

Designing a Competency Model for Research Faculty Members in Humanities Research Institutes: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Customizing the Assessment Center

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to design a competency model for recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes through the customization of an assessment center.

Methods and Materials: An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed in two qualitative and quantitative phases. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 key experts, including faculty members, research institute administrators, and human resource specialists. The conceptual competency model was extracted through thematic analysis. In the quantitative phase, the model was converted into a researcher-developed questionnaire. After its validity and reliability were confirmed, the questionnaire was distributed among 218 faculty members employed at humanities research institutes throughout Iran. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings: The findings demonstrated that the five-dimensional competency model, comprising individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies, had strong construct validity. Hypothesis testing revealed two principal pathways: (1) the interactive pathway—individual and professional competencies → behavioral competencies → research performance—and (2) the cultural-ideological pathway—ethical competencies → cultural-ideological competencies → research performance. The most important finding was the strong predictive role of cultural-ideological competencies in research performance.

Conclusion: This result indicates that commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity is not merely an ethical value but also a critical factor in effective knowledge production. Based on these findings, an operational framework for a customized assessment center was developed, comprising five customization principles, five simulated scenarios, and 15 observable behavioral indicators.

Keywords: Research faculty member competencies, assessment center, humanities research institutes, scientific-cultural identity, structural equation modeling, mixed-methods approach.

1. Introduction

Human capital constitutes one of the most consequential strategic resources of research organizations, particularly in institutions whose primary mission is the production, interpretation, and application of knowledge. In humanities research institutes, the quality of scientific outputs, policy recommendations, theoretical innovations, and sociocultural analyses depends substantially on the capabilities, values, and professional conduct of the faculty members recruited into the organization. Unlike routine staffing decisions, the recruitment of research faculty members is a long-term institutional investment because the selected individuals influence the intellectual direction, scientific reputation, organizational culture, and social legitimacy of the research institute over an extended period. Consequently, recruitment systems that rely predominantly on educational credentials, publication counts, interview impressions, or narrowly defined technical qualifications may fail to identify the deeper attributes required for sustainable research performance. Competency-based recruitment offers a more systematic approach by focusing on the integrated knowledge, skills, motives, personal characteristics, behaviors, and value orientations that enable individuals to perform effectively within a specific institutional context (Garcia, 2023; Michel, 2008).

Competency models provide structured descriptions of the attributes associated with effective performance in a particular occupation, organizational role, or strategic environment. Such models translate broad expectations into measurable dimensions and behavioral indicators that can inform recruitment, selection, development, performance appraisal, succession planning, and career progression. Their principal value lies in establishing a coherent connection between organizational strategy and human resource practices. Rather than evaluating candidates solely according to general qualifications, competency models enable organizations to determine whether individuals possess the specific capabilities required to fulfill institutional missions and respond effectively to contextual challenges. Competency frameworks may include technical expertise, analytical ability, communication, leadership, ethical judgment, emotional stability, collaboration, adaptability, and commitment to organizational values. The relative importance of these dimensions, however, varies

considerably across sectors and occupational settings, making contextualization an essential element of competency-model development (Garcia, 2023; Michel, 2008).

Research across different organizational sectors has demonstrated that competency requirements are neither universal nor interchangeable. Studies conducted in public administration, healthcare, education, petroleum organizations, construction projects, and entrepreneurial settings have identified distinct combinations of technical, managerial, interpersonal, strategic, and ethical capabilities. For example, competency models for public-sector human resource managers emphasize strategic human resource management, legal and administrative knowledge, communication, and organizational stewardship (Hajikarimi, 2021). Models developed for hospital and health-system managers highlight decision-making, leadership, coordination, resource management, professional accountability, and responsiveness to complex stakeholder needs (Kermani et al., 2017; Mosleh et al., 2023). Similarly, meta-synthetic evidence regarding public managers has demonstrated the multidimensional nature of managerial competency and the importance of aligning competency dimensions with sectoral responsibilities and national organizational conditions (Soveidi & Dosti, 2025). These findings indicate that competency models achieve practical validity only when their dimensions reflect the actual demands of the role and the strategic characteristics of the institution.

The contextual nature of competency is also evident in recent studies of managerial and leadership performance. Managerial competencies have been associated with enterprise creation, organizational development, problem-solving, and the effective mobilization of resources in small and medium-sized enterprises (Ogbara & Chukwunwa, 2025). In construction projects, managerial effectiveness depends on a combination of planning, coordination, technical understanding, communication, risk management, and stakeholder engagement (Rai et al., 2025). In educational organizations, professional leadership competencies include instructional understanding, organizational management, ethical conduct, interpersonal influence, and the ability to guide institutional development (Shirkani, 2025). Although these studies address different sectors, they collectively show that effective performance emerges from the interaction of multiple competency

domains rather than from technical knowledge alone. This insight is particularly relevant to humanities research institutes, where research faculty members must simultaneously demonstrate scientific expertise, independent judgment, ethical responsibility, intellectual interaction, and sensitivity to sociocultural contexts.

Faculty competency has received increasing attention because academic performance involves a complex combination of research, teaching, mentoring, institutional service, professional development, and social responsibility. Research on teaching-oriented faculty members has identified competencies related to subject-matter knowledge, instructional design, classroom management, student engagement, assessment, communication, professional ethics, and educational innovation (Goodarzi et al., 2022). Similarly, studies of newly recruited faculty members have emphasized the importance of continuous professional development, research capability, instructional competence, organizational socialization, communication, and adaptation to academic responsibilities (Jalaeifar et al., 2021). These competency domains are essential in universities where teaching and student development constitute central missions. Nevertheless, their direct application to research institutes is limited because the role configuration of research faculty members differs substantially from that of teaching-oriented academics.

In research institutes, faculty members are expected to produce theoretically significant and socially relevant knowledge, manage complex research programs, contribute to institutional research agendas, collaborate across disciplines, communicate with policymakers and nonacademic stakeholders, and preserve intellectual integrity under organizational or political pressure. Their performance cannot therefore be evaluated adequately through conventional academic indicators such as publication frequency, citation counts, teaching experience, or academic rank. These indicators may describe previous achievements but do not necessarily reveal the behavioral, ethical, or contextual capacities through which future performance is generated. A candidate may possess an extensive publication record yet lack the ability to collaborate, manage intellectual conflict, respond to societal problems, exercise epistemic responsibility, or align research activities with the mission of a specialized institute. Accordingly, the recruitment of research faculty members requires a competency framework that captures both visible qualifications and less observable characteristics.

The humanities intensify this requirement because humanities research is closely connected with interpretation, meaning, values, historical consciousness, cultural identity, and the critical examination of social institutions. Critical thinking in the humanities is not reducible to a generic cognitive skill; it also involves epistemic responsibility, sensitivity to assumptions, careful engagement with competing interpretations, and awareness of the social consequences of knowledge claims (McClean et al., 2024). Humanities researchers must evaluate complex and contested phenomena without oversimplification, distinguish evidence from ideological assertion, and engage constructively with intellectual disagreement. They are also expected to situate theories within historical and cultural contexts and to recognize that imported conceptual models may not fully explain local realities. Consequently, a competency model for humanities research faculty members should include not only methodological and disciplinary expertise but also intellectual openness, critical dialogue, ethical judgment, cultural understanding, social responsibility, and the capacity for context-sensitive theory development.

