

**EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS FOR DEVELOPING THE PROFESSIONAL
COMPETENCE OF DEPUTY DIRECTORS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF
UZBEKISTAN**

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Abstract:The quality of general secondary education increasingly depends not only on teachers' instructional performance but also on the professional competence of school leaders who coordinate, monitor, and improve the teaching-learning process. In this regard, deputy directors for academic affairs occupy a strategically important position, as they connect national education policy, school-level management, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, lesson observation, assessment, and data-based decision-making. This article examines effective mechanisms for developing the professional competence of deputy directors in secondary schools. The study is based on a qualitative conceptual analysis of international research on school leadership, continuous professional development, instructional leadership, and competence-based management, with particular attention to the reform context of Uzbekistan. The findings show that the professional growth of deputy directors becomes effective when it is organized as a systematic and continuous process rather than as occasional training. The article proposes a model consisting of diagnostic needs assessment, individual professional development planning, modular training, mentoring and coaching, school-based practice, professional learning communities, digital monitoring, reflective portfolios, and performance-based feedback. These mechanisms can strengthen managerial, pedagogical, analytical, communicative, digital, and reflective competencies of deputy directors. The article concludes that developing deputy directors' professional competence is a key condition for improving school governance, supporting teachers, and ensuring sustainable educational quality.

Keywords: deputy director, professional competence, academic affairs, continuous professional development, instructional leadership, school management, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

In modern education systems, school leadership is no longer understood only as administrative control or document-based management. It is increasingly viewed as a professional activity that directly and indirectly influences the quality of teaching, teacher development, student learning, and school improvement. International studies on school leadership emphasize that effective leaders create a shared vision, support teachers, organize professional learning, use evidence for decision-making, and build a positive learning environment. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins argue that school leadership has a significant effect on the organizational conditions that influence teaching and learning, while Day and Sammons highlight instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership as important dimensions of successful school improvement.

In the context of secondary schools, the deputy director for academic affairs performs a particularly important role. While the school principal usually carries overall institutional responsibility, the deputy director for academic affairs is directly involved in curriculum implementation, lesson quality monitoring, teacher support, methodological work, assessment coordination, academic planning, and analysis of learning outcomes. Therefore, the deputy director is not merely an assistant to the principal; rather, this position functions as a bridge between policy and classroom practice, between strategic planning and daily pedagogical activity.

The relevance of this issue is also connected with the educational reforms currently being implemented in Uzbekistan. The National Program for the Development of School Education in 2022-2026 emphasizes the implementation of a national curriculum based on advanced international experience, the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials, and the development of modern school models that correspond to international standards. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" also identifies priority of education, continuity of education, equal opportunities, and humanistic and democratic principles as important foundations of the national education system. These reforms require not only updated curricula and resources but also professionally competent school leaders who can translate reform ideas into practical school-level improvement.

However, the professional competence of deputy directors cannot develop automatically through years of experience alone. Experience may become valuable only when it is combined with reflection, feedback, evidence-based learning, mentoring, and continuous professional development. OECD TALIS findings also show that teachers and school leaders need lifelong professional learning in order to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and professional identity. In this sense, the development of deputy directors' professional competence should be considered a strategic component of educational quality assurance.

The problem is that in many school systems, professional development for middle-level school leaders is often fragmented, short-term, and insufficiently connected with real school problems. Training courses may provide theoretical knowledge, but they do not always lead to practical improvement in leadership behavior, teacher support, lesson observation, or data-based decision-making. For this reason, it is necessary to identify effective mechanisms that can develop deputy directors' competence in a systematic, practice-oriented, and measurable way.

The purpose of this article is to analyze and propose effective mechanisms for developing the professional competence of deputy directors for academic affairs in secondary schools. The article addresses the following research questions:

1. What competencies are essential for deputy directors for academic affairs in modern secondary schools?
2. Which mechanisms can effectively support the continuous professional development of deputy directors?
3. How can these mechanisms be organized into an integrated model suitable for school improvement?

Materials and Methods

This article is based on a qualitative conceptual research design. The study uses document analysis, theoretical synthesis, and comparative interpretation of international and national sources related to school leadership, professional competence, continuous professional development, and instructional leadership. The methodological basis of the article includes competence-based theory, instructional leadership theory, professional learning theory, and reflective practice.

The reviewed literature includes international research on school leadership and professional development, particularly the works of Hallinger and Murphy, Leithwood, Day and Sammons, Fullan, Desimone, Guskey, Darling-Hammond and colleagues, and OECD and UNESCO reports. Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model is especially relevant because it identifies such leadership functions as framing school goals, supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, and promoting teachers' professional development.

Professional development theory was analyzed through Desimone's framework, which identifies content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation as core features of effective professional development. Guskey's model was also used because it explains professional change as a process in which professional development leads to changes in practice, which then influence learning outcomes and professional beliefs. Darling-Hammond,

Hyler, and Gardner's review of effective professional development was used to strengthen the practical interpretation of CPD mechanisms, as their study reviewed rigorous evidence linking professional learning with changes in teaching practice and student outcomes.

