

Research Article

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How Can Core Competencies of School Principals Be Leveraged to Achieve Outstanding School Performance?

Nesreen S. M. Salah El-Din , Fathi M. Abunaser , Khalsa S. Al-Harthi , Rashid Sulaiman Hamdan Al-Fahadi

Abstract

Background/Purpose. This study explores the role of core competencies in enhancing school performance in Omani schools. Despite their significance, core competencies have not been officially recognized within the Omani educational system. The research aims to assess how these competencies utilized in school management and their impact on addressing daily challenges and emergencies. It also highlights the need for a structured framework to systematically apply core competencies in schools.

Materials/Methods. The study employed a qualitative research approach, collecting data through interviews with 45 school principals, conducted either directly or via Zoom. Data analysis was performed using MAXQDA software during the 2024–2025 academic year.

Results. Findings revealed that core competencies play a crucial role in improving school performance, particularly in crisis management and the implementation of urgent programs. However, their use remains informal mainly and non-strategic. The study identified a lack of an official definition and structured framework for utilizing core competencies, leading to inconsistent application across schools.

Conclusion. The study underscores the importance of establishing a conceptual and administrative framework to document and systematically apply core competencies in schools. It recommends developing standardized tools for diagnosing and documenting competencies, fostering a culture of institutional achievement documentation, and conducting further research on the impact of core competencies on student academic performance.

1. Introduction

The concept of core competencies in educational institutions has evolved significantly in recent years, and the topic has received significant attention in recent research, particularly in the context of evolving educational models influenced by technological advances and the knowledge-based economy. The concept of core competencies has revealed a clear discrepancy between the opinions of researchers and writers across various organizational sectors, including industry, commerce, education, and others. Despite the divergent opinions, there is broad agreement that the concept of core competencies stems from the existence of benefits that help an organization survive, grow, and excel.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman recognizes the vital role of education in implementing national policies and directions and in achieving the aspirations of Omani society. In this regard, the National Strategy for Education (2040) emphasizes that the country's economic and social growth depends on the education system's ability to cultivate a culture of creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, opportunity utilization, and the application of core competencies (Education Council, 2018). The Omani education system is centralized; however, the recently enacted School Education Law marks a new qualitative phase where schools play a central role in improving their own performance (Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2023). This is based on the School Self-Improvement System, which aims to build schools' capacities, enable them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and support their development, in addition to external evaluations conducted by an independent authority—the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education. These evaluations focus on five key areas: leadership, management, and governance; school climate; quality of teaching and assessment; academic achievement; and students' personal development (Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, 2024). Thus, schools' focus on core competencies represents a genuine opportunity for continuous improvement in their performance and for achieving a strong competitive reputation.

1.1. Study Problem

Omani teachers are among the most valuable assets of the education system. Most teachers in Omani schools are young professionals with early-stage career experience, demonstrating enthusiasm, energy, and a strong capacity for learning and development. They possess the potential to contribute significantly to the educational system's success (Ministry of Education and Federation of New Zealand Educational Organizations, 2017). Teachers undergo strategic professional development programs at the Specialized Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, which lasts for an academic year and aims to enhance their competencies and ensure their meaningful contribution to educational transformation and professional development in schools (Ministry of Education in Oman, 2016). To further motivate teachers' competencies, the Ministry of Education has established the "Educational Excellence Award for Omani Teachers," which is granted every two academic years to distinguished teachers based on a set of criteria, including creativity in utilizing technology, developing educational resources, participating in student support initiatives, improving the classroom environment, engaging in self-directed professional development, and initiating family and community engagement to support student learning (Ministry of Education in Oman, 2018). Additionally, Omani teachers are actively involved in various school committees, such as the "School Development and Improvement Team," the "Student Affairs Committee," and the "School Crisis Management Team." Through these teams, teachers have the opportunity to display their talents, creativity, and unique capabilities, propose innovative ideas for school development, and contribute to constructive solutions to school challenges (Ministry of Education in Oman, 2019).

However, the Omani education system lacks a clear, structured framework for defining and integrating core competencies into schools. Despite this, school administrations strive to utilize the

skills and capabilities of their teaching staff to enhance school performance and strengthen their reputation within the educational and local communities. These efforts coincide with several challenges facing the education system, including limited focus on organizational and developmental tools necessary for creating positive working environments in schools, a reliance on routine practices by teachers as the default approach to teaching, and inconsistencies in data and information utilization, which affect the effectiveness of educational processes. Furthermore, Omani teachers face declining morale due to the lack of systematic recognition of their achievements, along with disparities in workload distribution—some teachers bear a full teaching load with extensive responsibilities, while others have lighter schedules and fewer duties (Ministry of Education and Federation of New Zealand Educational Organizations, 2017). These challenges are likely to impact the effectiveness of core competencies in schools. This study aims to explore and understand the concept of core competencies from the perspective of Omani school principals and the mechanisms used to identify them. Additionally, it seeks to analyse how these competencies are employed to improve school performance by examining administrative and educational practices that enhance efficiency and effectiveness within educational institutions. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1.2. Research Questions

- How do Omani school principals perceive the concept of core competencies, and how are they identified?
- How are core competencies utilized to improve the performance of Omani schools?

