



Professional Skills for School Administrators in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Professional skills are essential for school administrators in the twenty-first century because they enable effective leadership, strategic decision-making, and the management of complex educational environments. Mastering these skills enables administrators to navigate challenges, implement innovative solutions, and foster an inclusive, supportive environment for students and staff. This paper aims to explore the Professional Skills for School Administrators in the 21st Century.

Methodology: This methodology entails conducting a thorough review of existing literature and case studies to identify and assess the essential skills required for effective school administration. The review combines findings from a variety of sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of current demands and best practices in educational leadership.

Results: The findings revealed that the multifaceted professional skills required of 21st-century school administrators are critical for effective leadership and management. Administrators can create equitable and supportive educational environments by focusing on ongoing development and best practices in these areas. These efforts are critical to navigating the complexities of modern education and ensuring long-term success for both students and schools.

Conclusion: The findings emphasize the importance of school administrators mastering a diverse set of professional skills to effectively lead and manage educational institutions. Emphasizing continuous growth and best practices in these areas is critical to creating equitable environments and achieving long-term success in education.

Keywords: Professional Skills, School Administrators, 21st Century

Introduction

The evolution of professional skills for school administrators in the twenty-first century reflects the changing landscape of education and leadership needs. Historically, school administration was primarily concerned with managing school operations, maintaining discipline, and ensuring compliance with educational regulations. Early twentieth-century school leaders were frequently tasked with routine administrative tasks, with little involvement in instructional leadership or overall strategic planning (Grissom, 2012). However, as educational reform gained traction in the late twentieth century, there was a growing recognition that administrators needed to develop more sophisticated skills, such as data-driven decision-making and instructional leadership (Cuban, 2013). This shift signaled the start of a broader recognition that effective school leadership necessitated a multifaceted skill set beyond traditional administrative functions. As we enter the twenty-first century, school administrators' roles have become increasingly focused on the integration of technology and the management of diverse educational environments. The rise of educational technology and the need for data management have become central to school administration, necessitating leaders who are skilled in both technological tools and data analysis (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). This transformation is driven by the need to use digital resources to improve teaching and learning outcomes while also ensuring effective school management. Furthermore, the emphasis on cultural competency and community engagement has increased, reflecting administrators' need to navigate and embrace diverse student populations and stakeholder interests (Meyer, 2010). These developments highlight the importance of having a broad skill set that includes both technical proficiency and interpersonal skills. Recent advancements in educational leadership emphasize the importance of adaptability and strategic thinking. School administrators must now demonstrate expertise in areas such as financial management, crisis response, and policy compliance while also creating an inclusive and supportive





school environment (Leithwood, 2010). Because of the dynamic nature of modern education, leaders must be both effective managers and visionaries capable of guiding their schools through times of change and uncertainty. As a result, the professional skills required of school administrators have grown to include a broader range of competencies necessary for navigating the complexities of today's educational settings (Day, 2014).

The value of professional skills for school administrators in the twenty-first century cannot be overstated, as they have a direct impact on the effectiveness of leadership and student outcomes. Modern school administrators must navigate a complex educational environment that includes technological advancements, diverse student populations, and changing educational standards. Effective leadership in this setting necessitates a sophisticated set of skills, such as strategic planning, technological proficiency, and instructional leadership. According to Leithwood (2010), administrators who possess these competencies are better able to develop and implement effective strategies for improving school performance and meeting the diverse needs of students and staff. In addition to strategic and instructional skills, financial and resource management have emerged as critical components of effective school leadership. Administrators must be skilled at budgeting, allocating resources, and securing funding to support educational initiatives while maintaining operational efficiency. Davis and Krajcik (2005) emphasize that skilled financial management allows school leaders to maximize resources and ensure that funds are used effectively to improve educational programs and student learning experiences. This competency is critical for maintaining the school's financial health and facilitating the implementation of innovative practices that promote student success. Furthermore, school administrators' responsibilities have expanded to include a strong emphasis on community engagement and cultural competency. As schools become more diverse, administrators must create an inclusive environment that values and supports all students and families. Meyer (2010) emphasizes the importance of effective community engagement and cultural understanding in developing strong relationships and fostering a supportive school climate. Administrators who excel in these areas are better positioned to address the challenges of diverse student populations while also promoting equity and inclusion in the school community.