The study did not involve experimental data collection. Instead, it offers a theoretical and practical model that can be used as a basis for further empirical research, pilot training programs, or dissertation-based experimental work. The analysis followed three stages: first, the key responsibilities of deputy directors for academic affairs were identified; second, the competencies required for these responsibilities were classified; third, effective mechanisms for competence development were synthesized into an integrated model.

Results

The professional competence of deputy directors for academic affairs can be defined as an integrated capacity to organize, coordinate, monitor, evaluate, and improve the educational process through managerial knowledge, pedagogical expertise, analytical thinking, communication skills, digital literacy, ethical responsibility, and reflective practice. This competence is not limited to knowing regulations or preparing documents. It includes the ability to make informed decisions, support teachers, analyze learning outcomes, organize methodological assistance, and lead educational improvement.

Table 1

Competence	Description	Practical manifestation
Managerial competence	Ability to plan, organize, coordinate, and monitor academic processes	Annual plans, lesson schedules, internal control, academic reporting
Pedagogical competence	Understanding of curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, and lesson quality	Lesson observation, teacher support, methodological guidance
Analytical competence	Ability to use data for decision-making	Analysis of student results, attendance, assessment, teacher performance
Communicative competence	Ability to interact effectively with teachers, parents, students, and administration	Meetings, feedback conversations, conflict resolution
Digital competence	Ability to use digital platforms and educational technologies	Digital monitoring, e-documentation, online resources, data dashboards
Reflective competence	Ability to evaluate one's own practice and improve it continuously	Reflective journals, portfolios, self-assessment, professional goals

These components show that deputy directors need a multidimensional professional profile. They are expected to be managers, instructional leaders, mentors, analysts, communicators, and lifelong learners at the same time. Therefore, their professional development should also be multidimensional.

The first effective mechanism is professional diagnostic assessment. Without identifying the real professional needs of deputy directors, training may become formal and ineffective. Needs assessment should evaluate the deputy director's knowledge, skills, leadership behavior, digital readiness, communication style, and ability to support teachers.

A professional diagnostic system may include self-assessment questionnaires, 360-degree feedback, analysis of school documentation, interviews, lesson observation reports, teacher feedback, and performance indicators. The purpose of diagnosis is not punishment or criticism, but professional growth. It helps answer the question: "Which competencies should be developed first?"

For example, one deputy director may need support in data analysis, while another may need improvement in giving constructive feedback to teachers. A third may be strong in documentation but weak in instructional leadership. Therefore, the diagnostic mechanism makes professional development individualized and meaningful.

The second mechanism is the creation of an individual CPD plan. After diagnosis, each deputy director should have a personalized development plan that includes professional goals, expected outcomes, learning activities, required resources, timeline, and evaluation criteria. This plan should be realistic, measurable, and directly connected with the deputy director's school responsibilities.

Such planning transforms professional development from a general training requirement into a personal growth trajectory. It also increases professional responsibility because the deputy director becomes an active participant in his or her own development rather than a passive listener in training sessions.

The third mechanism is modular training. Traditional training often provides too much general theory and too little practical application. For deputy directors, training should be organized in modules that reflect their real duties. Each module should combine theory, case studies, practical tasks, simulation, reflection, and assessment.

Modular training is effective because it allows competence development step by step. It also makes learning flexible. Deputy directors do not need the same training at the same time; they need training that corresponds to their diagnostic results and school context.

The fourth mechanism is mentoring and coaching. Training alone is not enough to change professional behavior. Deputy directors need support while applying new knowledge in real school situations. Mentoring can be provided by experienced school leaders, trainers, or supervisors. Coaching can focus on specific skills such as lesson observation, feedback, data interpretation, or team leadership.

Mentoring is especially useful for newly appointed deputy directors. It helps them understand professional expectations, avoid common mistakes, and develop confidence. Coaching, on the other hand, is more targeted and performance-based. A coach may observe how a deputy director conducts a teacher feedback conversation and then provide recommendations for improvement.

This mechanism is supported by the broader idea that leadership development should be practical and workplace-based. UNESCO's recent leadership-focused Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes that professional development should help school leaders clarify roles, delegate responsibilities, empower colleagues, and develop practical leadership capacity.

The fifth mechanism is school-based practice. Professional competence develops most effectively when learning is connected with real school problems. Therefore, deputy directors should be encouraged to conduct small-scale action research projects in their own schools.

For instance, a deputy director may investigate why students' achievement in a particular subject is declining, why teachers struggle with formative assessment, or why lesson observation feedback does not lead to improvement. The deputy director can collect data, analyze causes, plan an intervention, implement it, and evaluate the results.