Study Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to enriching the educational literature on the concept of core competencies by highlighting how school principals perceive this concept and the mechanisms for identifying it. Additionally, the study provides a knowledge framework that can assist researchers and policymakers in developing administrative and educational strategies based on core competencies. From a practical perspective, the study offers applied insights into how core competencies can be utilized to improve the performance of Omani schools by enhancing effective leadership, increasing the efficiency of administrative and educational processes, and fostering a more productive school environment that adapts to modern challenges.

2. Literature Review

The concept of core competencies emerged in the field of management through the research of Prahalad & Hamel (2009), who described core competencies from an organizational perspective, linking them to an organization's ability for collective learning, resource and skill coordination, and work techniques within the organization to deliver the best value and provide a true competitive advantage. Similarly, Scholes, Johnson, & Whittington (2008) defined them as the interconnected activities and processes through which resources are deployed and distributed to achieve the organization's competitive advantage, enhancing its ability to address critical success factors and better fulfill stakeholder needs compared to similar organizations in ways that are difficult for competitors to imitate.

Kim, Park, and Choi (2017) described core competencies as the individual and collective knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours in work, processes, and organizational capabilities that drive high organizational performance and provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Meanwhile, Kibugi, Githaiga, and Omariba (2023) defined them as the knowledge and skills possessed by employees and shared across different organizational units to contribute to the organization's efficiency.

The literature on strategic management and human resource management has shown variation in defining the concept of core competencies. Strategic management specialists view core competencies as an organization's ability to effectively utilize its resources to achieve a competitive advantage (Scholes, Johnson, & Whittington, 2008; Kim, Park & Choi, 2017; Meredith & Shafer, 2019). In contrast, human resource management experts associate them with employees' personal attributes, unique capabilities, and behaviors related to superior job performance (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006; Kibugi, Githaiga & Omariba, 2023), based on the assumption that human resources and intellectual capital are the most critical elements in creating core competencies (Kibugi, Githaiga & Omariba, 2023).

Chen and Chang (2011) discussed the relationship between organizational competencies and human competencies and how they interact to achieve the organization's competitive advantage (Figure 1). The first pathway represents the interaction and integration between an organization's core competencies and individual human competencies. The second pathway highlights organizational contexts (such as vision and mission, policies, shared values, and organizational culture) that enhance interaction, integration, and adaptation between organizational and individual human competencies. The third pathway illustrates core competencies linked to human competencies as a source of competitive advantage for the organization.

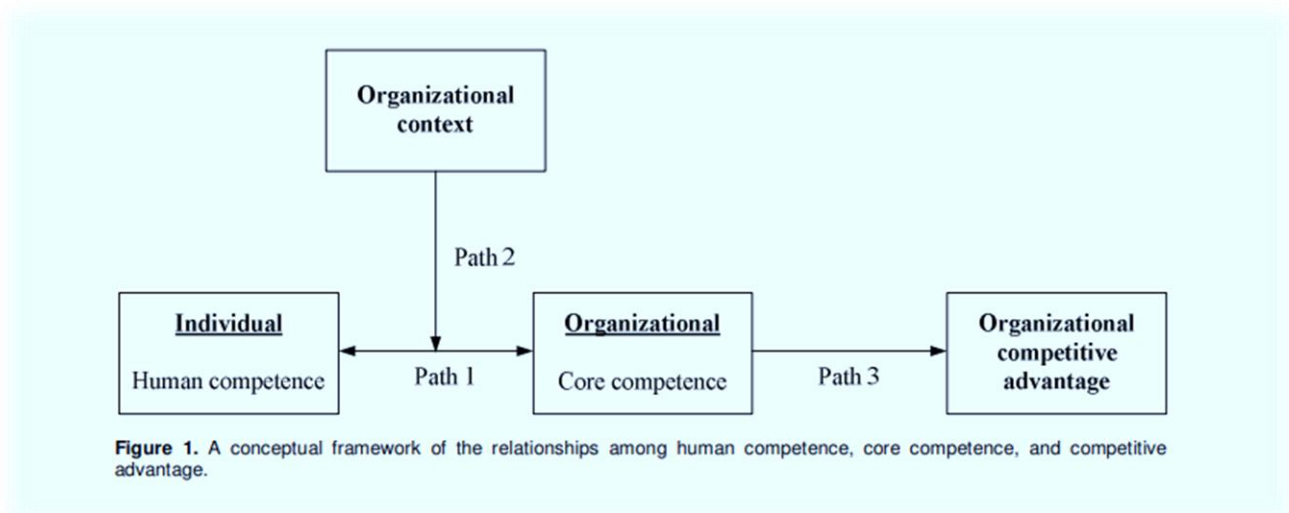


Figure 1. Relationship Between Organizational Competencies and Human Competencies (chen&chang,2011).