Studying professional skills for school administrators in the twenty-first century is critical due to the rapidly changing educational landscape and the growing complexity of school management. As schools face new challenges such as technological integration, diverse student needs, and shifting educational standards, administrators must be well-versed in a wide range of leadership skills. Understanding these skills enables current and aspiring administrators to navigate the demands of modern educational environments, make better strategic decisions, and support both students and staff. This knowledge also helps to develop targeted professional development programs that address the specific needs of school leaders, resulting in more effective and resilient educational institutions. Furthermore, investigating these abilities provides useful insights into how administrators can create inclusive and equitable learning environments. With a growing emphasis on cultural competency and community engagement, administrators must be skilled at creating supportive environments that value diverse backgrounds and address equity issues. Studying these professional skills enables administrators to better manage the dynamics of diverse school communities, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and implement practices that promote equity and inclusion. This focus is critical for developing school leaders who can effectively meet their students' diverse needs while also ensuring that all members of the school community have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Objective

This paper aims to explore the professional skills of school administrators in the twenty-first century.

Professional Skills for School Administrators in the 21st Century

Professional skills for school administrators in the twenty-first century are essential for navigating the complexities of modern educational settings. Here is an in-depth look at each key professional skill:





1. Leadership and Vision:

Leadership and vision are key components of effective school administration, especially in the twenty-first century. Strategic leadership entails providing a clear vision and direction for the school, which is essential for aligning educational practices with both standards and community needs. Effective administrators are expected to create long-term goals and strategies that not only meet educational requirements but also address their school community's specific needs (Leithwood, 2010). School leaders can help their institutions achieve academic excellence and foster a positive school culture by developing a coherent vision and actionable plans. This strategic approach ensures that all stakeholders work toward common goals, ultimately improving the school's overall effectiveness (Day, 2014).

In addition to strategic leadership, change management is an important aspect of modern school administration. Administrators must effectively lead their schools through the continuous evolution of educational landscapes caused by technological advancements, policy changes, and shifting practices (Kotter, 1996). Successful change management entails not only implementing new policies or technologies but also assisting and guiding staff and students through the resulting changes. Effective communication, empathy, and strategic planning are required to reduce resistance and ensure smooth transitions (Fullan, 2001). Administrators who excel at change management can help their schools adapt to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring a dynamic and responsive educational environment.

2. Communication Skills:

Communication skills are critical for school administrators because they enable effective interactions with staff, students, parents, and the larger community. Effective communication entails conveying clear, concise messages through a variety of channels, including written reports, emails, presentations, and in-person interactions (Hargie, 2011). For administrators, the ability to communicate information accurately and understandably is critical for coordinating efforts, setting expectations, and fostering a transparent and collaborative culture. Effective communication not only helps to align the school community with its goals, but it also improves school operations by reducing misunderstandings and keeping everyone informed about important issues and developments (Hargie, 2011).

In addition to effective communication, active listening is an important skill for school administrators. This entails actively listening to and comprehending the concerns and feedback of various stakeholders, and responding in a way that addresses their needs and perspectives (Brownell, 2012). Active listening contributes to a supportive and inclusive school climate by making stakeholders feel valued and heard. It enables administrators to identify and address potential issues before they escalate, as well as make informed decisions based on the input of the entire school community (Brownell, 2012). Administrators who practice active listening can strengthen relationships, foster trust, and develop a more responsive and empathetic leadership style.

