# A Qualitative Analysis of School Administrators' and Teachers' Opinions on School Culture: A Case of Baku

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*This study attempts to assess teachers' and school administrators' perspectives on school culture in Baku through a phenomenological approach. The participants consist of four volunteer school administrators and 20 teachers. Data for the study is collected through face-to-face interviews via a semi-structured interview form developed. Findings were analysed under seven themes using thematic data analysis. Results show that the school culture helps to create a commitment to school, instills responsibility, socialising with people, builds identity, and discovers students' skills. The main barriers to developing a positive school culture are excessive workload, financial problems in the school, the intervention of the parents in the school, infrastructure problems, and frequent changes of teachers and administrators. Results also show that conducting activities inside and outside school, motivating teachers and students, and communicating with parents are essential for developing the school culture.*

**KEYWORDS:**     School Culture, Organizational Culture, School Administrators, Teachers, Baku

## Introduction

Culture has been one of the important concepts for understanding groups of people and their behaviour (Hatch, 1993). Although the concept was initially used to understand and reveal the difference between societies, nations, tribes, and ethnic groups, over time it entered business life and became one of the main concepts for understanding organizational behaviour (Schoen & Ted-

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dlie, 2008). People working in an organization come from different subcultures. This feature can lead to different divisions and the formation of different subgroups in an organization. As a result, conflicts may occur within the organization. It is possible to combine all sub-cultures under one culture by creating an organizational culture (Guclu, 2003). Therefore, it can be stated that organizational culture is an important concept to prevent intra-organizational conflicts. Culture has an important role in influencing the functioning of the organization. It strengthens the bond between the employees in the organization, increases the common values, establishes an important bond between the employees and the organization. Culture shapes and controls the behaviour of employees, facilitating the transfer of organizational rules to newcomers in the socialization process. Organization culture teaches employees what they can and cannot do culture (Celikten, 2003). Hofstede (1980) defines culture as the collective mental programming of people in an environment. According to him, culture is not a characteristic of the individual. Culture is the characteristics of people who are conditioned by the same education and life experience. It is the common property of people; it has the power to influence and direct human behaviour.

Organizational culture is the set of values that the employees of an organization share and distinguish them from other organizations. If the shared common values are adopted by the employees and ensure their integrity, if the same things are thought about the goals and values of the organization, the culture of that organization is strong culture. On the contrary, if the employees cannot demonstrate unity and solidarity around the mission of the organization they work for, and there are problems in uniting in common values, the culture of that organization can be considered as weak culture (Robbins & Judge, 2017). The concept of organizational culture began to be studied in research communities related to organizational performance in the 1980s (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). According to Schein (1990), organizational culture is the unwritten rules that group members learn over time to ensure integration and internal harmony against external problems. Shared values and goals are supposed to be the main indicators of a strong culture (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Organizational culture in a school affects employees' behaviour, commitment to school, motivation and productivity (Peterson & Deal, 2009) and guides employees' behaviour (Hofstede, 1980) . Deal (1985) points out that behind every successful school there is a strong culture. Common values and goals ensure teachers' commitment to the school. Commitment leads to school success (Guclu, 2003).

Several researchers (Demirtas, 2010; Ipek, 1999; Ozdemir, 2006; Steinhoff & Owens, 1989) empirically investigated the phenomenon of culture in school settings focusing on its several aspects. Many studies (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) have revealed that culture has a vital importance in school

development. According to Peterson and Deal (2009), school culture is an important variable for school development because school culture affects the behaviour of employees, their commitment to school, motivation, and productivity. As an institution that trains people, the values of the school, that is, its culture, are at the forefront rather than the official rules for teachers. In this respect, school culture is found to be worth examining by the researcher. Despite the prevalence of studies that empirically examine the reflections of school culture in educational environments in almost every country, no research has been found that empirically examines organizational culture in educational organizations in Azerbaijan. The underlying reason is likely that the number of institutions dealing with the school culture within the field of educational administration in Azerbaijan is scarce. Therefore, this unexplored topic has the potential to enlighten to discover this unknown phenomenon in depth with its culture-specific patterns in an underexplored location at the intersection of West Asia and east Europe. This exploration may enable us to make international comparisons currently and in future research.

