Identifying Obstacles to Sustainable Professional Development of Iraqi Teachers and School Administrators in Order to Provide a Model for Overcoming Obstacles

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Abstract

Introduction: Professional development of school administrators and teachers is essential to fulfill the role of educational leadership and improve student learning. This research aimed to identify the obstacles to sustainable professional development of teachers and school administrators in Iraq in order to provide a model for overcoming the obstacles

Methodology: In terms of nature, it is a qualitative research conducted using the content analysis method. Potential participants included teachers, school administrators, and university professors in the fields of educational sciences in Iraq, who were selected purposefully based on a number-based criterion based on the theoretical saturation rule. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. The data analysis method was in the style of the Atride and Stirling model.

Findings: The results showed that the obstacles to sustainable professional growth and development in Iraq include: knowledge obstacles (weakness in specialized knowledge, weakness in technology, and weakness in educational content knowledge); The following were the ethical or moral barriers (personal ethics and organizational ethics), the practical or communication barriers (interpersonal communication, organizational communication), the policy-making barriers (strategic weakness and inattention to change), the organizational barriers (weakness of organizational justice, weak supervision, and weak support), and the organizational learning barriers (weakness in knowledge creation participation, weak documentation, and weak knowledge sharing).

Conclusion: Consequently, according to the results of previous research, it can be said that creating strong strategic plans, supporting changes and creativity, paying attention to the individual needs of principals and teachers, and strengthening content knowledge and professional ethics are among the measures that can help strengthen the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers in Iraq.

 Key Words: obstacles, professional competency, teachers, Administrators.

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Introduction

Professional development of school administrators and teachers is essential to fulfill the role of educational leadership and improve student learning. This is achieved by familiarizing them with modern educational research, improving monitoring and evaluation skills, mastering effective learning strategies, and using educational technologies. Administrators should acquire the ability to design and implement educational quality improvement programs through ongoing training and participation in specialized workshops and courses. This development not only improves school management, but also contributes to the academic growth of students and the empowerment of teachers by creating a more favorable learning environment (Harper, 2008).

Researchers have identified elements in the design of professional development programs that appear to maximize principals' and teachers' learning, including a strong focus on content, research-based learning methods, participation and collaboration, and alignment with school curricula and policies.

It is essential that principals and teachers continually update and develop their professional knowledge and skills to keep pace with this process of change and development.

Principals and teachers also have the responsibility to teach students, manage classrooms and student behavior, understand different teaching strategies, and possess specialized values. Therefore, professional development is a fundamental factor for principals and teachers to be able to perform their duties well. (Eroglu & Danmaskaya, 2021)

If managers and teachers have a high level of knowledge and ability, they can apply the best educational methods and approaches and actively participate in the education and training process. By being up-to-date in their field of expertise and familiar with current information, they will be able to transfer new concepts and skills to students. Using modern terminology, it can be said that the development of any society and environment depends on the knowledge and skills of its specialists, and managers and teachers, as people with high knowledge and ability, play a very important role in this process. By being up-to-date in their field of expertise and familiar with current information, they can apply advanced educational methods and approaches and, by being active in the education and training process, contribute to the development of society and the education of young generations. (Ramesh and Krishnan, 2020).

They should apply more creative and efficient educational methods by using advanced technologies and modern educational tools. Also, mastery of ICT skills is essential for administrators and teachers to be able to operate in the digital society of everyday life and to guide students towards learning and developing technological skills. (Exarchou et al., 2015). This development is in line with the changing times that are taking place among today's generation who

have the potential to grow into ideal talents at a global level (Le, Andrew, & Hedda, 2021). Pedagogical skills are seen as a sufficient indicator of the ability to use professional knowledge and educational tools. Pedagogical competence, in turn, is a part of pedagogical competence, as it includes the use and mastery of important professional knowledge, skills, and personal qualities that have reached a high level of perfection. (Mizambao & Baymirzayev, 2019).

