors that are related to the organization's goals and are under the control of employees (Peiró et al, 2020).

Method

A. **Approach and strategy:** According to the main question of the present research, the exploratory sequential combination design (qualitative-quantitative) was applied as the research design. In the qualitative phase, with thematic analysis method and semi-structured interview technique, with a number of experts in the field of management and leadership, especially educational leadership, meanings and indicators were provided for the design of authentic leadership behavior patterns of primary school principals. And in the quantitative phase, with the survey method and structured questionnaire tool (resulting from the first phase), the validity of the model of authentic leadership behavior of primary school principals was investigated among all primary school principals in Isfahan city.

B. **Data collection tools**: In the qualitative part, first, by using library studies and reviewing upstream documents in the field of authentic leadership, as well as semi-structured interviews, the relevant themes were extracted and the themes were converted into a framework using qualitative methods such as theme analysis and then the resulting framework came to the opinion of the experts and to measure its components, they expressed an opinion about its validity. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data in the qualitative part. To formulate the interview questions, first the theoretical background of the subject was studied in depth and then the final questions were formulated with the help of supervisors and consultants. Before starting the interview, a summary of the research plan, objectives and research questions were explained to the interviewees.

Then the interview questions were asked and the interview process was carried out. The interview time was about 1 hour. In order to record qualitative data and focus the interviewer more on the interview process, the interview was recorded with the permission of the interviewees. After the interview, all the recorded conversations were converted into text through the Speak Texter software. Questionnaire (quantitative phase): The tool of data collection in the quantitative phase of the research was a questionnaire made by the researcher, and the questions of this questionnaire were obtained from the documents and interviews conducted. This 120-item questionnaire was set up in 7 dimensions of awareness, honesty, trust, accurate assessment, supporter, transformational, and education.

C. **Statistical population and sampling method:** The research population in the qualitative phase was all experts in the field of educational management and leadership based in the General Department of Education of Isfahan province. Based on this, the "theoretical sampling" method has been used. In the current research, after interviewing 13 people, theoretical saturation was achieved in collecting data on the dimensions and indicators of principals. The general characteristics of the interviewees in the qualitative phase are given in Table No. 1. In the qualitative phase, 13 participants were

selected as a sample based on the two criteria of familiarity with elementary schools and expertise and experience in the field of authentic leadership behavior. b) Quantitative phase: The population investigated in the quantitative phase included all principals of elementary schools in Isfahan city who were working in the academic year 1400-1401 and the size of this population is 180 people. The statistics of the research community by region are shown in Table

D. **Data analysis**: In this research, MAXQDA and PLS software were used for theme analysis. Qualitative phase: Theme network is a suitable method in theme analysis that by forming comprehensive themes and selecting them according to the theoretical relationships hidden in the text of the interviews as well as the subject literature, the model of authentic leadership behavior of school principals was designed. In the quantitative phase, the structural equation model test was used to validate the model, and the model extracted from the qualitative phase was used to test the model and exploratory factor analysis was used to find the appropriate tool to measure the authentic leadership behavior of primary school principals to determine the effect of authentic leadership on the performance of primary school principals.

Table 1: General Characteristics of The Interviewees

	Work ex.	Degree	Gender	Position
1	20	Ph.D.	M	Head of Department
2	25	Ph.D.	M	Deputy of Elementary Education
3	15	MA	M	
4	14	MA	M	
5	18	Ph.D.	FM	
6	15	MA	FM	
7	8	MA	FM	
8	19	Ph.D.	M	General Administrator
9	20	MA	M	
10	9	BA	M	
11	12	MA	FM	
12	15	MA	FM	
13	14	MA	FM	

The sample size according to the Karjesi-Morgan table, the sample size is 120 people with a statistical population of 180 people. In this research, questionnaires were presented to 130 primary school principals and 120 completed questionnaires were received. Considering the extent of education areas in Isfahan, the stratified sampling method was used and each educational district of Isfahan city was considered as a class. At the stage of entering people into the sample, it is based on the criteria of experience (more than 5 years of experience) and the type of school (government).

Table. 3 Statistics Related to The Research Participants

District	FM	M	Total
1	14	16	30
2	22	18	40
3	10	10	20
4	16	14	30
5	10	10	20
6	21	19	30
Total	93	87	180

Table. 4 Number of Selected Samples From Each District

| Districts	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
No of principals	30	40	20	30	20	40	180
No of selected	20	25	15	20	15	25	120

Research Findings

To design the model with an inductive approach based on interviews and open, central and selective coding, the qualitative results were analyzed.