## School Culture

The school culture concept has been the subject of research since the 1980s (Demirtas, 2010). It is the secret flow of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that evolve. This set of rules constitutes the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of people at school (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Each school has its own identity, which is coded with moral codes, consisting of personal relationships, and this identity brings rituals. These rituals shape the behaviour and relationships in that school (Waller, 1932). In a metaphorical study about school culture, school was defined as family, home, and team by one third of the participants. In these schools, concern for each other and attachment to children are paramount (Steinhoff & Owens, 1989). When a school is visited by any visitor, a unique mood of that school surrounds the visitor. These elements include everything such as student and teacher behaviours and communication between management and staff. All these elements are called school culture (Erickson, 1987) . Shortly, school culture is unwritten rules, traditions, norms, and expectations that determine people's behaviour, dress code, way of speaking, whether they help their peers, and how teachers feel about their work and their students (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

## Elements of School Culture

School leaders have an important role in the formation of school culture. They communicate core values to employees through their daily work, so they shape

the school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1998). There are three stages while administrators shape the school culture. Firstly, they should know the concept of school culture. Secondly, they need to understand what kind of culture their school has. Thirdly, they shape their own school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). According to Hoy and Miskel (2015), culture consists of three elements: hidden assumptions, values, and norms. Steinhoff and Owens (1989) listed the elements that have a role in shaping the school culture as follows: the history of the school, common values and beliefs, stories and myths that explain the school, norms, traditions and customs, ceremonies, female and male heroes of the school. Deal (1985) verifies that these elements are school's history, school's heroes, school's rituals, school's ceremonies, school's stories, and its cultural network. Hargreaves (1995) empirically displayed that school culture, school effectiveness and school development, the academic achievement and learning rates in schools based on the welfarist culture were found to be low. Peterson and Deal (2009) proposed a theoretical framework to interpret school culture which is at the same time utilized to guide the data gathering process of this unexplored phenomenon of school culture characteristics in Azerbaijan culture based on the Baku case. This framework can be outlined as follows:

1. The definitions of school culture.

2. The foundations of school culture (mission, values, beliefs and assumptions, norms.

3. The history of school culture.

4. The symbols of school culture.

5. The actions in the school culture (routines and traditions, ceremonies, mission transmission.

6. Obstacles of school culture.

7. Developing school culture (expectations from administrators, expectations from teachers, strategies

Considering these theoretical prepositions, this research aims to determine the school administrators' and teachers' perspectives related to school culture operating in two public and two private schools in Baku. The research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What does the school culture mean?

2. What are the common values and beliefs shared at school (among administrators, teachers, students, and parents)?

3. What are the ceremonies, rituals, legends, stories, and important events at school? How are all embedded in school culture?

4. What is the role of graduates in the school culture?

5. What are the roles of the school principal and teachers in the development of school culture?

6. What processes and strategies can be followed to develop school culture?

## Research Methodology

This qualitative research has a phenomenological design. Phenomenology expresses the common meanings of the experiences experienced by the participants about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). The phenomenon of this research is school culture which is an underexplored topic for Azerbaijan and worthy of investigation as people have superficial knowledge about this but do not have in depth information.

## The Context of the Study

The opinions of teachers and school administrators working in two public schools and two private schools in Baku province were investigated. A limited number of public schools have been allowed to visit by the central authorities. Among the permitted schools, the two oldest public schools were considered eligible. Since the history of a school is a necessary element for the culture to develop and settle (Peterson & Deal, 2009), old schools can be eligible for purposeful sampling. Furthermore, school culture (Mees, 2008) is closely related to school success. These two schools were purposively selected due to the highest acceptance rates to universities. The first of the selected schools was built during the Soviet Union period. It is the pilot school of the region. Azerbaijan has experienced many wars after gaining its independence as a state. This school had many martyrs among its graduates during the wars. The school was named after one of the martyr's graduates. It gives education to 1390 students with its 125 employees. The second state school, on the other hand, is a school that was established right after Azerbaijan gained its independence. It provides educational services to 1279 students with its 120 employees. Both schools have been operating for more than twenty-five years.

Since going to schools for data collection within the scope of the research is not common in Azerbaijan, most of the schools do not permit because of research purposes. The first of the private schools -gave permission- was established within a university and has been providing education in

Azerbaijani, Russian and English languages for 22 years. Although the second private school is new, it is a school with an educational background and corporate culture. The school has been providing education in Azerbaijani and Russian languages for six years with 11 branches in three cities.

## Participants

Twenty teachers and four school administrators working in two private and two public schools operating in Baku in the 2019-2020 academic year were selected as participants voluntarily. Participants included the school administrator and a deputy administrator from each school and teachers of five different branches from each school. Since the selected participants are expected to have sufficient experience in the research (Bas & Akturan, 2017), two years of experience is required for the administrators to have a good command of school culture. Maximum variation sampling was used while selecting the participants. Maximum variation was also provided by the public-private school and teacher-administrators variations. A total of 20 teachers, aged between 24-61 years were interviewed. All the interviews were held in schools. Three of the administrators are school principals and one is vice principal. Since it was the first year of the principal in the second private school and the vice-principal has been working there for a long time, the vice principal was considered to be more appropriate for the research purposes.

