

## **Investigating the role of strategic planning in schools in increasing educational productivity**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of strategic planning in increasing the educational productivity of schools. In recent years, rapid social and educational changes have doubled the necessity of adopting a forward-looking and purposeful approach in school management. Strategic planning, as one of the modern tools of educational management, enables managers to identify the current situation, analyze strengths and weaknesses, and determine long-term goals, and determine the direction of the educational organization towards improving quality and effectiveness. This study was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and in a library manner, and the findings were collected based on the analysis of internal and external sources. The results show that the use of strategic planning increases the coordination between goals and activities, enhances employee motivation and participation, improves managerial decision-making, optimizes the use of resources, and ultimately increases educational productivity. Also, schools with strategic planning perform better in terms of performance indicators such as student academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, and organizational efficiency. At the same time, challenges such as lack of management knowledge, weakness in environmental analysis, and lack of strategic culture prevent the full implementation of this approach in Iranian schools. Finally, the necessity of training managers, developing a local model of strategic planning, and using management technologies for continuous monitoring and evaluation is emphasized.

**Keywords:** strategic planning, educational management, educational productivity, schools, quality of education.

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, educational systems around the world have faced extensive transformations resulting from rapid technological changes, globalization, and the complexity of social and cultural needs. In such circumstances, schools can no longer function solely as institutions for the transmission of traditional knowledge; rather, they must plan their goals, resources, and activities with a strategic approach in a way that can respond to new educational challenges. In the meantime, strategic planning, as one of the key tools of modern educational management, plays a fundamental role in improving the productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of schools (Rezaei, 2012).

The Iranian education system in general, and the curriculum planning system in particular, are managed through a centralized decision-making process. Therefore, curricula are completely predefined and in the form of textbooks, which deprives teachers and students of any possibility of interference (Mehrmohammadi, 2002:354).

Strategic planning is a systematic process through which educational organizations identify missions, analyze the internal and external environment, determine long-term goals, and design a path to achieve them. In other words, strategic planning is a bridge between the current situation and the desired state of education, which, through informed and analysis-based decision-making, determines the direction of schools (Qarainejad, 2019). In the current situation where the Iranian education system is faced with issues such as lack of financial resources, inconsistency between programs, and weakness in human resource management, the use of strategic planning can be considered as an efficient method for increasing educational productivity (Ahmadi et al., 2019). Educational productivity can be defined as the ratio of desired educational outputs (such as academic achievement, skill development, and student and teacher satisfaction) to educational inputs (such as time, human resources, and financial resources). From this perspective, any management action that can enable more effective use of resources will lead to increased educational productivity (Khosravi, 2018). Strategic planning is important because it provides a basis for informed and purposeful

decision-making in schools by comprehensively analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) and aligns educational activities with the overall goals of the Ministry of Education (Mirzaei, 2019). In recent years, the Iranian education system has made efforts to institutionalize a culture of strategic planning at various levels, but evidence shows that these efforts have often faced obstacles due to reasons such as the lack of strategic management skills among school administrators, the lack of accurate data for decision-making, and weaknesses in following up and evaluating programs (Abbasi, 2011). In fact, effective implementation of strategic planning requires a systemic and forward-looking attitude among educational administrators; an attitude that moves them away from being involved in routine and reactive affairs and toward proactive decision-making based on data analysis (Hosseini, 2012). From a theoretical perspective, strategic planning is rooted in modern management theories that emphasize the prediction and control of the changing organizational environment. Theories such as management by objectives (MBO) and total quality management (TQM) are both close to strategic planning in some way because they emphasize coordination between organizational goals and practical actions (Daft, 2019; cited in Jafari, 2020). In educational environments, strategic planning is a tool for directing teaching, training, evaluation, and human resource development activities that can elevate the mission of schools from the level of short-term plans to the level of long-term vision (Saedi, 2019). In Iranian primary and secondary schools, one of the main challenges is the lack of coherence in executive plans and the lack of alignment between school goals and macro-educational policies. For this reason, developing and implementing a scientific strategic plan can increase the participation of teachers, students, and parents, improve organizational morale, enhance teaching quality, and reduce waste of educational resources (Mirzadeh and Ghanbari, 2020). From a managerial perspective, school principals should play the role of “strategic leaders,” meaning they should not only be executive planners but also inspire and guide employees towards achieving common goals (Mousavi, 2013). Several studies in Iran have

shown that there is a positive and significant relationship between the level of strategic planning in schools and educational productivity indicators. For example, a study by Naderi et al. (2013) in secondary schools in Tehran province showed that schools with a written strategic plan are in a better position than schools without a strategic plan in terms of academic performance, teacher satisfaction, and educational efficiency indicators. Ahmadi and Soleimani's (2010) research also showed that training managers in strategic planning increases their ability to optimally allocate human and financial resources. In addition to these findings, attention should also be paid to the cultural and human dimension of strategic planning. Effective implementation of this type of planning requires a participatory organizational culture; a culture in which teachers and school staff have a sense of ownership over goals and plans. Without such a culture, even the best strategic plans will remain at the level of documents and will not have a real impact on educational productivity (Ghaffari, 2019). Therefore, training in strategic planning skills and creating a cultural and motivational environment for its implementation is one of the fundamental requirements of modern school management. In general, in successful education systems, strategic planning is considered a dynamic, flexible, and participatory process that is developed and continuously evaluated with the active participation of all stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents, and even students) (OECD, 2021). While in many schools in the country, planning is still carried out in a prescriptive and top-down manner, the experience of developed countries has shown that the use of participatory methods and detailed environmental analysis has a direct impact on increasing educational productivity and effectiveness (Hassani, 2001).