After completing the interview process and line-by-line analysis of the presented concepts, open codes were first identified and then each one was placed under a category.

Table 5 : The method of converting primary codes (open code) to axial codes

Primary codes	category explored
Correct diagnosis of the school principal	
Considering environmental conditions	
Self-confidence in handling matters	being aware
Ensuring competence	
Expressing goals clearly	
Expressing desires clearly	
Share feelings	Honesty
Committed to the decisions made	
Clarity in words	
Participation in all matters	
Respect the right to equality	the trust
Rule of law at work	
Fair assessment	
being fair	
Principal's support for students	Accurate assessmen
How the principal deals with students and staff	
Helping the principal to find her/himself	
A principal who accepts that each person has her own capabilities	
A principal who makes employees understand the value of what they d	
The role of a transformational leader	Supporter
The feedbacks that the leader gives to the individual	
Intended training	transformational
Preparing the school environment for effective learning	Education
Planning for teachers' teaching method	
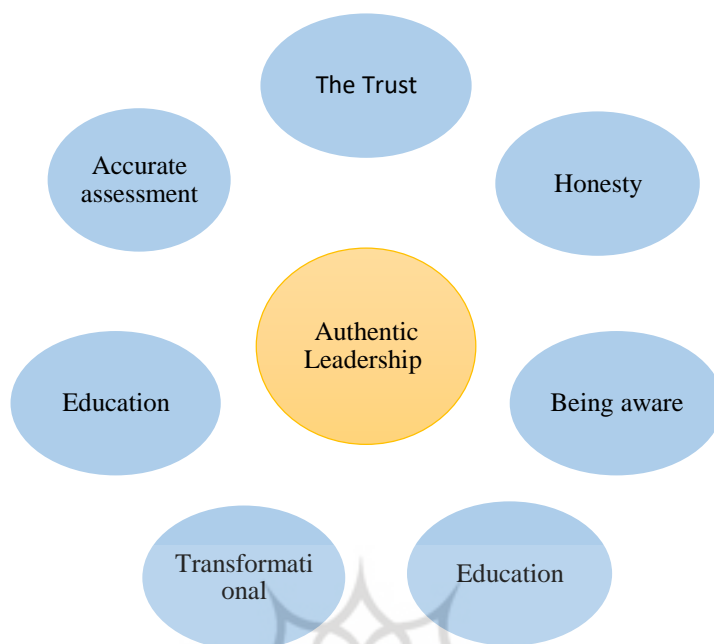
Figure (1) The first model

Path analysis

Path analysis is a series of successive regressions to discover the causal relationships between the discovered variables and present the newly born model of the researcher After running the regression, we execute the commands according to the rules. In the first step, the dependent variable is put aside. In the second step, the variables whose sig is greater than 0.05 are removed and are not calculated in the next regression. Finally, the variable whose beta is higher is placed in the position of the dependent variable, this process is repeated until the final model is extracted.

Table 6. Path Analysis (Transformative)

Variables	MD	SDD	Beta	T	Sig.
Being aware	.26	.4	.2	.6	.5
Honesty	.24	.6	.2	3.8	0.0
Trust	.18	.7	.1	2.5	0.0
Accurate assessment	.21	.6	.1	3.1	0.0
Supporter	.38	.7	.3	5.4	0.0
Education	.37	.6	.2	.6	0.0

Table 7. Path analysis (supporting)

Variables	MD	SDD	Beta	t	Sig.
Honesty	.4	.58	.45	7.14	0.00
Trust	.1	.7	.93	1.48	.14
Accurate assessment	.4	.5	.41	7.2	0.00

Table 8. path analysis (honesty)

| Variables	MD	SDD	Beta	t	Sig.
Accurate Assessment	.9	.42	.83	24.4	0.0

The two variables of education and being aware have no relationship with the rest of the variables, but after talking with experts, research literature and qualitative research, the relationship between these two variables is proven with the dependent variable. The researcher carefully connects the lines of communication to the dependent variable in dotted form.