Within the Iranian higher education and research system, faculty recruitment is additionally shaped by national strategic documents, cultural priorities, and institutional expectations concerning Islamic-Iranian identity. Research on identity-creating faculty members has emphasized that academic competence should be accompanied by the capacity to contribute to cultural formation, national identity, ethical development, and the advancement of knowledge consistent with the broader values of society (Bagheri & Mobasheri, 2023). Similarly, models of faculty recruitment derived from upstream policy documents and the Statement on the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution have highlighted the necessity of aligning recruitment criteria with national scientific goals, cultural commitments, ethical standards, revolutionary values, and long-term development priorities (Khadevi & Ahmadi, 2023). These studies suggest that the competency of faculty members in the Iranian context cannot be conceptualized exclusively through internationally standardized academic indicators. Instead, it should incorporate the relationship between scientific excellence, ethical conduct, cultural identity, and responsiveness to national needs.

However, the inclusion of cultural and ideological dimensions in recruitment models raises significant methodological and ethical challenges. Such dimensions must be defined with sufficient conceptual clarity to prevent

subjective judgment, arbitrary interpretation, or discriminatory application. Broad constructs such as commitment, identity, intellectual independence, and social responsibility cannot be assessed reliably through general interviews or unstructured evaluations. They need to be translated into specific, observable, and job-relevant behaviors. For example, commitment to scientific-cultural identity may be reflected in the ability to analyze local problems through contextually appropriate frameworks, critically evaluate imported theories, develop indigenous conceptual alternatives, and respond to national research priorities without compromising scientific integrity. Similarly, intellectual independence should be assessed through evidence-based reasoning, principled disagreement, and resistance to inappropriate pressure rather than through conformity or personal opinion. Therefore, the operationalization of culturally embedded competencies is essential for ensuring fairness, transparency, and defensibility.

Assessment centers provide a potentially appropriate mechanism for such operationalization. An assessment center is not a physical location but a systematic evaluation process in which multiple trained assessors observe candidates across several standardized exercises designed to elicit job-relevant behaviors. These exercises may include group discussions, case analyses, presentations, role-playing tasks, policy simulations, in-basket exercises, and structured interviews. Assessment centers are particularly valuable when the target competencies involve communication, judgment, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, ethical decision-making, and behavioral consistency. Because candidates are evaluated through multiple methods and by multiple assessors, assessment centers can reduce dependence on a single test or interviewer and provide richer evidence regarding complex competencies. Nevertheless, their effectiveness depends on the quality of the competency model, the relevance of the exercises, assessor training, scoring procedures, and adaptation to the organizational context.

Evidence from Iran indicates that assessment and development centers may be undermined by several structural and operational problems, including the use of poorly defined competency dimensions, insufficiently standardized exercises, weak assessor preparation, inadequate feedback systems, excessive reliance on imported frameworks, and limited alignment with organizational strategy (Akbari et al., 2016). These pathologies can reduce validity and transform the

assessment center into a formalistic procedure rather than an evidence-based selection mechanism. Therefore, establishing an assessment center for humanities research institutes requires more than adopting generic exercises. It necessitates customization based on the institution's mission, the specific role of research faculty members, the sociocultural environment, and the behavioral manifestations of the competencies to be assessed. Without such customization, the assessment process may fail to distinguish between candidates who possess general academic qualifications and those who can perform effectively within the distinctive environment of a humanities research institute.

Contemporary recruitment systems are also increasingly influenced by digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Algorithmic tools can support applicant screening, test administration, data integration, and decision-making; however, they may reproduce historical inequalities, obscure decision rules, or privilege easily quantifiable indicators over complex human attributes. Research on fairness in artificial intelligence-driven recruitment has emphasized the need for transparent metrics, bias detection, explainability, representative data, human oversight, and continuous validation (Mahapatra, 2024). Likewise, industry-oriented work on diversity and inclusion in artificial intelligence-based recruitment has shown that technological efficiency does not automatically produce equitable selection and that recruitment systems must be designed to account for diverse candidate experiences and structural sources of exclusion (Bano et al., 2024). These concerns are highly relevant to competency-based assessment because the standardization of behavioral indicators and scoring rules can promote fairness, whereas vague or poorly validated constructs can intensify bias. Accordingly, even when technology is used, expert judgment and culturally informed validation remain indispensable.

A robust competency model must therefore balance several potentially competing requirements. It should be sufficiently comprehensive to represent the complexity of research faculty performance but sufficiently parsimonious to remain usable. It should reflect international knowledge regarding competency modeling while remaining sensitive to national and institutional conditions. It should include cultural and ethical dimensions without allowing these dimensions to become vague or ideologically arbitrary. It should recognize the importance of measurable research expertise while avoiding the reduction of academic excellence to bibliometric indicators. Finally, it should

support objective behavioral assessment while preserving the intellectual freedom and critical responsibility essential to humanities scholarship. Achieving this balance requires empirical investigation rather than the direct adoption of pre-existing competency lists.

The diversity of competency models developed in Iranian organizations reinforces the importance of indigenous model construction. Studies of public-sector human resource managers, hospital managers, health-system managers, teaching-oriented faculty members, and newly recruited academics have each identified role-specific competency configurations (Goodarzi et al., 2022; Hajikarimi, 2021; Jalaeifar et al., 2021; Kermani et al., 2017; Mosleh et al., 2023). Although these models provide valuable conceptual foundations, they do not fully address the distinctive role of research faculty members in humanities research institutes. Teaching-focused models prioritize educational and classroom competencies, managerial models emphasize administrative performance, and health-sector models are shaped by service delivery and clinical governance. Humanities research institutes, by contrast, require a combination of advanced research expertise, indigenous theory-building capacity, intellectual dialogue, interdisciplinary collaboration, policy responsiveness, ethical integrity, cultural understanding, and commitment to socially meaningful knowledge production.

Methodologically, the development of such a model benefits from the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence. Qualitative inquiry is necessary to identify context-specific meanings, expert experiences, latent expectations, and culturally embedded competency manifestations that may not appear in existing instruments. Quantitative analysis is then required to examine the measurement properties of the resulting dimensions, test their distinctiveness, and evaluate the structural relationships among them. Exploratory sequential mixed-methods designs are particularly suitable when a conceptual framework must first be generated from qualitative data and subsequently validated through quantitative measurement and modeling (Morgan, 2018). This design allows the voices of experienced faculty members, administrators, and human resource specialists to inform model development while ensuring that the final framework is subjected to empirical evaluation.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach can clarify whether competency dimensions function independently or through interconnected pathways. Recent competency research suggests that effective performance is generated

through combinations of attributes rather than isolated characteristics. Leadership competency supports career progression when personal, relational, and organizational capacities reinforce one another (Garcia, 2023). Managerial effectiveness in entrepreneurial, construction, educational, public-sector, and health contexts similarly depends on the interaction of technical, behavioral, strategic, and ethical capabilities (Ogbara & Chukwunwa, 2025; Rai et al., 2025; Shirkani, 2025; Soveidi & Dosti, 2025). For research faculty members, individual characteristics may support behavioral effectiveness, professional expertise may strengthen intellectual participation, and ethical commitments may provide the foundation for culturally responsible knowledge production. Structural modeling can identify these relationships and determine which competency pathways contribute most strongly to research performance.

Despite the recognized importance of competency-based recruitment, a clear empirical gap remains concerning research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes. Existing studies have addressed general faculty competencies, professional development, teaching-oriented academic roles, identity-creating faculty characteristics, and recruitment criteria derived from national policy documents (Bagheri & Mobasheri, 2023; Goodarzi et al., 2022; Jalaeifar et al., 2021; Khadevi & Ahmadi, 2023). However, limited research has integrated these perspectives into a validated multidimensional model specifically designed for use in a customized assessment center. Moreover, the relationships among individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies and their contributions to research performance have not been sufficiently examined. Addressing this gap may improve the transparency, strategic alignment, and predictive validity of faculty recruitment while providing an operational basis for designing simulations, behavioral indicators, and assessor guidelines.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to design and validate a competency model for recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes through the customization of an assessment center.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach to design a competency model for recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes. Within this approach, the qualitative phase was conducted to extract context-specific concepts and develop the conceptual model, and its findings provided the

foundation for instrument development and empirical testing in the quantitative phase.