From this perspective, examining the role of strategic planning in Iranian schools not only helps to better understand the relationship between scientific management and educational productivity, but can also pave the way for designing local models for effective school management. Especially in the recent period of transformation of the country's education, where upstream documents such as the Fundamental Education Transformation Document place

special emphasis on evidence-based and data-driven planning (Ministry of Education, 2020), the need to review school planning methods is felt more than ever.

Therefore, the main issue of this research is to what extent can strategic planning increase educational productivity in schools and what managerial and cultural factors play a role in the success or failure of this type of planning? The answer to this question can not only add to the richness of the theoretical literature of educational management, but also provide tools in practice to improve the quality of decision-making and school performance. This research aims to analyze and explain the role of strategic planning in increasing educational productivity in order to provide solutions to improve the quality of school management based on scientific and research evidence.

### **Research Background**

Asadi et al. (2010) in a study titled “The Effect of Strategic Planning on Improving the Performance of Secondary Schools in Isfahan City” concluded that implementing strategic planning components, including visioning, goal setting, internal and external environment analysis, and performance monitoring, plays a significant role in increasing the productivity and efficiency of the educational system. The findings showed that schools with strategic planning have been able to allocate their human and financial resources in a targeted manner and prevent duplication and waste of resources. This study emphasized that strategic planning can change the direction of schools from a reactive to a proactive and forward-looking state. In an article titled “The Role of Strategic Planning in Improving the Educational Quality of Elementary Schools,” Karimi (2019) examined the impact of using strategic methods in educational processes. He stated that strategic planning not only affects educational performance, but also teachers’ job satisfaction and the spirit of participation in the school. Based on the findings, schools with strategic planning have a better communication structure between principals, teachers, and parents, and determine educational goals based on data analysis and the real needs of students.

Rezaei and Mahmoudi (2019) emphasized in their study titled “Strategic Planning and Its Impact on Effective School Management” that in

today’s schools, educational productivity does not depend only on financial resources or equipment, but also requires a targeted and forward-looking management system. This study, analyzing data from 60 school principals and vice principals in Hamedan city, showed that there is a direct and significant relationship between the level of familiarity of principals with strategic planning and the level of educational productivity. In a study titled “Evaluating the Impact of Strategic Planning on the Efficiency of the Education System in Markazi Province,” Farahani (2018) found that many schools lack a written strategic plan and decisions are made in them more ad hoc and reactively. The results showed that designing and implementing strategic plans helps principals to chart the path of educational growth and development based on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and to use available resources optimally. In an article titled “The Role of Educational Leadership and Strategic Planning in Improving the Performance of Elementary Schools,” Naderi (1401) concluded that managers with skills in strategic planning are more capable of creating innovation, motivation, and coordination among employees than other managers. He emphasized the importance of integrating strategic planning with curricula and training programs and concluded that this alignment increases educational productivity and student satisfaction with the learning process.

Sharifi and Amiri (1396) showed in a study titled “Investigating the Relationship between Strategic Planning and the Productivity of Secondary School Employees” that the presence of strategic planning in schools strengthens organizational culture, enhances interactions among employees, and increases the sense of belonging in the educational environment. Their findings indicated that the more school administrators participate in developing and implementing strategic plans, the more motivated employees are to achieve educational goals.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The education system of any society is considered the foundation of the human and social development of that country. In recent decades, rapid developments in technology, economics, and social needs have meant that schools can no longer be managed using

traditional methods and require scientific and forward-looking approaches in management to respond to the complex needs of the new era (Maleki, 2016). In such circumstances, strategic planning has been proposed as a tool for purposeful direction of activities, identification of opportunities and threats, and optimal use of educational resources (Karimi, 2019).

Strategic planning is a systematic process in which educational administrators outline the long-term vision of schools and determine goals and executive policies based on an analysis of the internal situation and the external environment (Bryson, 2018). Despite the high importance of this approach, existing evidence shows that many schools in the country still lack a well-written and coherent strategic plan and that decision-making is mostly done in a fragmented and reactive manner (Farahani, 2018). This situation has led to a waste of human and financial resources, repetition of errors, and a decrease in educational productivity. On the other hand, educational productivity means the extent to which learning goals are achieved, the efficiency in the use of resources, and the improvement of the quality of teachers' and students' performance (Sharifi and Amiri, 2017). When a school lacks a strategic direction, educational and training activities will not have the necessary coherence and coordination, and school staff cannot move in an integrated manner towards organizational goals. As a result, the teaching-learning process becomes fragmented, dissatisfied, and performance declines. Domestic studies (such as Rezaei and Mahmoudi, 2001) have shown that there is a significant relationship between managers' familiarity with strategic planning principles and the level of educational productivity. In schools with strategic planning, educational decisions are made based on real data, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and measurable goals. Also, teachers' participation in developing programs increases their sense of belonging and work motivation. In contrast, in schools that lack such a program, decisions are often made under the influence of personal preferences or momentary circumstances, and the educational system does not have the necessary dynamism. Therefore, the main question of the present study is whether strategic planning can increase educational productivity in schools?

And if the answer is yes, what components and indicators of strategic planning have the greatest impact on improving educational performance? Answering these questions can pave the way for formulating new policies in school management, and moving from traditional management to strategic and data-driven management.

