
Identification of Effective School Culture Dimensions in High Schools (Case: High Schools in Ilam Province)

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Abstract:

This study aimed to identify different dimensions of effective school culture. To achieve the abovementioned objective, related literature was studied as a 1st step. Then, to determine the final components, a questionnaire containing 126 items was compiled and after confirming its validity and reliability. It was distributed among 30-people- sample consisting of Management & educational administration experts & scholars. The result of the study were analyzed by using descriptive statistics of people (such as frequency & percentage) and also factorial statistical analysis and of other tests of the basic components were offered to establish the dimensions of school culture. The results revealed that schooling effective culture involves 10 basic components as the followings: Symbols& norms, history of the school, norms and behaviors, customs, reinforces celebrations, objective and missions, events, ceremonies & norms. In the end, the 10 dimensions of the effective school culture were also ranked

Key words: School culture, effective school culture, culture dimensions

Introduction

As one of the basic subsystems from total educational system, the schools can play a very essential role in education and training of students. The importance of schools in educational system has caused its various aspects to be investigated and revised in order to make this system efficient and effective more than ever. Hence, during recent decades, each of the researchers, experts, and officials of educational system, critics for educational system has typically emphasized in one and or more cases of items in educational system in order to make it effective more than ever. For instance, some researchers have assumed educational curricula, learning-teaching methods, educational sources, human resources and the like as some of the essential effective factors in educational achievement of students while the other basic factor that has affected all of the above factors, is the infrastructure titled as school culture. The importance of school culture is too high to the extent that some relevant topics are mentioned about the school as a culture. Christopher Wagner as one of the researchers and experts in the field of school culture implies about importance of school culture that the school culture affects any event that occurs in the school (including students' educational achievement)[14]. Therefore, dealing with subject of school culture and purposing a model for effective school culture in this way may be heuristic and effective.

Literature and history of research

Searching for the research literature may signify that the research and theoretical history regarding the effective school culture has been limited generally to study on some of cultural features, which have been affected totally by organizational culture per se. But, during recent decades the experts throughout the world have emphasized directly and indirectly in importance of school culture. Nevertheless, no integrated and widespread model has been purposed for effective school culture in high schools.

In 1930s, sociologists have identified the importance of school culture. The origins of employing term culture to describe intra- school life were started with investigation of Waller (1932). He highlighted that with their specific identity, the schools include complex ceremonies from personal relations and a group of ideas from folkways, mores, irrational sanctions, and moral codes [10]. But at the end of 1970s, the educational researchers started purposing the relationship among quality of school climate and educational consequences. The evidences signify that principals in successful schools suggest that focus on developing a culture under title of learning climate may be necessary for improvement of spirit in teachers and educational achievement for students. When the complex models of existing beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas, and behaviors are inappropriate or heterogeneous in fact the culture causes anything to progresses unsuitably. The principals of successful schools perceive the vital role that organizational culture may play in development of successful school [4].

For a long time, theorists in organizations have focused their attention in culture as the foremost measure that can be taken by the leader. Educational theorists have reported that the school principals affected on learning that has been equalized and adjusted by school climate and culture (and of course, this effect is not a direct impact) (Hallinger& Heck, 1998). Watson (2001) implies that if the culture is not appropriate and apt toward learning then students' educational achievement will be also problematic. Fink and Resnick (2001) have remarked that school principals are responsible for creating widespread culture for teaching and learning in any school. Other experts also declare that school culture and climate effect on educational achievement for students (Maslowski, 2001; Hoy et al, 1990, 2006)[7].

The paradigm of 'culture' (which is borrowed from anthropology) has been ever-increasingly studied both as an independent variable in organizational researches and employed as fundamental allusion regarding the organization. Similarly, Mearson and Martin (1998) have expressed that we could mention the organizations under title of culture. In other words, we assume the culture as an organizational allusion; namely, it is considered as a distinctive variable that should be manipulated. Under this condition, educational research tends to identify this point that the schools are some complex identities, which

possess distinguished organizational cultures. This attitude leads to codification and purposing some operational definitions, which clarify the origin and basis for school institutional culture and they are used in school related studies.