## Instrument Used

The interview form consisting of 12 semi-structured questions was developed by the researchers. It consisted of six personal information questions and 12 interview questions. The first question is about the definition of school culture. The next eight questions were developed in accordance with the theoretical framework prepared by Peterson and Deal (2009) related to the sub-elements of the school culture. The last three questions were developed based on expert opinions. These are questions respectively about the roles of teachers and administrators in the development of school culture, about strategies, and about the problems encountered.

## Data Collection Process

While the data collection process was continuing, one of the researchers attended the "Qualitative Research Methods", a four-week online training given by the University of Amsterdam. The permissions for the interviews were obtained from Hacettepe University Ethics Committee and Baku Education Administration. The interviews were performed face to face. They were

recorded by obtaining written permission from the participants. The longest interview took 101 minutes, and the shortest interview took 25 minutes.

## Data Analysis

The data were transcribed in the Microsoft Word program. Participants were coded indicating their gender, status and school type. For example, a female teacher from the public school interviewed was coded as SSFT12. A male teacher interviewed from private school was coded as PSMT13. The data were read several times before coding. Firstly, 924 codes were produced. Later, the codes were combined and finally 761 codes were finalized. In the second stage, seven main themes were reached. At the last stage, the findings were interpreted and explained. Direct quotations of the participants were included to support the comments.

## Findings and Discussion

### School Culture Definitions

Participants' opinions on the definitions of school culture have been investigated with the questions "Have you heard of the concept of school culture before?" and "What does the concept of school culture mean to you?" The concept of school culture was defined by the participants in five different ways. These are "relationships, behaviours, educational activities, traditions and ethical rules".

The participants mostly described the school culture as "relationships". The concepts of "relationships" and "behaviours" have come to the fore in both public and private schools in terms of the meanings attributed to school culture.

*"I think of the relationships among teachers, between teachers and students, between teachers and parents, and between teachers and administrators." (SS1MT1)*

*"School culture is a set of behaviours that are appropriate to any place that has rules. We can call school culture for the behaviours that are unique to the school and distinguish it from other places…" (PS2MT17)*

### The foundations of School Culture

The foundations of school culture are examined under the subthemes of mission, beliefs and assumptions, norms, and values.

**Mission**. School's mission was investigated by the question "Are there any mission and vision statements of your school?" As a result of the interviews, it

was determined that all schools have written mission statements but no vision statements. The missions of the schools were defined by the participants in two ways: "raising beneficial people for the society" and "raising world citizens". While in private schools, the emphasis on raising beneficial people for both the country and the world is important, in public schools the emphasis was put on raising beneficial people for the society.

*"Our mission is to raise children who are beneficial and worthy to the Azerbaijani society and Azerbaijani people, to raise children who lend a hand and do not refuse help from those who are in trouble" (SS1FT3)*

*"Our mission is to raise citizens who are beneficial firstly for ourselves and then for the world and represent us abroad." (PS1FT13)*

**Beliefs and Assumptions**. Teachers' understanding of the school, school culture, mission, students and education were asked by the question "What are the common values and beliefs shared in your school (between administrators, teachers, students and parents)?" Participants' beliefs and assumptions are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

**Subtheme of Beliefs and Assumptions.**

| No | Beliefs and Assumptions | Public | | Private | | Total |
|----|-------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | The function of the school is the education of values. | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| 2. | The school is like its leader. | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 7 |
| 3. | Mission means unity. | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 6 |
| 4. | Students value the work they do themselves. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 5. | The quality of the school is equal to the quality of its teachers. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 6. | Mission makes life meaningful. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Total | 7 | 2 | 14 | 3 | 26 |

As it is stated in Table 1, participants' perceptions are similar to the literature (Hoy & Miskel, 2015). They can be summarized as "The function of the school is the education of values", "The school is like its leader.", "The

quality of the school equals the quality of the teachers" and "The mission unites people". It was also stated that the mission unites employees in an institution.

*"Every school is like its own manager. The spirit of the manager becomes the same with the teachers as time passes." (SS1FA2)*

Teachers emphasized the importance of administrators in developing the school culture. Both the teachers and the administrators agree that the function of the school is to transfer the values. While the teachers emphasized the mission, the administrators did not give mentioned the mission.

**Norms**. The behaviours expected from teachers asked, "What are the common values and beliefs shared in your school (between the administrator, teacher, students and parents)?" (Table 2).

