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Identifying the Competency Model Dimensions of Faculty Members (Case Study: Farhangian Universities in Tehran)

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: The objective of this study was to identify and delineate the competency model dimensions essential for faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. This research aimed to explore the specific competencies necessary to enhance the effectiveness and professional development of faculty in an educational setting.

Methodology: This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data from 29 faculty members across various departments at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. Theoretical saturation was achieved to ensure the comprehensiveness of the data collected. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts and identify key themes and categories representing faculty competencies.

Findings: Five main themes representing essential faculty competencies were identified: ethical competencies, scientific competencies, research competencies, communication competencies, and information technology competencies. Each theme comprised several categories detailing specific competencies, such as individual integrity, pedagogical expertise, research skills, interpersonal communication, and technological proficiency.

Conclusion: The study highlighted a comprehensive set of competencies required by faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran to effectively fulfill their educational roles. These competencies span across ethical considerations, scientific knowledge, research capabilities, communication skills, and technological adeptness. Addressing these competencies through targeted development programs could significantly enhance faculty performance and, consequently, student learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Faculty Competencies; Farhangian; Qualitative Research; Higher Education; Faculty Development; Educational Technology; Ethical Competencies; Scientific Competencies*

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1. Introduction

The evolving landscape of higher education necessitates ongoing faculty development to ensure that academic staff possess the requisite competencies to meet contemporary educational challenges (Deeb et al., 2019; Labrague et al., 2019; Mashayekhi & Mafinejad, 2022; Rampold et al., 2018). As universities intensify their focus on quality teaching, research, and community service, the competency models for faculty members become crucial frameworks for guiding professional growth and institutional alignment (Hejazi, 2020; Mahdian et al., 2021; Soleas et al., 2020).

Faculty development programs (FDPs) have increasingly become a focal point in academic literature, with numerous studies demonstrating their effectiveness in enhancing teaching, research, and administrative competencies (Bilal et al., 2019). These programs are designed not only to improve individual faculty performance but also to foster a culture of excellence within institutions. According to Ambarsarie, Mustika, and Soemantri (2019), such initiatives are most effective when they are closely aligned with the specific needs and professional contexts of their participants (Ambarsarie et al., 2019).

In Iran, recent research by Bazrafkan et al. (2023) has highlighted the diversity of learning styles and roles among faculty at medical universities, suggesting that development strategies should be tailored to accommodate these variations to maximize effectiveness (Bazrafkan et al., 2023). Similarly, Ghasemi et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of empowering faculty by enhancing their roles in educational settings through targeted development efforts. These studies underscore the critical need for FDPs that are not only comprehensive but also responsive to the dynamic requirements of academic roles (Ghasemi et al., 2023).

The concept of faculty competencies extends beyond the traditional realms of teaching and research. As Milner, Gusic, and Thorndyke (2011) argue, a well-rounded competency framework should include dimensions such as ethical and communication skills, which are vital for fostering a supportive and inclusive academic environment (Milner et al., 2011). This broader view is supported by Koskenvuori et al. (2018), who conducted a scoping review on healthcare professionals' ethical competence, highlighting its pivotal role in clinical and educational settings (Koskenvuori et al., 2018). Moreover, the integration of technology in education has brought additional competencies into focus. Martin, Budhrani, and Wang (2019) examined faculty perceptions of their readiness to teach online, revealing significant gaps that could impact the effectiveness of digital education initiatives. This finding points to the need for FDPs that address technological competencies, ensuring that faculty are equipped to handle both traditional and virtual classrooms (Martin et al., 2019).

Addressing the complexities of faculty development requires a nuanced understanding of how competencies are perceived and implemented within academic institutions. Paradis et al. (2018) found that while many educational frameworks articulate competencies clearly, there is often a disconnect between these frameworks and actual teaching practices (Paradis et al., 2018). This gap suggests that identifying and aligning faculty competencies with institutional goals remains a challenging yet essential task.

