



## THE EDUCATION OF URBAN MANAGERS IN IRAN SINCE 1950S TO 2004

Mahmud Saeedi Rezvani\* Hadi Saeedi Rezvani\*\*

### *Abstract*

**Purpose-**This paper tries to describe and evaluate the education and training programs for the municipalities' staff and the urban managers in Iran since 1950s, by reviewing the history and changes in these programs.

**Design/methodology/approach-** This article bases its discussion of the urban manager education evolution on the original document about the educational activities at municipalities in Iran. In this way the documentary and criterion methods are used.

**Findings-** The intense activities regarding education of urban managers started with the establishment of the Municipalities Union in 1958. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979 the Development Deputy of the Interior Ministry continued these educational programs after a lapse of two decades. In 2002 the Municipalities Organization was established and these educational programs continued under the new organization. Before the Islamic revolution, these educational programs included 1) Pre-service training and 2) In-service training. The educational programs after the revolution can be classified into three groups: 1) Publication for the purpose of enculturation; 2) long-term courses for educating urban managers; 3) Short-term courses.

**Keywords:** Urban managers, Action research, Short-term courses, Modular education.

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\* Assis. Prof. Dr., Faculty of Education and Psychology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, e-mail: saeedy@um.ac.ir

\*\* Ph.D candidate, University of Tehran, Department of Urban Planning, Iran, hadisaeedi@yahoo.com

### **1-Introduction**

This paper describes the history and changes in education of urban managers and evaluates these educational programs. Using the available documents on the subject, the paper tries to give a real picture of these programs. And considering the scientific principles of educational planning, the paper evaluates them.

The paper tries to answer the following **questions**:

1. When did the efforts to educate the urban managers and the municipalities' staff in Iran begin and how did it continue?
2. Has the urban managers' education been based on scientific principles of educational planning?

Scientific principles in educational planning of skill based (job oriented) courses are:

1. Determine the occupation tasks and sub tasks (job analysis)
2. Draw up goals and contents of courses based on job analysis
3. Offering the standards of success in training courses based on needed knowledge, skills and attitudes for better performing on jobs.

Considering various aims of the study, two methods have been used in this research:

1. The **documentary method** used to describe the education of the urban managers.
2. The **Criterion method** used to analyze the intended curriculum and answer the second question. In this section, the evaluated research method is used. In this method authors try to depict the scheme of weakness and strength points about the existent status. Our judgments are based on criterion method. It means that we consider certain standards about a training program, and then follow these standards in current programs.

This paper is written in four parts. The present introduction illustrates the questions and methods of the study. The second part is a review of some related theories. The third part describes the education of urban managers and municipality's staff in Iran. The fourth part discusses the weaknesses of educational programs.

### **2- Theoretical literature**

In the traditional approach of vocational education, after assessing the needs, the desirable subject matters are organized and presented in the form

of systematic and classic courses. This approach was seriously challenged in the 1990's. Probably the first one who seriously and systematically criticized the traditional approach was Donalds A. Schon (1987). In his book *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* he criticizes traditional approaches of vocational education and quoting Shils (1978) states "Technical rationality is a type of epistemology of action with positivist philosophy as its source. The advocates of technical intellect believe that, practitioners are means for solving issues. They use technical tools for ascertain special purposes" (Schon, 1987: 3). But Schon believes that "mostly the problematic positions are counted as unique instances" (ibid: 5).

He also discuss the contradiction of values in a special situation, remarking three factors of uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict for creating situations which cannot be solved by technical knowledge. He mentions designing professions such as architecture, urban planning, laws and management as examples. He brings the following reasons why the professions related to planning such as architecture and urban development management cannot be taught but should be learned and guided:

1-Skilled planning of a type of knowledge in action;

2-Planning is a type of holistic skills;

3-Skilled planning is dependant on the capacity of planners to differentiate between desirable and invalid plans;

4-Planning is a creative action (ibid: 158);

His discussion put doubt on two famous intellectual pre assumptions saying that:

a. Academic research can bring about the technical knowledge of the environment.

b. Professional knowledge taught in schools and universities can prepare students for practice in real situation (ibid: 9).

So, the vocational education in general and the vocational education of managers in particular have been criticized.