In the qualitative phase, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 key experts, including experienced faculty members, research institute administrators, and human resource specialists. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which combined theoretical and snowball sampling strategies. The inclusion criteria consisted of at least five years of experience in the research system, direct experience in recruitment or evaluation processes, and familiarity with the missions of humanities research institutes. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis with the assistance of MAXQDA, leading to the extraction of the conceptual competency model.

In the quantitative phase, the model was transformed into a 30-item researcher-developed questionnaire covering five dimensions: individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies. The questionnaire's content validity was confirmed through the calculation of the content validity ratio ($CVR > 0.72$) and content validity index ($CVI > 0.85$), while its reliability was supported by Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.81. The questionnaire was distributed among 218 faculty members working at humanities research institutes throughout Iran, with a response rate of 90.8%. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0. This analytical method was selected because of its suitability for complex models involving moderate sample sizes and multidimensional latent variables.

This mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of the conceptual depth obtained from the qualitative phase with the statistical validity established in the quantitative phase. Accordingly, it represented an effective step toward developing a context-specific, flexible, and implementable model for Iranian humanities research institutes.

3. Findings and Results

One of the key findings of this study was the identification of distinctive dimensions and elements that differentiate the assessment process for recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes from assessment processes used in other academic settings, particularly teaching-oriented universities. Unlike universities, where teaching constitutes the principal activity, humanities research institutes focus on fundamental

knowledge production, the critical analysis of cultural and social issues, and policy consultation. This fundamental distinction requires the design of an assessment process capable of measuring components that receive relatively limited attention in other academic contexts.

Based on the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with 18 key experts, five distinctive dimensions were identified in the assessment process for recruiting research faculty members:

1. Commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity, defined as the ability to analyze phenomena within an Islamic-Iranian value framework and produce knowledge aligned with national strategic policy documents;
2. The ability to engage in intellectual dialogue within an ideological environment, referring to the capacity to interact with opposing viewpoints without extremism or undue compromise;
3. Social responsibility in knowledge production, referring to attention to the actual challenges of society and interaction with nonacademic stakeholders;
4. The capacity for indigenous theory building, involving the development of conceptual frameworks grounded in Iran's historical and cultural experience;
5. Intellectual independence within the framework of the political system, referring to critical thinking accompanied by commitment to the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Unlike conventional recruitment criteria, such as the number of publications or educational background, these dimensions are not directly observable, are culturally embedded, and can be assessed only through advanced instruments such as assessment centers. Participants emphasized that neglecting these dimensions in existing recruitment processes had resulted in the selection of individuals who, despite possessing adequate technical qualifications, were unable to operate effectively within the long-term missions of research institutes.

The thematic analysis subsequently resulted in the extraction of five principal competency components: individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies. These components were consistent not only with the perspectives of domestic experts but also with the international literature on competency modeling (e.g., Spencer & Spencer, 1993). However, in the Iranian context, the ethical and cultural-ideological

components assumed considerably greater importance. For example, one experienced faculty member stated, “We need researchers who do not merely publish articles but are also capable of producing knowledge rooted in our culture and values.” Similarly, one higher education policymaker stated, “A research faculty member must be capable of producing knowledge within our ideological environment that is both original and responsive to national needs.”

To overcome the challenge of converting conceptual components into measurable criteria, each of the five components was translated into observable behavioral indicators. These indicators were developed according to four criteria: (1) observability by assessors, (2) measurability across three performance levels—novice, proficient, and expert—(3) alignment with the research institute’s mission and national strategic policy documents, and (4) convertibility into assessment-center scenarios. For

example, the indicator “refusal to yield to pressure to alter research findings” is assessed in a “policy-maker interaction” scenario, whereas the indicator “analysis of social issues from an Islamic-Iranian perspective” is evaluated through a group discussion concerning social justice.

These indicators were directly derived from the experts’ actual experiences and enable objective scoring by multiple assessors. Overall, translating competency components into observable behavioral indicators constituted a critical step toward operationalizing the competency model. This approach shifts the recruitment process away from a subjective and quantitatively oriented system toward a transparent, equitable, and evidence-based system. It also enables the assessment of latent components that remain inaccessible through conventional methods by evaluating them in simulated environments.

Table 1

Components and Subcomponents of the Conceptual Competency Model for Research Faculty Members

Main Component	Subcomponents	Operational Definition	Role in the Model
Scientific-cultural identity—central core	Commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity	The ability to analyze phenomena within an Islamic-Iranian value framework and produce knowledge aligned with the 20-Year Vision Plan and the Statement on the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution	Guides and directs all other components
Scientific-cultural identity—central core	Commitment to national strategic policy documents	—	—
Scientific-cultural identity—central core	Social responsibility in knowledge production	—	—
Individual competencies	Self-awareness	Inherent and personality-related characteristics that provide the foundation for a stable scientific identity and sustained performance	Foundation of personality stability
Individual competencies	Emotional stability	—	—
Individual competencies	Responsibility	—	—
Individual competencies	Intrinsic motivation	—	—
Professional competencies	Capacity for indigenous theory building	Scientific and methodological capabilities required for the production of original and context-specific knowledge	Foundation of scientific legitimacy
Professional competencies	Mastery of qualitative research methods	—	—
Professional competencies	Scientific writing skills	—	—
Professional competencies	Capacity to analyze cultural and social issues	—	—
Ethical competencies	Scientific integrity	Commitment to ethical principles in knowledge production and dissemination and in interactions with stakeholders	Foundation of social credibility
Ethical competencies	Social responsibility	—	—
Ethical competencies	Protection of privacy in research	—	—
Ethical competencies	Ethical interaction with students	—	—

Behavioral competencies	Capacity for intellectual dialogue	Interactive and managerial capabilities required for collaboration, intellectual leadership, and influence	Facilitates interaction between individual and professional competencies
Behavioral competencies	Conflict management	—	—
Behavioral competencies	Teamwork in interdisciplinary projects	—	—
Behavioral competencies	Intellectual leadership	—	—
Cultural-ideological competencies	Analysis of issues within the framework of Islamic principles	The ability to analyze phenomena within an Islamic-Iranian cultural framework and remain committed to national strategic policy documents	Mediates the relationship between ethical competencies and scientific-cultural identity
Cultural-ideological competencies	Responsiveness to national needs	—	—
Cultural-ideological competencies	Resistance to the imposition of Western models	—	—
Cultural-ideological competencies	Intellectual independence within the framework of the political system	—	—

In response to the primary research question—“What competency model can be extracted for recruiting research faculty members through an assessment center in humanities research institutes?”—the qualitative data produced an identity-oriented conceptual competency model for research faculty members. The model comprises five principal components—individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies—and one guiding core, namely scientific-cultural identity. These elements explain research faculty performance through an interactive and nonlinear structure.

This model has three principal characteristics that distinguish it from existing competency models:

1. **Context specificity:** Components such as commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity and intellectual independence within the framework of the political system were directly extracted from the perspectives of domestic experts and are aligned with national strategic policy documents.
2. **Interactivity:** Unlike hierarchical models, the proposed model emphasizes dynamic interactions among the competency dimensions.
3. **Operational applicability:** Each component was translated into observable behavioral indicators that can be incorporated into assessment-center scenarios.

Therefore, the extracted model provides not only a theoretical response to the primary research question but also an operational framework for customizing assessment centers in humanities research institutes. The framework makes it possible to assess latent, behavioral, and cultural competencies in a transparent, equitable, and evidence-

based manner. The model represents an innovative step toward reforming the system for recruiting scientific talent in Iran and may be employed as a national reference model.