Nkundabakura et al. (2024) in a study titled "Effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development Training Program in the Training of Principals and Teachers of Mathematics and Science in Rwandan Secondary Schools" found that when principals and teachers continuously update their subject content knowledge, pedagogy and technology, they teach more effectively. Koranchi and Bampo (2023) conducted a study titled Continuous Professional Development for Public School Teachers: Benefits and Concerns. The study found that the participants found the CPD programs beneficial. These programs benefited them in various aspects of their work. However, the study revealed that the participants had concerns that if properly addressed by the stakeholders, would help improve the quality of subsequent programs to the benefit of the participants and the educational service. No research has been conducted to accurately identify the obstacles to the professional development of teachers and principals in Iraq, and there is not enough information to develop in-service training programs for teachers and principals. Therefore, this research is necessary to develop information-based training programs to empower teachers and principals in Iraq. Therefore, this research raises the fundamental question of what are the obstacles to the sustainable professional development of teachers and principals in Iraq and how to provide a model for overcoming the obstacles?

Methodology

This study used the qualitative content analysis method and the Atride-Stirling (2011) thematic analysis model. This method involves identifying and extracting codes and key points from the text. First, the researcher identified primary concepts by reading the text carefully and completely and selected them as basic themes. These basic themes represent the essential and important points in the data.

In the next step, the basic themes were transformed into organizing themes by combining and summarizing. In this step, the researcher reviewed the basic codes and put similar and related concepts together to form organizing themes. These organizing themes help to categorize the data and create a logical framework for analysis. Then, overarching themes emerged from the integration of organizing themes. These overarching themes are identified as the main and comprehensive themes of the text and have the ability to cover the entire research topic. The researcher, based on her diagnostic abilities and mastery, selected appropriate names for each category of codes and themes that

best represented the main and central concept of each category. This systematic process allowed the researcher to analyze the qualitative data in a deeper and more coherent manner and to present the results in a meaningful way that was relevant to the research objectives.

Potential participants included school principals, teachers, and university professors in the fields of education in Iraq, who were selected purposively based on the number-based criterion based on the theoretical saturation rule. The purposive sampling criterion in this study was that principals, teachers, and administrators had a master's degree or higher, had at least ١٠ years of teaching and management experience, and had at least a master's degree. The sample size was determined according to the theoretical saturation rule. With the purposive sampling method based on the theoretical saturation level during the interviews, the researcher reached data saturation with ٢١ interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The questions for this interview were designed based on a review of the research literature and the results of qualitative studies. During the interview process, the interviewees were asked what their opinion was about the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers? What indicators does the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers have? What obstacles are there to the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers? And the following questions were asked based on the participants' responses. The duration of each interview was between ٤٥ and ٧٥ minutes, and after obtaining permission from the interviewees, their voices were recorded, and then the data were analyzed and coded.

Using the Atride-Stirling (٢٠١١) thematic analysis method, qualitative data were analyzed until a network of themes was reached. In the first stage, parts of the interview texts were extracted and recorded in writing. Then, in the initial coding, the codes related to each section were placed in separate tables. In the next stage, codes that were similar in terms of meaning were compared and basic themes were extracted. These basic themes were categorized based on semantic similarities and presented as organized themes. Finally, the organized themes were transformed into an abstract and comprehensive theme and a final table of theme classification was compiled. To ensure the accuracy and robustness of the research, Guba and Lincoln (١٩٩٤) indicators were used. These two researchers believe that four main criteria are necessary to evaluate the scientific validity of qualitative studies: validity (acceptability, believability), trust and reliability, confirmability, and transferability. In this research, the emphasis was on two indicators of credibility and transferability, which were used as criteria for evaluating the information presented in the research.

Research Findings

Using the interview content analysis method, an attempt was made to extract and categorize the content and themes of the studied pattern. Examples of interview statements are given in Table ١.