Introducing "The Critical Movement in Management and Manager-Educator Relations", Elliot and Reynolds (2001) say that the critical movement in contemporary management studies has been reflected in both theory and practice of management education in following areas:

1) Management curricula (such as Alson and Wilmot 1992);

2) Educational method (such as Friekh and Gerry, 1996);

3) Quantitative Research in management<sup>1</sup> (Alson and Ditz, 2000).

Criticizing the traditional approaches led to introducing new approaches as alternatives. Eisner (1997) believes that to be able to practice knowledge in the field of any vocation, graduates should possess eight characteristics:

- 1) Understanding relations;
- 2) Knowing intricacies;
- 3) Being aware of the complexity of issues;
- 4) Being able to change the purpose during the process;
- 5) Being able to decide when there is no formulated rule;
- 6) Using imagination
- 7) Being capable to act within the limitations of a media;
- 8) Being able to develop an aesthetic framework.

Another approach introduced by Schon (1987) is the education for reflective practitioners. Based on his research and studies on architecture, Schon developed his approach especially in this field and tried to introduce the methodology of educating a reflective architect. His book on educating architects is actually reports of his research activities and observance as well as his own learning experiences. In fact, the essence of his educational approach is "**action research**". The important point considering this approach is that the examples and case studies Schon introduced are on those subjects in which a real situation can be created in classroom. Now this question comes up that if it is possible in the manager education to create a real situation in the classroom? An architecture student while designing the plan of a building or a student of urban design while designing a street can imagine himself in a real situation but a student of urban management doesn't seem to have the same opportunity.

Here an old question arises that "Is the management a teachable major at all?" To answer this question, it is better to differentiate between the terms

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to point out that criticisms leveled against positivist research approach do not mean that the quantitative research should be stopped. But the relative ineffectiveness of this method in producing beneficial knowledge to solve the intricate problems of the present world necessitates giving attention to other methods.

Thus, the interpretive research approach to obtain the criteria of evaluation for creating the foundations for progress and improving action; the action research approach with the objective of improving the action by developing the individual; the critical research approach with the objective to formulate the injustices and put forward liberation actions and conduct are given more attention.

"management education" and "manager training". Management education is a process which provides usual students knowledge to become capable of management. For example, a group of graduates become selected to study a post-graduation course in management. But manager training is "in-service education" for those who are practicing management. This can include different types of educational programs to increase managers' skills of management.

There is no doubt in the necessity and possibility of improving managers' ability through in-service education. Therefore, the question mentioned above is related to management education. Referring to this question Litterell (1998) challenges knowledge base of management. In his view the knowledge base of management should include a set of definable, acceptable and testable assumption about organizations and management. Analyzing the academic knowledge of management, he believes that "there is neither such base, nor is one attainable" (Litterell, 1998:33).

Analyzing the academic knowledge of management, Litterell results that the history of applying management in scientific fields shows that the practical usage of management knowledge in actual environments has faced serious challenges. Fiedler in this regard says that "yet, the success rate in selecting and training leaders still leaves much to be desired"(Fiedler, 1998:335). He believes that "the problem is that we cannot predict what a future leadership situation will be" (Fiedler, 1998: 335).

According to Fiedler, the current method of selecting and training managers is based on two basic assumptions:

- 1) Managers who perform well in one management situation will also perform well in others;
- 2) Managers will be able to make effective use of their cognitive resources including their knowledge, analytical mind, duty and skill.

But his studies showed that none of these assumptions are true, and the current method of selecting and training managers have been useless.

These theories and views place more emphasis on the question mentioned before: "Is management teachable?" Those who plan education of urban managers should provide a clear answer to this question before planning any educational program, in addition learners are a basic factor in training urban managers,. Training courses can be beneficial for those who possess some individual qualities necessary for management, such as creativity, assertiveness, good memory and high intellect but for those who do not have inherent competency defined as the "art of management", the academic knowledge cannot do much.

This paper has made difference between the education of some persons as a manager by classical educational courses, and the training of the current managers by in-service training courses.

By discussing some approaches about the possibility of conveying some skills that are necessary to a manager, we want to ponder this question: "Is the management ability a nature or a nurture matter? In other words, is it possible to make a person without managing experience, a well manager by academic courses?" Nevertheless, the article considers the training courses of current managers as a positive action.