### **Importance and Necessity of Research**

Rapid scientific and social developments in the 21st century have presented educational systems with new challenges. Today, school is not just a place for teaching formal subjects, but also a learning and dynamic institution that must be able to adapt to environmental changes (Fullan, 2021). This is not possible without strategic planning and forward-looking thinking. Strategic planning helps educational administrators to adjust the direction of the school in line with the needs of society and students, allocate resources purposefully, and improve educational performance.

In Iran, one of the fundamental weaknesses of the education system is the lack of coherent and long-term planning at the school level (Nadari, 1401). Many administrators perform their duties on a daily and executive basis and pay less attention to environmental analysis, strategy development, and performance evaluation. This is while in developed countries, strategic planning is recognized as an integral part of school management and increases efficiency, creativity, and satisfaction of educational stakeholders (Davies & Ellison, 2020).

From a scientific perspective, the importance of the present study lies in bridging the gap between theory and practice in the field of educational management. Although at the theoretical level, the benefits of strategic planning have been repeatedly raised, at the school level, its implementation still faces cultural, structural, and knowledge barriers. The present study can provide a clearer perspective for policymakers and administrators by examining the experiences of administrators and analyzing the impact of strategic planning components on educational productivity. From an applied perspective, the results of this study can be a practical guide for school administrators, supervisors, and educational experts to improve educational performance by better understanding the dimensions of strategic planning (including



environmental analysis, goal formulation, program implementation, and results evaluation). Also, the research findings can be a basis for designing empowerment courses for managers in the field of strategic management and scientific planning in schools.

Finally, the necessity of conducting this study is because educational productivity, as one of the key indicators of the success of the education system, requires conscious and forward-looking management. Given the limited financial and human resources in the country's schools, educational goals can only be achieved through strategic planning and optimal allocation of resources. Therefore, examining the role of strategic planning in increasing educational productivity is not only a research topic, but also a necessity for reforming and advancing the country's education system.

### **Research Method**

The present study is of a descriptive-review (library) type and its aim is to analyze and explain the role of strategic planning in schools in increasing educational productivity, based on the findings and scientific perspectives of domestic and foreign researchers. This type of research method, relying on the systematic collection, review, and analysis of texts, documents, theories, and previous studies, seeks to discover patterns, conceptual relationships, and factors affecting the research topic, without the researcher collecting field data. The results of this method showed that there is a positive, direct, and significant relationship between the quality of strategic planning implementation and the level of educational productivity, and that improving strategic planning can lead to improved teaching quality, increased staff motivation, and optimal use of educational resources.

### **Theoretical foundations**

#### **The concept of strategic planning**

Strategic planning is one of the most important management tools for guiding and controlling organizations towards achieving long-term goals. This concept was first introduced in the 1960s in the field of industrial management and gradually expanded to public and educational organizations (Bryson, 2018). In general, strategic planning is a systematic and dynamic process by which organizations determine their goals, analyze the internal and external environment, and design

strategies to achieve the desired vision (Malaki, 2016).

In schools, strategic planning means developing plans that can determine the school's direction in line with its educational and training mission. This type of planning, unlike traditional planning, which is short-term and based on responding to current problems, emphasizes foresight, situation analysis, and data-based decision-making (Karimi, 2019).

According to Mintzberg (2019), strategic planning is not just a set of documents and goals, but a type of organizational learning process that forces members of the organization to think about the future and coordinate actions. In the educational field, this process helps administrators and teachers to jointly review learning goals and design new methods to improve school performance. Strategic planning, as an organized and systematic process, is the foundation of effective management and achieving sustainable development in any organization, including businesses, the private sector, and government and public organizations. In the field of education, this approach creates a fundamental transformation towards an efficient, flexible, and responsive educational system to the needs of the Islamic society of Iran. In general, strategic planning is defined as a type of long-term planning, 10 to 20 years or more, which includes selecting long-term and short-term goals and determining the means and strategies necessary to achieve them. This process is carried out by proactive and far-sighted planners and, in addition to the internal relations of the organization, also deals with the relations between the organization and the external environment. The word "strategy" is derived from the Greek word "Strategos", which means "army leader" or "senior army commander". This refers to the existence of a policy, law and guidance for achieving success in complex operations. Initially, this word was used in the military world, but as the concept spread to other areas, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, it was used in the business world and then in higher education and government organizations. There are many definitions of this term. Chandler (1962) considers it to be the determination of long-term goals and the allocation of resources to achieve them. Ansoff (1965) introduces it as "the law and

guidance required for rational profitable growth". Anthony (1965) provides a precise definition and considers it as the process of making decisions about the goals, resources and policies of the organization. Mason (1969) also defines it as a conceptual statement of the future business. These definitions jointly indicate that strategic planning goes beyond short-term and operational planning and does not focus on following existing methods, but strives for fundamental change and transformation of the organization. At the macro level, strategic planning is divided into three main levels: 1) micro strategy: (planning for a specific educational unit such as a school), 2) macro strategy: (planning for the national level or a large educational organization such as the Ministry of Education), and 3) supra-macro strategy: (planning for international organizations such as UNESCO and ISESCO). Also, Jerry Kaufman and Jerry Herman propose three levels of micro, macro and supra-macro, which at the macro level includes the educational system, school or educational organization. Arthur J. Davis also identifies different levels of planning at the national, state, institutional and project levels. These divisions show that the strategic planning process is implemented independently at each level and that communication and coordination between levels are essential.