Table ١- Parts of speeches and basic themes

speech fragment	Basic theme
As an experienced teacher in Iraq , I have gained many experiences during these years . One of the main obstacles in the sustainable professional development of managers and teachers is our educational beliefs . If we believe that students ' abilities are fixed and unchangeable , this belief can lead to a reduction in our efforts to improve teaching methods . I myself had this belief at the time , but with the passage of time and experience , I realized that by changing and using diverse teaching methods , all students can progress .	educational beliefs , knowledge of educational psychology , out of habit practicing positive behaviors , Knowing the audience Knowing the strategies and styles Edgy , Knowing the goals of teaching and the need to have knowledge of the curriculum in the direction of development A well - established professional
The knowledge of educational psychology is very important for us . This knowledge helps us to better understand the needs and behaviors of our students . I remember in one of my classes , a student had a behavior problem that caused disruption in my class . Using the knowledge of educational psychology and positive techniques , I was able to help this student to improve his behavior and be more successful .	
There is always a desire to get used to positive behaviors in my class. As teachers, we have to constantly get used to positive behaviors in order to be positive role models for our students . One of my colleagues, who was used to encouraging and praising students, was able to significantly increase their motivation and self - confidence and make the classroom atmosphere more positive .	
Knowing the details and styles Educating students can improve the process Please help . One of my experiences in this field was using visual methods for students who were interested in visual learning . By using diagrams , pictures and teaching videos , I was able to simplify the understanding of complex concepts for these students .	
Knowing the goals of teaching and having knowledge of the curriculum is also one of the things that helps in sustainable professional development . Accurate planning and sufficient knowledge of the content have helped us to teach in the best possible way . Managers and teachers who clearly understand their teaching goals can Design the class and teaching materials in such a way that students can achieve these goals in the best way . For example , in designing my curriculum , I always pay attention to the fact that every activity and content should help the student achieve one of the educational goals . In the end , we must say that continuous trainings and institutional supports are very important for the professional development of managers and teachers . Training programs should include training related to educational beliefs , knowledge of educational psychology , audience recognition and strategies It is an edge . Also , financial support and appropriate constructions should be provided so that managers and teachers can update and develop their professional skills in the best way .	

Because the number of interviews was large, only one of the interviews was given in table number one as an example. Next, by extracting the organizing and comprehensive subjects, a network of subjects was formed

Table ۲- Basic, organizing and inclusive themes

Basic themes	Organizer themes	Overarching theme	The main theme
Inadequacy of knowledge on the subject of weakness in educational content , lack of regular training workshops , lack of conferences , weakness in teaching . methods and valuable skills	*Weakness in specialized knowledge*	Knowledge barriers	
Weakness in understanding technologies , incomplete understanding of social networks , weakness in using software and hardware. Little familiarity with new technologies and access to them . Little familiarity with virtual space , The need to create suitable platforms for technologies	*Weakness in technology*		
false educational beliefs , knowledge weak in educational psychology , from getting used to positive behaviors , Poor knowledge of the audience Inadequate knowledge of strategies and styles Edgy , Inadequate understanding of teaching goals and the need to have curriculum knowledge in line with sustainable . professional development	*Weakness in content knowledge of education*		
The lack of patience of the teacher, the insufficient patience of the teacher, The teacher's lack of positivity , insufficient attention to sympathy and respect for students and colleagues, weakness in perseverance and self - regulation , Little positive spirit towards development A well - established professional	*Individual ethics*	Obstacles of the secretary	
Lack of attention to good manners, lack of mutual understanding, Paying little attention to the instructions and coordination with the manager , not paying attention to doing the work voluntarily. no difference To manage time in the direction of sustainable professional development	*Organizational ethics*		
The problem of good communication with students, disregarding student orientation , not paying attention to communication skills , Being weak in giving effective feedback , not paying attention to forgiveness and forgiveness, not considering problem solving in line with sustainable professional development .	*Interpersonal communication*	Barriers to action	
The absence of departmental and inter - departmental cooperation between managers and teachers. In order to teach participation , lack of research course Interaction with the manager and executive staff , the need to use social , . networks in line with sustainable professional development	*Organizational communication*		