Figure (2) final model
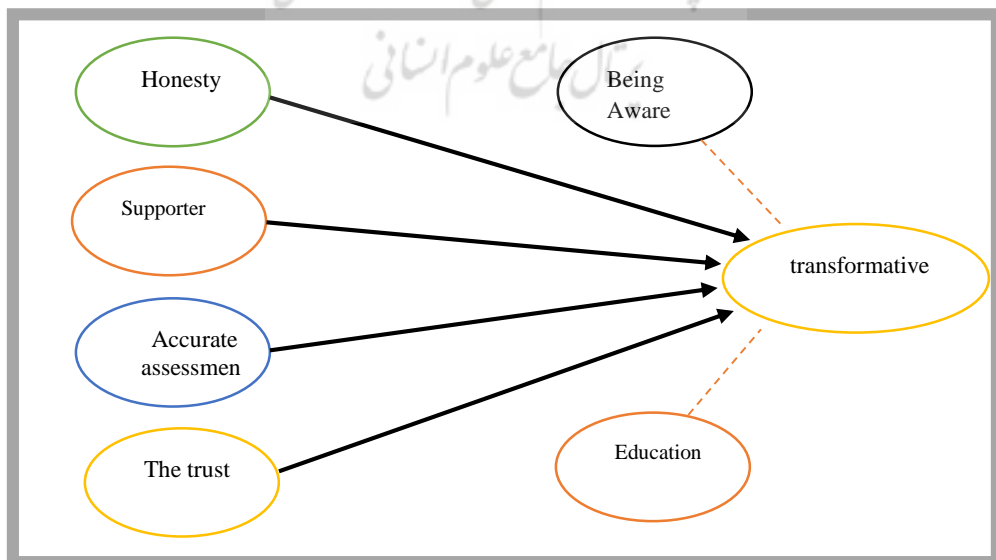
After drawing the final model of the research, the assessment and validity of this presented model will be discussed. In fact, the main part of the fourth chapter refers to the discovery of patterns in the sample and its generalization to the target population of the research. In the current research, the researcher seeks to discover the authentic leadership behavior pattern of school principals; Therefore, first we run the research model, which actually consists of two external and internal models, in the software in its initial state, then we measure