By situating the article within the broader discourse on faculty development and competency modeling—as discussed in the works of Hawkins et al. (2015) and Nottingham, Mazerolle, & Barrett (2017)— this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing faculty development practices and provides a localized insight into effective academic competencies, supporting the advancement of higher education in the region (Hawkins et al., 2015; Nottingham et al., 2017). In this context, our study explores the competency dimensions of faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran, using a qualitative approach to capture a comprehensive view of the competencies deemed most crucial by the faculty themselves. Through semi-structured interviews, this research aims to achieve theoretical saturation in understanding what competencies faculty members perceive as most vital for their professional roles and effectiveness.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the competency dimensions of faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the perceptions and experiences of faculty members regarding their competencies, which are complex and multidimensional phenomena.

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that a wide range of experiences and perspectives on faculty competencies were represented. Participants included both male and female

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Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology
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faculty members from various departments and faculties at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. The selection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that no new themes were emerging from the data.

All participants provided written informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participants were also assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in Persian. These interviews provided the flexibility necessary to explore deep insights into the faculty members' views and experiences while also allowing the research to remain focused on the study's objectives. The interview guide was designed to include open-ended questions that encouraged participants to discuss their views on necessary competencies, experiences in their roles, and perceptions of competency development.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidential nature of the process, and their informed consent was obtained.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method facilitated the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within data. The thematic analysis was conducted in several phases: initial coding, theme development, and refinement of themes. Coding was performed manually, and codes were grouped into potential themes that were reviewed, defined, and named in an iterative process that continued until a comprehensive set of themes that accurately reflected the data was developed.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were implemented. These included prolonged engagement with the data, peer debriefing, and member checking, where initial findings were shared with some participants for their validation. Additionally, detailed methodological documentation was maintained to enable transparency and reproducibility of the study.

3. Findings and Results

This study involved 29 faculty members from various departments at Farhangian Universities in Tehran, providing a diverse sample reflective of the academic community. The participants comprised 17 males (59%) and 12 females (41%), highlighting a balanced gender representation. The age distribution of the participants ranged from 28 to 65 years, with the majority (55%) falling within the 40-55 age group, indicative of a highly experienced faculty cohort. Academic ranks were varied, including 10 Assistant Professors (34%), 12 Associate Professors (41%), and 7 Full Professors (24%), ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives on competency dimensions.

Table 1

The Results of Thematic Analysis

Dimensions	Components	Indicators
Ethical Competencies	Individual	- Assertiveness in performing job duties- Work conscience- Persistence and tirelessness- Establishing justice in the classroom among students
		- Forgiving others' mistakes- Trustworthiness with students- Adhering to professional ethical principles- Spirit of justice and equality
		- Respect for all students and colleagues- Patience in dealing with others- Positive thinking towards people and events- Neat appearance
		- Logical and reasoned- Organized and punctual
	Social	- Acceptance of individual differences- Respect for all students and colleagues- Observance of academic norms
		- Spirit of cooperation and teamwork- Creating unity of procedure, strategy, policy, and goals among work groups
		- Positive thinking towards people and events- Attention to the developmental and ethical values of society
Scientific Competencies	Educational	- Self-awareness of course content and mastery over the subject- Holding a relevant educational degree
		- Conducting continuous assessments during, before, and after the educational course
		- Ability to use technology and teaching aids- Employing various methods and techniques for content delivery