Deal and Peterson (1999) declare that there is no unanimous agreement over the best definition for school culture. Most frequently accepted definitions, which are presented generally, include as follows:

- (School) culture comprises of common beliefs and values, which closely link a community together (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, 1983).
- It (school culture) is a lens through which the participants may see them and the world (Hargreaves, 1994).
- Deal and Peterson (1999) have defined school culture that the school culture includes unwritten rules and customs and traditions, norms, and expectations, which penetrate into anything i.e. into the method based on which the individuals act; how they wear clothes; what they are talking about; and or whether they seek for helping others or not; and how the teachers' feeling and emotion can effect on their work and students [10].
- Barth (2002) defines school culture as a complex model of norms, attitudes, behavior, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths, which have been deeply embedded in every aspect of school.
- Hinde (2004) looks at school culture as norms, beliefs, traditions, and customs, which are developed and created in school over the time. According to his view, culture is a group of expectations and assumptions, which directly effect on the activities done by educational workers and learners. Moreover, school culture is not static, but it is a dynamic and independent cycle that reflects collective beliefs, assumptions, and ideas and this in turn reflects the identity of school and standard of behavioral consequences.

According to viewpoint of Robbins and Alvy, school culture reflects some aspects, which the school community notices them for example some aspects including how they hold festival and about what subject they may discuss. These aspects take place in their daily activities. The school culture may effect on productivity of learners, professional development, execution of leadership and traditions. In addition, Reams and Spencer (1998) argue that the internal structures and processes may be effective determinant in school performance. For example, collegiality, cooperation, processes of common decision making, constant improvement in educational activities, and involvement and long-term commitment and obligation have been assumed as the methods for strengthening the positive culture in a school[1].

It has been implied in another point that the concept of schools as having the distinguished cultures is not deemed as a new topic. In 1932, Willard Waller stated that the schools possess a culture that is clearly specified to them. The parents and students always tend to identify a certain spirit in the schools of course the spirit of such schools may be discovered and examined with difficulty.

The students, who have been present in several schools, may select the culture in which they intend to work in as a part of a composition. They know that the affairs are different in terms of positive or negative method (something more than rules and procedures). The educational members may walk in a new school and at same time impress it directly. They attentively or intuitively start interpretation of unwritten rules, unexpressed expectations, and the existing games. In general, profile of school culture may be described especially through seven norms as follows:

1. customs
2. expectations

3. relationships
4. center of curriculum
5. extracurricular activities
6. decision making processes
7. graduation requirements

Likewise, it has been expressed that school culture is significantly related to teacher's occupational burnout (Friedman, 1991) and recently there is also relationship among this variable with collective and general efficiency of teacher, school climate, and teacher's job satisfaction, and rate of quitting their job (Mattingly, 2007). The school culture has been described as 'Hidden Curriculum' (Hidden curriculum, 1999) that differs from school climate and it has been illustrated as a psychological element in school arrangement while the school culture is described as an anthropological component that means as a culture [10]. Deal and Peterson declare that several studies show the culture and its outcome should support from correction and improvement in the school otherwise the improvement will not occur. Improvement in student's educational achievement occurs in the schools with positive and professional culture that reflect school positive climate [7].

Many studies have been carried out about organizational culture and it has been implied in this regard that the culture refers to existential philosophy, dimensions, and or characteristics, which closely interrelated and mutually dependent together. But most of researchers have not made any effort to identify these dimensions and features. They assume the culture as a social abstract phenomenon. If there is a culture and we can discuss about it then it should have certain dimensions, which could be defined and measured (Robbins, 2006:381) and here the school effective culture has been examined. Similarly, this point has been taken into consideration; in other words, developing a model that can remove the problems in this course. Deal and Peterson (2002) explain about culture and its importance that all organization, particularly schools, trains their performance through a common system of public norms and emotions, values, and traditions. These factors induce sense of enthusiasm, purposefulness, and a common spirit to the organization. The schools may be subjected to error and destroyed without a positive strong culture. The school and or regional culture may play essential role in excellent performance. They argue that school culture consists of several complex elements like values, traditions, language, intent, and a combination of special customs and rites, physical symbols and artifacts, and language and phrases, which are used by educational workers and students and they are followed by change and learning in school world[3]

The aforesaid variables in this investigation are influenced by the studied works from some researchers like Deal and Peterson (2002, 2009), who have mentioned some elements such as symbols, physical objects, architecture, traditions and rites, biography and narratives [3].