How the performance of the urban management influences the improvement in quality of urban life, and decreases the social abnormal behaviors. The more urban managers are familiar with the right and efficient methods of urban management, the better they could manage a city according to the city situations. Therefore training of urban managers and offering the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes have a crucial role in successful urban management.

### **3- Urban Managers Education in Iran**

#### **3-1- Urban Managers Education before the Islamic Revolution**

##### **3-1-1- Urban Managers Education before establishment of the Municipalities Union**

Before the establishment of Municipalities Union the activities to educate urban managers was limited to publishing periodicals and reports related to city management.

A while before the formation of Tehran's Municipal Association, in 1907 "Baladia newspaper" published in Tehran included some news about city management. After the establishment of Tehran's Municipal Association this periodical acted as an organ of the association. Some while later, some other periodicals such as "Balad al-Amin" in Mashhad (1910) and "Baladia" in Tabriz (1910) commenced publication. Being related to the issues of the city association and also to urban management, the contents of these periodicals unintentionally and unofficially have played a role in education of urban managers (Rezazade, 1999).

In the contemporary period, the publication of the book *City Planning Education for the Municipalities in Iran* written by Engineer L.C.Gibbs - who was one of the officials of the Truman fourth doctrine organization in Iran, can be considered the first step in educating municipalities' staff and urban managers. This book contained technical and scientific guide for the municipalities in Iran to solve the problems of urban development. However,

it did not have any practical impact on urban management in Iran because it was written in English and no Persian translation was available (Rashidiyah, 1964:180).

3-1-2- Educating municipality's staff and urban managers after the establishment of the Municipalities Union

"The Municipalities Union of Iran" was established in 1956 and started its activities in 1958. This union formed several committees such as translation department, census and information, publication, management and education, and improvement of financial affairs, and very soon started to educate municipalities staff (Shafi'ee, document number 1).

The objectives of the Union according to its constitution were "to guide municipalities to maintain new administrative methods based on the prevalent fundamentals of the developed countries by implementing the following actions:

A) Conducting annual and monthly conferences, publishing useful periodicals and establishing libraries and training courses;

B) Gathering information about the municipalities in Iran and in the world in one centre and exchanging the needed information;

C) Encouraging people to participate more in the local affairs;

D) Creating cooperation between the municipalities and governmental organizations to bring about convenience for citizens; (Ibid, document number 4 dated 8/9/1961).

So educating the municipality's staff and the urban managers has seriously and objectively been a part of the organization objectives and programs.

The educational activities of the Municipalities Union can be classified as follows<sup>2</sup>:

1) **Pre-service training:** In this program about 300 employees passed a one year course in finance, and utilities of municipalities. These courses were conducted for those holding a high school diploma with the cooperation of the Interior Ministry, University of Tehran, and Polytechnic School of Tehran (Ibid, document number 17 dated 2/5/1966).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information refer to the Municipalities Union of Iran, year Book, 1996, pp. 554-561.

2) **Developing Correspondence Courses:** These courses started in 1961 for the first time under the guidance of an American advisor in the Municipalities Union, Thomas Turson, and it had 230 participants in total.

3) **Municipality Management and Financial Management courses:** The first course on municipality and financial management was conducted in the autumn 1963 in the College of Administrative Sciences in Tehran University. The funding for the courses was provided by the Planning and Budget Organization till 1965. Nine courses on this subject were conducted from 1963 to 1966 and the last one was from October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1966 to March 15<sup>th</sup> 1967, and 17 mayors and urban managers participated (ibid, document number 29 dated September 1967). Total participants of these nine courses were 235 (The Year Book of the Municipalities Union, 1966, p 559). In addition, from 1963 to March 1967, seven courses in municipalities' financial affairs were conducted with about 180 participants (ibid).

The first course on urban management for graduates was conducted in 1966. The participants selected via examination and interview from among 274 candidates. 55 Selected practitioners participated in a ten-week course and finally 20 of them were employed to work as mayors and deputy mayors. In the second course from 334 candidates 40 persons were selected via examination and interview to participate in the course (Shafi'ee, document number 29, dated September 1967). According to Hadi Mubargha, who was the managing director of the Municipalities Union in three periods started at 1965, 1968 and 1973, "about 1000 persons holding high school diploma and 150 graduate students participated in these courses to study urban management."