From the above discussion, the concept of core competencies can be summarized as the unique strengths, capabilities, and resources that an organization possesses, forming the foundation for building and enhancing its benefit. These competencies encompass tangible resources (such as organizational, physical, financial, and human resources) and intangible resources (such as employees' knowledge, informal networks, organizational culture, organizational reputation, and intellectual property). Naturally, the emphasis on these resources varies depending on the organization's activities and operations (Li, Clark & Sillince, 2018). The core competency perspective emphasizes focusing on valuable, rare, and non-transferable resources to provide a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization (Kabue & Kilika, 2016). Prahalad & Hamel (2009) identified three key criteria for core competencies in organizations: they should be difficult for competitors to imitate, widely reusable across the organization to maximize benefits, and capable of delivering added value that results in greater benefits for stakeholders.

In the context of schools, core competencies can play a crucial role in enhancing educational outcomes, reputation, school effectiveness, and student academic performance. Omweri (2024)

found that core competencies, institutional culture, and the effective use of resources significantly contribute to improving academic performance in schools. Similarly, Bantoc and Yazon (2023) revealed that behavioral core competencies are key predictors of teacher performance, reinforcing the idea that strengthening these competencies can lead to better educational outcomes. Li et al. (2024) also identified a strong relationship between teachers' digital competencies and their performance. Drago et al. (2022), through a systematic literature review, demonstrated that dynamic competencies and strategic behavior influence organizational performance, highlighting that core competencies are not static but must be continuously developed and adapted to maintain a competitive edge in a dynamic environment. Agha et al. (2012) emphasized the critical role of core competencies in formulating effective competitive strategies, noting that shared vision, collaboration, and empowerment (as dimensions of core competencies) significantly impact competitive advantage and organizational performance. Sumantri et al. (2023) found that dynamic competencies positively influence competitive advantage, innovation performance, and creative capabilities. Sudrajat (2014) demonstrated that leadership, competency, and human capital directly affect competitive advantage, with additional indirect effects through knowledge, technology, and innovation. Similarly, the findings of Dewi et al. (2023) and Kibugi, Githaiga, and Omariba (2023) confirmed the significant positive impact of leadership capabilities and core competencies on organizational performance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to achieve its objectives, aiming to explore the perspectives of school principals and their assistants regarding core competencies and their role in improving school performance. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploratory studies of this nature, as it allows participants to express their experiences and provide an in-depth understanding of topics related to core competencies. Since qualitative research takes place in the natural environment where the phenomenon under study exists (Creswell et al., 2003), it provides researchers with practical experience and a valuable opportunity to understand the context in which participants interact, as well as the influence of this context on their perceptions and behaviors (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting the studied phenomenon by uncovering the meanings behind events to achieve a deeper comprehension (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This is accomplished by examining participants' experiences and perceptions related to the phenomenon. This approach differs from quantitative research, which primarily relies on numerical measurement of the phenomenon without delving into its deeper understanding through direct engagement with it in its natural setting.

3.1. Study Sample

The process of selecting the study sample involved two stages. The first stage focused on determining the geographical areas covered in the study. The researchers aimed to expand the scope of the research to include different regions across Oman, hoping to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study and to explore the extent of agreement or variation in perspectives among participants from different areas. Consequently, the study included participants from the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiyah, Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah, and Musandam. The second stage involved selecting the individuals who would participate in the study. A purposive sampling technique was used in line with the qualitative research approach, which allows researchers to select individuals who are expected to contribute significantly to understanding the research problem and answering the study questions (Creswell et al., 2003). As Patton (2002) suggests, purposive sampling is associated with selecting information-rich cases that can provide in-depth insights into key research issues (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Since the aim of this study is not to generalize findings but rather to gain a clear and deep understanding of the reality of core

competencies, their role, ways to develop them, and the challenges hindering their application in Omani schools, the sample included school principals and their assistants with diverse experiences in education. They were selected based on their ability to provide perspectives relevant to the study's objectives. Participants were contacted personally, and the purpose of the study was explained to them before obtaining their consent to participate.