strategic plan , lack of proper perspective in the direction of sustainable professional development , Absence of appropriate missions of the organization . lack of operational strategies and plans ,	*Strategic weakness*	*Weakness of politics*	
lack of change plans , lack of sufficient support for changes in the direction of professional development , Lack of attention to the development of creativity and innovation , little attention to the individual needs of managers and teachers Fear of change in officials , managers and teachers in the direction of . sustainable professional development	*Ignorance of change*		
The lack of attention of officials and managers to individual and group development . Weakness in supervision and monitoring of sustainable professional development by officials . Ambiguous job path , little attention to the stigma of managers and teachers. The need for meritocracy in the education system in the direction of sustainable professional development	*Weakness of organizatio nal justice*	*Organizational barriers*	
of attention of officials and managers to clinical attention and supervision , lack of attention to the selection and recruitment of managers and teachers, lack of attention to the creation of a suitable reward and punishment system . Lack of scientific value of the professional development of managers and teachers in . the direction of sustainable professional development	*Supervisory weakness*		
The lack of attention of officials and administrators to the support of administrators and teachers. Insufficient access to resources, little attention to the path of growth and advancement of managers and teachers. Lack of sufficient financial resources for sustainable professional development	*Supportive weakness*		
Little attention to cooperative teaching , the inability of managers and teachers to acquire more knowledge about the content , little attention to action research and lesson research , little attention to group meetings to compile content , Little attention to the production of online and virtual content in the direction of . sustainable professional development	*Weakness in participatio n in knowledge creation*	*Neglecting organizational learning*	
The necessity of writing the experiences of managers and teachers in line with their professional capacity . The necessity of the recommendations of managers and teachers to the coder in the field of professional development . lack of information banks in schools, Not paying attention to identifying the valuable knowledge of managers and teachers. The lack of skills in writing reports and recording changes by managers and teachers in the direction of sustainable . professional development	*Weakness in documentation*		
The need to share experiences between managers and teachers in line with professional growth , little attention to the promotion of cooperation between managers and teachers . Weakness in creating magazines and bulletins for teacher 's professional development by education officials. Inadequacy of conference and meeting professional growth of managers and teachers , Inadequacy of teaching festivals in the direction of sustainable professional development	*Weakness in knowledge sharing*		