3. Technological Proficiency:

Technological proficiency is becoming increasingly important for school administrators as they navigate the demands of modern education settings. Educational technology integration refers to the effective use of digital tools and learning management systems (LMS) to improve teaching and learning. Administrators must not only implement but also support the integration of these technologies into the curriculum to improve student engagement and educational outcomes (Weller 2011). School leaders can create more dynamic and interactive learning environments by incorporating educational technologies like interactive whiteboards, digital assessments, and online collaboration platforms. Administrators must also facilitate professional development for teachers to ensure that they are properly equipped to use these tools in their instructional practices (Hattie, 2009).

Data analysis, like technology integration, is an essential skill for school administrators. Leaders can use data to make informed decisions, track student progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of various educational programs and initiatives (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013). Effective data analysis entails gathering and interpreting information on student performance, attendance, and other relevant metrics to identify trends, measure outcomes, and implement evidence-based improvements. Administrators who are skilled at data analysis can use these insights to address academic challenges,





optimize resource allocation, and drive continuous improvement in their schools (Wayman, 2005). This competency not only helps with strategic planning but also improves the ability to respond to the changing needs of the school community.

4. Financial Management:

Financial management is a critical skill for school administrators, which includes budget development and effective resource acquisition strategies. Budget development entails creating and managing the school's budget, with an emphasis on forecasting, tracking expenses, and ensuring that financial resources are used efficiently. Administrators must create a comprehensive budget that is consistent with the school's goals and priorities, allocating funds to support critical programs and initiatives (Barton & McCarty, 2007). This process necessitates careful planning and supervision to monitor spending, adjust as needed, and maintain financial stability. Effective budget management allows schools to maximize resources, support instructional and extracurricular programs, and address any financial issues that may arise (Odden & Picus, 2014).

In addition to budget management, grant writing and fundraising are critical skills for obtaining additional funds. Administrators must identify potential funding opportunities, such as grants from government agencies, foundations, or private donors, and develop compelling proposals to secure them (Miller, 2009). Organizing fundraising events or campaigns is another important aspect of financial management because it allows schools to raise funds for specific projects or programs. Successful grant writing and fundraising efforts can provide the resources needed to support educational programs, improve facilities, and implement innovative projects that would not be possible with a regular budget alone (Smith 2012). By effectively participating in these activities, school administrators can supplement their budgets and achieve their educational goals more effectively.

5. Instructional Leadership:

Instructional leadership is an essential component of effective school administration, focusing on curriculum oversight and professional development to improve educational outcomes. Curriculum oversight entails ensuring that the curriculum is rigorous, relevant, and consistent with state standards and students' diverse needs. Administrators are responsible for evaluating and refining the curriculum to meet these criteria, ensuring that instructional materials and methods are current and effective in promoting student learning (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). School leaders who oversee curriculum development and implementation ensure that the educational content delivered is not only compliant with state requirements but also tailored to their students' specific needs and interests, resulting in a more engaging and effective learning environment (Tyler, 1949).

Equally important is the commitment to teachers' professional development, which includes ongoing support and training to improve instructional practices and facilitate professional growth. Effective instructional leaders design and promote professional development programs that meet the needs of teachers and keep them up to date on educational best practices and innovations (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This assistance includes organizing workshops, providing mentorship, and encouraging educators to collaborate and share effective strategies and resources. Investing in teacher development helps administrators ensure that instructional practices are constantly improved, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for students (Guskey, 2002).

6. Human Resource Management:

Human Resource Management is a critical component of school administration, encompassing both staff recruitment and retention as well as performance evaluation to ensure a high-quality learning environment. Staff recruitment and retention entail hiring qualified individuals and creating a positive work environment to retain talented educators and administrative personnel. Effective recruitment strategies include creating clear job descriptions, implementing fair and thorough hiring processes, and attracting candidates who share the school's mission and values (Ingersoll, 2001). Retention is also important because creating a positive and supportive work environment, providing professional development opportunities, and recognizing employee achievements all contribute to long-term job satisfaction and lower turnover rates (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Administrators must consider





workload, professional development, and work-life balance to keep a motivated and committed workforce.