The final sample consisted of 45 participants from the seven governorates, distributed as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Study Sample

Characteristic	Measure	Frequency	%	Total
Gender of Principal	Male	17	37.78	45
	Female	28	62.22	
Governorate	Muscat	28	62.22	45
	North Al Batinah	1	2.22	
	South Al Batinah	6	13.33	
	North Al Sharqiyah	1	2.22	
	Dhofar	1	2.22	
	Al Dakhiliyah	7	15.56	
	Musandam	1	2.22	
Experience in the Present School	< 5 years	9	20.00	45
	5 – <10 years	15	33.33	
	10 – <15 years	12	26.67	
	> 15 years	9	20.00	
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's	28	62.22	45
	Master's	15	33.33	
	PhD	2	4.44	

Table 1 illustrates the demographic diversity of the study sample in terms of gender, geographical location, experience, and educational qualifications, making the study's findings reflective of the reality in Oman. For the purpose of this study, each participant was assigned a coded identifier. For example, the code (M5) represents "Principal 5." All participants preferred to remain anonymous and chose to be identified using coded labels instead of their real names.

3.2. Data Collection

Personal interviews used as the primary data collection tool. The interviews included open-ended questions focusing on core competencies, such as how Omani school principals perceive the concept, how they identify core competencies, and how these competencies are utilized to improve school performance. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach, allowing researchers to ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses to ensure comprehensive coverage of

different aspects of the study. The semi-structured format was chosen due to its flexibility, which enables researchers to begin with a set of pre-prepared questions while also exploring emerging topics of interest during the conversation (O’Leary, 2005, p. 164). Regarding the interview process, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the Department of Educational Studies and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Education, school principals and their assistants were contacted to coordinate suitable times for the interviews. Due to the wide geographical distribution and the distance of some school principals, the interviews were conducted using two methods: face-to-face interviews and by Zoom meetings.

1. Face-to-face interviews in the offices of school principals and their assistants (25 principal)
2. Online interviews via Google Meet and Zoom (20 principal)

Each interview lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the participants’ willingness to continue the discussion and provide additional insights. Participants’ responses were recorded—with their consent—using a digital recording device to ensure high audio clarity. The flexibility of digital recording also facilitated easy transfer of audio files to a computer, making transcription more efficient. The recorded interviews were transcribed into Word documents and stored on a secure computer in preparation for qualitative data analysis. All interviews were conducted in an environment that ensured participants’ privacy, and data were handled in a way that safeguarded confidentiality, in accordance with scientific research ethics.

3.3. Data Analysis

After data collection, qualitative content analysis was employed. Data analysis is often considered the most challenging aspect of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013) due to the absence of universally agreed-upon rules for qualitative data interpretation. The entire process relies heavily on the researcher’s analytical mindset and approach (Patton, 2002, p. 433). The data analysis process began by entering the transcribed interviews into MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. An inductive approach was applied, where the data were coded based on major themes. This process involved a careful review of the transcripts, the development of a coding system, and the identification of emerging patterns and themes. Categories were developed inductively through immersion in the data to uncover meaningful patterns, themes, and interrelationships (Christensen & Johnson, 2004, p. 362). This required a thorough and in-depth reading of the texts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interviews before initiating the coding process. The coding process was guided by research questions and key concepts from the literature review. Once coding was completed, the next step was retrieving the categorized segments according to their respective themes. These segments were then transferred from MaxQDA to Word documents for further analysis to generate answers to the study’s research questions. (Figure 1)

