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Identifying the Dimensions and Components of Continuous Improvement of the Performance of Sama Primary Schools

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Purpose: The continuous improvement of the performance of Sama schools through the effective dimensions and components let to create a competitive advantage for Sama schools. Therefore, the aim of this study was identifying the dimensions and components of continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools.

Methodology: This research in terms of purpose and implementation method was applied and qualitative from type of exploratory, respectively. The statistical population of the current study was all the faculty members of the educational management field, Sama staff managers, school principals, teachers and trainers, and students of Sama, which according to the principle of theoretical saturation number of 20 people of them were selected as a sample. The samples of the present study were subjected to a semi-structured interview, which its validity was confirmed by the triangulation method, and its reliability was obtained by the method of agreement coefficient between two coders 0.89, and the data obtained from the interview were analyzed by thematic analysis method in MAXQDA software.

Findings: The findings showed that the continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools had 65 concepts, 11 components and 4 dimensions. Its dimensions and components were included educational equipment and facilities (with two components of hardware infrastructure and educational and teaching aids), professional capabilities and skills (with two components of professional skills of teachers and trainers and professional skills of managers), program-oriented (with three components of teaching and learning process, research program and training program) and managerial competencies (with four components of financial resources management, strategic thinking, systematic evaluation and internal and external communication). In the end, the theme network pattern of continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools was designed.

Conclusion: According to the results of this study, in order to continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools must use the identified dimensions and components for it and provide the ground for their implementation.

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1. Introduction

The principal characteristic of the contemporary world is its rapidly accelerating pace and transformations across various societal arenas, with these changes manifesting as threats and opportunities for societies, especially various organizations (Rodrigo, Ortiz-Marcos, Palacios & Romero, 2022). Education is a critical pillar of growth and development in any country, and today's educational landscape has become complex and intertwined with the emergence of technologies (Teoh, Zain & Lee, 2021). Every organization must optimally utilize all its resources and facilities for success. Thus, an organization's success hinges on its tangible and intangible assets, and this scrutiny is particularly significant in educational organizations and schools due to their role in nurturing the human resources of other future organizations (DeHart, Benner & Chambers, 2020). The education sector is among the most crucial in any society and requires adaptation to the changing world, prompting leaders and planners towards changes in practices, management styles, objectives, missions, and structural reengineering. This sector plays a pivotal role in developing advanced humans and promoting societal cultures and values (Asheghi, Imani & Sharifi, 2022). In today's evolving world, organizations, including educational ones like schools, must continuously improve to stay competitive and utilize opportunities in the complex external environment to address organizational issues and minimize shortcomings (Shayesteh Nia, Shafizadeh & Soleimani, 2023). Schools, as vital and fundamental social institutions, play a crucial role in guiding, educating, and controlling individuals and fulfilling various societal, economic, and cultural functions. With changes in educational systems, including objectives, processes, methods, tools, etc., the flow of education and learning has transformed, necessitating schools as part of the social system to adapt and evolve in their functions and responsibilities (Tabai, Shafizadeh & Soleimani, 2022). Schools are prime locations for instigating change in values, beliefs, and behaviors, preparing students for social and economic services and employment based on their talents and interests (Zhao, Zhang, Wu, Shen, Tong & Li, 2019). Efficient and practical management in the education sector plays a significant role in societal development, leading to increased teacher job satisfaction, stronger parent-school relationships, reduced academic failure, and enhanced innovation, creativity, and optimal human resource utilization (Kuriloff, Jordan, Sutherland & Ponnock, 2019).

Organizational performance evaluation is a primary topic in organizational studies, encompassing tasks assigned to the workforce to achieve competitive and product excellence goals, linked to cost, flexibility, speed, reliability, and quality (Taheri, Taghipour Zahir & Jafari, 2019). Effective and efficient human resource performance is a key to organizational success, indicating productivity, quality, profitability, and customer orientation. Successful organizations strive to identify and manage factors affecting human resource performance and behavior (Albornoz, Cabrales, Calvo & Hauk, 2018). Organizational performance study examines the impact of individuals, groups, and structures on internal performance, employing derived knowledge to enhance organizational effectiveness. Hence, organizations must pay special attention to understanding and studying the performance of their members (Jangmo, Stalhandske, Chang, Chen, Almqvist, Feldman et al., 2019). Organizational performance involves understanding, predicting, and managing human performance within an organization, focusing on human performance in organizational situations and challenges (Devi, Randhawa, Bansal, Angurana, Malhi, Nallasamy & Jayashree, 2023). Performance improvement assists organizations and employees in meeting needs, with educational organizations continually seeking to enhance their performance (Sanchez, Sanchez & Cardona, 2018). For schools to improve performance, all individuals directly interacting with students must possess the necessary competencies to fulfill their responsibilities. Competent, high-performing staff can enhance school performance, whereas low-performing staff may lead to a decline in school performance (Khan, Gomersall & Stylianou, 2023). The study of organizational performance as a scientific field, formed in the mid-1940s, comprises various performance sciences, including psychology, sociology, social sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science. Therefore, organizational performance is a multidisciplinary field seeking to understand individual, group, and organizational processes and performances within organizations, used to better understand and manage individual performance in the workplace (Shokohi & Keshtvarz Kandazi,