Cavanagh and Dollar (1997) have implied several features like 1) Improved educational outcomes; 2) Focus on learning; 3) Empowerment and mutual care; 4) Cooperation; 5) Participation; 6) Social processes; and 7) Collective and individual knowledge and at the same time they have mentioned six elements for effective culture as follows (which refer to professional values and they assume the importance of social institute of training and education and requirement for growth in school arisen from pedagogic principles.

- 1) The emphasis in creating learning as learning community in which there is a commitment to professional growth and improvement of students' achievements.

- 2) Collective cooperation that empowers teachers in exertion of professional judgment through development of supportive interpersonal relationships.
- 3) The cooperation denotes the interaction among teachers where the information about important operational issues about the school like curriculum is shared.
- 4) The shared planning is a collective process thereby the common attitude toward school is realized through logical planning.
- 5) Transformational leaders share the power and facilitate process of development and improvement of school that causes involvement of potential power of individual and teachers' commitment [15].

Sophier and King (1985) also purposed 12 relevant norms to effective school culture, which have been employed by various researchers within various times and for several times to measure strong and effective culture so these norms are as follows:

Teamwork, experiment, high expectations, reliability and confidence, objective and tangible support, acquisition of basic knowledge, recognition and acknowledgement, attention, ceremonies and praising, good ties (well-treatment), involvement in decision making, supporting from what it is important, traditions, and honest open communication [9].

According to Stoll, these parameters can be also mentioned for school culture: ceremonies, stories, common words and advices, taboos, rewarding technique, rites and rewards, communications and behaviors, rules of arrival and departure, and events [5]. Based on attitude of Phillips, there are three basic behaviors, which may be examined in evaluation of school culture. These behaviors, which have been implied as parameters of school healthy and effective culture, are as follows: Professional cooperation, friendly and or collegiality relations, and efficiency and or self-determination [13].

McGill Christ et al (1995) state that the school culture can be interpreted through three general and interrelated dimensions including: Professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and opportunities for learning [11].

Stoll and Fink (1996) have identified 10 cultural norms, which effect on school improvement. These norms are as follows:

- 1-Common goals: We know where we intend to go.
- 2- Accountability for achievement: We should succeed.
- 3- Professional collective cooperation: We work together here.
- 4- Constant improvement: We can be better than what we are now.
- 5- Lifetime learning: Learning is addressed for all in long run.
- 6- Risk ability: We learn new items through experience.
- 7- Support: Always there is someone to help us.
- 8- Mutual respect: Everyone has something to purpose.
- 9- Openness: We discuss about our differences.

10- Acknowledgement and satisfaction: We feel good sense toward each other [11].

The leadership center at middle level has purposed six elements to express school culture as follows:

1-Interactive leadership; 2- Teacher's cooperation and participation; 3-Professional development; 4-Supporting comprehensively by colleagues; 5- The unity of goal; and 6- History of organization [12]

The investigation done by (Lambert, 1996; Newman & Associates, 1996; Kruse, 2007; Du Four, 2002) on communities of professional learning may strengthen the centrality of cultural elements in school achievement and these elements are as follows:

- A shared sense of purpose
- Teacher involvement in decision making
- Collaborative work around instruction
- Norms of improvement
- Professional learning by staff
- A sense of joint responsibility for student learning[2].

Similarly, Deal and Peterson have purposed the following elements as the components of school culture: symbols, ceremonies and rites, norms and behaviors, traditions and customs, goal and mission, biography and stories, rewards and derives, festivals and formalities [2].

With concluding the given literature and history, the main question of the present investigation is that what model could be purposed for effective school culture in high schools?

Methodology

This study is of applied type in terms of goal and it is descriptive- survey research in terms of way of execution and manipulation of variables.

Testees: They include statistical population for determination of validity within primary framework and proportional to the suggested model comprising of 50 experts in educational administration. To examine rate of importance of the variables, 444 female and male principals and teachers from high schools were considered as sample by means of Krejcie and Morgan sample size table in this investigation and there were chosen by cluster sampling technique.

Tool: The standard questionnaire with 126 questions was employed as measurement tool in this study, which was based on various components of efficient school culture and thereby the variables of effective school culture have been examined in high schools. Face validity and content validity of questionnaire were calculated by judgment from experts and its reliability was computed through calculation of Cronbach's alpha effective (97%) after trial execution it among 50 teachers and principals, who had been randomly elected.