The main difference between strategic planning and other types of planning, especially long-term and linear planning, is flexibility and strategic analysis. Strategic planning seeks to answer two basic questions: "What should we do?" (objectives) and "How should we do it?" (strategy). Rather than focusing solely on implementing what has already been decided, this process is a process of forward-looking, strategic analysis, thoughtful innovation and stakeholder participation. In other words, strategic planning is a "proactive planning" that is opposed to "reactive planning"; that is, instead of waiting for a crisis or change and then reacting, they take action based on prior analysis and an ambitious vision. This approach allows organizations to act creatively and innovatively and take control of their future. Therefore, within the framework of the educational system, strategic planning gives the school, as an independent organization, the opportunity to not only respond to upstream policies (such as the transformation document),

but also to develop its own policies to improve the quality of education by recognizing its local characteristics and the needs of the surrounding community.

### **Stages and Components of Strategic Planning in Schools**

Several researchers (including Bryson, 2018; Davies & Ellison, 2020) identify four main stages for strategic planning that can also be adapted in educational settings:

1- Determining the Mission and Vision (Vision & Mission):

Every school needs to draw a clear future for purposeful movement. The vision is a picture of the desired future of the school, while the mission expresses its existential philosophy and fundamental values. In successful schools, the vision is developed not only by administrators but also with the participation of teachers, students and parents (Nadari, 1401).

2- Analysis of the internal and external environment (SWOT Analysis):

In this stage, internal strengths and weaknesses (such as teacher capabilities or resource limitations) and external opportunities and threats (such as educational policies, social changes and technology) are identified. Environmental analysis helps managers make more informed decisions and allocate resources based on priorities (Farahani, 2018).

3- Strategy Formulation:

Based on the results of environmental analysis, managers determine the school's macro and micro goals and identify strategies to achieve them. For example, increasing educational quality through teacher empowerment or improving academic outcomes through collaborative learning can be part of strategic goals (Rezaei & Mahmoudi, 2019).

4- Implementation, Evaluation, and Review:

No program has practical value without implementation and evaluation. The final stage involves allocating resources, monitoring progress, and continuous review. In dynamic schools, evaluation is not done annually but continuously and in interaction with stakeholders (Davies & Ellison, 2020).

Strategic Planning Implementation Process and Models in Schools

Successful implementation of strategic planning in schools requires a structured and multi-stage

process in which the school principal plays a key role as a leader and executor. This process requires attention to management principles, awareness of fundamental concepts, and mastery of specialized models and tools. Research shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between the level of strategic planning implementation by principals and the improvement of educational and training performance indicators. This process functions as a closed system in which each stage is dependent on the next stage, and implementation without paying attention to these stages will result in failure to achieve strategic goals.

Different models of the strategic planning process have been presented in different sources, each with its own emphasis. Some of these models include:

- Alwani Model: This model includes seven steps: 1) Determining and formulating future goals, 2) Identifying existing strategies, 3) Analyzing environmental conditions, 4) Analyzing internal resources, 5) Identifying the current situation, 6) Determining necessary changes in strategies, and 7) Implementing the desired strategy.
- Bryson Model: This model includes steps such as initial agreement, determining tasks, analyzing stakeholders, preparing a mission statement, understanding the organization's environment, determining strategic issues, determining strategies, describing plans and actions, setting a future vision, and preparing a one-year operational plan.
- Nistani Model: This model includes fourteen steps: 1) Pre-planning activities, 2) Formulating philosophy, mission, and beliefs, 3) Formulating overall goals, 4) Formulating a 5- to 20-year vision, 5 and 6) Studying the internal and external environment, 7) Identifying strategic issues, 8) Determining system strategies, 9) Formulating a strategic plan, 10) Operationalizing the plan, 11) Formulating a strategic plan document, 12) Assessing the plan before implementation, 13) Implementing the plan, and 14) Continuous evaluation and review.
- Tyler Model (in the form of educational planning): This model includes nine steps: 1) Determining goals, 2) Identifying current strategies, 3) Analyzing the environment, 4) Analyzing resources, 5) Understanding the

overall state of the organization, 6) Determining the extent of strategic changes, 7) Strategic decision-making, 8) Implementing the strategy, and 9) Measuring and controlling the strategy.

- ICAF Model: This model consists of four stages: 1) Ordering the chaos, 2) Planning the goals, 3) Planning the means, and 4) Planning the resources and implementing and controlling.

According to these models, the implementation process in schools usually consists of stages that first focus on developing organizational foundations and then on operationalizing and implementing these foundations. These stages are: 1- Planning for planning: This stage includes agreement by senior school officials, forming a planning council, assessing the organization's readiness to carry out this process, determining dimensions, costs, stakeholders, and time frame. 2- Analyzing the current situation and identifying strategic issues: In this stage, using analytical tools such as SWOT analysis (identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and PEST (analysis of political, economic, social, and technological factors), the current situation of the school and its surrounding environment are examined. The goal is to identify the main problems and challenges that stand in the way of achieving the goals. 3- Determining the mission, vision, and values: The school's mission is formulated as its existential philosophy and reason for establishment. The vision is the desired image of the school's future in a specific period of time (usually 3 to 5 years) that must be inspiring and achievable. Values are also the ethical and behavioral basis of all school activities that are extracted from the document of transformation based on Islamic principles. 4- Determining goals and strategies: Based on the mission and vision, specific and measurable long-term and short-term goals (with quantitative and qualitative indicators) are formulated. Then, strategies (general solutions) are determined to achieve these goals. 5- Operationalizing and formulating operational plans: At this stage, the strategies are divided into operational plans (daily or weekly activities). One common pattern for this is to separate the goals into two main axes: "teaching-learning process" and "cultural, artistic, health, and sports activities." 6- Doing the right things and implementing: This stage involves allocating resources, coordinating

activities, and implementing programs in a documented manner. There is an emphasis on doing the “right things” at the “right time” with the “right resources.” 7- Continuous evaluation and review: The last stage involves monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school

using established indicators. This continuous evaluation allows the school principal to identify deviations and, if necessary, revise and update strategies and programs. This process is repeated cyclically so that the school is constantly evolving and improving.