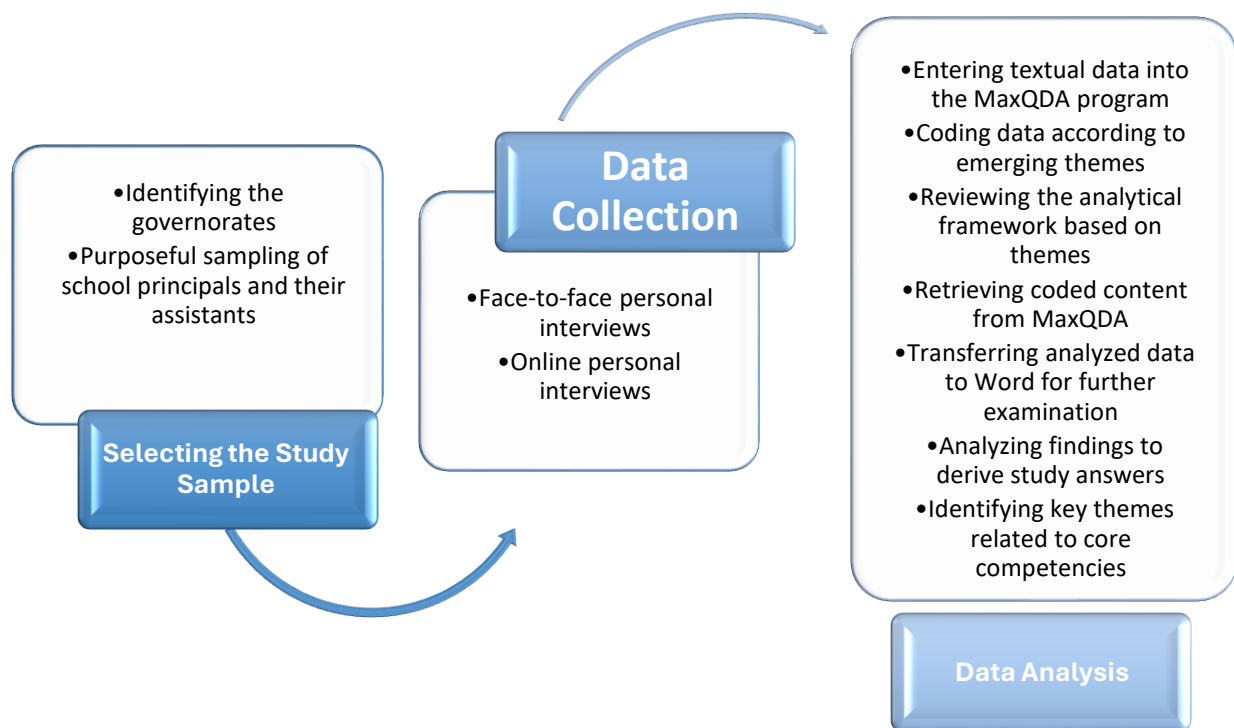


Figure 1. Data Collection and Analyses

4. Results

Results related to the first question: How do Omani school principals perceive the concept of core competencies? In addition, how are they identified?

The qualitative analysis of the interview responses revealed that the term core competencies is not explicitly used in Omani schools. However, principals associate the concept with the exceptional skills possessed by teachers in their schools. These competencies are recognized through various school practices and activities. The following is a detailed breakdown of the findings:

- Concept of Core Competencies:

The interview results indicated that the term core competencies is not formally used in Omani schools, nor is it included among the schools' objectives. Participants stated that they had never used this term before. Principals M6, M7, and M11 explicitly expressed that this concept does not exist in their schools. As M6 stated: "This topic has never been mentioned, whether in training or official documents." Similarly, M7 added: "As a term, it does not exist for us as an educational community." M11 agreed, stating: "We have never used this term before." Despite confirming that core competencies are not recognized in their schools in an institutional sense, the interviewees could understand the concept in terms of the exceptional skills that some teachers possess. The principals acknowledged that certain teachers demonstrate unique skills that could be considered core competencies within their schools. M5 noted: "There are teachers with skills in various fields, and sometimes, a teacher stands out with a unique competency compared to her colleagues." These competencies are evident in daily school practices and can be identified through specific indicators. As M6 explained: "Competencies can be recognized through teachers' daily practices or performance indicators. They represent a skill-based aspect that teachers possess." Furthermore, these competencies become particularly apparent when needed, as M9 highlighted: "These teachers can manage situations effectively when necessary." Thus, while core competencies as a formal term may not exist in Omani schools, they manifest in teachers' practices and are acknowledged when required.

- Identifying Core Competencies:

The interviewees stated that identifying teachers' competencies is based on individual efforts by school principals rather than a structured or standardized system. However, they generally recognize teachers' competencies through the following methods, as illustrated in the following diagram:



Figure 2. Methods of Identifying Core Competencies

- Methods of Identifying Core Competencies:

The results identified six methods for identifying Core Competencies as follows:

1. Workplace Engagement and Direct Observation: Some school principals emphasized that engaging closely with staff plays a significant role in discovering their abilities, potential, and skills. M1 stated: "We identify core competencies through daily interactions with teachers in any school we work in." Additionally, principals assign tasks to teachers, observe their performance over extended periods, and assess their competencies through prolonged engagement. M16 explained: "We provide teachers with opportunities to take on various responsibilities, and those who demonstrate strong competencies are nominated for leadership positions within the school."

2. Professional Teams and Committees: Professional teams reveal numerous skills possessed by their members through task execution, allowing talented individuals to stand out. M5 stated: "I sometimes form professional teams to identify core competencies." M11 added: "I classify work teams into specialized professional groups." He further explained: "When distinguished individuals are selected within the school, they contribute to various fields that support institutional development." M2 highlighted that this process is informal and can be derived from team-based activities and committees. Other participants mentioned that school management assigns teachers based on the school's needs in teaching, administration, and training.