This mechanism develops analytical, managerial, and reflective competencies at the same time. It also changes the deputy director's role from controller to improvement leader. Instead of simply identifying problems, the deputy director learns to solve them through evidence-based action.

Guskey's approach to professional development evaluation is useful here because it emphasizes that professional learning should be linked with organizational support, use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes. Therefore, the effectiveness of deputy directors' professional development should be measured through multiple indicators, including teacher feedback, school documentation quality, instructional monitoring, student progress, and reflective evidence.

Performance-based evaluation should be developmental rather than punitive. Its purpose is to identify growth, provide feedback, and plan the next stage of professional learning.

Discussion

The results of this conceptual analysis show that developing the professional competence of deputy directors requires a systemic approach. Individual mechanisms are useful, but their effect becomes stronger when they are integrated. For example, modular training is more effective when it is based on diagnostic results. Mentoring is more meaningful when it supports school-based practice. Digital monitoring becomes useful when it informs feedback and decision-making. Reflective portfolios become stronger when they are linked with performance-based evaluation.

Therefore, the proposed integrated model can be presented as follows:

Professional diagnosis → Individual CPD plan → Modular training → Mentoring and coaching → School-based practice → Digital monitoring → Reflective portfolio → Performance-based feedback → Continuous improvement

This model reflects the logic of continuous professional development. It begins with identifying needs and ends with renewed professional growth. In reality, the process does not stop; it continues as a cycle. After feedback, new needs are identified, and the next stage of development begins.

The proposed model also corresponds to international trends in school leadership. Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model shows that effective school leaders should focus on goals, curriculum, instruction, student progress, and teacher development. Similarly, OECD and UNESCO reports emphasize that school leaders need preparation, professional learning, and practical leadership competencies in order to improve education quality.

For Uzbekistan, this issue is especially important because current reforms require school leaders who can implement the national curriculum, support teachers, improve educational quality, and use modern approaches to management. The National Program for the Development of School Education in 2022-2026 stresses the need to introduce modern school models and improve the quality of the teaching staff. Deputy directors for academic affairs are directly involved in these tasks; therefore, their professional competence is a practical condition for reform implementation.

One of the main problems in traditional professional development is its separation from school reality. If deputy directors attend training but return to schools without mentoring, practical tasks, feedback, or monitoring, the effect of training may remain limited. This is why effective mechanisms should be practice-based. The deputy director should not only learn about instructional leadership but also practice it through lesson observation, teacher coaching, data analysis, and school improvement projects.

Another important issue is the shift from control-oriented management to support-oriented leadership. In many schools, lesson observation is still associated with inspection and criticism. However, modern instructional leadership requires developmental feedback. The deputy director should help teachers improve, not only identify mistakes. This requires communicative competence, emotional intelligence, pedagogical knowledge, and ethical responsibility.

Digital competence is also becoming increasingly important. Modern deputy directors need to manage information efficiently, analyze data, and make timely decisions. However, digital tools alone do not guarantee quality. A digital platform becomes meaningful only when it supports professional judgment, collaboration, and improvement. Therefore, deputy directors should be trained not only in technical use of digital systems but also in interpreting data and applying it to pedagogical decisions.

Reflective competence deserves special attention. Without reflection, professional activity may become routine. A reflective deputy director asks: Why did this problem occur? How effective was my decision? What evidence supports my conclusion? What should I do differently next time? Such questions develop professional maturity and prevent mechanical management.

The development of deputy directors' professional competence also requires institutional support. Regional pedagogical mastery centers, school principals, district education departments, and higher education institutions can cooperate in creating professional development programs. These programs should be continuous, evidence-based, and connected with real school improvement goals.

Conclusion

The professional competence of deputy directors for academic affairs is one of the key factors influencing the quality of general secondary education. Deputy directors are responsible for organizing and improving the academic process, supporting teachers, monitoring instruction, analyzing learning outcomes, and implementing educational reforms at the school level. Therefore, their competence should be developed through systematic and effective mechanisms.

This article has identified major mechanisms for developing deputy directors' professional competence. These mechanisms should not function separately; they should be integrated into a continuous professional development cycle.

The proposed model suggests that competence development should begin with diagnosis, continue through personalized and practice-oriented learning, and be strengthened through mentoring, reflection, monitoring, and feedback. Such an approach can develop deputy directors' managerial, pedagogical, analytical, communicative, digital, and reflective competencies.

For the education system of Uzbekistan, the development of deputy directors' professional competence is especially relevant because national reforms require strong school-level leadership. Effective deputy directors can help transform policy goals into practical improvements in teaching, learning, assessment, teacher support, and school culture.

Future empirical research may test the proposed model through experimental or quasi-experimental design. For example, deputy directors from different districts may participate in a structured CPD program, and their professional competence can be measured before and after the intervention using surveys, interviews, lesson observation analysis, teacher feedback, and school performance indicators. Such research would provide stronger evidence for the practical effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms.

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