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Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology
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		- Mastery of educational content- Considering the abilities and capacities of learners (gender, age, etc.)- Appropriate timing in presenting content
		- Having a lesson plan- Mastery and application of various modern teaching methods
Research Competencies	Research	- Ability to monitor new technologies and determine necessary skills- Ability to propose and implement skill-based projects to the university
		- Conducting theoretical and skill-based projects in their field of expertise- Writing scientific articles and books in their field of expertise
Communication Competencies	Interpersonal	- Showing warmth and acceptance towards others in the workplace- Avoiding judgmental attitudes towards others in the workplace
		- Being trustworthy- Clear and unambiguous communication with others- Skill in conducting joint educational work with colleagues
	Collective	- Skill in conducting joint research work with colleagues- Ability and willingness to work in a team with colleagues
		- Sense of responsibility towards colleagues- Helping colleagues when needed- Getting help from colleagues when needed
		- Interaction with colleagues and participation in scientific communities- Having a reciprocal and respectful relationship with colleagues and stakeholders
Information Technology Competencies	Software	- Development of knowledge structures vs non-knowledge structures in software- Access for all staff to software technology in the organization
		- Presence of secure electronic systems for recording experiences and knowledge- Necessary software for creating virtual discussion forums
	Hardware	- Development of knowledge structures vs non-knowledge structures in hardware- Access for all professors to hardware technology at the university
		- Presence of secure hardware for creating virtual discussion forums- Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the university's hardware systems

This study revealed a complex framework of competency dimensions, components, and indicators critical for faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. The thematic analysis identified five main dimensions of competencies: Ethical, Scientific, Research, Communication, and Information Technology. Each dimension encompasses specific components and a series of indicators, which are supported by excerpts from the interviews conducted.

3.1. Ethical Competencies

Ethical competencies were frequently emphasized by the participants, highlighting traits such as assertiveness, work conscience, and persistence. As one interviewee stated, "Being persistent and having a strong work ethic are essential to establishing justice and fairness in the classroom," which illustrates the importance placed on these qualities. Further indicators include the adherence to professional ethics, such as fairness, respect, and patience in interactions, with one faculty member remarking, "Respect for all students and colleagues is non-negotiable in creating an inclusive learning environment."

3.2. Scientific Competencies

Participants expressed that scientific competencies are fundamental to their roles, focusing on thorough knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to effectively convey it. Indicators such as mastery over educational content, continuous assessments, and the use of various teaching aids were noted. "The ability to adapt teaching methods to the needs of students is crucial," noted one participant, highlighting the dynamic nature of educational delivery.

3.3. Research Competencies

Research competencies were identified as pivotal, with skills in monitoring new technologies and executing research projects being highlighted. "Engaging with the latest research and integrating it into practical applications is a key part of our job," a participant explained. This includes the ability to write scientific articles and books, as well as manage and implement skill-based projects.

3.4. Communication Competencies

Effective communication was another critical competency, encompassing clear, trustworthy interactions and the ability to work collaboratively. "Clear communication builds trust and facilitates better educational and research outcomes," one interviewee emphasized. This category also covers the ability to engage in constructive and respectful interactions with colleagues and students.

3.5. Information Technology Competencies

Lastly, competencies in information technology, divided into software and hardware, were highlighted as essential for modern educational environments. Participants noted the importance of having access to and being able to use relevant

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Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology
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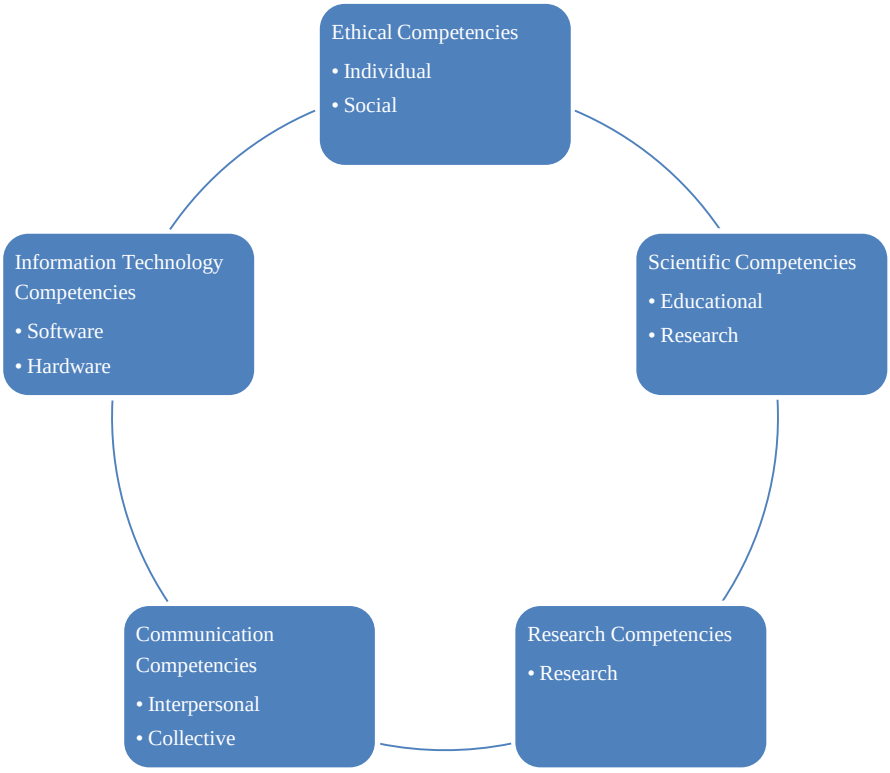
technologies. "Staying updated with the latest software and hardware not only enhances our teaching capabilities but also ensures we are effective educators," a respondent commented.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Study



