

Designing a Model of Teaching-Learning Culture in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Objective: One of the significant aspects of education is the teaching and learning process. In other words, all educational activities aim to create a suitable environment for the realization of this process. The goal of this study is to design a model of teaching-learning culture in schools.

Methodology: From an objective standpoint, this research falls within the category of applied studies. It also follows a qualitative approach and utilizes ethnography as its methodology. The study population includes educational science professors, all administrators, and teachers in the city of Noor. For gathering information on theoretical foundations and literature, a review of books, journals, theses, and other documents available in specialized libraries was conducted. The research tools used were interviews and non-participant observation.

Findings: The findings indicate that assessment in Noor's schools is of two types: continuous and final. In most of the public schools, teaching methods are traditional and teacher-centered, whereas in schools for gifted students, they are student-centered, with the teacher playing a supervisory role. The teaching and learning culture in these schools is considered weak. Loss of motivation is one of the influential factors in reducing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in Noor. Due to financial issues and resource limitations in schools, facilities are also inadequate.

Conclusion: Overall, it can be inferred that current education is not aimed at lasting and standard learning but rather merely at achieving grades.

Keywords: Teaching, Learning, Schools, Education, Noor City

1 Introduction

Today, given the continuous growth and widespread changes, including new innovations in various fields, especially in education, the need for ongoing education and acquiring essential skills has become increasingly important.

Consequently, schools must also play their role effectively and appropriately (Sezgin et al., 2020). Studying culture as a collection of facts involves examining the characteristics of a society's culture and includes dynamic methods rather than static information. In other words, culture is continuously forming and should, therefore, be taught as a

process (Michelson, 2018). Among the subcultures of schools and universities, the culture of learning and teaching holds a special place in their culture (Maarefvand et al., 2018a, 2018b). School culture is a determining factor in school improvement. Actions in school culture have a significant impact on the results of school administrators' efforts (Deal & Peterson, 2016). The learning culture appears through collaborative learning experiences and the sharing of ideas, expectations, values, and beliefs among teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the school (Weeks, 2012). Shine (2010) suggests that the learning culture is a phenomenon of the social fabric (Long & Van Hanh, 2020). In other words, creating the core values of a learning culture and encouraging students to practice these values is a task that educators must perform to foster a learning culture in the classroom (Carpenter, 2015; Srirama et al., 2020). The ultimate goal of a learning culture is the development of self-reliant learners who can manage their learning, discover their special interests and abilities, and negotiate new tasks to grow in those areas (Barabach & Keller, 2020). Research shows that the development and effectiveness of schools are significantly affected by various factors, including the culture of teaching and learning (Sezgin et al., 2020). There has been considerable discussion in the literature about perspectives on culture and how these views are closely linked to the practices of teaching and learning (Maijala, 2020). Human behavior is derived from the process of socialization, which always occurs within the specific context of cultural environments, which in turn, affects the educational process (Parsakia, Rostami, Darbani, et al., 2023; Parsakia, Rostami, Saadati, & Navabinejad, 2023). Nowadays, schools that have managed to create a culture where both teachers and students grow are known as greenhouse schools. In these schools, there is no difference in the number of students or educational facilities. Instead, administrators strive to create a clear educational perspective and assist teachers in reaching their maximum potential in the classroom (Dadgarpanah & Khanghahi, 2014; Tuyet et al., 2020). Recognizing the cultural context of education and learning is one of the essential prerequisites for effective management and planning of the teaching and learning process. In fact, school culture provides a broad framework that helps better understand the complex relationships within the school and simplifies understanding the problems and issues of school stakeholders and students (Carpenter, 2015; Sezgin et al., 2020). This research aims to advance in this field and assist educational administrators, especially in the city of Noor, to become aware of the components

encompassing the teaching-learning culture prevalent in schools, including the process of teaching and learning, classroom assessment, the educational and administrative role of the principal and vice-principals, relationships among school colleagues, parental involvement in school activities, and physical school facilities. The goal of this research is to design a model of teaching-learning culture in schools.