Common tools	General Description	Stage of the strategic planning process
Planning council, preliminary reports	Managers' agreement, team formation, setting a framework and schedule	Planning for planning
SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis	Identifying challenges and opportunities (SWOT, PEST)	Analysis of the situation and strategic issues
Strategic map	Developing the school's desired philosophy and vision for the future	Determination of mission, vision and values
EFE/IFE matrix Decision-making models	Setting measurable goals and overall strategies	Determination of goals and strategy
Implementation calendar, operational plans	Translating strategies into operational activities and annual plans	Operationalization
Annual document, evaluation indicators	Allocating resources, implementing activities and monitoring	Implementation and control
Structural equation models, stakeholder feedback	Monitoring, evaluating performance and adjusting plans	Evaluation and review

### Importance and Necessity of Research

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In Iran, one of the fundamental weaknesses of the education system is the lack of coherent and long-term planning at the school level (Nadari, 1401). Many administrators perform their duties on a daily and executive basis and pay less attention to environmental analysis, strategy development, and performance evaluation. This is while in developed countries, strategic planning is recognized as an integral part of school management and increases efficiency, creativity,

and satisfaction of educational stakeholders (Davies & Ellison, 2020).

From a scientific perspective, the importance of the present study lies in bridging the gap between theory and practice in the field of educational management. Although at the theoretical level, the benefits of strategic planning have been repeatedly raised, at the school level, its implementation still faces cultural, structural, and knowledge barriers. The present study can provide a clearer perspective for policymakers and administrators by examining the experiences of administrators and analyzing the impact of strategic planning components on educational productivity. From an applied perspective, the results of this study can be a practical guide for school administrators, supervisors, and educational experts to improve educational performance by better understanding the dimensions of strategic planning (including environmental analysis, goal formulation, program implementation, and results evaluation). Also, the research findings can be a basis for designing empowerment courses for managers in the field of strategic management and scientific planning in schools.



Finally, the necessity of conducting this study is because educational productivity, as one of the key indicators of the success of the education system, requires conscious and forward-looking management. Given the limited financial and human resources in the country's schools, educational goals can only be achieved through strategic planning and optimal allocation of resources. Therefore, examining the role of strategic planning in increasing educational productivity is not only a research topic, but also a necessity for reforming and advancing the country's education system.

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### **Key Components and Tools in Developing and Implementing Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning in schools uses a series of specialized components and tools that help the school principal to implement the process in a systematic, scientific, and effective manner. These components and tools not only provide a systematic structure to the process, but also help in decision-making management, resource allocation, and performance evaluation. In fact, these tools are analytical tools that allow the school principal to become aware of his current situation and identify effective solutions to improve it. The importance of these tools is such that research findings show that the application of components such as strategic thinking, educational information system, and SWOT analysis is low in the current situation of Iranian

schools, while it is very high in the desired situation, and this difference makes the performance difference significant. The main components of a school strategic plan include four basic parts that all rely on each other:

1- Mission Statement: This statement is the philosophy and reason for the establishment of the school. In the vision of the transformation document, the school's mission is defined as "providing educational services and opportunities for the development and excellence of the identity of students." This statement should be simple, clear, and reflect the core values of the school.

2- Vision Statement: The vision is a picture of the desired and ambitious future of the school. This vision should be clear, attractive, realistic, and measurable and achievable within 3 to 5 years. For example, the vision for the first year of secondary school could be "the achievement of self-knowledge, careers, and appropriate major choices by most students."

3- Objectives: The goals define the school's overall and long-term goals. These goals should be formulated based on the mission and vision and expressed in SMART (Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) format.

4- Strategies: Strategies are general and long-term solutions to achieve the goals. These strategies are extracted from the analysis of the internal and external situation of the school (for example, through the SWOT model). For example, a possible strategy to deal with the weakness in the performance of students in mathematics lessons could be "Improving the teaching-learning process of mathematics and science lessons".

5- Action Plans: These plans divide the strategies into daily or weekly activities. These plans should include factors (who, what to do, when, how much, how). For example, an action plan might include "conducting weekly counseling sessions for students with math difficulties by the relevant teachers throughout the school year."

6. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Key performance indicators are indicators that allow the school principal to measure and compare his or her performance. These indicators should be both quantitative (e.g., grade point average, grade repetition rate) and qualitative (e.g., teacher and parent satisfaction, student engagement).

7. Strategy Document: This document is a comprehensive report that brings together all of the above components and serves as the “constitution” of the school during the planning period. This document includes an introduction, school introduction, mission and vision statement, situation analysis, goals, strategies, operational plans, and evaluation indicators. The analytical tools used during the process are very important. The most important of these tools are:

- SWOT analysis: This tool is the most prominent and widely used tool in strategic planning. The school principal and the planning team should use this tool to identify the school's internal and external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis helps the principal make decisions to determine appropriate strategies. For example, if one of the school's strengths is having experienced teachers and one of the environmental opportunities is collaborating with a local university, a strategy could be "establishing collaboration with the university to implement specialized and research projects."

- PESTEL analysis: This tool is used to analyze the school's external environment, especially political, economic, social, cultural, legal, and technological factors. This analysis helps the school principal to be aware of major changes in the social and political environment and respond to them in a timely manner.