**4) Conducting Archives courses:**

These courses were held from 13<sup>th</sup> August 1965 to 1<sup>st</sup> September 1965 with 44 participants to be trained as archivists of the Tehran municipality. Also six educational courses were conducted for archivists throughout the country from October 1966 to February 1967; the duration of each course was two weeks and totally 161 trainees participated (ibid).

**5) Fire-Fighting courses:**

The first course of fire-fighting was conducted on 14 January 1966 and 16 trainees who were the head of fire-fighting offices in major cities participated (Year Book of Municipalities Union. 1966, p. 560).

**6) The Scholarships of Municipalities Union:**

The period of these scholarships were from one to six months. Followings are examples of these scholarships:

A) Sending 10 trainees to USA by USA International Development Organization support

B) Sending 10 trainees to England for one month in March 1965

C) Deputing one trainee to France for one year, using the municipalities cold-storage department scholarship

D) Sending two persons to India for six months to study the local governments (Ibid).

**7) Publishing the Municipalities Magazine:**

This periodical was published with educational approach and tried to highlight the scientific methods and world's experiences in urban management. Since 1956 it was a monthly magazine and was distributed among the municipalities and its employees (Shafi'ee, document number 48 dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1977). The 109<sup>th</sup> issue of the Municipalities magazine was published in November 1967. (Ibid, document number 62).

**8) Relationship with International Union of Local Authorities (IULA):**

Through IULA, which was a research organization related to municipalities, most of the world's experiences in the field of municipalities were transferred to Iran and some of the information received was published in the Municipalities Magazine. In 1975 Tehran was the host of the IULA conference in which all the mayors from around the world were gathering together. It was a great achievement for the Union. Moreover, most of the Union scholarships were awarded through IULA.

**9) Publishing Year Books:**

In 1966 and 1967, two year books of Municipalities Union were published. The contents of these year books were statistics and information regarding the municipal affairs as well as research articles and regulations of the municipalities (Ibid, document number 22).

**10) A Three year plan for municipal staff education:**

This plan was based on the municipal organization needs for human resources. According to the plan, 4500 municipal staff as well as job candidates in municipalities participated in some educational courses. These courses include:

A) Urban Management (General Course);

B) Municipality Management (Specialized Course);

C) Accounting and Finance;

D) Auditing;

E) Archives and Management of Records;

F) Supplying Properties and Storage Offices (Ibid, document number 29 dated September 1967).

This plan organized all the scattered courses in urban management, finance and archives of the municipalities and made them systematic.

Since 1974, the Municipalities Union started new activities in the educational field of municipalities and wanted to establish an institute for higher education in municipal services. According to Mubargha "the Union was on the verge of establishing a college of urban management in this period". Meanwhile using computers in the major municipalities was under process. (Ibid, document number 1/40 in 1974)

The documents of the Municipalities Union show that during the second half of 1970's the Union's network was being expanded throughout the country. In main cities like Shiraz, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Kerman, Isfahan and Karaj municipalities provided some lands to the Union <sup>3</sup>. In the letter of Asadullah Isfahani (the Interior Minister of the time) addressed to Ali Qadeemi Mahani (the managing director of the Municipalities Union) regarding establishment of educational centers for the municipalities employees, he wrote: "According to the Article 108 of the Municipal Law, the education of the municipalities personnel have been designated to the Municipalities Union. Thus, hereby it is agreed that some lands will be at the disposal of this Union in order to establish educational centers with the approval of the Interior Ministry." (Ibid, document number 55, dated 16/9/1977)

In addition to the Municipalities Union educational activities, a book titled *The Management of the Municipalities* published in three volumes by Ali Niyam in 1970, which was one of the effective and lasting efforts in the field of urban management education.

### **3-2- Education and training of the Urban Managers after the Islamic Revolution**

Soon after the Islamic Revolution, in 1980, the Municipalities Union was dissolved and its educational activities came to a halt for about two decades. In the second half of the 1990's the following activities started in this regard:

1) Establishing post-graduation courses in urban management as a sub-major of executive management by the Ministry of Sciences and Research and also establishment of urban management courses by Government Management Organization. These courses have been conducted since 1999 without any interruption.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from the interview with Hadi Mubargha on 17-12-2003

2) Conducting elections of the Urban and Rural Islamic Council throughout the country in 1998 for the first time.