During the quantitative phase, after the questionnaire’s validity and reliability had been confirmed, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the five-dimensional factor structure of the conceptual competency model for research faculty members. The analysis was performed in SmartPLS 4.0 using the partial least squares method because this method is more appropriate than covariance-based methods, such as AMOS, for complex models involving a moderate sample size ($n = 218$) and multidimensional latent variables (Hair et al., 2022).

The principal objective of the confirmatory factor analysis was to test the hypothesis that the 30 questionnaire items would load significantly onto five distinct factors—individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies—and that the proposed structure would demonstrate acceptable model fit.

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that all items had standardized factor loadings exceeding 0.70, thereby surpassing the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 for establishing convergent validity. For example, the item “I am able to analyze social issues within the framework of Islamic principles,” representing a cultural-ideological indicator, had a factor loading of 0.86. The item “I remain calm when confronted with criticism,” representing an individual competency indicator, had a factor loading of 0.82. These findings indicate that each item adequately represents its respective component and is conceptually distinguishable from the other components.

Table 2

Standardized Factor Loadings, t Values, and p Values for All Questionnaire Items

Component	Item Code	Item	Factor Loading (λ)	t Value	p Value
Individual competencies	F1	I possess scientific self-awareness.	0.82	12.45	< .001
Individual competencies	F2	I recognize my scientific strengths and weaknesses.	0.79	11.80	< .001
Individual competencies	F3	I remain calm when confronted with criticism.	0.85	13.10	< .001
Individual competencies	F4	I fulfill my research commitments without supervision.	0.81	12.20	< .001
Individual competencies	F5	I have strong intrinsic motivation to discover the truth.	0.83	12.65	< .001
Individual competencies	F6	I make rational decisions under stressful conditions.	0.80	11.95	< .001
Professional competencies	T1	I am capable of developing indigenous theories.	0.88	14.20	< .001
Professional competencies	T2	I effectively use qualitative research methods, such as discourse analysis.	0.85	13.40	< .001
Professional competencies	T3	My scientific articles demonstrate substantial analytical depth.	0.82	12.50	< .001
Professional competencies	T4	I analyze social issues from an Islamic-Iranian perspective.	0.86	13.75	< .001
Professional competencies	T5	I am capable of designing interdisciplinary research projects.	0.80	11.90	< .001
Professional competencies	T6	I remain current with the specialized literature in my field.	0.78	11.50	< .001
Professional competencies	T7	I can develop a new conceptual framework based on Iranian experience.	0.87	13.95	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B1	In intellectual discussions, I respect opposing viewpoints.	0.84	13.00	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B2	I can resolve intellectual disagreements without creating tension.	0.81	12.30	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B3	I collaborate effectively in group projects.	0.79	11.75	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B4	I can scientifically defend my viewpoint within an ideological environment.	0.86	13.60	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B5	I am capable of exercising intellectual leadership in research teams.	0.83	12.70	< .001
Behavioral competencies	B6	I collaborate effectively with researchers from other disciplines.	0.80	12.00	< .001
Ethical competencies	E1	I maintain scientific integrity in my research.	0.85	13.30	< .001
Ethical competencies	E2	I consider the social consequences of my research.	0.82	12.40	< .001
Ethical competencies	E3	I comply with research ethics principles during data collection.	0.80	12.10	< .001
Ethical competencies	E4	I treat students fairly and respectfully.	0.78	11.60	< .001
Ethical competencies	E5	I refrain from manipulation or bias when publishing findings.	0.84	12.90	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C1	I am committed to a cultural-Islamic identity.	0.91	15.30	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C2	My research is aligned with the 20-Year Vision Plan.	0.89	14.85	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C3	I critically evaluate Western models and propose context-specific alternatives.	0.87	14.10	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C4	I resist the imposition of Western models.	0.89	14.85	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C5	I can maintain my intellectual independence within the framework of the political system.	0.88	14.50	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	C6	The knowledge I produce is aligned with Islamic-Iranian values.	0.90	15.00	< .001

The following indices were used to evaluate the overall fit of the model:

- The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which measures discrepancies between the observed covariance matrix and the model-implied covariance matrix;

- The normed fit index (NFI), which compares the proposed model with an independent or null model.

As shown in Table 3, the proposed model demonstrated acceptable fit.

Table 3

Model-Fit Indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Fit Index	Calculated Value	Acceptable Threshold	Status
SRMR	0.063	< 0.08	Acceptable
NFI	0.921	> 0.90	Acceptable

These findings indicate that the five-dimensional competency model for research faculty members is consistent with the empirical data and possesses adequate construct validity.

Two criteria were applied to establish discriminant validity, thereby confirming that each factor was distinguishable from the other factors:

- All components had average variance extracted values exceeding 0.50, with a mean AVE of 0.68;
- The square root of the AVE for each component exceeded its correlations with the other components;
- All heterotrait-monotrait ratio values were below 0.85, indicating sufficient discriminant validity among the factors.

These findings confirm that the five competency components are conceptually and statistically distinguishable and that each component measures an independent construct.

The confirmatory factor analysis findings clearly indicate that the five-dimensional competency model for research faculty members, which was extracted during the qualitative phase, possesses strong construct validity. The model is not

only conceptually coherent but also consistent with the empirical data. This confirmation provides a sound foundation for proceeding to the next phase, namely hypothesis testing through structural equation modeling.

Overall, the confirmatory factor analysis results demonstrate that the questionnaire used in this study can adequately measure the complex and multidimensional structure of research faculty member competencies within Iranian humanities research institutes. This finding strengthens the scientific validity of the conceptual model and enables the relationships among its components to be tested.

One of the principal objectives of the quantitative phase was to confirm the five-dimensional structure of the conceptual competency model for research faculty members extracted during the qualitative phase. This structure consists of five independent but interrelated components: individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies. Each component represents a dimension of the complex performance expected of research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes. Confirmatory factor analysis within the PLS-SEM framework was used to validate this structure.

Table 4

Component-Level Validity and Reliability Indices

Component	Number of Items	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Individual competencies	6	0.64	0.89	0.87
Professional competencies	7	0.61	0.87	0.85
Behavioral competencies	6	0.58	0.85	0.83
Ethical competencies	5	0.59	0.83	0.81
Cultural-ideological competencies	6	0.72	0.91	0.89

As shown in Table 4, all components achieved acceptable levels on the principal validity and reliability indices. The AVE for every component exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.50, indicating strong convergent validity. In other words, the items associated with each component explained more than 50% of the variance in that component. In

addition, the composite reliability coefficient for every component exceeded 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency among the items associated with each component. These findings confirm that each of the five components measures a valid and reliable construct.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity of the Factors

Component	1	2	3	4	5
1. Individual competencies	0.80	0.48	0.52	0.45	0.50
2. Professional competencies	0.48	0.78	0.55	0.49	0.53
3. Behavioral competencies	0.52	0.55	0.76	0.51	0.54
4. Ethical competencies	0.45	0.49	0.51	0.77	0.47
5. Cultural-ideological competencies	0.50	0.53	0.54	0.47	0.85

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to establish discriminant validity. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for each component, represented by the values on the main diagonal, must exceed the correlations between that component and the other components, represented by the off-diagonal values. As shown in Table 5, this condition was satisfied for all components. For example,

the square root of the AVE for the cultural-ideological competency component was 0.85, whereas its highest correlation with any other component—its correlation with behavioral competencies—was only 0.54. This finding indicates that each component is conceptually and statistically distinguishable from the other components and measures an independent construct.