As can be seen in Table ٢ after reviewing and eliminating the basic recurring themes, ٧٧ basic themes, ١٥ organizing themes, and ٦ overarching themes were ultimately extracted. In the next step, the theme network was drawn.
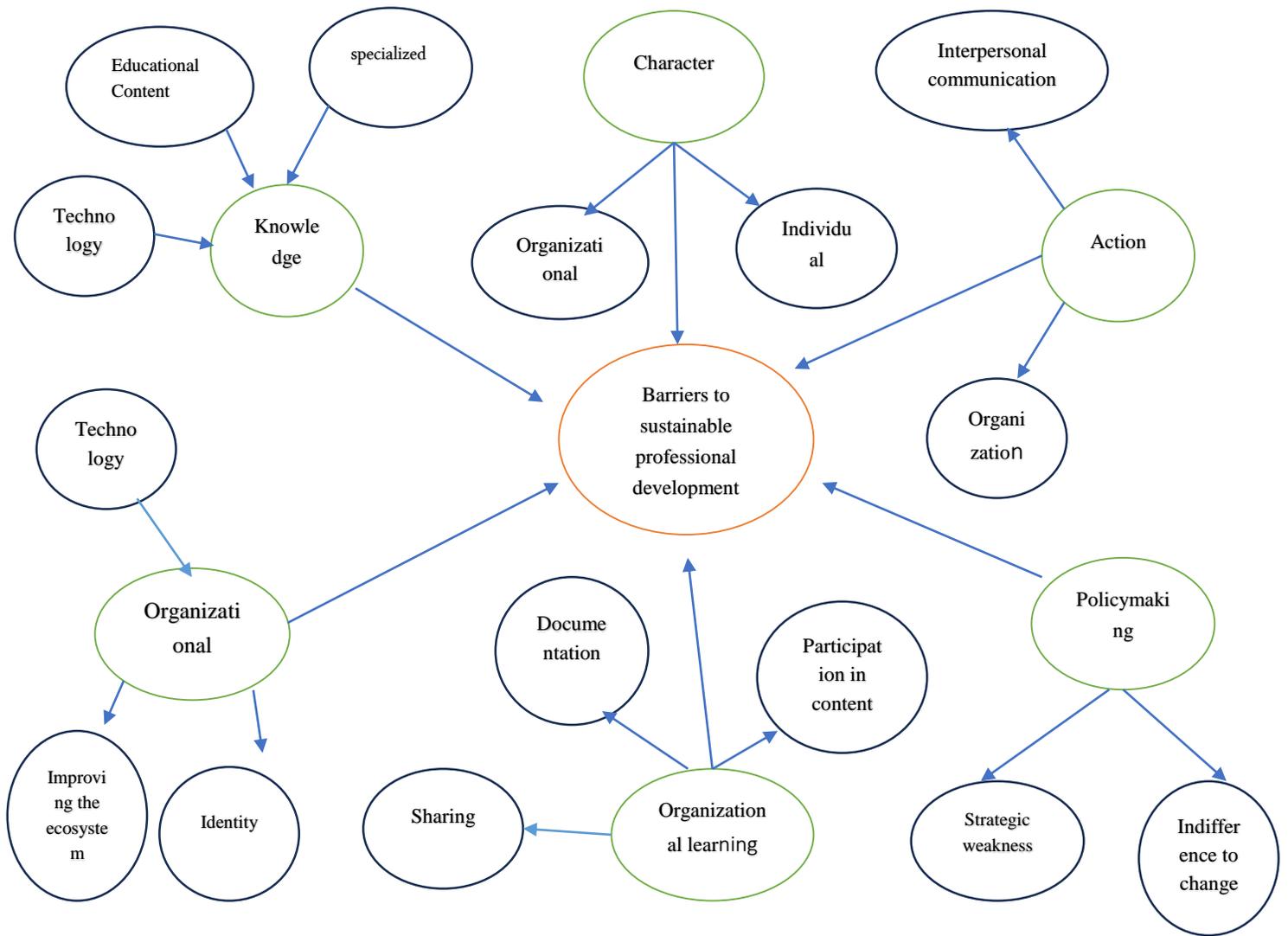
Figure 1- Thematic network of components of obstacles to sustainable professional development of principals and teachers in Iraq
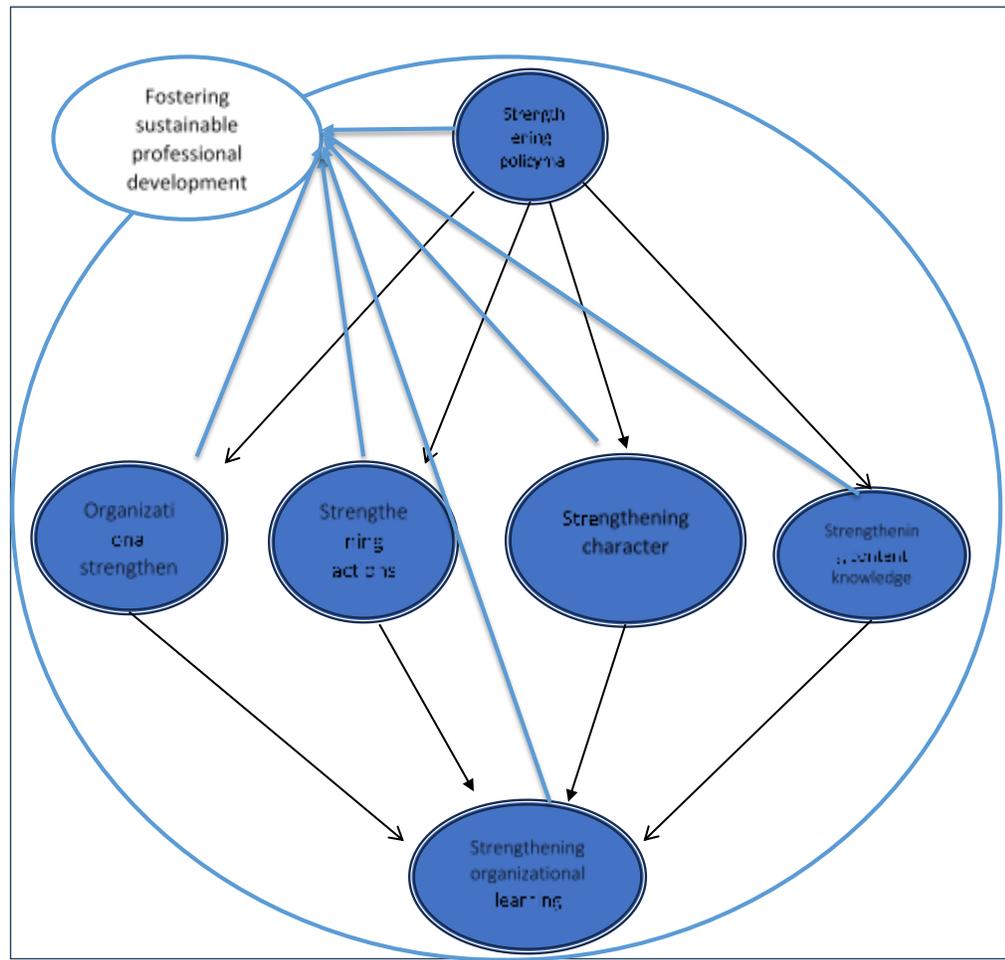
Figure 2: Model for promoting sustainable professional development of principals and teachers in Iraq