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2019). Clearly defining a school's mission and optimizing student education and learning by the principal and all school staff can effectively impact the quality and performance of the school (Zen, Schneuer, Alahakoon, Nassar & Lee, 2021).

Literature Review

Mokhtari, Shafiepour Motlagh & Agha Hosseini (2022) in their research on strategies for utilizing the experiences of successful schools to improve educational quality, concluded that this construct included 80 basic themes, 24 organizing themes, and 7 overarching themes encompassing experience sharing, launching successful school festivals, professional development, documenting managers' experiences, management based on the learning organization, integrated management, and storytelling.

Paudel (2021), in a study on academic performance dimensions in the context of higher education institutions, found that academic performance comprised four dimensions: research and publication (with components like engagement in research, bringing research insights into the classroom, guidance through technology, translating theory into practice, publication count, and student engagement), innovation (with components such as in-class information quality, classroom environment, case-based learning, and activity focus), interactive learning (with components like term lesson planning, subject-specific lesson planning, and the use of electronic portals in class), and capacity building (with components such as generating new knowledge, student participation in research, and technology in classrooms).

Narimani, Mehrdad & Jalili (2021) in their research on a model for improving the performance of primary school managers identified 15 components across four dimensions: leadership development (with four components: developing human relations, enhancing managerial abilities, professional development of managers, and strengthening team skills), structural improvement (with three components: enhancing organizational culture, improving contextual factors, and developing education and learning), performance planning (with four components: change management, performance improvement based on goals, coaching skills development, and continuous improvement program), and self-development (with four components: adherence to ethical and value principles, personal skill development, self-efficacy, and motivation).

Shokohi and Keshtvarz Kandazi (2019) introduced factors influencing the organizational performance of teachers in their first year of service, including ability, leadership, intelligence, learning, personality, culture, attitude, design, motivation, environment, group characteristics, technology, belief systems, perception, environment, strategy, power, structure, communication, social capital, contradiction, biographical characteristics, and politics.

Rezaee and Tarin (2017) in their meta-analysis research on factors affecting the performance of school principals concluded that effective factors included education, management experience, creativity and innovation, motivation, metacognition, age, gender, social skills, supervision and control, in-service training, job motivation, management stability, organization, job satisfaction, unity and consensus, client satisfaction, autonomy, and teaching.

Triguero, Pena-Vinces, Gonzalez-Rendon & Sanchez-Apellaniz (2012) in their research on human resource management practices and performance improvement assessment with financial and non-financial approaches found that the most important human management factors affecting organizational performance improvement included recruitment, training, evaluation, flexible rewards, job design, two-way communication, job stability, equality, and job quality.

Organizations, regardless of their mission, purpose, goals, and vision, operate in a national or international realm and are accountable to customers, stakeholders, and interested parties. Therefore, evaluating organizational performance outcomes is considered a crucial strategic process, and continuous performance improvement is a process that should always be undertaken, with individuals continually assessing and improving their position without realizing it. Continuous performance improvement in organizations enhances customer satisfaction, citizen and stakeholder trust, and public confidence, particularly relevant in educational organizations like Sama. Given that Sama schools cover a large number of students nationwide, identifying key indicators of continuous performance improvement can provide a practical and operational

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model for developing schools, creating conditions for achieving an ideal state, attracting and retaining students, and gaining a competitive advantage. Continuous performance improvement in Sama schools through effective dimensions and components creates a competitive advantage for these schools. Hence, the aim of this study was to identify the dimensions and components of continuous performance improvement in Sama elementary schools.