Table 6

Standardized Factor Loadings

Component	Item	Factor Loading (λ)	t Value	p Value
Individual competencies	I possess scientific self-awareness.	0.82	12.45	< .001
Individual competencies	I recognize my scientific strengths and weaknesses.	0.79	11.80	< .001
Individual competencies	I remain calm when confronted with criticism.	0.85	13.10	< .001
Individual competencies	I fulfill my research commitments without supervision.	0.81	12.20	< .001
Individual competencies	I have strong intrinsic motivation to discover the truth.	0.83	12.65	< .001
Individual competencies	I make rational decisions under stressful conditions.	0.80	11.95	< .001
Professional competencies	I am capable of developing indigenous theories.	0.88	14.20	< .001
Professional competencies	I effectively use qualitative research methods, such as discourse analysis.	0.85	13.40	< .001
Professional competencies	My scientific articles demonstrate substantial analytical depth.	0.82	12.50	< .001
Professional competencies	I analyze social issues from an Islamic-Iranian perspective.	0.86	13.75	< .001
Professional competencies	I am capable of designing interdisciplinary research projects.	0.80	11.90	< .001
Professional competencies	I remain current with the specialized literature in my field.	0.78	11.50	< .001
Professional competencies	I can develop a new conceptual framework based on Iranian experience.	0.87	13.95	< .001
Behavioral competencies	In intellectual discussions, I respect opposing viewpoints.	0.84	13.00	< .001
Behavioral competencies	I can resolve intellectual disagreements without creating tension.	0.81	12.30	< .001
Behavioral competencies	I collaborate effectively in group projects.	0.79	11.75	< .001
Behavioral competencies	I can scientifically defend my viewpoint within an ideological environment.	0.86	13.60	< .001
Behavioral competencies	I am capable of exercising intellectual leadership in research teams.	0.83	12.70	< .001
Behavioral competencies	I collaborate effectively with researchers from other disciplines.	0.80	12.00	< .001
Ethical competencies	I maintain scientific integrity in my research.	0.85	13.30	< .001
Ethical competencies	I consider the social consequences of my research.	0.82	12.40	< .001
Ethical competencies	I comply with research ethics principles during data collection.	0.80	12.10	< .001
Ethical competencies	I treat students fairly and respectfully.	0.78	11.60	< .001
Ethical competencies	I refrain from manipulation or bias when publishing findings.	0.84	12.90	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	I am committed to a cultural-Islamic identity.	0.91	15.30	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	My research is aligned with the 20-Year Vision Plan.	0.89	14.85	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	I critically evaluate Western models and propose context-specific alternatives.	0.87	14.10	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	I resist the imposition of Western models.	0.89	14.85	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	I can maintain my intellectual independence within the framework of the political system.	0.88	14.50	< .001
Cultural-ideological competencies	The knowledge I produce is aligned with Islamic-Iranian values.	0.90	15.00	< .001

As shown in Table 6, all principal items had factor loadings exceeding 0.70 and statistically significant p values below .001. These results indicate strong statistical significance and appropriate loading of each item onto its corresponding component. The findings therefore confirm

that each item adequately represents its respective conceptual component.

Overall, the confirmatory factor analysis findings clearly demonstrate that the five-dimensional structure of the research faculty member competency model possesses strong construct validity. The structure is not only

conceptually coherent and grounded in the qualitative findings but is also consistent with the quantitative data. This confirmation provides a sound foundation for proceeding to the next stage, namely testing the relationships among the components through structural equation modeling. It also indicates that the extracted model may be used as a valid framework for evaluating and recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes.

In response to the subsidiary research question—"What competency variables are involved in recruiting research

faculty members through an assessment center in humanities research institutes?"—this section identifies and tests the causal relationships among the components of the research faculty member competency model. Based on the conceptual model extracted during the qualitative phase, five principal components—individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies—were treated as latent variables. The relationships among these components were tested using PLS-SEM.

Table 7

Path Coefficients, t Values, and p Values for the Causal Relationships Among Competency Components

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t Value	p Value	Status
H1	Individual competencies → Behavioral competencies	0.38	4.25	< .001	Supported
H2	Professional competencies → Behavioral competencies	0.42	4.70	< .001	Supported
H3	Ethical competencies → Cultural-ideological competencies	0.45	5.10	< .001	Supported
H4	Cultural-ideological competencies → Research performance	0.36	3.95	< .001	Supported
H5	Behavioral competencies → Research performance	0.29	3.20	.001	Supported

As shown in Table 7, all hypotheses were statistically significant, with $p < .001$ or $p = .001$, and all path coefficients exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.10. These findings indicate that individual and professional competencies exert direct and statistically significant effects on behavioral competencies. In other words, researchers who possess personality stability and strong scientific capabilities are more likely to perform effectively in interactive environments, such as intellectual discussions and collaborative projects. Ethical competencies also exerted a strong effect on cultural-ideological competencies, indicating that researchers characterized by scientific integrity and social responsibility are more inclined to produce knowledge within a cultural-Islamic identity framework.

Moreover, cultural-ideological and behavioral competencies independently and significantly influenced research performance. This finding is particularly important because it indicates that, within Iranian humanities research institutes, commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity is not merely an ethical value but also a strong predictor of research performance. In other words, researchers capable of producing knowledge within a national-Islamic value framework are likely to demonstrate better long-term research performance.

From an interpretive perspective, the findings suggest that none of the components is sufficient in isolation. Instead, a network of causal relationships among the

components contributes to the emergence of effective research performance. For example, individual competencies without professional competencies cannot independently produce behavioral competencies. Similarly, ethical competencies do not directly affect research performance unless they are translated into cultural-ideological competencies.

Overall, identifying these influential variables and the causal relationships among them provides a direct response to the fourth subsidiary research question. The findings indicate that the competency model for research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes is a dynamic and interactive system in which each component plays a critical role in shaping final performance. These findings provide a strong foundation for designing a customized assessment center capable of evaluating these relationships in simulated environments.

In response to the subsidiary research question—"What are the relationships within the competency model for recruiting research faculty members through an assessment center in humanities research institutes?"—this section provides a more detailed analysis of the causal relationships among the components of the competency model. Based on the structural equation modeling findings, the relationships among the components were not only statistically significant but also revealed complex and interactive conceptual patterns. These patterns provide a deeper understanding of

the nature of competency within Iranian humanities research institutes.

Table 8

Path Coefficients, R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 for the Causal Relationships Among the Components

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	t Value	p Value	R^2	f^2	Q^2
Behavioral competencies	Individual competencies	0.38	4.25	< .001	0.41	0.22	0.28
Behavioral competencies	Professional competencies	0.42	4.70	< .001	—	—	—
Cultural-ideological competencies	Ethical competencies	0.45	5.10	< .001	0.20	0.25	0.19
Research performance	Behavioral competencies	0.29	3.20	.001	0.32	0.18	0.25
Research performance	Cultural-ideological competencies	0.36	3.95	< .001	—	—	—

As shown in Table 8, 41% of the variance in behavioral competencies was explained by two sources: individual competencies ($\beta = 0.38$) and professional competencies ($\beta = 0.42$). This finding indicates that a researcher's interactive capacity, including the ability to engage in intellectual dialogue and manage conflict, results from the simultaneous interaction of personality stability and scientific capability. Without individual stability, even a highly knowledgeable researcher may respond irrationally when confronted with criticism or disagreement. Conversely, without professional capability, even an emotionally stable individual may be unable to participate meaningfully in intellectual dialogue. The effect sizes of these relationships indicate moderate-to-strong effects.

Cultural-ideological competencies received 20% of their explained variance from ethical competencies ($\beta = 0.45$). This relationship indicates that researchers who demonstrate scientific integrity and social responsibility are more inclined to produce knowledge within a cultural-Islamic identity framework. In other words, a researcher's ethical orientation provides a foundation for cultural commitment. The effect size for this relationship ($f^2 = 0.25$) also indicates a moderate-to-strong effect.