**Table 2**

**Participants' Opinions on the Subtheme of Norms.**

| No | Norms | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teachers | Admin. | Teachers | Admin. | |
| 1. | We should expand our relations. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| 2. | We should teach the education of values to students. | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 11 |
| 3. | We should be role models. | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 4. | We shouldn't label students. | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 5. | We shouldn't receive gifts from parents. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 6. | We should know our mission. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 7. | We should motivate students. | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8. | We should be like parents to students. | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 9. | We should not get interested in the positions of the parents. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Total | 16 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 37 |

As shown in Table 2, participants' perceptions of the subtheme of norms were like the studies in the literature (Hoy & Miskel, 2015; Peterson & Deal, 2009). Private and public-school teachers have a consensus on the importance of relationships and the education of values. Three participants from private schools stated that they should be a role model to students. While no opinion was expressed about not labelling students in private school, three participants from the public school drew attention to this issue.

*"Relationships are important at school. Sometimes there may be such a person that you don't even say hello to him because you don't know. However, as relationships develop, as we get to know him, we see that he is a very valuable person, there is a lot we can learn from him." (PS1FT12)*

*"Our aim should not only be to train good physicists, good mathematicians, good chemists, our first goal as teachers should be to raise good people." (SS1FT3)*

**Values**. With the question of "What are the common values and beliefs shared in your school?" it is aimed to learn the opinions of the participants on values. The participants conceptualized "solidarity", "respect and kindness", "trust and sincerity", "justice and transparency", "responsibility", "attention and care", "patience and understanding" and "patriotism". The participants' opinions on values are given in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Subtheme of Values.**

| No | Values | Public | | Private | | Total |
|----|--------|--------|---|---------|---|-------|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1 | Solidarity | 8 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 18 |
| 2 | Respect and kindness | 9 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 18 |
| 3 | Trust and sincerity | 6 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 17 |
| 4 | Justice and transparency | 7 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 12 |
| 5 | Responsibility | 5 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| 6 | Patience and tolerance | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 10 |
| 7 | Care and attention | 7 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 9 |
| 8 | Patriotism | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Total | | 49 | 8 | 35 | 8 | 100 |

Table 3 shows that participants value solidarity the most. Solidarity referred both to cooperation and moral support for the participants.

*"For any purpose in front of us, during any meeting with parents or while solving*

*any problem, our manager is directly involved. For this reason, it is never difficult for us to solve problems. This support is important to us. Therefore, we can find very suitable solutions for every issue." (SS1FT4)*

*"We try to be together both good and bad days. When someone has a problem, we try to solve it together as much as possible." (SS2FT8).*

The participants expected to respect and kindness from both administrators and parents. Besides, they stated that they should also treat students with respect and kindness. Solidarity is also valued by the participants from both types of school. Solidarity is followed by the values such as responsibility, fairness and transparency, patience and understanding.

**History of School Culture**

The history of school culture consists of three subthemes of the past, stories and graduates. Participants' opinions' related to the subthemes of past, stories and graduates displayed similarities with the literature (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Participants' opinions on the dimension of history can be summarized as "instilling motivation", "commitment to school", "being a role model", "instilling responsibility" and "decreasing discipline problems".

**Past**. Participants' views on the past were tried to be determined with the question "How does know the history of the school that you work for affect school culture?" (Table 4).

**Table 4**

**Subtheme of Past.**

| No | Past | Public | | Private | | Total |
|----|------|--------|----|---------|------|-------|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | The past is important to guide the future. | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 8 |
| 2. | The past is important to form and protect the values. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| 3. | The past is motivation leading to development. | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 4. | The past makes our jobs meaningful. | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 5. | The past is important if there is a success. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

*Table 4 continued*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | The past is not very impor-tant. | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | | 10 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 24 |

Some quotes about the views in Table 4 are as follows:

*"Knowing the past is important for comparison: how it was before, how it is now. It is important to know whether we can go forward, where we have problems, and what kind of problems we experience during any period. It is important to know history if we follow, analyse and apply it. Just knowing it won't change anything. Therefore, knowing right and wrong is important for a better future" (PS2FT11)*

*"When you don't know the past, you just go to work and come back, which is something meaningless. When you know it, you value, protect, and try to improve it" (SS1MT5)*

While participants in public schools did not associate success with the past, private schools did, perhaps due to commercial anxiety.

**Stories**. The opinions of the participants were received with the questions "What are the legends, stories and important events told in your school?", and "How do these legends, stories and important events affect school culture? (Table 5).