3. Performance Evaluation Reports: Performance reports help in identifying the core competencies of some teachers. These reports are compiled after multiple visits by school administrators and supervisors and serve as a documented reference for teachers' skills. M12 mentioned: "We primarily rely on performance and technical evaluation reports from the electronic portal and lead teachers' assessments to identify core competencies." He further added: "Individual

and institutional excellence reports provide key indicators of outstanding teachers who deserve recognition and further development." Thus, these reports play a crucial role in documenting and utilizing core competencies when needed.

4. Official Engagements and Events: Official engagements and school events play a significant role in revealing talents and competencies. M33 stated: "Core competencies are identified through meetings and participation in school-organized events, where achievements are highlighted and shared on social media." M16 added: "Competencies can be recognized through opportunities given to teachers and staff to participate in various events and activities. Those demonstrating strong competencies are nominated to lead workshops and initiatives." M38 confirmed this by stating: "Through their participation in activities and projects, it becomes possible to identify outstanding teachers and staff members." Thus, school events and activities are among the most effective methods for discovering core competencies

5. Competitions: Competitions and challenges provide a platform for revealing talents and competencies. M40 stated: "Achievements become evident when participating in national or international competitions, where exceptional competencies gain recognition and are honored." M10 added: "Social media and competition participation have helped elevate the profiles of outstanding individuals, leading to greater international recognition of their skills." Competitions thus serve as a fertile environment for showcasing talent and competencies.

6. Achievements: Some teachers' efforts and excellence become evident through their accomplishments within the institution, demonstrating their core competencies. M11 stated: "Some teachers' work speaks for itself—they showcase innovation and excellence in their classrooms and beyond, contributing additional projects that highlight their capabilities." Competencies naturally emerge during exhibitions, workshops, and school visits, where achievements can be observed and evaluated. M44 mentioned: "Competencies become evident through practices in educational meetings and activities." Additionally, some teachers showcase their skills and accomplishments via social media. M45 noted: "Teachers' achievements can be observed through social media, where they present their work and skills on the school's daily updates page."

Results related to the second question: How are core competencies utilized to improve the performance of Omani schools?

The responses from the study sample indicate that the strategic dimension is lacking in the employment of core competencies in Omani schools. There is no organized or well-known framework to guide and employ the core competencies of teachers towards improving school performance. Instead, there are scattered efforts that usually occur within the context of daily and urgent work situations, driven by the beliefs, experiences, and competencies of school principals. Below are the details of the findings:

Recognition of the Importance of Competencies vs. the Lack of Strategic Approach: The school principals in the study sample firmly believe in the importance of teacher competencies in improving school performance, as these skills add value within schools. However, they acknowledge that Omani schools lack a strategic approach to utilizing teacher competencies. The study sample confirms that despite the presence of many core competencies, there is no effort to catalog and organize these competencies into known lists, and there is no system for investing in them or a guide to reference in order to improve school performance. Participant M9 states, "The administrations notice and appreciate these competencies, but they do not invest them in the proper way." Participant M2 mentions, "There is a process for sorting competencies under the title of skills, and teachers are distributed according to the needs of the school, but they are not listed." Participant M1 adds, "Unfortunately, these competencies exist in our memory, but we have not thought of documenting them and putting them out as a statement." Participant M10 says, "We know the teachers and

students who excel in various areas, but this is not written as a list. It can be proven through initiatives, activities, and projects they are involved in." Therefore, it is also implicit. Participant M17 notes, "Competencies are generally present, either in memory or in the work context, and the school principal can point out the person with the skill." Participant M6 adds, "Let's assume there is an issue in activating educational technology; I would point to teacher so-and-so." Participant M24 mentions, "We have an English teacher who has financial management skills; I know her, so I assign her this role without an official explanation or a database to refer to for this aspect." The Role of Core Competencies in School Performance: Despite the absence of an organized framework for utilizing competencies, school principals are keen to make use of teacher competencies in improving school performance, often in response to daily and urgent work situations. This mainly focuses on four aspects: achieving the school's plan, professional development for teachers, enhancing extracurricular activities, and implementing new and urgent programs. The study highlights that core competencies contribute to achieving the school's goals, particularly in areas like teaching and learning, and that competencies are actively used in training programs and enhancing school activities. Furthermore, core competencies are often employed to handle new and urgent tasks in the educational system.

4.1. The Role of Core Competencies in School Performance

The school principals in the study sample indicated that despite the lack of an organized framework for utilizing competencies, they are keen to leverage teacher competencies to improve school performance. This done within the context of daily and urgent work situations and primarily focuses on four aspects: achieving the school plan, professional development for teachers, enhancing school activities, and implementing new and urgent programs.