Another critical component of human resource management is performance evaluation, which entails conducting a systematic assessment of staff performance and providing constructive feedback to promote professional growth and improvement. Regular performance evaluations assist in identifying areas for development, setting goals, and providing guidance for improving instructional practices and administrative duties (Marsh, 2012). Effective evaluations should be based on specific criteria and incorporate multiple sources of feedback, such as self-assessments, peer reviews, and student performance data (Danielson, 2007). Providing actionable feedback and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement are critical for assisting staff members to advance in their roles and contribute effectively to the school's success.

7. Community Engagement:

Community engagement is an important aspect of school administration, with a focus on developing partnerships and managing public relations to support and improve the educational environment. Building partnerships entails establishing and maintaining relationships with community organizations, businesses, and parents. This collaboration can provide students with valuable resources, support, and opportunities that are not available through the school alone (Epstein, 2011). Effective partnership strategies include involving local businesses in career education programs, collaborating with community organizations to fund extracurricular activities, and involving parents in school governance and decision-making. Schools can foster strong connections within the community, resulting in a network of support that contributes to student success and enriches the educational experience.

Public relations are equally important for managing the school's image and effectively communicating with the media and the general public. To maintain a positive reputation, administrators must manage media relations, promote the school's achievements, and address any issues that arise (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). This includes creating clear and compelling messages, responding quickly to media inquiries, and actively sharing information about school accomplishments and initiatives (Morrison, 2014). Effective public relations strategies help to create a positive image of the school, foster community support, and keep stakeholders informed and engaged with the school's mission and activities.

8. Policy and Compliance:

Policy and compliance are critical aspects of school administration, which include both regulatory adherence and upholding high ethical standards. Understanding and adhering to federal, state, and local regulations governing education, safety, and administration is referred to as regulatory compliance. School administrators must be knowledgeable about a wide range of laws and policies, including those governing student privacy, special education, health and safety standards, and anti-discrimination legislation (Lauen, 2011). Compliance ensures that the school follows legal frameworks, avoiding potential legal issues and promoting a safe and equitable learning environment. To ensure effective regulatory adherence, administrators must review and update school policies regularly, provide staff training, and implement procedures that are in line with current legal requirements (Sharkey, 2009).

Ethical standards are also critical in ensuring that all practices and decisions in school administration are done with integrity and fairness. Administrators must uphold the profession's ethical standards by making transparent, equitable decisions that benefit students and the school community (Leithwood, 2010). This includes resolving conflicts of interest, ensuring fair treatment for all individuals, and cultivating a culture of honesty and accountability (Sergiovanni 2001). Administrators foster trust with students, parents, and staff by upholding high ethical standards, as well as creating an environment that encourages ethical behavior throughout the school. Maintaining integrity in all aspects of school administration is critical to sustaining a positive school culture and achieving long-term success (Brown, 2008).

9. Crisis Management:





Crisis management is a critical responsibility for school administrators, requiring both emergency preparedness and crisis response to ensure the safety and stability of the school community. Emergency preparedness entails creating and implementing comprehensive plans to address a variety of emergencies, such as natural disasters, security threats, and health crises. Administrators must develop detailed emergency plans outlining evacuation procedures, communication, and coordination with local emergency services (Pfefferbaum et al., 2008). These plans should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in potential risks and to ensure that all staff, students, and stakeholders understand emergency protocols. Regular drills and training sessions are also part of effective preparedness, which helps to ensure readiness and improve the school community's response to actual emergencies.

Crisis response is just as important, focusing on managing and mitigating the impact of crises through timely and coordinated actions. During a crisis, administrators must promptly activate their emergency plans, communicate clearly with all stakeholders, and assist those affected (Mitchell, 2003). An effective crisis response entails not only meeting immediate needs but also managing long-term recovery and support for the school community. Administrators must collaborate closely with emergency responders, mental health professionals, and other support services to ensure a thorough response that minimizes disruption and promotes recovery (Wachtel, 2006). Administrators can protect students and staff's well-being while also maintaining the educational environment's stability and continuity by effectively managing crises.