Method of data analysis: To analyze data, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) was employed and inferential statistics (factor analysis and Friedman test) were used via SPSS21edition.

Research findings about first question:

1. First question: what are the effective high school culture dimensions?

First by studying the literature and the background of the research in Iran and the World and also doing interview with experts in field of organizational culture, 126 indicators have been extracted. The statistical analysis of obtained data from survey of experts indicated that 116 indicators in form of 10 main dimensions indicating the effective school culture dimensions. These dimensions are: symbols, the background and the history of the school, behaviors, ceremonies and rituals, amplifiers, celebrations, objectives and missions, events, formalities, norms, obtained indicators are:

Research findings regarding second question

1. What is the importance of the dimensions in accordance with the views of managers and teachers?

The obtained dimensions have been ranked after performing the Friedman test and as it is indicated in table 1 these factors have been ranked from 1 to 10 in accordance with their priority.

Table 1 ranking the elements of schools' effective culture form administrators and teachers point of view

Table1:ranking dimension of effective school culture	
grade	dimension
first	symbols
second	Ceremonies and rituals
third	Norms
fourth	Reinforcements
fifth	ceremonial
sixth	history
seventh	behaviors
eighth	Goals of mission
ninth	celebrities
tenth	events

The results of the test indicated that in terms of significance the symbols as the most important dimension and after that the ceremonies and rituals, norms, amplifiers, formalities and the school history and behaviors, objectives, celebrations and events were known as the least significance dimensions in views of the managers and teachers.

Conclusion

The present study has been done with the aim of identifying effective school culture for high schools. The issue based on which this research is formed was to know what the effective school culture dimensions

are, and what the sub-indicators of these dimensions are to identify and promote the school culture through it.

- 1- In order to accomplish such objective 10 dimensions have been identified that in which highest score was related to the dimension of the symbols, therefore, the managers who are the beneficiaries of the schools must emphasize more on the symbols and work on them.
- 2- Since after the symbols, ceremonies and rituals gained the highest ranks regarding to importance, we can conclude that the managers of the schools must pay serious attention to the ceremonies and rituals and appropriate selection of ceremonies and rituals that can reinforce the mission of school.
- 3- Based on the ranking of the dimensions, managers must respectively emphasize and pay attention to the dimensions such as norms, reinforces, ceremonial, school history, behaviors, objectives, celebrations and events. It means that managers can promote the quality of school culture through it.
- 4- The politicians can devise programs for promotion of school culture and making it more effective school culture by having such dimensions and indicators.

Research recommendations

Regarding to the dimensions and extracted indicators and using them for reinforcing effective culture at schools, there are some necessary actions and approaches that can be mentioned as follows:

1. Based on the findings of the present research and the fact that the symbols are in priority, it is recommended to do the below actions to reinforce the symbols: displaying the students' educational progress, paying attention to the school building and its appearance, to show on banners the issues that are important for students, parents, teachers and the school, supporting the teachers objectively and the head of the school shall be the symbol of the school culture and its achievements.
2. Since the research results put the importance of ceremonies and rituals ranking in the second and norms ranking in the third, it is recommended to the school managers to pay adequate attention on below indicators: the morning ceremony and the things are told or done during this ceremony, considering the events that establish professional orientation within the school and honoring benefactors and donors at school. The managers, through such indicators, can provide the grounds of reinforcing school mission, reinforcing professional orientation among teachers and reminding the good deeds and benchmarking philanthropists.
3. Regarding to the results of the research about the importance by reinforcing the main mission of school through banners and reminding it for teachers and also through exhibitions and paying attention to formal and informal bonuses, it is recommended that the managers to provide the reinforce factors for reinforcing the school mission. Also reinforcing other individuals that are present in order to provide school the possibility of effective increase of school culture and ultimately the whole school effectiveness.
4. It is also suggested that the managers regarding the indicators such as; position of individuals in specific ceremonies, the celebrations' details for more effectiveness, the ceremonies and school current rituals, explaining and placing the mission and objectives of the school within corridors, involving teachers and students and their parents in school decisions and considering the main

events of school and training area and supporting whatever is significant, provide the necessities of reinforcing effective culture within schools.

5. Regarding to the research results we can get help from such dimensions and indicators in order to study and recognize school culture and to provide its outcome for the parents to provide the necessities of reinforcing such kind of culture.

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