**Table 5**

**Subtheme of Stories.**

| No | Stories | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | About the school founder | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| 2. | About the graduates | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| 3. | About the success | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 4. | About the hardships | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 5. | About the teachers | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 6. | About helping | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | | 11 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 24 |

As it is seen in Table 5, stories about school founders and graduates are a prominent feature of school culture.

*"The stories I have heard the most here are about the school founder. Despite the difficulties and threats, he faced, he spoke about establishing the school" (PS1MT16)*

*"When this school building was held, parents, teachers, and everyone came. Some people were involved in the demolition of the wall, and some people helped with the door and window issues, some got cement with their own money. Certain jobs were done in this way. I also worked here as a parent at that time. There was only this building at that time. In short, our school was established with difficulties in this way." (SS1MT5)*

Stories about school founders in public schools and stories about success in private schools come forward.

**Graduates**. Opinions on the subtheme of graduates were examined with "Are there any exemplary people who graduated from your school? and "What kind of programs do you have for graduates?" (Table 6).

**Table 6**

**Subtheme of Graduates.**

| No | Graduates | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin | Teacher | Admin | |
| 1. | They come themselves. | 2 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 9 |
| 2. | We invite them to school. | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| 3. | There is a lack of communication. | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| 4. | We have special days for graduates. | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 5. | We have a department for graduates. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | | 10 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 27 |

Some examples of the opinions stated in Table 6 are as follows:

*"We have graduate programs. Apart from that, our cooperation with graduates is good. We are always in contact. Sometimes they come by themselves, sometimes we invite them." (PS1FT12)*

*"We invited graduates on the 25th anniversary of our school. Rather, the first graduates were invited. It was a good program. It was a pleasant environment." (SS2FT6)*

There is no regular communication between teachers and graduates in public schools regarding the contact with the graduates. It can be inferred that the

status of private schools regarding graduates is in better condition.

## Symbols of School Culture

Participants' opinions on symbols were investigated with the questions "Are there any symbols and logos of your school? and "How do these affect school culture? Similar results to the literature (Peterson & Deal, 2009) were obtained. All selected schools have different symbols besides the school uniform, flag, logo, and school anthem. The lyrics and the music of the school anthems in all four schools were written by their teachers. It was stated that teachers' wearing uniforms was effective in preventing students' distraction. Especially the colourful dresses worn by female teachers were mentioned. The opinions of the participants are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7**

**Participants' Opinions on the Theme of Symbols.**

| No | Symbols | Public | | Private | | Total |
|----|---------|---------|-------|---------|--------|-------|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Commitment to school | 7 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 13 |
| 2. | Responsibility | 4 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 13 |
| 3. | Giving identity | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| 4. | Eliminating the differences | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| 5. | Instilling motivation | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| 6. | Decrease in disciplinary problems | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 7. | Improving relationships and socializing | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 8. | Forming unity | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 9. | Avoiding distraction | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10. | Being a role model | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Total | 22 | 2 | 23 | 5 | 52 |

As seen in Table 7, a uniform as a symbol closes the class gap between both students and teachers, facilitates relationships and creates unity. The opinions about symbols leading to school engagement and imposing responsibility were widely accepted among the participants.

*"It is better that students wear a school uniform than they wear a colourful dress. Even though we are a private school, people's financial situation is different. When there is a school uniform, those differences disappear. Also, the uniform is a measure of student's innocence. They seem more appropriate for their age when they are in uniforms. Apart from that, the logo on the uniform shows that the student belongs to the school"* (PS2MT17).

Unlike the literature, one participant stated that the logo is unnecessary.

*"The logo forces people to buy that uniform. The logo issue is as if it is a commercial concept specific to private schools. You can buy the same uniform without the logo for much cheaper than outside, however. The logo is necessary for the school, it is meaningless for the student. The logo shows which school you belong to. But this detail is not needed by anyone."* (PS1MT16)

Another differentiation with the literature is the use of Azerbaijani classical compositions in the breaks in a public school, and this causes a decrease in discipline problems in the school.

*"During breaks, the children used to run in the corridors, fight, and fall. As soon as the recess bell rang, they used to throw themselves out of the class. Now it is not like this. There is a radio intersection in every classroom. They sit down and listen to the music now."* (SS2FT7)

**Action Dimension of School Culture**

The action dimension theme of school culture consists of subthemes of "routines and traditions", "ceremonies" and "mission transmission".