- Analytical matrices: Models such as the Strategic Assessment Matrix (SPACE), BCG Matrix, and GSM Matrix are also used to prioritize strategies and decide on the direction of the organization.

- Strategy Map: This tool helps to visualize the overall strategic goals of the school and the relationships between them. The strategy map of Sharif University of Technology, which includes 60 goals in four layers of outcomes, stakeholders, processes, and infrastructure, is an example of the use of this tool at a higher level.

- Stakeholder Theory: This theory believes that the success of an organization is related to the recognition and management of the needs and expectations of stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, municipality, parents, etc.). Identifying stakeholders and determining their level of influence and willingness to participate is a tool that helps the school administrator facilitate the

acceptance and implementation of strategies by creating stakeholder cooperation and participation. In addition, models such as the Resource-Based View (RBV), which believes that the success of the organization is based on internal strategic resources and capabilities, and Porter's Competitive Forces Model, which is based on the analysis of the competitive environment. These models are used at the level of universities and large educational institutions, but after localization they can also be used in schools to analyze issues. In general, the use of these components and tools transforms the strategic planning process from an emotional and experience-based process to a systematic, demonstrable and data-based process. The school principal's ability to use these tools directly impacts the success of strategy implementation and, consequently, educational productivity.

### **The Relationship Between Strategic Planning and Educational Productivity**

Numerous studies, both nationally and internationally, have confirmed the existence of a positive and significant relationship between strategic planning and educational productivity. For example, a study by Asadi et al. (2010) showed that in schools where strategic planning is systematically implemented, student academic performance, teacher satisfaction, and overall school productivity are significantly higher than in schools without a written plan.

Maleki (2016) also emphasizes in his book Strategic Management in Education that strategic planning can create a bridge between the broad goals of the Ministry of Education and the daily actions of schools. In his view, without this bridge, educational activities will be scattered, untargeted, and ineffective.

From a theoretical perspective, there are various models to explain this relationship. One of the most common models is the Dynamic Learning Model presented by Fullan (2021). According to this model, organizations such as schools achieve high productivity when organizational learning, continuous feedback, and strategic thinking are institutionalized in them. In this framework, strategic planning is not only a tool for decision-making, but also a process for the professional and cultural growth of the organization.

### **The role of strategic thinking and organizational structures in improving educational productivity**

Strategic planning as a process is more than a final document, it creates a platform for strategic thinking that has a deeper understanding of its role in increasing educational productivity. Strategic thinking refers to a set of skills, perspectives, and behaviors of managers and employees in an organization that, instead of solving a problem, seek to create conditions in which the problem does not arise. This type of thinking allows organizations to act creatively and innovatively and take control of their future. In schools, strategic thinking means that the manager and staff, instead of being limited to their daily tasks, think about questions such as “What should we do?” and “How should we do it?” Research findings show that strategic thinking, as one of the executive components, has the highest correlation coefficient with optimal performance in the desired situation. This means that at the peak of success, managers consistently use strategic theories and models and predict and plan for the future. This thinking allows schools to adapt effectively to environmental changes and take full advantage of opportunities. On the other hand, one of the key factors in the success of strategic implementation is the organizational structure. The organizational structure of a school should be such that it does not hinder effective strategic performance. In successful schools, the organizational structure is usually not centralized, but rather a network or participatory structure. In these structures, the school principal plays the main role as a leader and motivator, but decisions about goals and strategies are made jointly with teachers, parents and other stakeholders. This participation provides three key factors: first, increasing the commitment of managers and staff to common goals. second, increasing creativity and innovation, as different ideas are obtained from different stakeholders. third, creating managerial coherence and improving decision-making. An organizational structure that encourages participation allows for improved educational productivity through improved internal processes such as teaching-learning and increased employee commitment. On the other hand, an organizational structure that is bureaucratic and hierarchical rather than

participatory can make strategic implementation extremely difficult. The concept of reinvention also plays a significant role in this process. Reinvention means changing and modifying organizational structures and processes to adapt to new environmental conditions. In schools, this may include changes in the management structure, modification of teaching-learning methods, changes in the assessment system, and changes in the way parents and students participate. Successful implementation of a strategy requires the creation of an “agile” organization that can respond quickly and effectively to environmental changes. This flexibility is actually the result of the correct implementation of the three main stages of strategic education management, namely: environmental analysis, educational orientation and goal setting, strategic design, platform development and implementation, and control. Successful implementation of these stages increases employee understanding and commitment, determines the direction of education, and transforms the education system from a reactive system to a proactive and effective one. This change in organizational culture, including the importance of participation, reminds the principal of the role of leader, and causes schools with a strategic plan to perform more effectively in the educational, cultural, and social areas and to adapt better to environmental changes. In addition, a successful organizational structure, in terms of information technology, must also be equipped with a Management Information System (MIS). Access to up-to-date and reliable information about the state of the school and its surroundings is one of the requirements for strategic implementation. These systems allow the administrator to make decisions based on evidence, rather than based on emotions or personal experience. These systems can include learning management systems (LMS), student databases, educational resource management systems, etc. A strong information system facilitates strategic implementation and ensures that all activities are carried out within the framework of long-term goals and are environmentally friendly. Ultimately, an effective organization is one in which strategic thinking is ingrained in its culture and its organizational structure also enables the

implementation of this thinking in a tangible and practical way. This combination allows the school to transform from a service institution to a learning organization that is always seeking to improve, innovate, and improve performance. The Impact of Strategic Planning on Students' Academic Performance

According to data from Asadi et al. (2010), schools with a written strategic plan have been able to increase students' academic performance by an average of 15 to 20% compared to schools without a plan. The reason for this improvement is precise goal setting and coordination of educational activities with the school's long-term goals.