2. Methodology

This study was applied and qualitative in nature, specifically exploratory. The population comprised all faculty members of Educational Management, Sama headquarter managers, school principals, teachers, instructors, and Sama students, with 20 participants selected through purposive sampling based on theoretical saturation. Five criteria were used for selection: key informants with extensive knowledge in continuous performance improvement of Sama schools, recognition by peers in this field, theoretical understanding of the evolving theory, diversity in organizational positions and jobs, and willingness to participate. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation, meaning no new data emerged, and interviews were conducted up to the 20th participant for confirmation. The frequency and percentage of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of subjects' demographic characteristics (Gender, Role, Work experience, Age)

Demographic characteristic	Value	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	70
	Female	6	30
Role	Professors	5	25
	Sama managers	3	15
	School managers	6	30
	Teachers and instructors	4	20
	Students	2	10
Work experience (Except students)	Below 25	15	83.33
	At least 25	3	16.67
Age (Except students0	Below 60	17	94.44
	At least 60	1	5.56

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection, along with a demographic information form. Interviews consisted of four questions, outlined in Table 2, designed based on theoretical foundations and with the assistance of guiding professors. Each interview lasted between 20 to 60 minutes. Interviews were individual, and after each question, responses were confirmed or revised with the interviewee before proceeding. The validity of interviews was confirmed through triangulation, and reliability was achieved with a 0.89 agreement coefficient between two coders.

Table 2. Interview questions

Row	Question
1	How do managers, experts, teachers, and students perceive and describe continuous performance improvement in Sama schools?
2	How do these groups describe themselves in terms of educational quality and its improvement?
3	How compatible do they find policies, programs, methods, and educational, nurturing, and administrative practices in Sama schools with continuous performance improvement?
4	How do they describe strategies for continuous performance improvement?

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The research process involved designing four questions for interviews, identifying samples, explaining the study's importance, and obtaining verbal consent. Interviews were conducted individually at predetermined times and places, with important points noted and recorded for later review. Due to COVID-19 and distance constraints, some interviews were conducted via Skype, WhatsApp, and phone. Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed multiple times. Data from interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA software for thematic analysis.

3. Findings

In this study, 70% of respondents were male, and 30% female. The sample included 25% faculty members, 15% Sama headquarter managers, 30% school principals, 20% teachers and instructors, and 10% Sama students. The results of the thematic analysis, identifying dimensions and components of continuous performance improvement in Sama primary schools, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The reults of thematic analysis to indentify the dimensions and components of continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools

Dimension	Component	Concept
Educational equipment and facilities	Hardware infrastructure	1. School area
		2. School safety and health
		3. Establishment, development, and enrichment of information and educational resources at the school level
		4. Open space area
		5. Covered space area
		6. Sports area
		7. Laboratory space area
		8. Green space area
	Educational and teaching aids equipments	9. Internet access
		10. Use of e-learning materials including gamification
		11. Specialized and standard sports equipment
		12. Laboratory equipment
		13. Teaching aids
		14. Smartboard
		15. Single desks and chairs
Professional capabilities and skills	Teachers' professional skills	16. Relevant and high-level education
		17. Job commitment
		18. Professional ethics
		19. Media literacy
		20. Discipline
		21. Work experience
		22. Expertise
		23. Creativity and innovation
		24. Religiousness
		25. Citizenship behaviors
		26. Job motivation
	Managers' professional skills	27. Management experience
		28. Teaching experience

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		29. Management knowledge
		30. Social responsibility
		31. Public relations
		32. Ability to implement laws and regulations in the school
		33. Sufficient knowledge of the Fundamental Transformation Document
Program-focused	Teaching and learning processes	34. Allocation of a specific part of the educational program to introduce professions, arts, and practical occupations
		35. Teacher's teaching style and attention to students' personal experience and participation in learning activities
		36. Special attention to teamwork during the teaching process and creating experiences and working environment during the teaching and learning process
		37. Attention to the quality of education by placing innovative and creative teaching and practical and conceptual learning goals
	Research program	38. Attracting organized participation of scientific and research centers
		39. Membership in the Young Researchers Club
		40. Patent registration
		41. Implementation and execution of research programs with special attention to the scientific education domain of the Fundamental Transformation Document
	Nurturing programs	42. Sama internal festivals
		43. Educational festivals
		44. Sports achievements
		45. Quranic achievements
		46. Family involvement in school educational activities
		47. Talent development
		48. Comprehensive plan for family-school cooperation to strengthen the cultural education of families
Managerial competencies	Financial resource management	49. School budget
		50. School income
		51. Current expenses of the school
		52. Staff salaries
		53. Maintenance costs of schools
	Strategic thinking	54. Long-term planning
		55. Planning to intellectually persuade students to accept the heart and internal norms and values of the Sama brand in schools based on the criteria of the Fundamental Transformation Document
		56. Operational plans
	Systematic evaluation	57. Continuous supervision and evaluation based on specific criteria
		58. Providing realistic feedback
		59. Incentive policy
		60. Using various assessment systems to measure different performance aspects of the school
	Internal and external communications	61. Taking appropriate measures to attract, educate, and employ committed and deserving human resources
		62. Constructive and effective family participation
		63. Management stability
		64. Teacher in-service training
		65. Establishing a supply chain for schools and activities based on it