**Routines and Traditions .** The question "Are ceremonies and rituals held at certain intervals in your school?" was asked to learn the opinions of the participants about the routines and traditions they perform in their schools. The opinions are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 shows that the most expressed traditions and routines in schools are "competitions", "introduction of school subjects", "trips and visits", "inviting role model people to school", "organizing theatres", and "discussions and information sharing". Apart from this, the culture of greeting is widespread at school, parents are frequently invited to the school, and meetings are arranged so that students can meet graduates. Traditions and routines such as "keeping in frequent touch with parents, arranging summer camps, class hours and rewarding of students" were expressed by a small number of participants. In public schools, the most emphasized routine and tradition by the participants was the competitions, and in private schools, the most emphasized routine and tradition were inviting people who are role models to the society. Traditions such as communicating with parents at regular intervals, inviting them

**Table 8**

**Subtheme of Routines and Traditions.**

| No | Routines and Traditions | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Competitions | 5 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 14 |
| 2. | Introducing the subjects | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| 3. | Trips and picnics | 7 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 10 |
| 4. | Inviting role model people to school | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 |
| 5. | Organizing theatres | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| 6. | Discussions and information sharing | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| 7. | Greeting | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| 8. | Inviting parents to school | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 9. | Teachers attending another teacher's lessons | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 10. | Arranging meetings between graduates and students | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 11. | Giving presents to teachers | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 12. | Rewarding students | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 13. | Arranging class hours | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 14. | Frequently communicating with parents | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 15. | Summer camps | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Total | 33 | 7 | 28 | 5 | 73 |

to school, giving gifts to teachers on special days, and organizing theatres were identified as traditions in both school types. Both teachers and administrators think that competitions are important for school culture.

**Ceremonies.** To learn the opinions of the participants about the ceremonies held at the school, the question "Are there ceremonies and rituals held at certain intervals in your school?" was asked. The participant opinions are given in Table 9.

**Table 9**

**Subtheme of Ceremonies.**

| No | Ceremonies | Public | | Private | | Total |
|----|-----------|--------|------|---------|--------|-------|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Ceremonies on important days in the history of the country | 9 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 23 |
| 2. | Jubilee ceremonies | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 3. | Graduation ceremonies | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| 4. | Retirement ceremonies | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | | 15 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 31 |

Table 9 shows that the responses of the participants are similar to the literature (Peterson & Deal, 2009). The ceremonies were identified as "important days in the history of the country", "celebrating the jubilees", "graduation ceremonies" and "farewell ceremonies of the retired". Because the participants defined history as "it is important to form and protect the values", "it is important to guide future", "it is motivation leading to development." and "it gives meaning to work you do", it was identified as an important event to remember important days of the country's history with ceremonies and convey them to students.

*"The days of genocide and occupation are commemorated in our school. The history teachers give information about those days and explain the importance of them."* (PS1MT15).

*"This year we have celebrated the jubilees of three 65-year-old teachers at school. They were given a certificate of honour by the school, a bunch of flowers, a gift to keep as a souvenir."* (SS2FT7).

The teachers reported that ceremonies related to the important days of the country's history, the celebration of the jubilees, farewell ceremonies of graduation and retired people are arranged. The only ceremony voiced by the administrators was related to the important days of the country's history.

**Mission Communication**. The administrators' opinions on the ways of communicating the mission to the staff at school were obtained by the question "How do you convey your mission and vision to teachers?". The codes are summarized in Table 10.

As seen in Table 10, the administrators convey the mission to the teachers

**Table 10**

**Subtheme of Mission Communication.**

| No | Mission communication | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teachers | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Pedagogical meetings | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 2. | Mission-oriented events | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 3. | Department meetings | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 4. | Hanging the mission on the walls | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 5. | Teacher's oath that embodies the mission | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 6. | Meetings with the school founder | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | | 0 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 10 |

collectively or use the methods such as hanging the mission on walls.

*"We have pedagogical councils. Activities are held at school every day. There are Olympiad works and various competitions are organized at school. The teacher can't get out of that frame anyway, because these processes run every day. There is no special need to remind of the mission. We act with a plan of actions; they always remember it"* (SS1FA2).

*"Generally, collective communications are made. We have weekly pedagogical councils with teachers and other meetings, through them, we try to convey and remind the mission. The general activities of the school are also mission oriented. We talk about these topics in the department meetings."* (PS2MA4)

Since public schools are affiliated with the Ministry of Education and are governed by public regulations, they do not go beyond the specified framework. For this reason, they use department and pedagogical meetings and activities to communicate and remind the mission. Private schools can use different methods because they are independent.

## Obstacles to the Development of School Culture

The question "What kind of difficulties do you face as a school principal in developing the school culture?" was asked from school administrators, but the teachers also touched on this issue (Table 11).