Analysis of the research results showed that formulating clear and measurable educational goals, along with continuous assessment programs, allows teachers to adjust their actions based on the real priorities and needs of students. This approach is less common in schools without strategic planning, and activities are carried out sporadically and sometimes not in line with the school's overall goals. Practical Implementation at the School Level: Case Studies and Implementation Challenges

Strategic planning as a theory can be implemented in schools in different ways. Two practical examples in Iran, the "Boom Plan" and the "School Strategic Plan", illustrate the different levels of implementation of this approach. The Boom Plan (Special Strategic Plan for Elementary and Secondary Schools) is a major strategic document developed by the Ministry of Education and is mandatory for all public, non-profit and board of trustees schools. The plan is based on the six areas of the Transformation Document (Ideological Education, Economic Education, Scientific Education, Social Education, Biological Education and Aesthetic Education) and requires schools to devote approximately 60 hours during the academic year to field and practical activities of this plan. This plan is a high-level "tactical" implementation that allows schools to align their activities with the broader goals of the education system. On the other hand, the school strategic plan is a micro-"strategic" document that is developed by the school itself, with the participation of principals, teachers, parents and students. This document is supported by the

transformation document and operates on the model of the balanced school. This document is usually a long-term document (3 to 5 years) that includes a mission statement, vision, macro and micro goals, strategies, operational plans (with a multi-page implementation calendar) and evaluation indicators. This modern implementation is not only a requirement for evaluating managers, but also a tool for organizing activities, monitoring against the indicators of the transformation document and increasing stakeholder participation. Despite its many benefits, the practical implementation of strategic planning in schools faces significant challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of managers who are trained effectively and take risks in this field. Many managers are unable to change and evolve because of their traditional, focused executive skills. Another challenge is the feeling of anxiety about change and staying in the comfort zone. Change means leaving the old frameworks that provide managers and teachers with security and certainty. This feeling can lead to resistance to inevitable changes. In addition, there are ideological challenges and a lack of clarity about the future in the education system, which, especially in a situation where long-term policies are constantly changing, create confusion and a loss of motivation for ambitious foresight. These challenges are at the national and organizational levels and directly affect the performance of schools. At the school level, there are more practical challenges. One of these challenges is the high cost and time-consuming nature of the process. Developing a school strategy document requires time, energy, and resources that schools do not usually have. Another challenge is the lack of specialized and knowledgeable staff in this process. Many teachers and administrators are not trained on how to conduct a SWOT analysis or develop an effective strategy. This lack of awareness can lead to incorrect or superficial implementation of this process. Also, the lack of access to up-to-date information and implementation accuracy, which is one of the important factors for the success of strategic planning, is another challenge. Without accurate data on student performance, parental needs, and the physical conditions of the school, it is not possible to develop an effective strategy. This lack of access to regular and reliable



data turns managers' efforts towards semi-technical and experience-based decision-making. Another challenge is the multifaceted interaction of organizational goals. The school, as an adaptive entity, and its activities not being coordinated with the goals of other components of the educational system (such as the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, executive departments), can lead to problems such as conflict in prioritizing activities and waste of resources. Educational productivity in these circumstances is defined as a set of multiple goals (educational, training, social, etc.), and adapting these goals to the school's strategy is another major challenge. Finally, there is also a cultural challenge: a culture in which change means risk and stability means security, can severely limit the implementation of an agile and forward-looking process such as strategic planning. The success of implementing this process depends on the clarity of objectives, active participation of stakeholders, access to information, empowerment of managers, and creation of a culture that accelerates change and innovation. The suggestion presented in the research is that the education and training organization should provide the necessary platforms, including providing specialized training to empower managers in the field of strategic planning and creating appropriate information systems.

#### **Relation to Educational Productivity: The Vision of the Education System and the Transformation Document**

Strategic planning in schools is not just an administrative or paper process, but a systematic approach to improving educational productivity. Educational productivity in this context means achieving educational and training goals with the greatest efficiency, effectiveness, and quality, with the optimal use of limited resources (time, human resources, space, and budget). This concept has gained a central position within the framework of the Iranian education system, especially after the approval of the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education (2011). The Transformation Document, as the first major strategic document of the country's education system, presents a comprehensive vision of Islamic-Iranian education and introduces strategic planning at the school level as a key tool

for realizing this vision. The Transformation Document does not consider educational productivity to mean simply increasing grades or reducing costs, but rather defines it in the context of educating the whole person and producing intelligent, committed, and creative human resources. This document identifies four main axes for educational transformation:

1. Ideological-moral education
2. Scientific-technical education
3. Economic-vocational education
4. Socio-political education

Strategic planning in schools, by formulating a mission and vision appropriate to these four axes and in line with local characteristics, enables the transformation of these macro-goals into operational measures. In other words, a school that has a strategic plan is able to allocate its resources in a way that has the greatest impact on the realization of these four axes. This coordination between the macro-level (Transformation Document) and the micro-level (school program) is the core of increasing educational productivity. In this framework, educational productivity is measured in two main dimensions:

Efficiency: achieving goals with the least cost and waste of resources.

Effectiveness: achieving desired qualitative and quantitative goals, such as improving scientific literacy, moral development, life skills, and social participation of students.