Finally, 32% of the variance in research performance was explained by behavioral competencies ($\beta = 0.29$) and cultural-ideological competencies ($\beta = 0.36$). This finding is particularly important because it indicates that, within Iranian humanities research institutes, commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity is not merely an ethical value but also a strong predictor of research performance. Researchers who can place their knowledge at the service of national needs and Islamic values are likely to generate more

effective long-term research outputs. The ability to interact within environments characterized by multiple theoretical perspectives, as represented by behavioral competencies, also independently influenced research performance. This finding demonstrates the importance of teamwork and intellectual leadership in research projects. All Q^2 values were positive, indicating that the model possessed adequate predictive relevance. These findings were also consistent with the perspectives expressed by experts during the qualitative phase.

Overall, the analysis of the relationships among the components indicates that the competency model for research faculty members constitutes an interactive and dynamic system in which each component plays a critical role in shaping final performance. These findings provide a direct response to the fifth subsidiary research question and demonstrate that the relationships within the competency model for Iranian humanities research institutes are nonlinear, interactive, and context dependent. This deeper understanding provides a sound foundation for designing a customized assessment center capable of evaluating these complex relationships in simulated environments.

In response to the primary and subsidiary research questions, the final competency model for research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes was developed based on the PLS-SEM findings. The model represents the integration of the qualitative findings, through which the competency components were extracted, and the quantitative findings, through which the causal relationships were tested. It comprises five principal components and the causal relationships among them.

Table 9

Final Model: Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, t Values, p Values, and Statistical Significance

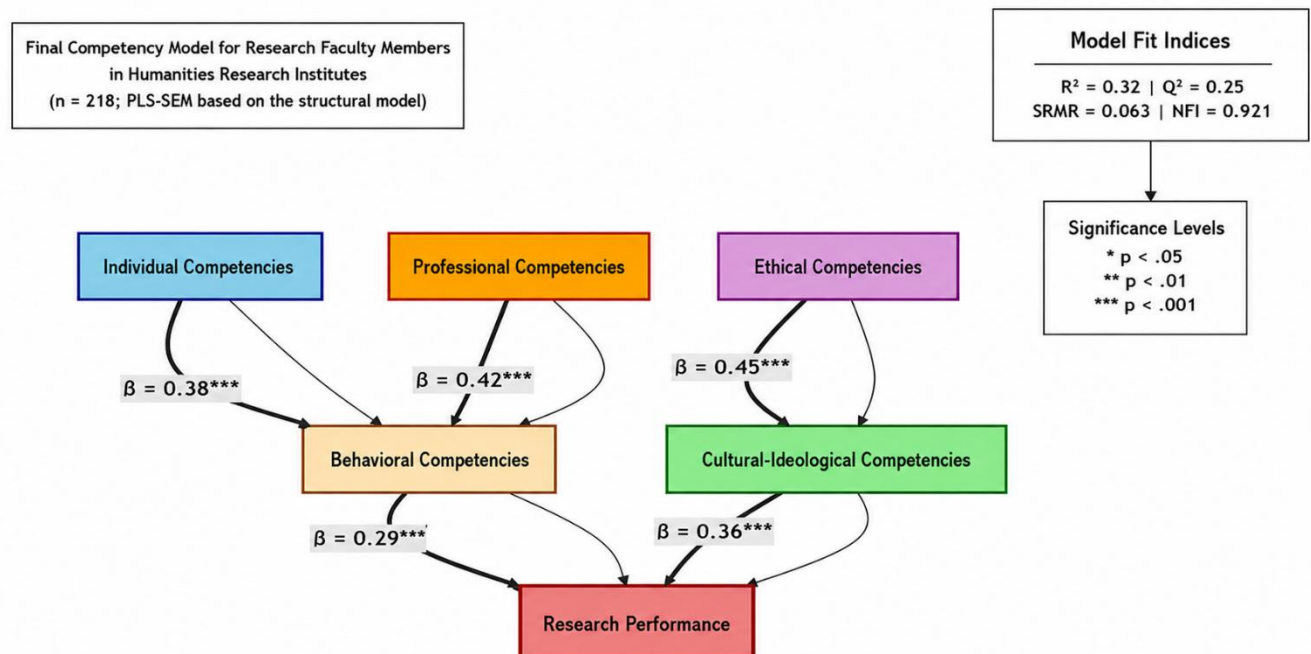
Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t Value	p Value	Status
Individual competencies $\rightarrow$ Behavioral competencies	0.38	0.09	4.25	< .001	Significant
Professional competencies $\rightarrow$ Behavioral competencies	0.42	0.09	4.70	< .001	Significant
Ethical competencies $\rightarrow$ Cultural-ideological competencies	0.45	0.09	5.10	< .001	Significant
Behavioral competencies $\rightarrow$ Research performance	0.29	0.09	3.20	.001	Significant
Cultural-ideological competencies $\rightarrow$ Research performance	0.36	0.09	3.95	< .001	Significant

As shown in Table 9, all causal relationships were statistically significant, with $p < .001$ or $p = .001$, and all path coefficients exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.10. These

findings indicate that the final model possesses strong statistical validity.

Figure 1

Final Competency Model for Research Faculty Members



The final competency model for research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes is based on two principal pathways, each of which reflects a fundamental aspect of researcher performance within this specific context. The interactive pathway, which emerges from the combination of individual and professional competencies, indicates that a researcher who possesses personality stability—including self-awareness, emotional stability, and responsibility—and simultaneously demonstrates scientific capability—including the capacity for indigenous theory building, mastery of qualitative research methods, and the ability to analyze cultural and social issues—will be able to function effectively in complex interactive environments. Such environments include

intellectual discussions involving opposing viewpoints and interdisciplinary collaborative projects. This interactive capacity, summarized as behavioral competencies, directly and significantly influences research performance ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = .001$).

Alongside the interactive pathway, the cultural-ideological pathway performs an equally important but conceptually distinct role. This pathway indicates that researchers who demonstrate scientific integrity, social responsibility, and commitment to ethical principles in their work are more inclined to produce knowledge within a cultural-Islamic identity framework. This involves critically evaluating Western models, proposing indigenous alternatives, and directing research activities in accordance

with the 20-Year Vision Plan and the Statement on the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution. Cultural-ideological commitment ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$) is therefore not merely an ethical value but also directly and more strongly influences research performance ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$). This finding is particularly important because it indicates that, within Iranian humanities research institutes, commitment to a cultural-Islamic identity is not merely an ideological requirement but a strong and scientifically supported predictor of effective research performance. In other words, researchers who can place their knowledge at the service of national needs and Islamic-Iranian values are likely to produce deeper, more applicable, and more sustainable research outputs over the long term.

The validity of the final model was confirmed from both statistical and conceptual perspectives. Statistically, all causal relationships were significant, and the model-fit and predictive indices were at acceptable levels: $R^2 = 0.32$, indicating that the model explained 32% of the variance in research performance; $Q^2 = 0.25$, indicating positive predictive relevance; SRMR = 0.063, which was below the threshold of 0.08; and NFI = 0.921, which exceeded the threshold of 0.90. Conceptually, the model was fully consistent with the perspectives expressed by experts during the qualitative phase and provided a direct and comprehensive response to the primary and subsidiary research questions.