3) Establishment of the Municipalities Organization in 2002.

The graduate course in urban management and its contents was approved by the Supreme Council of Planning in the Ministry of Research and Sciences on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1999 as one of the majors in humanities. According to the entrance examination booklet for the post graduation course in 2004, this course is a sub major of executive management and only those who had already had five years experience working in urban management field could join the course. So far the Faculty of Management of Allamah Tabatabayi University and University of Tehran have been offering this course, but the admission of students for this course has not been regular. The duration of this course is six semesters. The specialized units for this course contain 24 units, 4 seminars and 4 units dissertation. According to the "Role and Capability" clause of the course, graduates will be able to use their knowledge and thinking to make relation between urban services activities and the regional and national plans and also will be able to expand the culture of citizenship and participation.

The urban management courses of the Industrial Management Organization have been conducted unsystematically and the participants have been limited to government organization directors and employees. The usual motivation for participants is promotion in their jobs and few of them work in urban management. Therefore, these courses have not been effective in the urban management of the country.

The formation of Islamic councils throughout the country in 1998 brought new phases to the urban management system and a new organization for urban managing was established. Indeed, this development effects the education of urban managers. One of the new activities in this regard has been the publication of an educational booklet in simple language on various fields of rural and urban management. This booklet has been published by deputy office for People's Participation Propagation affiliated to the Agriculture Ministry and the Interior Ministry. From 1986 till the establishment of the Municipalities Organization in 2002 the civil deputy of the Interior Ministry has been carrying out this duty. And the Office of Civil Planning and the Urban Studies and Planning Center of this deputy office carried out effective research and publication on urban planning and urban management.

Formation of the Education and Expansion of Human Resources department in the Municipalities Organization was a great step toward municipality's education and promises new activities in this field. According to the reports on this office activities, on 2003 totally 37 short term educational courses and educational seminars have been planned and by the end of March 2004 the below-mentioned workshops have been conducted:

- 1) Workshops on the Collection of taxes;
- 2) Workshops on the Municipalities Investment;
- 3) Workshops on improving urban green environment;
- 4) GIS education workshop.

Moreover, Municipalities Organization reactivated the publication of the magazine "Shahrdariha" (Municipalities) in 1999 and till February 2005, 68 issues of this magazine were published. Content on the magazine is mostly educational matters related to urban issues and urban management. Likewise, quarterly journals of "Urban Management" and "The Culture of Security" have also been regularly published by this organization since 1999. In addition, the organization has published tens of volumes of books in the fields of urban management and urban planning.

#### **4- Evaluating the Educational Programs of the Urban Managers**

##### **4-1- Evaluating the Educational Programs of the Municipalities Union (before the Islamic revolution)**

The educational activities of the urban managers before the Islamic revolution can be divided into two types:

- 1) Pre-service training (like the 10 week courses conducted in 1966)
- 2) In-service Education

The in-service education can be divided into two types:

- a. Providing publications such as magazines, booklets and books in order to improve urban managers' knowledge of their field;
- b. The short- term courses on related subjects such as finance and fire fighting courses.

A scientific evaluation of these courses is not possible now since they are not conducting any more, and there are no evaluation studies available from the past. However, by an overview of the curriculum we can say that using various programs alongside, and not sufficing to one special method and course, as well as stressing on short-term courses instead of formal and long-term courses have been merits of these programs.

Because there is no evaluation available on these programs, it is not known whether they have been based on the educational needs or not. The only result we can get from this past is to care for "educational evaluation" as an important part of any educational planning.

#### **4-2- Evaluating the Educational Programs of Urban Managers after the Islamic Revolution**

Activities regarding urban manager education after the Islamic revolution can be divided into three parts:

- 1) Education for the purpose of enculturation;
- 2) Formal and long-term courses for educating urban managers;
- 3) Short term courses;

The first part includes conferences, publishing specialized and semi-specialized books, journals and reports on general management and urban management. The usefulness of these activities is proved by the scientific studies; however difficulty of evaluating is their main limitation.