4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study identified five main themes representing the competencies necessary for faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran. The themes include Ethical Competencies, Scientific Competencies, Research Competencies, Communication Competencies, and Information Technology Competencies. Each main theme comprises several categories that capture the specific aspects of the broader competency dimension, providing a nuanced understanding of faculty capabilities.

The theme of Ethical Competencies includes categories such as Individual Integrity and Social Responsibility. Individual Integrity focuses on personal attributes such as assertiveness in job duties, work conscience, and persistence. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining ethical standards in personal conduct and decision-making. Social Responsibility encompasses adherence to professional ethics, fairness in student interactions, and a commitment to equality and respect within the academic community. This category highlights the role of faculty members in fostering an inclusive and ethically sound learning environment.

Under Scientific Competencies, two key categories were identified: Pedagogical Expertise and Subject Mastery. Pedagogical Expertise refers to the skills and knowledge required to effectively teach and engage students, including the use of various teaching methods and continuous assessment strategies. Subject Mastery involves a deep understanding of the subject area, evidenced by the faculty's ability to convey complex ideas clearly and authoritatively. This category is crucial for ensuring that the educational content delivered is both accurate and intellectually stimulating.

The Research Competencies theme is divided into Research Skills and Scholarly Contribution. Research Skills encompass the abilities necessary for conducting robust academic research, such as knowledge of research methodologies and data analysis techniques. Scholarly Contribution involves the application of research findings to further knowledge in the field, including publishing papers and participating in academic conferences. This category

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Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology
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underscores the importance of ongoing scholarly engagement and contribution to the academic community.

Communication Competencies consist of Interpersonal Communication and Collaborative Engagement. Interpersonal Communication covers the skills needed to effectively communicate with students, colleagues, and the broader academic community, emphasizing clarity, empathy, and responsiveness. Collaborative Engagement refers to the ability to work effectively within teams, including joint teaching, research projects, and administrative tasks. This category highlights the collaborative nature of academic work and the importance of building and maintaining productive relationships.

Finally, Information Technology Competencies are categorized into Technological Proficiency and Digital Literacy. Technological Proficiency entails the skills required to utilize educational technology and digital tools effectively in teaching and research. Digital Literacy focuses on understanding and leveraging digital platforms for communication, collaboration, and information dissemination. This theme reflects the increasing integration of technology in education and the need for faculty to be adept at using digital resources to enhance learning and research outcomes.

The strong emphasis on ethical competencies identified in our study is aligned with global educational trends that prioritize integrity, fairness, and respect in academic settings (Koskenvuori et al., 2018). The participants highlighted the necessity of ethical behavior not only in their interactions with students but also in maintaining professionalism and confidentiality, which are essential for fostering a trustworthy educational environment. These findings resonate with those of Ambarsarie, Mustika, and Soemantri (2019), who underscore the importance of need-based models in faculty development that reinforce ethical standards in medical education (Ambarsarie et al., 2019).