The application of this final model extends beyond its function as a theoretical framework because it also serves as an operational foundation for designing a customized assessment center. Within this approach, each model component, including intellectual independence within the framework of the political system and the capacity for intellectual dialogue within an ideological environment, is converted into a set of observable behavioral indicators. These indicators are subsequently transformed into simulated assessment-center scenarios, such as analyzing a research ethics case, participating in a role-playing exercise involving pressure from a policymaker, or designing an interdisciplinary project. Assessors then use a standardized checklist to evaluate the extent to which each indicator is demonstrated in an objective and transparent manner. Overall, the final competency model for research faculty members in Iranian humanities research institutes constitutes an interactive and dynamic system in which each component plays a critical role in shaping final performance. The model provides not only a theoretically valid response to the research questions but also an operational and

implementable framework for reforming the recruitment system for scientific talent in Iran. Its implementation could produce a meaningful transformation in the quality and orientation of humanities research in the country.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to design and validate a competency model for recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes through the customization of an assessment center. The findings produced a multidimensional, context-sensitive model comprising individual, professional, behavioral, ethical, and cultural-ideological competencies, with scientific-cultural identity functioning as the model's central orienting core. The qualitative findings demonstrated that effective performance in humanities research institutes cannot be explained solely by conventional indicators such as academic qualifications, publication records, methodological knowledge, or years of professional experience. Rather, research faculty performance depends on the interaction of scientific expertise, personal stability, ethical responsibility, intellectual engagement, cultural understanding, and the capacity to produce knowledge responsive to national and societal needs. The quantitative findings supported this conceptualization by confirming the five-factor measurement structure and demonstrating significant structural relationships among the competency dimensions.

The confirmatory factor analysis indicated that all questionnaire items loaded strongly on their designated constructs, with standardized factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The values obtained for average variance extracted, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha also confirmed adequate convergent validity, internal consistency, and measurement reliability. In addition, the Fornell-Larcker and heterotrait-monotrait criteria supported the discriminant validity of the five competency dimensions. The overall model-fit indices, including SRMR = 0.063 and NFI = 0.921, indicated that the proposed structure was compatible with the empirical data. These results suggest that the five dimensions are related but conceptually distinct and that each represents a specific aspect of research faculty competence. This finding supports the general premise of competency modeling that effective performance is multidimensional and should be assessed through a coherent system of interconnected but distinguishable attributes (Garcia, 2023; Michel, 2008).

The establishment of a valid five-dimensional structure is consistent with previous competency research conducted in diverse organizational settings. Competency models developed for public-sector human resource managers, hospital managers, health-system managers, and public managers have similarly demonstrated that occupational effectiveness cannot be reduced to technical knowledge and instead requires combinations of personal, managerial, relational, ethical, and strategic capabilities (Hajikarimi, 2021; Kermani et al., 2017; Mosleh et al., 2023; Soveidi & Dosti, 2025). Although the specific dimensions identified in these studies reflect their respective institutional settings, their multidimensional character supports the present finding that research faculty competency is generated through several complementary domains. The present model extends this literature by showing that humanities research institutes require a distinctive configuration in which cultural-ideological competencies and scientific-cultural identity assume a central role alongside more conventional individual, professional, behavioral, and ethical competencies.

The findings regarding professional competencies also correspond with previous studies of faculty performance. In the present study, professional competencies included the capacity for indigenous theory building, mastery of qualitative research methods, scientific writing ability, interdisciplinary project design, command of disciplinary literature, and the analysis of cultural and social issues. These findings align with research indicating that faculty effectiveness depends on advanced disciplinary knowledge, research capability, professional development, communication, and the ability to respond to evolving academic responsibilities (Goodarzi et al., 2022; Jalaeifar et al., 2021). However, the present results reveal an important distinction between teaching-oriented faculty roles and research-focused appointments. Whereas teaching-oriented competency models necessarily emphasize instructional design, classroom management, student assessment, and pedagogical communication, the competency requirements identified here place greater emphasis on original knowledge production, theoretical development, critical analysis, interdisciplinary research, and policy relevance.

The qualitative findings further showed that professional competence in humanities research cannot be understood merely as technical proficiency. Humanities researchers are expected to interpret contested phenomena, recognize the assumptions underlying theoretical positions, engage responsibly with diverse intellectual traditions, and assess

the social implications of knowledge claims. This interpretation is consistent with the view that critical thinking in the humanities involves epistemic responsibility rather than only the mechanical application of analytical skills (McClean et al., 2024). The capacity for indigenous theory building identified in this study may therefore be understood as an advanced form of epistemic responsibility. It requires researchers to assess whether established theories adequately explain local historical and cultural realities, to avoid the uncritical transfer of external frameworks, and to develop concepts that are empirically grounded and contextually meaningful.

The structural model revealed that individual competencies exerted a significant positive effect on behavioral competencies ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001$). This finding indicates that self-awareness, emotional stability, responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and rational decision-making under pressure provide an important foundation for effective interpersonal and professional behavior. Research faculty members who understand their strengths and limitations, regulate their emotional responses, and remain committed to their responsibilities are more likely to engage constructively in intellectual discussions, manage disagreements, collaborate with colleagues, and exercise intellectual leadership. This result supports broader competency literature showing that observable workplace behavior is often rooted in relatively stable personal attributes and motivational dispositions (Garcia, 2023; Michel, 2008).

The positive relationship between individual and behavioral competencies is also consistent with studies of leadership and management across different sectors. Managerial performance in small and medium-sized enterprises, construction projects, educational organizations, and public institutions depends not only on formal knowledge but also on self-management, responsibility, communication, adaptability, decision-making, and interpersonal effectiveness (Ogbara & Chukwunwa, 2025; Rai et al., 2025; Shirkani, 2025; Soveidi & Dosti, 2025). The present findings extend this principle to research organizations. Intellectual work is frequently treated as an individual activity, yet the production of significant research increasingly requires collaborative project design, peer criticism, interdisciplinary negotiation, and engagement with policy and community stakeholders. Individual stability therefore becomes operationally important because it influences whether researchers can participate productively in these relational environments.

Professional competencies also demonstrated a significant positive effect on behavioral competencies ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$), and this relationship was slightly stronger than the effect of individual competencies. This result suggests that constructive intellectual behavior requires not only emotional stability and responsibility but also sufficient scientific expertise. Respectful dialogue, conflict management, and intellectual leadership cannot be separated from the researcher's ability to formulate defensible arguments, interpret evidence, understand methodological limitations, and communicate disciplinary knowledge. A researcher who lacks adequate professional competence may appear cooperative but may be unable to contribute meaningfully to complex discussions. Conversely, a technically capable researcher who lacks behavioral competence may struggle to convert expertise into collective knowledge production. Thus, behavioral effectiveness emerges from the interaction between personal maturity and scientific capability.

This finding is compatible with research emphasizing the connection between competency frameworks, leadership development, and career progression (Garcia, 2023). It is also consistent with models developed for managers in health, public administration, construction, and entrepreneurial settings, where technical and strategic knowledge must be expressed through communication, coordination, problem-solving, and leadership behavior (Kermani et al., 2017; Mosleh et al., 2023; Ogbara & Chukwunwa, 2025; Rai et al., 2025). In humanities research institutes, this integration is especially important because research questions are often theoretically contested and culturally sensitive. Effective researchers must be able to defend their interpretations without suppressing alternative perspectives, manage disagreement without weakening scientific rigor, and lead intellectual work without creating an authoritarian research climate.

The structural model further showed that ethical competencies had the strongest direct effect among the antecedent relationships, significantly predicting cultural-ideological competencies ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that commitment to scientific integrity, research ethics, fairness, social responsibility, and the avoidance of manipulation provides the moral foundation for culturally responsible knowledge production. Cultural-ideological commitment, when grounded in ethical competence, is less likely to become superficial conformity and more likely to be reflected in responsible attention to national needs, critical engagement with theoretical models, and the

production of socially meaningful knowledge. The relationship therefore indicates that scientific-cultural identity should be rooted in ethical practice rather than assessed as an isolated declaration of values.