10. Cultural Competency:

To create a supportive and fair educational environment, school administrators must be culturally competent, which includes diversity and inclusion as well as equity practices. Promoting and supporting a diverse and inclusive school environment entails actively creating an environment in which all students and faculty feel valued and respected, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics (Banks, 2006). Administrators are in charge of enacting policies and practices that celebrate diversity and ensure that all members of the school community can participate fully and fairly in school activities. This includes offering cultural competence professional development to staff, developing inclusive curricula, and developing programs to support underrepresented groups (Gay, 2010). By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, school leaders contribute to the creation of a positive and enriching environment that improves learning outcomes and fosters mutual respect among students and staff.

Equity practices are also an important aspect of cultural competency, as they ensure that all students, regardless of background or circumstance, have equal access to opportunities and resources. Administrators must create and implement policies to address educational disparities, such as access to advanced coursework, extracurricular activities, and support services (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This includes analyzing data to identify and close achievement gaps, providing targeted support to students who face systemic barriers, and ensuring fair and just school practices (Theoharis, 2007). Effective equity practices help to ensure that all students have the support and resources they require to succeed, creating an educational environment in which every student can thrive regardless of their starting point.

Conclusion

To summarize, school administrators in the twenty-first century must possess a wide range of professional skills to manage and lead educational institutions effectively. The educational landscape has shifted dramatically, necessitating a broad skill set that includes leadership and vision, communication, technological proficiency, financial management, instructional leadership, human resource management, community engagement, policy and compliance, crisis management, and cultural competency. Each of these areas contributes to the creation of a dynamic, equitable, and effective learning environment that meets the diverse needs of students while also promoting the professional development of teachers. To meet these changing demands, school administrators should engage in ongoing professional development and training tailored to these key areas. This includes pursuing advanced education and certifications in strategic leadership, data analytics, and crisis



management. Administrators should also prioritize the development of effective communication and interpersonal skills to foster collaborative relationships with staff, students, and the community. Furthermore, effective technology use and staying current with educational innovations are critical for improving instructional practices and operational efficiency.