Scientific competencies were particularly emphasized, with participants noting the importance of subject mastery and the ability to effectively impart knowledge. This aspect is crucial, as highlighted by Milner, Gusic, and Thorndyke (2011), who argue that a faculty's expertise in their subject area directly influences their teaching efficacy and, by extension, student outcomes (Milner et al., 2011). The need for continuous learning and adaptation to new educational methodologies reflects a growing recognition of the dynamic nature of pedagogical content knowledge as discussed by Bilal, Guraya, and Chen (2019), who found that faculty development programs significantly enhance teaching skills (Bilal et al., 2019).

Our findings also underscored the importance of research competencies, which include the ability to conduct meaningful research and contribute to the academic community's knowledge base. This is consistent with the views of Hawkins et al. (2015), who stress the importance of research skills in competency-based medical education (Hawkins et al., 2015). The ability to integrate research with teaching and community service is increasingly recognized as a hallmark of a well-rounded academic, supporting the advancement of both theory and practice in educational settings.

Communication competencies emerged as a pivotal theme, with clear and effective communication being recognized as fundamental to successful teaching and collaboration. This finding is supported by the work of Ghasemi et al. (2023), who highlighted the role of communication skills in enhancing educational outcomes (Ghasemi et al., 2023). Effective communication is not only about conveying information but also about fostering relationships and facilitating academic and administrative processes within universities.

Finally, the emphasis on information technology competencies reflects the increasing integration of digital tools in education. Martin, Budhrani, and Wang (2019) have highlighted the growing necessity for faculty to be proficient in online teaching platforms and digital communication tools, a need that has only been amplified by the recent shifts towards virtual learning environments (Martin et al., 2019). The competency to adapt and utilize technology effectively is now recognized as essential for contemporary educators, facilitating a more flexible and accessible learning experience for students.

This study successfully identified the crucial dimensions of competency models for faculty members at Farhangian Universities in Tehran, encompassing ethical, scientific, research, communication, and information technology competencies. These competencies are deemed essential for faculty members to effectively fulfill their roles in education, research, and community service. Ethical competencies emphasized the importance of integrity and professionalism, while scientific competencies highlighted the need for deep knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Research competencies were centered around the capability to conduct impactful studies, whereas communication competencies focused on the ability to convey information clearly and foster interpersonal relationships. Lastly, information

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Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology
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technology competencies underscored the necessity for faculty members to be adept with digital tools, crucial in today's increasingly virtual learning environments.

The findings of this study underline the multifaceted nature of faculty roles within Farhangian Universities in Tehran, illustrating a broad spectrum of competencies that are essential for their success. By delineating these competencies, the study not only contributes to the academic literature but also serves as a guide for developing targeted faculty development programs. These programs can be instrumental in enhancing faculty performance and ultimately improving the quality of education offered.

Despite its insights, this study has several limitations. The sample size, although sufficient for qualitative saturation, was limited to faculty members from Farhangian Universities in Tehran, which may not fully represent the diversity of academic environments across different regions or disciplines. Additionally, the study relied solely on semi-structured interviews, which, while rich in detail, might not capture all aspects of faculty competencies that could be observed through other methods such as classroom observations or peer reviews.

Future research should consider expanding the demographic and geographic scope of the study to include a more diverse range of universities and disciplines. This expansion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the required faculty competencies across different educational contexts. Moreover, employing a mixed-methods approach could enrich the data, combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures to provide a more robust analysis of faculty competencies.

The study's implications for practice are significant, suggesting that universities should consider these identified competencies when designing faculty development programs. Specifically, these programs should not only focus on enhancing teaching and research skills but also on developing ethical decision-making, effective communication, and digital proficiency. Implementing such comprehensive development initiatives could lead to more effective education strategies, improved student outcomes, and a more adaptive and innovative academic staff. Furthermore, policymakers and educational leaders could use these findings to revise and enhance recruitment and evaluation criteria for faculty members, aligning them more closely with the identified competencies.

Authors' Contributions

In this study, the authors collectively were responsible for data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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