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Findings of Table 3 revealed that continuous performance improvement in Sama primary schools had 65 concepts, 11 components, and 4 dimensions. These included educational equipment and facilities (hardware infrastructure and educational and teaching aids), professional capabilities and skills (teachers' and principals' professional skills), program-focused (teaching and learning processes, research, and nurturing programs), and managerial competencies (financial resource management, strategic thinking, systematic evaluation, internal and external communications).

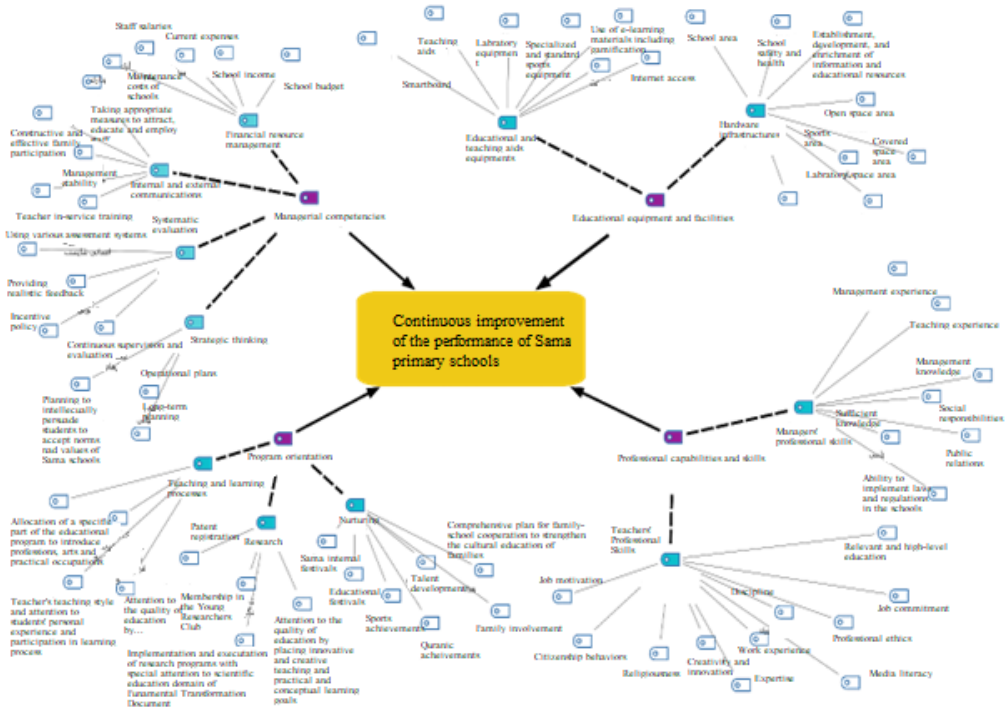

Figure 1. Thematic network of continuous improvement of the performance of Sama primary schools

4. Conclusion

Education and schools, with their unique objectives and functions, hold a special place in the realization of comprehensive educational programs in a country. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the dimensions and components of continuous performance improvement in Sama primary schools.

The findings of this study revealed that continuous performance improvement in Sama primary schools consisted of 65 concepts, 11 components, and 4 dimensions. These dimensions and components included educational equipment and facilities (hardware infrastructure, educational and teaching aids), professional capabilities and skills (professional skills of teachers and instructors, and professional skills of managers), program-centric approaches (teaching and learning processes, research programs, and nurturing programs), and managerial competencies (financial resource management, strategic thinking, systematic evaluation, and internal and external communications).