Figure 2 shows a model for overcoming obstacles to sustainable professional development for Iraqi school administrators, teachers, and principals. This model consists of 15 organizing concepts and 6 overarching concepts. The obstacles to sustainable professional growth and development in Iraq include: knowledge obstacles (weakness in specialized knowledge, weakness in technology, and weakness in educational content knowledge); clerical or ethical obstacles (personal ethics, organizational ethics); action or communication obstacles (interpersonal communication, organizational communication); policy-making obstacles (weakness in strategic communication and inattention to change); organizational obstacles (weakness in organizational justice, weak supervision, and weak support); and organizational learning obstacles (weakness in knowledge creation participation, weak documentation, and weak knowledge sharing).

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the research results and identified barriers, the first step in strengthening the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers in Iraq is to strengthen policymaking. Previous research has also shown that strategic planning can play an important role in improving educational processes and the professional development of principals and teachers. In this regard, Collinson et al. (2009) found that the transformation of education in the 21st century depends on the support of educational policies through increased participation of principals and teachers in educational policymaking, greater coordination of government policies across institutions, and collaborative and differentiated models for lifelong professional development. In many studies, it has been emphasized that the development of visions, strategies, long-term and short-term plans can serve as the backbone of the professional development of principals and teachers. These plans should be targeted and implementable in order to meet the educational and professional needs of principals and teachers. Also, officials should pay special attention to changes in the education system and support change programs, which is consistent with the results of Mabley et al. (2023).

Supporting creativity and innovation in the educational environment can also help improve the quality of teaching and learning. By creating an environment where administrators and teachers can implement their new ideas and methods, their motivation and job satisfaction increase. Paying attention to the individual needs of administrators and teachers is also of great importance. Each teacher has his or her own conditions and needs that must be considered. Another important dimension is strengthening content knowledge and developing individual and organizational ethics. Previous research has shown that administrators and teachers with strong content knowledge and appropriate professional ethics can teach in the best possible way and have a positive impact on student learning. Also, strengthening the actions and communications between administrators and teachers, managers, and other school staff can help create a harmonious and supportive work environment. Based on this research, paying attention to each of these dimensions and components can lead to improved organizational learning among administrators and teachers. Principals and teachers can produce the necessary content, benefit from each other's experiences, document these experiences and make them available to others. Various studies have shown that sustainable professional development of principals and teachers not only leads to improved quality of education, but also increases motivation and job satisfaction of principals and teachers. This, in turn, can have positive effects on overall school performance and student academic outcomes.

In this regard, the results of the study by Isa et al (٢٠٢٤) showed that the quality of principals and teachers is related to their professionalism, and qualified principals and teachers can create high-quality educational processes. Consequently, according to the results of previous research, it can be said that creating strong strategic plans, supporting changes and creativity, paying attention to the individual needs of principals and teachers, and strengthening

content knowledge and professional ethics are among the measures that can help strengthen the sustainable professional development of principals and teachers in Iraq.

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