Knowledge Contribution

Mind Map: School Administrators' Key Skills in the 21st Century

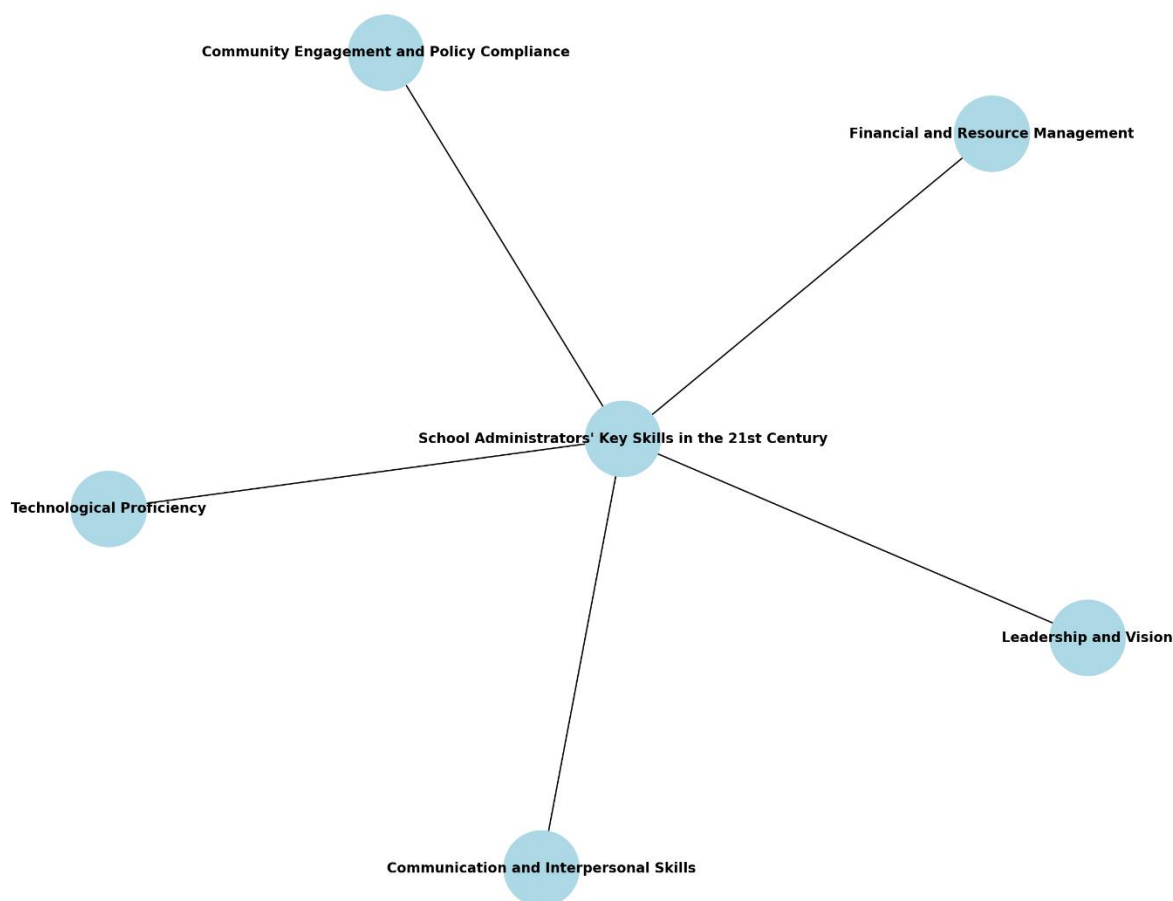


Figure 1 Professional Skills for School Administrators in the 21st Century

The mind map depicts the essential skills required of school administrators in the twenty-first century, emphasizing a combination of leadership, communication, technological proficiency, financial and resource management, and community engagement. Strategic vision, professional development, and data-driven decision-making are all components of effective leadership, whereas communication is concerned with developing collaborative relationships and resolving conflicts. Administrators must also keep up with educational technology, manage financial resources effectively, and ensure crisis preparedness. Furthermore, fostering cultural competency and ensuring policy compliance are critical for creating inclusive, equitable, and legally sound learning environments. These interconnected skills are essential for running dynamic, modern educational institutions.



Recommendation

Practice Recommendations

Based on the data, several practice recommendations for school administrators in the twenty-first century can be made.

1. Ongoing Professional Development: School administrators should prioritize ongoing education and training, especially in leadership, crisis management, and data-driven decision-making. This will allow them to keep up with the rapidly changing educational landscape and improve student outcomes.

2. Technological Proficiency: Administrators must embrace and integrate cutting-edge education technologies. They should prioritize technology-enhanced instructional practices and digital tools to improve operational efficiency.

3. Effective communication and relationship-building skills are essential for administrators. This includes building collaborative relationships with teachers, students, and the larger community, as well as effectively managing conflicts.

4. Financial and Resource Management: Administrators must ensure that financial resources are allocated wisely and in line with the school's goals. Training in financial oversight and human resource management is critical for staff retention and school success.

5. Effective crisis and risk management requires administrators to develop robust response plans for emergencies and crises. This encompasses both operational risks and community relations during difficult times.

6. Cultural Competence: Creating an inclusive and equitable school environment is crucial. Administrators should foster a culture of diversity and ensure that all students' needs are met.

Further Research Recommendations

1. Impact of Technological Integration on Learning Outcomes: More research is needed to determine how effectively integrating educational technologies affects student learning outcomes and operational efficiency in schools. This could include looking into the best practices for technology adoption in different school settings.

2. Investigating different leadership styles in crisis management can yield valuable insights. This could help administrators determine the most effective strategies for dealing with school crises, such as health emergencies or natural disasters.

3. Financial Management in Educational Institutions: Research on how financial strategies impact school performance, especially in underfunded schools, can help administrators optimize resource allocation and staff retention.

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