Interpreting these findings, it can be said that without supervision and continuous performance improvement, no program can be executed correctly, and such improvement itself requires planning. Implementing a variety of educational programs to meet societal needs, particularly those of children, and to achieve high social, psychological, emotional, and ethical objectives, necessitates significant financial and physical resources and efficient human resources. Achieving coherence, increasing effectiveness, and reaching the goals of educational programs is not possible without a system of continuous performance improvement. Improving school performance has been a primary concern of the educational system in most countries worldwide, and the factors influencing it have been a major issue of interest for education specialists for a

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long time. The primary education phase is one of the most crucial educational periods as it is ripe with opportunities for the development and flourishing of cognitive, emotional, social, and educational skills, which will impact students' subsequent educational phases. Upon entering primary education, students mentally prepare to acquire many educational and developmental matters, and significant changes occur in their minds regarding social issues. This set of changes and transformations in primary education can be observed in educational quality since the life opportunities of students are strongly influenced by the educational quality they receive in schools. Improving performance and developing quality are considered the most important criteria for development and, as UNESCO puts it, are at the heart of education. Therefore, education must strive for excellence, and if quality is overlooked, all efforts and expenses will be in vain, not only wasting the lives of students but also losing the ability to compete and survive in a world that does not consider itself responsible for our lives.

In the dimension of educational equipment and facilities, with two components of hardware infrastructure and educational and teaching aids, strategies can include increasing school space in terms of open areas, covered spaces, sports areas, laboratory spaces, and green spaces, improving school safety and health, creating, developing, and enriching educational and training information units and resources at the school level, upgrading internet conditions, laboratory equipment, smart boards, educational aids, and single desks and chairs, improving specialized and standard sports equipment, and utilizing electronic educational content and gamification.

In the dimension of professional capabilities and skills, with two components of teachers' and instructors' professional skills and managers' professional skills, strategies can involve increasing the use of relevant and higher education, enhancing commitment, experience, motivation, and job expertise, improving professional ethics, religiosity, social responsibility, civic behavior, public relations, media literacy, creativity and innovation, knowledge and experience in management and teaching, focusing on discipline, adequate knowledge and understanding of the Fundamental Transformation Document, and the ability to implement laws and requirements of higher-level documents in schools.

Furthermore, in the program-centric dimension, with three components of the teaching and learning process, research programs, and nurturing programs, strategies can include allocating a specific part of the educational programs to introduce professions, arts, and practical jobs, teachers' teaching style and attention to students' personal experience areas and engaging them in learning activities, focusing on group work in the teaching process and creating experiences and working spaces during the teaching and learning process, focusing on the quality of teachings with innovative and creative teaching by teachers and practical and conceptual learning of curriculum goals, attracting and engaging organized participation of scientific and research centers, membership in the Young Researchers Club, patent registrations, implementing research programs with attention to the educational scientific aspect of the Fundamental Transformation Document, increasing participation in Sama and Education internal festivals, striving for sports and Quranic successes, family participation in school nurturing activities, increasing talent development, and using a comprehensive program of family and school partnership to strengthen the nurturing culture of families.

Moreover, in the dimension of managerial competencies, with four components of financial resource management, strategic thinking, systematic evaluation, and internal and external communications, strategies can include increasing school budgets and income, reducing maintenance and current expenses, timely payment of staff salaries, practical and long-term operational planning, planning for the intellectual persuasion of students to internally accept the norms and values of the Sama brand based on the Fundamental Transformation Document criteria, consistent supervision and evaluation based on specific criteria, providing realistic feedback and awarding certificates of appreciation, using different evaluation systems to assess various performance aspects of the school, adopting appropriate measures for attracting, training, and employing competent and committed human resources, attracting constructive and effective family participation, increasing managerial stability, using in-service training for teachers, and creating a supply chain for schools and operating based on it.

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The study population was limited to all faculty members of Educational Management, Sama headquarters managers, school principals, teachers, instructors, and Sama students. Different motivations of the study population may influence responses to questions and research results. Also, different educational levels of the population may affect the understanding of question concepts. Therefore, in generalizing the results of this study, attention must be paid to its limitations. Additionally, given these limitations, it is recommended that further research on the continuous performance improvement of Sama schools be conducted. Moreover, this research was conducted only on the continuous performance improvement of Sama primary schools, and it is suggested that this research be extended to first and second middle schools. Another research proposal is to design a model of continuous performance improvement for Sama primary schools from the perspective of the organization's stakeholders and the students' parents. The results of this study have many practical implications for specialists and planners of the Sama organization. Based on the results of this study, to improve the continuous performance of Sama primary schools, the identified dimensions and components should be utilized, and the conditions for their implementation should be facilitated.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical considerations, including confidentiality, privacy of personal information, and interviewee privacy.

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Authors' Contributions

In this study, the student was responsible for conducting interviews, data collection and analysis, and initial manuscript writing. The professors supervised data analysis and final manuscript writing.

Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest in this study.

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