This interpretation is consistent with studies that have emphasized the role of identity, values, and national policy frameworks in defining faculty competency in Iran. Models of identity-creating faculty members have highlighted the responsibility of academics to contribute to scientific, cultural, ethical, and social development (Bagheri & Mobasheri, 2023). Similarly, faculty recruitment models based on upstream documents and the Statement on the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution have stressed alignment among scientific capability, ethical commitment, national objectives, and Islamic-Iranian identity (Khadevi & Ahmadi, 2023). The present study advances these perspectives by empirically clarifying the relationship between ethical and cultural-ideological competencies. Rather than treating them as interchangeable, the model indicates that ethical competence functions as an antecedent that strengthens culturally grounded and nationally responsive research behavior.

Behavioral competencies had a significant positive effect on research performance ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = .001$). This finding confirms that research productivity and effectiveness depend partly on researchers' capacity to interact, collaborate, manage intellectual conflict, participate in interdisciplinary projects, and exercise intellectual leadership. Although behavioral competencies had a smaller direct coefficient than cultural-ideological competencies, their effect remained statistically meaningful and theoretically important. Research faculty members rarely produce institutional impact solely through isolated scholarly activity. They must coordinate projects, mentor junior researchers, engage with scientific communities, communicate findings, negotiate methodological disagreements, and translate research into forms that can be understood by policymakers and other stakeholders.

The effect of behavioral competencies on research performance aligns with evidence from managerial and leadership studies showing that relational and leadership competencies contribute to organizational outcomes, project effectiveness, enterprise development, and career advancement (Garcia, 2023; Ogbara & Chukwunwa, 2025; Rai et al., 2025; Shirvani, 2025). It also complements findings on newly recruited faculty members, whose successful professional development depends on communication, academic collaboration, organizational

adaptation, and participation in professional communities (Jalaeifar et al., 2021). The present study demonstrates that these behavioral competencies remain important in research-oriented institutions, although their expression differs from that required in teaching-focused universities or managerial organizations.

Cultural-ideological competencies exerted the strongest direct effect on research performance ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$). This was one of the most distinctive findings of the study. It indicates that the ability to produce knowledge aligned with Islamic-Iranian values, critically examine imported models, respond to national needs, and maintain intellectual independence within the institutional system contributes meaningfully to research performance. This relationship should not be interpreted as suggesting that ideological conformity automatically improves scientific productivity. Rather, the qualitative findings indicate that culturally grounded competence involves contextual analysis, indigenous theory building, societal responsiveness, and the ability to connect scientific inquiry with the historical and cultural realities of Iran.

The finding is consistent with research on identity-creating faculty members and policy-informed faculty recruitment, both of which emphasize that academic performance in the Iranian context includes contributions to cultural development, national scientific advancement, and the resolution of locally relevant problems (Bagheri & Mobasheri, 2023; Khadevi & Ahmadi, 2023). It also corresponds with the concept of epistemic responsibility in humanities scholarship, according to which researchers should critically examine the foundations, implications, and contextual adequacy of their knowledge claims (McClean et al., 2024). From this perspective, cultural-ideological competency can improve research performance when it encourages deeper contextualization, greater social relevance, and the development of original frameworks rather than the mechanical reproduction of external theories.

The model explained 41% of the variance in behavioral competencies, 20% of the variance in cultural-ideological competencies, and 32% of the variance in research performance. Furthermore, all Q^2 values were positive, demonstrating the model's predictive relevance. These results indicate that the proposed pathways provide meaningful but not exhaustive explanations of research performance. The interactive pathway—individual and professional competencies influencing behavioral competencies, which subsequently affect research performance—shows that effective scientific behavior

develops from the integration of personal and technical resources. The cultural-ideological pathway—ethical competencies influencing cultural-ideological competencies, which then affect research performance—shows that responsible and context-sensitive knowledge production is grounded in ethical commitments. Together, these pathways support the conceptualization of competency as a dynamic system rather than a checklist of independent attributes.

The mixed-methods design strengthened this conclusion by combining context-sensitive qualitative exploration with quantitative validation. The sequential use of interviews, thematic analysis, questionnaire development, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural modeling enabled the model to remain grounded in expert experience while also being subjected to psychometric and empirical testing. This approach is consistent with the methodological advantages of combining qualitative and quantitative evidence when concepts must first be explored and subsequently measured and tested (Morgan, 2018). The resulting model therefore possesses both contextual relevance and statistical support.

Another important contribution of the study was the translation of abstract competencies into observable behavioral indicators and assessment-center scenarios. This operationalization responds directly to known weaknesses in assessment and development centers in Iran, including vague competency definitions, inadequate contextualization, weak standardization, and insufficient alignment between exercises and organizational missions (Akbari et al., 2016). By defining behavioral indicators and linking them to simulations such as intellectual group discussions, research ethics cases, interactions with policymakers, and interdisciplinary project design, the proposed framework can reduce dependence on subjective interviews and publication-based screening.

The emphasis on transparent indicators, multiple assessors, and standardized simulations also has implications for fairness in recruitment. Contemporary research on artificial intelligence-assisted recruitment has warned that standardized technologies can reproduce bias when their constructs, datasets, and decision rules are poorly designed (Bano et al., 2024; Mahapatra, 2024). Although the present model was not designed exclusively for algorithmic recruitment, its behaviorally anchored structure could support more transparent human or technology-assisted assessment. However, cultural-ideological indicators must be applied cautiously, with clear definitions, assessor training, procedural safeguards, and evidence-based scoring

to prevent subjective interpretation. Overall, the findings demonstrate that a customized assessment center grounded in a validated competency model can provide a more comprehensive, equitable, and mission-aligned approach to recruiting research faculty members in humanities research institutes.

This study had several limitations. The qualitative phase relied on the experiences of 18 experts, and although thematic saturation was achieved, the participants may not represent the full diversity of humanities research institutes, disciplinary traditions, and institutional perspectives in Iran. The quantitative data were collected using a self-report questionnaire, which may have been affected by social desirability, particularly for ethical and cultural-ideological items. The cross-sectional design also limits causal interpretation, even though the structural model was theoretically specified. In addition, research performance was examined within the proposed model without longitudinal observation of actual recruitment outcomes, subsequent job performance, publication quality, policy impact, or retention. The proposed assessment-center scenarios and behavioral indicators were conceptually developed but were not evaluated through a complete operational trial involving real applicants, trained assessors, inter-rater reliability analysis, and criterion-related validation.

Future studies should validate the model across a broader range of research institutes, academic disciplines, geographic regions, and organizational cultures. Longitudinal designs should examine whether candidates' assessment-center scores predict subsequent research productivity, scientific quality, policy influence, teamwork, ethical conduct, and institutional commitment. Researchers should compare self-report measures with peer ratings, supervisor evaluations, portfolio evidence, and direct behavioral observation. Experimental implementation of the proposed assessment center is also needed to evaluate assessor agreement, scenario difficulty, incremental validity, applicant reactions, adverse impact, and cost-effectiveness. Future research may additionally test alternative structural pathways, potential mediators and moderators, and differences associated with academic rank, professional experience, disciplinary field, and institutional mission.

Human resource units in humanities research institutes should replace predominantly credential-based recruitment with a multistage competency-based system that integrates document review, structured interviews, work-sample exercises, group discussions, ethical decision-making

scenarios, and interdisciplinary project simulations. Each competency should be defined through explicit behavioral indicators and scored by multiple trained assessors using standardized rating scales. Cultural-ideological competencies should be evaluated through evidence of contextual analysis, responsiveness to national problems, intellectual independence, and responsible theory development rather than through general statements of commitment. Institutions should regularly audit the assessment process for reliability, fairness, transparency, and predictive validity and should use the resulting competency profiles not only for selection but also for onboarding, professional development, performance management, leadership preparation, and succession planning.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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