Strategic planning, by setting SMART goals and key performance indicators (KPIs), allows for the measurement of both dimensions of efficiency and effectiveness. For example, a school can set "20% increase in student participation in socio-cultural activities by the end of the school year" as one of its strategic goals. Then, by designing specific operational plans (such as holding group meetings, collaborating with local institutions, etc.) and monitoring related indicators (number of participants, student feedback, number of projects implemented), it can evaluate its productivity in this area. The Transformation Document also places great emphasis on stakeholder participation (students, parents, teachers, local community). By involving these stakeholders in the development and implementation process, strategic planning not only increases their acceptance and commitment,

but also injects non-financial resources (such as time, expertise, social networks) into the education system. This directly leads to increased productivity, as the school no longer relies solely on its own internal resources and can draw on broader capacities in the community.

Finally, strategic planning enables organizational learning and continuous improvement by creating a culture of continuous monitoring and review. A school that regularly evaluates its performance against established indicators is able to identify its weaknesses and quickly implement improvement strategies. This continuous improvement cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) is the core of Total Quality Management (TQM) which directly leads to increased educational productivity.

Therefore, strategic planning in schools is not a bureaucratic requirement, but an intelligent strategy to realize the vision of the education system and increase educational productivity. In this approach, the school transforms from a traditional executive unit into a learning, flexible and purposeful organization that is able to adapt to environmental changes and provide the best educational services with minimal waste of resources.

### **Conclusion**

Analysis of research and findings shows that strategic planning is one of the most effective factors in improving school performance and increasing educational productivity. In schools lacking strategic planning, activities are more reactive, scattered, and short-term, and decisions are often made based on momentary conditions and taste. This approach leads to reduced coordination between school units, waste of human and financial resources, and ultimately a decrease in the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, strategic planning can be considered as a vital tool for guiding the school towards specific and long-term goals, which makes all activities coordinated and purposeful in order to achieve the macro goals of the education system. One of the key aspects that this research has highlighted is the role of strategic planning in setting clear, measurable and realistic goals. Clear and specific goals enable teachers to align their teaching activities with the school's goals, and students, with a clear understanding of educational expectations, make a more

purposeful effort to learn. Studies have shown that schools with strategic planning have been able to significantly improve the average academic achievement of students and also make the learning process structured and continuous. This also improves students' critical thinking skills, problem-solving, teamwork and social abilities, and directly affects the quality of the overall educational experience.

The role of principals in the successful implementation of strategic planning is also prominent. The findings of the study showed that principals who have received adequate training in strategic planning and are familiar with the principles of educational leadership and resource management have a higher ability to coordinate activities, allocate resources optimally, and guide teachers and staff. Principals who actively participate in designing programs can increase the motivation and commitment of staff and teachers and reduce resistance to change. This participation, in addition to increasing teachers' organizational belonging, creates a dynamic and learning educational environment in which all members of the school strive towards common goals.

The analysis of the findings also shows that strategic planning plays an important role in the productivity of schools' human and financial resources. Targeted allocation of resources and facilities, reduction of duplication, prioritization of activities, and optimal management of human resources increase operational efficiency and reduce waste of resources. Even in conditions of budget and human resources constraints, schools can maximize the use of available resources and significantly improve the quality of education through strategic planning. This issue doubles the importance of strategic planning as a tool for managing limited resources and increasing educational efficiency. In addition to the positive effects, obstacles to implementing strategic planning were also considered in this study. Weakness of managers' skills, cultural and organizational resistance of teachers and staff, limited financial and human resources, and lack of sufficient support from policymakers are the main challenges facing schools in implementing strategic plans. However, the findings showed that even in the face of these challenges, the systematic implementation of strategic planning

and the creation of a participatory culture in the school can maintain its positive effects on educational productivity and teaching quality and prevent waste of resources. In addition to its direct impact on teaching and learning, strategic planning also helps to strengthen the organizational culture and the participation of teachers and staff. The research showed that when teachers and staff participate in the design and implementation of programs, their sense of belonging, motivation, and organizational commitment increase and resistance to change decreases. This leads to the full implementation of educational programs and to their alignment with the overall goals of the school and the education system. Without the active participation of stakeholders, strategic planning, no matter how detailed, will reduce its effectiveness and become nothing more than an administrative directive.

Analysis of the findings shows that strategic planning brings about coordination between educational goals, resources, teaching methods, and complementary activities of schools. This coordination not only helps to improve the quality of learning and academic performance of students, but also increases the motivation and satisfaction of teachers and staff. In strategic schools, programs are designed in such a way that each educational and training activity plays its role in achieving the school's macro goals and the waste of resources is minimized.

One of the important aspects of strategic planning is improving the quality of managerial decision-making. Managers who are familiar with strategic planning methods and tools can make more informed decisions based on data and evidence and continuously improve educational processes. This evidence-based decision-making allows for the measurement of the effectiveness of programs and the implementation of necessary reforms, and helps create a continuous learning cycle at the school level.

In general, it can be concluded that strategic planning transforms schools from a reactive and unaligned state to purposeful, systematic and dynamic organizations. This approach increases resource efficiency, improves the quality of learning, promotes employee motivation and commitment, and creates a positive organizational culture. The importance of strategic planning is doubled in the current

situation when schools are faced with resource constraints, social pressures, and high educational expectations. Finally, educational researchers and policymakers recommend that empowering managers in strategic planning, creating active participation of teachers and staff, developing a culture of innovation and change, and continuously supporting the implementation of programs are essential for improving the educational productivity of schools. According to the findings of this study, strategic planning can be considered as the backbone of educational management in schools, which, while improving the quality of learning, resource management, and staff participation, provides the basis for achieving the major goals of the education system.

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