The second type of education is the formal long-term courses (post-graduation degree in urban management) approved by the Supreme Council of Planning. The approved curriculum for the post-graduation course of urban management put it under the category of humanities which identify it as a theoretical major. While according to the policy of the Ministry of Sciences Researches and Technology, formal long-term courses which are tended to educate student for human resource jobs in organizations should come under the scientific-applied groups (The Supreme Council of Planning, Scientific-Applied department, 1999).

Moreover, this course is based on the separate subject curriculum model, while to prepare students for jobs in urban management, it should follow skill-based and modular curriculum models.

Another problem regarding this program is related to the basic challenges of the traditional approach in vocational education. It is seriously discussed that in some fields such as management creating a real situation in the class is not possible. So, how the academic knowledge of management can play its role in educating a successful manager?

The third part of educational programs contains short-term courses and educational conferences organized by the concerned offices in municipalities, universities and other similar institutions. These programs has their advantages of being less expensive in comparison with long term courses, and keeping trainees related to real situation of the working

environment so that they can connect learning to their working situation. It should be noticed that financial and time limitations oblige planners to select the most suitable courses considering the institutional needs as well as the programs performance and evaluation. Nowadays because of the communication expansion providing diverse and various courses by different authorities is emphasized. And with the websites like [www.apa.com](http://www.apa.com) and [www.modestogov.com](http://www.modestogov.com) that provide different types of workshops of virtual education in this regard, access to such courses is easy. But investments in long term courses highlight the issue of resource limitations.

### **5- Conclusions**

In brief, the education of the urban managers in Iran commenced with the establishment of the Municipalities Union in 1958. The educational activities contained: 1) Pre-service training 2) Developing Correspondence Courses 3) Municipality Management and Financial Management courses 4) Conducting Archives courses 5) Organizing Fire-Fighting courses 6) The Scholarships of Municipalities Union 7) Publishing the Municipalities Magazine 8) Relationship with International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) 9) Publishing two Issues of the Year Book of the Municipalities Union 10) Planning Three-Year Educational Program for the Municipality's staff.

From the Islamic revolution in 1979 to the early 1990s there were no special activities in this field. With the formation of the Islamic councils in 1998 special attention was paid to the education of the municipality's staff. Also in 2002 the establishment of Municipalities Organization which is the forerunner of the Municipalities Union revived these educational activities once again. The activities of Education and Human Resources Development Office in the Municipalities Organization and formulation and implementation of post-graduate studies in urban management are great steps toward a better future in the field of educating the municipalities and the urban managers in Iran.

The activities of the Municipalities Union before the Islamic revolution had the merit of providing diversity in education and stressing on semi-official short-term courses. However, the main activity after the Islamic revolution has been the post-graduation course of the urban management that was criticized in this paper for following reasons:

- 1) Approval of this field in the humanities and as a theoretical category instead of scientific-applied category;
- 2) Not following the curriculum model of skill-based and modular curriculum;

- 3) Ignoring the serious criticism already made to traditional approach of vocational education.

Regarding short-term education their merits are as below:

- 1) Low expenditure in comparison to the long-term courses;
- 2) The proximity of the trainees with real working conditions; and
- 3) Integrating of training with the working issues.

In Iran, the municipalities and urban managers' training efforts began fifty years ago, but they have suffered from following problems:

- 1- The theoretical framework and its hypothesis are not clear. It means that personal characteristics in learning management skills are not considered. There is no respond for this question: "Is this possible to educate people by relevant concepts and principles, and then expect them to perform well as a successful manager in executive situation?"
- 2- There is no scientific evaluation of performed educations. The effectiveness and the weaknesses of these educations are ambiguous. Moreover, the previous experiences are not used for promoting the later educational courses, because of the lack of documentation and evaluation.
- 3- There is not enough attention to applied aspect of formal courses of urban management. It may occur because the scientific approach of skill-oriented courses is not used. Prevalent tendency to subject orientation also can be seen obviously in urban management training as other fields of training.

Based on the findings of this study, the authors have the following suggestions to improve the education of urban managers and municipalities stuff:

1. Short-term pre-service and in-service courses based on the action research method
2. Using the modular curriculum model
3. Evaluating current educational programs and documenting the existing educations

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