A. The Link between Core Competencies and the School Plan: Most participants agree on the strong connection between achieving the goals of the school plan and the presence of core competencies in schools, with some attributing a high percentage to this connection. Participant M7 states, "Core competencies contribute to achieving the goals of the plan by up to 80%. We need competencies, skills, and talents that help us achieve the goals, especially in the areas of teaching and learning." Participant M9 adds, "There are goals related to activities, achievement, and creativity, and these goals cannot be achieved without sufficient competencies among the staff." Participant M3 emphasizes, "When we assign tasks in the plan, we look at the competencies related to them to achieve the goal." Participant M5 mentions, "I distribute these competencies based on the school's goals." Participant M18 notes, "Competencies are closely linked to the school plan and significantly contribute to achieving its goals." Participant M19 confirms, "Competencies are used to strengthen and develop the school's strengths and weaknesses."

B. Core Competencies as a Tool for Professional Development: Core competencies, as indicated by the school principals in the study sample, are clearly utilized to achieve the goals of the school plan by benefiting from teachers' skills to implement workshops and training programs for other teachers in areas of excellence they possess, which contribute to achieving the school's goals. Participant M6 states, "The idea of the school plan is essentially derived from the school performance quality report and actual needs, and planning is done to meet these needs through the competencies available within the school or by recruiting trainers from outside the institution if they are not available." Participant M13 mentions, "The school plan's goals are achieved by effectively using competencies in support and training." Participant M15 adds, "These competencies are integrated into the teachers' professional development strategies." Participant M20 states, "For example, the competency of using modern teaching technologies is included in the school plan to enhance academic achievement."

C. Enhancing School Activities: On the other hand, some link the importance of core competencies to the management of extracurricular student activities, where teachers' talents and exceptional abilities are utilized to nurture students' talents through school activity teams, such as managing the school theater group, scouting and guiding teams, sports teams, and others. Participant M33 mentions, "Core competencies contribute to leading scientific and educational activities at the school." Participant M44 confirms, "The school's students win many local awards thanks to the talented teachers who are keen to train the students and develop their talents and areas of excellence." School principal M18 states, "At the beginning of the year, I assign teachers to school activity teams based on their capabilities and talents."

D. Implementing New and Urgent Programs in Schools: The school principals in the study sample confirm that they utilize teachers' skills and unique capabilities to complete emerging and urgent tasks in the educational system, in order to deliver the best possible performance with the available resources. Participant M13 states, "When something new arises, I immediately turn to teachers I know have better capabilities in the specific subject, as higher authorities issue new programs to us, sometimes without any support." Participant M21 adds, "For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when we suddenly transitioned to remote learning, we started looking for teachers skilled in technology, and they played a pivotal role at that time." Participant M9 mentions, "When the school participates in a competition, or something new and important arises, I directly form teams of distinguished teachers and entrust them with presenting the school in the best possible light."

5. Discussion

(The results of the study indicate several key points related to the concept of core competencies in Omani schools, how they are identified, and how they are utilized to improve school performance. Below is an interpretation and discussion of the results:

- **Absence of a Formal Definition for Core Competencies:** The study revealed that the term "core competencies" is not one of the official terms commonly used in the Omani educational system, reflecting a gap in institutional awareness of this concept, even though participants were able to relate it to teachers' distinguished skills. This aligns with the definition provided by Prahalad & Hamel (2009) of core competencies as an organizational concept based on the ability to learn collectively and coordinate resources. Modern literature supports this variance in defining competencies across strategic and managerial domains. Scholes, Johnson, & Whittington (2008) and Kim, Park & Choi (2017) argue that core competencies rely on non-replicable resources, giving the organization a competitive edge. Therefore, the absence of a formal definition in Omani schools may lead to the unstructured utilization of these capabilities, which calls for the formulation of a clear conceptual framework in line with global trends (Kibugi, Githaiga & Omariba, 2023).

- **Methods of Identifying Core Competencies:** The results indicated that school principals rely on informal methods such as daily interactions, forming professional teams, performance reports, and participation in events and competitions to identify core competencies. This approach reflects the practical nature and reliance on personal experience without standardized mechanisms for documenting competencies (Abunaser & Ahmed, 2025). This finding aligns with what Chen & Chang (2011) discussed regarding the relationship between organizational competencies and human competencies, where their interaction is fundamental to achieving a competitive advantage. Studies such as Omweri (2024) and Bantoc & Yazon (2023) emphasized the importance of identifying competencies through educational practices and formal activities, highlighting the need for the development of standardized diagnostic tools that integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods for documenting these capabilities, which contributes to sustainably improving school performance.