**Table 11**

**The Theme of School Culture Barriers.**

| No | Barriers | Public | | Private | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teachers | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | Total |
| 1. | Excessive work-load | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 2. | Founder's intervention in school affairs | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 3. | Insufficient salaries | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 4. | Teachers and schools not have the same purpose | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 5. | Parents' intervention in school affairs | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 6. | Infrastructure issues | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 7. | Unfair salary system | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 8. | Curriculum problems | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 9. | Frequent changes in teachers | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10. | Schools' inability of not choose their teachers | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 11. | Oversized school population | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 12. | Financial problems of the school | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 13. | Low education level of parents | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

*Table 11 continued*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Frequent changes in administrators | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 1 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 19 |

As seen in Table 11, excessive workload was seen as an obstacle to school culture. Considering that the activities are important for the school culture, teachers' inability to participate in the activities due to the intensity of the lessons was considered as an important obstacle. Parents' intervention in school affairs was seen as an obstacle to school culture in both private and public schools.

*"Even though we are a public school, our format is different and for this reason, I would like our curriculum to be different. But this is not allowed. Apart from that, I would like to choose the teachers myself as the principal. A teacher with a high score does not mean a good teacher. Sometimes we receive such a high-scored teacher that his humanistic aspects are not sufficient." (SS1FA2)*

*"We may have conflicts with parents coming from different environments. I also came from a different environment. But every school has a spirit. We all have to find that spirit of the school and act in that direction. Radical interventions from outside can take the school's culture out of its orbit and traditions may be broken." (SS2MA3)*

Private schools face more obstacles to the development of school culture than public schools. The unfairness of the salary system was expressed as a problem in private schools, but it was not reported as a problem in public schools. As a requirement of the centralized system, wages are not seen as a problem in public schools, as there are standard applications in salaries. Since it is a local issue in private schools, it can be difficult to apply a standard fee to cope with competition with other private schools and retain teachers. Due to commercial concerns, the frequent intervention of the school founder or owner in the affairs of the school is a problem that can be encountered in private schools. Such a problem was not reported in public schools. Other obstacles to school culture were "insufficient salaries", "teachers and school not having the same purpose", and "frequent changes of teachers".

## Developing School Culture

The theme of developing school culture has been examined under three subthemes.

**Tasks expected from teachers.** The opinions on the subtheme of the tasks expected from teachers, were obtained with the question "What are the roles

of you and your colleagues as teachers in developing school culture?" (Table 12).

**Table 12**

**Subtheme of Tasks Expected from Teachers.**

| No | Tasks expected from teachers | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Fulfilling responsibili-ties | 5 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| 2. | Communicating frequently with parents | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| 3. | Constantly improving themselves | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 4. | Being a role model for students | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 5. | Providing students' participation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 6. | Smiling | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 7. | Knowing the students | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 8. | Taking into account the individuality of students | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Total | 14 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 26 |

In Table 12, the primary expectations from teachers are to obey the school rules and fulfil their responsibilities.

*"Teachers must not forget that they are teachers. The teachers must fulfil all the responsibilities that fall on them. Whatever the problem may be, the teachers should put everything aside once they enter the classroom. We shouldn't reflect our problems on students." (PS1FT12).*

*"Teachers should not be aggressive towards each other, everyone should respect each other, be polite to others and obey the laws. It is necessary to obey the laws to protect the values. If I do not obey the laws, I cannot protect these values." (SS2FT9).*

**Tasks expected from administrators.** The opinions on the subtheme of expectations from administrators were asked through "What are the roles of school principals in developing school culture?" (Table 13).

**Table 13**

**Subtheme of Tasks Expected from Administrators.**

| No | Tasks Expected from Administrators | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | Paying individual attention to teachers | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| 2. | Motivating teachers | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 6 |
| 3. | Equal treatment for everyone | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 4. | Being a role model | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| 5. | Spending time with teachers | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 6. | Checking the teachers | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 7. | Paying attention to teachers' opinions | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 8. | Building unity at school | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 9 | 2 | 16 | 1 | 28 |

As it can be seen from Table 13, it is prominent that administrators should show individual interest in teachers and motivate them. The importance of administrators not making discrimination between employees, spending time with teachers and creating unity at school was emphasized by the participants.

**Strategies.** The participants' views on the subtheme of strategies were obtained with the question "What kind of processes and strategies can be followed for the development of school culture (enabling administrators and teachers to unite around common values and beliefs)?" (Table 14).

From Table 14, it is understood that in-school and out-of-school activities are important. A participant from private schools emphasized the importance of changes in the school.