Figure (3) The primary reflective exterior model in standard coefficient estimation mode
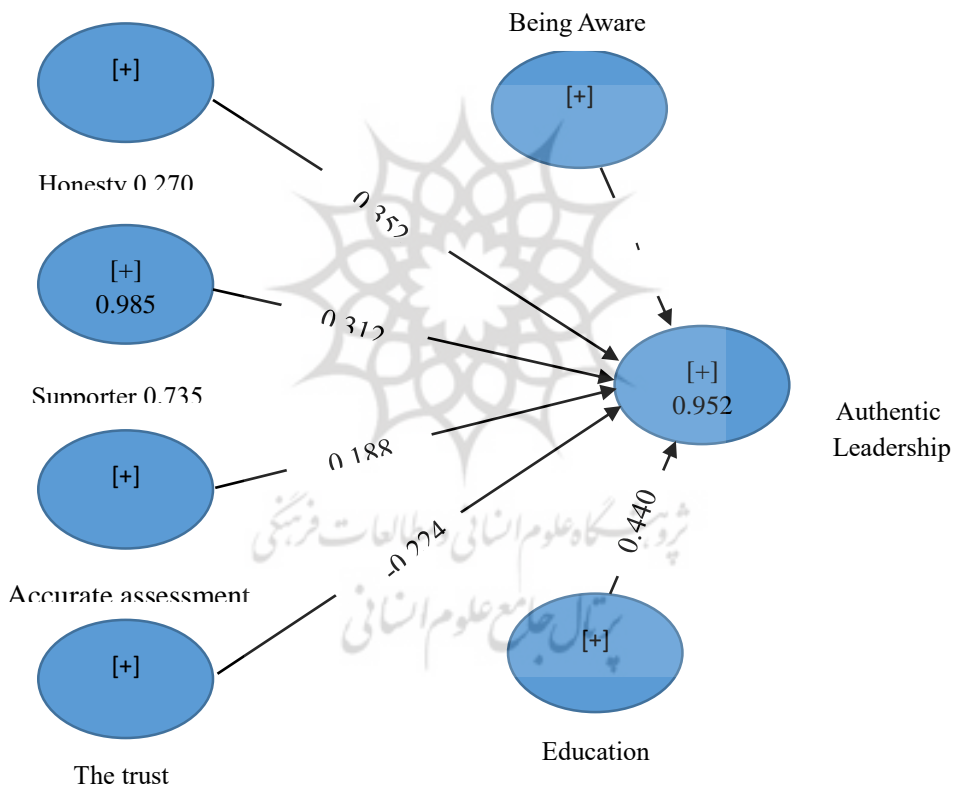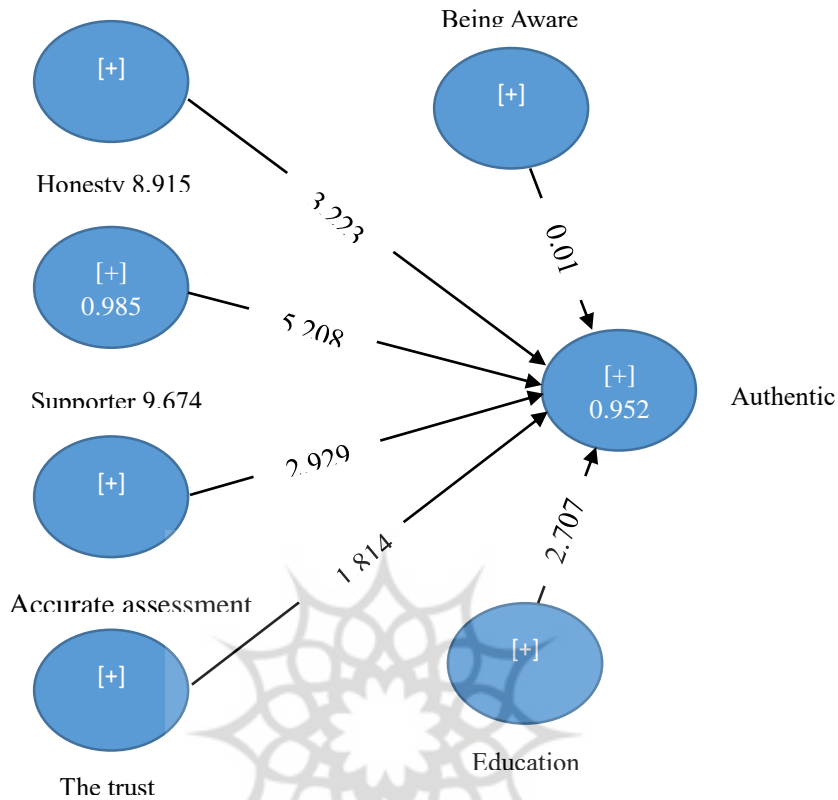
Figure (4) The primary reflective external model in the significance mode of the coefficients

External reflective model tests

In fact, until now, authors such as Sarsted (2019), Lee (2016), Hensler (2009), Giffen (2014), have considered at least 7 main tests for the measurement model (external model). In addition to investigating the relationship between hidden and manifest variables, it evaluates the reliability and validity of the structure.

Model reliability tests

The reliability of the model actually introduces the model as a slice of reality to reflect the results of that reality, but these results must have the necessary generalizability in quantitative research because the most important advantage of quantitative research compared to qualitative research is its validation and reliability (generalizability) from one sample to another. To measure the reliability of the model, at least 4 tests must reach the permissible limit and the results accepted by the experts. Cronbach's alpha test is the oldest test to measure the generalizability of the results. In fact, Newman 2014 states that this test is the internal correlation of the questions of a variable (outside the model). In this test, Cronbach's alpha

coefficient calculated for each variable
must be at least above 0.7.

Table (9) Cronbach's alpha test

variable	Cronbach's alpha
Education	.82
Being aware	.79
Accurate assessment	.86
Trust	.86
transformational	.94
Supporter	.91
Honesty	.92

Fortunately, the reliability of the model
was confirmed based on this test, and all
Cronbach's alpha test coefficients are
higher than the cut point of 0.7.

Table 10 Significance test, intensity and direction of hypotheses

Result	T value	P value	Hypothesis Confimation
education ← Transformational	1.305	0.192	No
Being aware ← Transformational	1.418	0.157	No
← Accurate Assessment Transformational	1.949	0.052	No
← Accurate Assessment Supporter	8.940	0.000	Yes
Honesty ← Transformational	5.478	0.000	Yes
Supporter ← Transformational	4.906	0.000	Yes
Honesty ← Transformational	1.369	0.172	No
supporter ← Honesty	6.422	0.000	Yes

Interpretation:

Because the value of T-VALUE is outside the range of 1.96 and -1.96, then H0 hypothesis is rejected with 99% probability and H1 hypothesis, which is the researcher's hypothesis, is accepted. If the value of T-VALUE is not outside the range of 1.96 and -1.96, the hypothesis of the researcher is not accepted.