- **Utilizing Core Competencies to Improve School Performance:** The study results revealed that core competencies are often used in an unstrategic manner to address daily and urgent circumstances. This shows that the connection between competencies and school performance is implicit and undocumented. This discovery supports the literature highlighted by Drago et al. (2022) and Agha et al. (2012) on the importance of adopting a strategic approach to utilizing competencies for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Studies such as Sudrajat (2014) and Sumantri et al. (2023) emphasize the need to link competencies with institutional plans and professional development programs, which could lead to improved school performance and enhanced organizational efficiency, especially amid technological transformations and the knowledge-based economy.

- **Core Competencies as a Tool for Professional Development:** The study showed that school principals attempt to link core competencies with achieving the school's plan objectives by utilizing them in professional development and implementing workshops and educational activities. This link indicates their recognition of the importance of competencies as a central element in supporting innovation and creativity within the educational institution. These results align with literature that emphasizes that using competencies in professional development programs contributes to achieving excellent educational performance (Li et al., 2024). Dewi et al. (2023) also noted that investing in teachers' digital and behavioral abilities is a crucial element in improving organizational performance. This practical connection between competencies and the school plan should be adopted within an official strategic framework that ensures documenting achievements and using them as a reference to improve future performance.

- **Enhancing School Activities:** Many researchers agree that extracurricular activities are an essential part of the educational process, as they help develop students' social and leadership skills and foster values of cooperation and discipline (Samuel & Extension, 2024). The results of this study confirmed that teachers with outstanding competencies play a pivotal role in leading these activities, whether in School Theater, scouting teams, or sports activities. Furthermore, assigning tasks according to teachers' skills contributes to achieving positive results. One of the school principals mentioned that the school wins many local awards thanks to the efforts of talented teachers. This aligns with the findings of Antovska & Kostov (2016), who noted that involving creative teachers in school activities raises student performance levels and enhances their motivation to participate.

- **Implementing New and Urgent Programs in the School:** The study revealed that school principals rely on teachers with specialized skills when facing new challenges or implementing new programs, such as the swift transition to online education during the pandemic (Abunaser, et al., 2024). This aligns with what Collie & Martin (2016) stated about the importance of teachers' flexibility and ability to adapt to changes in learning environments, as teachers are the key factor in the success or failure of any educational transformation. Previous studies have also shown that schools that adopt an approach based on utilizing teachers' skills to address new challenges and manage change achieve better performance than schools that rely on strict administrative directives without involving teachers in decision-making (Brown et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that core competencies, despite not being officially adopted within the Omani educational system, are considered a fundamental element in improving school performance. Establishing a clear conceptual and administrative framework to document and utilize these competencies is seen as a critical step toward achieving sustainable development and educational excellence. Contemporary literature and recent studies support this approach, which

calls for the integration of educational policies with institutional development to enhance performance and innovation in Omani schools.

Despite the significance of the findings, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that should be considered when generalizing the results or building upon them in future research. The study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology using semi-structured interviews, which may limit the quantitative generalizability of the results. Moreover, the sample was limited to 45 school principals, making the findings context-specific and reflective of their individual administrative experiences, which may not necessarily represent the perspectives of other educational stakeholders such as teachers or educational supervisors. Additionally, the data collection was confined to interviews without the inclusion of other tools such as observation or document analysis, which may restrict the diversity of data sources. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches, targeting a broader range of educational stakeholders and settings to ensure a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

7. Suggestion

The study recommends the following:

- To establish an official definition of the concept of core competencies within the Omani educational system, aligning with international literature, which will facilitate the standardization and systematic application of these concepts in schools.
- To develop an internal system focused on documenting achievements and successes based on core competencies, using them as a reference to stimulate creativity and innovation within schools through internal communication channels or recognition events and awards.
- Broader research involving schools from different governorates should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of applying core competencies in improving school performance and to study their impact on student academic outcomes and the overall educational environment.
- Diagnostic tools should be developed to document teachers' core competencies, including standardized criteria based on quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods. This will help monitor performance and effectively identify strengths and weaknesses.

Declarations

Author Contributions. (Nesreen S. M. Salah El-Din: Literature review, conceptualization. Khalsa S. Al-Harthi.: methodology, Fathi m. Abunaser. Review editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. Rashid Sulaiman Hamdan Al-Fahadi data analysis. All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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Ethical Approval. This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Sultan Qaboos University Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. [REAAF/EDU/DEFA/2024/14]). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy and confidentiality were fully respected throughout the study.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. However, due to privacy and ethical restrictions, the data are not publicly available.

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