*"At school, it is necessary to organize competitions, panels, discussions, and tournaments between both teachers and students. Relationships between people need to be improved. Teachers should have a high level of worldview." (SS1FT2)*

*"Social activities such as trips and picnics can be a suitable strategy. Everyone should participate in such activities. Activities are an appropriate strategy if the administration wants to create unity among the team. People get to know each other.*

**Table 14**

**Subtheme of Strategies.**

| No | Strategies | Public | | Private | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Teacher | Admin. | Teacher | Admin. | |
| 1. | In-school activities | 5 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 16 |
| 2. | Out-of-school activities | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| 3. | Training teachers | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| 4. | Making changes at school | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 5. | Satisfaction surveys | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 6. | Giving seminars to the parents | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 7. | Transferring authority | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 10 | 2 | 16 | 3 | 31 |

*We witness that the managers we know as stern are soft in character. It is the same with the students. We always lecture, always give homework, always make exams and things get monotonous after a while. As a result of it, our relationships with students and parents get worse. But after doing an activity outside school, we become in a different teacher in the eyes of students. We can say what we have to say, and students understand and accept correctly what we say."* (PS2FT11)

Conducting satisfaction surveys, arranging seminars, and training for parents, and transferring of authority are among the suggested strategies for the development of school culture in private schools. The importance of teachers' in-service and post-service training was also emphasized by the participants.

## Results and Implications

The first result of the study is that most of the teachers and administrators working in two public and two private schools in Baku have not heard of the concept of school culture before. In the definitions of school culture, "relationships", "behaviours", "educational activities", "traditions" and "ethical rules" were emphasized. Participants who know the components and indicators of the school culture show that the concept is not well-known among educators. The second question of the study is in a way identical to the functions of school culture. Accordingly, it is thought that school culture causes school engagement by increasing motivation in both employees and students.

The participants think that communication with graduates is an important element of school culture. Thirdly, school culture improves human relations and provides socialization among individuals. In this socialization process, it is understood that especially ceremonies, routines and traditions act as a glue. The fourth result is that the school uniform, which can be considered among the symbols of the school culture, has the potential to eliminate, especially socio-economic differences, among students and even teachers. It can be inferred that the school uniform has an integrative function within the school culture. Similarly, the school logo gives identity and belonging to students which are considered among the indicators of strong school culture. Participants' opinions on perceptions of school culture led to the conclusion that the school mission unites employees around the same purpose. In addition, it was concluded that activities, ceremonies, and other routines at school make teachers feel valued and thus lead to school engagement. Another consequence that among the functions of school culture is the potential of school culture to reduce disciplinary problems. In addition, the importance of school culture in increasing student achievement was emphasized.

Another result suggested that school culture offers positive role models for individuals. The success of the school's graduates can also be a role model for the students at the school. Consequently, the presence of graduates and the stories told is important for the school. The obstacles in front of school culture are "excessive workload", "low salaries", "teachers and schools not having the same purpose", "parents intervening in school affairs", "insufficient infrastructure", "frequent changes of teachers", "frequent changes of principals" "school's inability not to choose its teachers", "the large school population" and "school's financial problems". To overcome these obstacles, teachers may use the strategies such as "fulfilling their responsibilities", "communicating frequently with parents", "developing themselves continuously", "being a role model for students" and "ensuring the participation of students". The behaviours expected from administrators are "showing individual attention to teachers", "motivating teachers", "being a role model at school", "treating everyone equally", "spending time with teachers", "supervising teachers" and "creating unity at school".

## Recommendations

1. Considering the fact that the participants do not fully know the meaning of school culture, it seems important to provide opportunities to improve the awareness and knowledge of school staff about school culture, especially for administrators.

2. As in-school and out-of-school activities are important in terms of school culture to develop unity and solidarity at school, it may be recommended to

organize activities inside and outside the school at regular intervals.

3. The teachers' inability to participate in collective activities at school due to the excessive workload weakens their relations with students and with themselves. For this reason, keeping the workload of teachers at a reasonable level is important for school culture.

4. Low salaries are one of the obstacles to school culture. Financial anxiety pushes teachers to look for another job at the end of the shift. For this reason, teachers cannot participate in the activities organized by the school and cannot focus on the mission of the school. It is important that salaries must be regulated at schools so that teachers do not seek a second job.

5. Another obstacle to school culture is the frequent changes in teachers and administrators. Time is needed for the formation of school culture. Incentive mechanisms that will enable employees to work at school in the long term can be effective.

6. The fact that administrators do not leave their rooms weakens their communication with teachers, which in turn, harms the image of the administrator. It may be suggested that administrators should continuously be among the teachers and get to know them closely.

7. Based on the finding that communication with the graduates is weak, it may be suggested that school administrators should set up a tradition to establish regular and systematic communication with the graduates and make the continuation of their relationship with the school a part of the corporate culture.

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