





*Research Paper*

## Superintendent Perceptions of Preparation Adequacy and Appointment: A Study of the Uramanat Regions of Kermanshah Province

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to investigate the adequacy of preparation and appointment of school district superintendents using a qualitative analytical approach and the interpretive phenomenology method. The statistical population of the study consisted of six superintendents and 18 professional teachers from the Uramanat school districts. Participants were selected purposively using the snowball sampling method. Data collection continued using in-depth semi-structured interviews until reaching theoretical data saturation. A three-step coding method was used for data analysis. The results of the data analysis show that superintendents perceive political, social, and family backing as affective factors in the appointment of superintendents. Teachers perceive political and family backing, acknowledging supporters, and political investment as affective factors in the appointment of superintendents.

**Keywords:** *Political appointments, Political superintendents, School district superintendents, Preparation of superintendents*

### Introduction

Studies show that school district superintendents play a key role in improving education in their districts. They are in charge of executing the general educational policies in the educational institutions of a district or area, affecting the culture of that area positively by planning and leading the education system (Jun & Min, 2017: 2). Hence, the manner, regulations and process by which they are appointed are really important. Review of literature shows that academic and managerial competence, beliefs and adherence to values, good relations with senior managers (Shariati & Arabiun, 2007), family connections, social status (Atafar & Azarbaijani, 2001), and political power and backing (Mumpain, 2015) comprise the most affective factors in the appointment of superintendents.

Currently, one of the most important challenges plaguing educations in Iran is failure to attend to the standard criteria for the appointment and promotion of superintendents, causing dissatisfaction among teachers and the inefficiency of the education system in general (Piriaei & Niknami, 2017). The educational context in various school districts has created different trends in appointing superintendents. Uramanat, in particular, deserves extra attention due to the cultural, language, and religious characteristics of its people. Given that no serious studies have been conducted on the current experiences and viewpoints on the preparation adequacy and appointment of superintendents in Uramanat, the present research was designed to understand the preparation adequacy and appointment of school district superintendents in Uramanat by answering the following questions:

How do school district superintendents perceive the reasons for their appointment?

How do teachers perceive the reasons for the appointment of school district superintendents?

How are school district superintendents prepared for their appointment?

## **Methodology**

The present research was conducted using a qualitative analytical approach and the interpretive phenomenology method. The statistical population of 24 participants in the study consisted of six superintendents and 18 professional teachers from the Uramanat school districts. The participants were selected purposively using the snowball sampling method. Data collection continued using in-depth semi-structured interviews until theoretical data saturation. All the interviews were conducted in-person, lasting 30-60 minutes. The interviews were immediately transcribed and coded. Data validity was confirmed using member check and data reliability was confirmed using external check. Data was coded and categorized simultaneously with data collection, and disagreements were discussed by the researchers until a

consensus was reached. Next, the researchers reviewed and coded the results to extract the main themes.

## **Results**

According to data analysis, superintendent of the Uramanat school district perceive their appointment mostly affected by three factors of political backing, social backing, and family backing. Data analysis for the second question shows that teachers perceive political backing, family backing, acknowledging supporters, and political investment as the most important factors affecting superintendents' appointment. Investigating the third question revealed that the Ministry of Education has no official plan to prepare superintendents. They are appointed based on their previous knowledge and experience to lead and manage various educational districts.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The aim of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of the participants and the way they perceive the factors affecting superintendents' preparation and appointment in school districts. Data analysis shows that political backing alongside social and family backing increases the chances of being appointed as a superintendent. This finding indicates that the appointment of school district superintendents in the Uramanat region is political due to its cultural fabric and small size of the area. As for the teachers, they perceive political backing through the mechanisms of acknowledging supporters and political investment to be the affective factors in the appointment of school district superintendents. Accordingly, those individuals with social, political, and economic advantages, or other gains for the party, group, or individual supporting them, are appointed. Of these, individuals with the best chance to provide important contributions for the party, group, or supporter in the social or political arena will have the best opportunity to be appointed. Data analysis for the third question shows that, in a politicized environment, there is no official preparation adequacy plan for the appointment of superintendents. They begin work by relying on their previous knowledge and hoping to gain more experience on the job. This incurs heavy costs on the education system. Therefore, it is proposed to supervise the appointment of school district superintendents and prevent intervention by politicians, in particular members of parliament, in the appointment of superintendents in the education system. Instead, the opinions of educated members of the local community should be used in the appointment of school district

superintendents and the way must be paved to provide incentives for women superintendents to be appointed, as well. Quality courses for the adequate preparation of superintendents, district superintendents in particular, must be run.

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