Discussion And Conclusion

The present research conducted in order to design and investigate the effect of authentic leadership model for principals of primary schools in Isfahan city. For this purpose, the data obtained from interviews analyzed by 13 experts familiar with the subject of the research. Then these factors finalized and completed using the thematic analysis approach. After drawing the initial and final models using the structural model, the validity and reliability of the model determined. The results of the present study are consistent with the following studies. Abdullahi (2016), Moradi, Moghadam, & Jafari (2018), Sepahvand et al. (2018), Sagnak & Kuruoz (2017), Kiersch & Peters (2017), Gill et al. (2018), Nabavi & Feng (2016).

Authentic leaders in schools improve teachers' performance, expand interpersonal relationships, strengthen positive work attitudes such as commitment, job involvement, positive organizational behavior, sense of security and job satisfaction, and develop emotional states. Authentic leaders in schools can provide a platform for school growth and development by helping teachers find meaning in their work, creating optimism and commitment among teachers, and encouraging transparent relationships in order to build trust and improve a positive moral space. Due to the fact that the theory of authentic leadership is trying to train leaders who show their real selves to the people around them and away from any deception and hypocrisy, they should behave in accordance with their inner truth, therefore it is important for school administrators to be familiar with this leadership style and its consequences (Rajasekar et al,2013).

Effective and learning schools are still a universal aspiration for all education systems. Although useful researches have been done on the characteristics of these schools, but still how these schools work and analyzing the ways to access them, requires more research efforts. The effectiveness of each school should be reviewed at least once every 5 years based on the opinions of parents and students. Especially considering the acceleration of changes and developments in various fields and the impact of new achievements of science and technology on the body of education, effectiveness as a continuous fundamental change has demanded new paradigms; Therefore, it is necessary to seek to identify the influencing factors on the effectiveness of school management, which in this research is focused on the role of authentic leadership.

Leadership in schools should support knowledge and learning, which makes teachers strive to invent, apply and share knowledge, improve their job engagement and passion and expand team success (Baron, 2016). Authentic leadership is able to support following the rules and ethical principles in performing duties, paying attention to new opinions and thoughts of employees and listening to their opinions, creating friendly and sincere mutual relations with teachers, empowering teachers to carry out assigned tasks and decision-making areas, changing old bureaucracies, supporting the psychological well-being of teachers and creativity and innovation by building trust between employees and organizational teams(Nasiri et al, 2014). Authentic leaders value teachers' opinions and suggestions, share information and materials with teachers with full openness, encourage teachers to do a better job, create morale and strengthen the morale of teachers, involve teachers in responsibilities, seek the cooperation of students' parents, take sufficient action to solve the problems of the students and solve the problems of the teachers as well and the result of these matters will be the more effectiveness of the activities in the school.

Achieving the ideal situation in the category of authentic leadership requires the all-round attention of officials to this concept. Authentic leadership includes individual, team, and organizational levels, and it arises in a very superior organizational context. Therefore, the first principle in improving the current situation is to pay attention to the concept of an excellent organization and create the conditions for the educational organization to take steps in that direction. What is more important than anything else in the subject of authentic leadership is self-awareness and self-regulation and leadership behaviors that provide the means for his/her growth in the organization.

The current research had some limitations: first, taking professors' time to conduct interviews because all interviews were not conducted during office hours and the researcher conducted some interviews during non-office hours. This research is cross-sectional and the data was obtained at a specific point in time. Due to the fact that the sample of this research was selected in an accessible manner, caution should be exercised in generalizing its results to other societies.

Due to the novelty of this issue, researchers can use the theoretical foundations of this research as criteria and propose and test several hypotheses based on that. This research can be the source of other researches and help to develop knowledge in this field. In future researches, the statistical population can be the employees of different organizations, and even the individual and environmental factors that affect the future outlook of students can be investigated. It is suggested that this research be conducted once again

on a random sample so that its results can be more generalizable.

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