2 Methods and Materials

Given that this study aims to design an innovative school model and the findings are intended for practical application to improve the teaching-learning process in schools, it falls under applied research. It also follows a qualitative approach using ethnography. This study views the issue of culture in the workplace from an interpretive and social constructionist perspective, aiming to describe the dynamics of this social construct, thereby selecting ethnography as the fundamental method. The research population studied includes educational science professors (educational management) and all administrators and teachers in the city of Noor who had the most information on the subject. The researcher reviewed books, journals, theses, and other available documents in specialized libraries to gather theoretical foundations and literature, and also utilized available data. Non-participant observation was another method used for collecting information in this study, as the most fundamental and crucial data collection activity in ethnography involves observation processes that occur with active participation of the observer, sometimes equating ethnography with participatory observation methods. The sampling in this research was done purposefully within the framework of sampling logic in ethnography. The sampling used was purposive sampling. In this method, the main objective is to understand the experiences of all groups participating in the research. One of the essential points in this sampling method is determining the number or size of the sample. The number or size of the sample in such research depends on theoretical saturation of the research questions. When the researcher finds that the responses given or the interviews conducted with individuals in the society or research field are similar and lead to repetitive answers, and no new data exists, it is called theoretical saturation. The number of participants in the study was determined based on theoretical saturation and reached 20 people. Interviewees were both male and female. Given that in this method of information collection is based on the researcher's needs, this study used non-participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Although the literature and theoretical foundations of the topic were prepared using library and internet resources, the measurement tools in this research were interviews and observation. Therefore, two tools, interview and non-participant observation, were used in this research.

3 Findings and Results

In this study, the concepts of internal and external validity, as they are used in quantitative research, do not apply. Instead, it is more appropriate to use the term "dependability" as an alternative for internal validity and "transferability" for external validity, which is closer to the notion of generalizability. The method of "test-retest reliability" was used for the final assessment in this research, which refers to the consistency of data categorization over time.

In this study, from 8 interviews, initially 339 primary codes were derived, excluding overlaps. With the inclusion of merging and overlaps for more accurate coding and to facilitate the research process, 53 categories remained. After a process of continuous comparative analysis, these categories were summarized into 11 classes. Each interview began with a general question related to the research goal, followed by subsequent questions shaped by the participant's statements and the data needed. Initially extracted codes, in the next phase, primary codes (first-level coding) from the raw data analysis of the interviews were grouped based on the similarity and overlap of concepts or the repetition of some concepts (second-level coding). Similar categories were then compared across different classes through axial coding. We will now discuss the results.

Many participants believed that assessment in Noor schools includes both continuous and final forms. The participants felt that the purpose of continuous assessment, in addition to impacting the final evaluation, is to identify strengths and weaknesses in students. Most interviewees believed that final assessment is calculated based on continuous and final grades at the end of the term. They also believed that discipline, activity, and participation in class indirectly affect the final assessment. Relationships and interactions were a fundamental part of the teaching and learning process from the respondents' viewpoint in this study. It is clear that all participants believed that relationships and interactions in school directly and indirectly affect learning. The nature of the interaction between teachers and students varied among participants. Most saw the interaction between the administrative staff

and teachers as friendly, supportive, and guiding, and they viewed their own interactions positively, considering the administrative staff as supportive colleagues. They believed that the content of their interactions often revolved around specific students, children of divorced parents, etc., and involved providing information to teachers. Most respondents described the relationship between teachers as very positive, respectful, and constructive. Some other respondents considered seniority an important factor in choosing their interactions with colleagues, with friendly interactions being specific to more experienced colleagues. Some participants believed that to assess the quality of students' relationships with each other, interviews should be conducted with the students themselves. Regarding the relationship between teachers and parents, participants believe that interactions are diverse but always respectful and considerate of the parents' status and personality. Some other participants in the study criticized family interactions with the school and believed that parents do not cooperate sufficiently with the school or that their interactions are excessive. In this study, academic motivation was facilitated through 7 methods (competition, grading, ranking in entrance exams, creating connections between lessons and everyday issues, enriching the environment, teacher characteristics, and student participation in learning). Teachers in Noor encourage students to learn using these 7 methods. In most of the nearly all public schools, the teaching method is traditional and teacher-centered, while in schools for the gifted, it is student-centered, with the teacher playing a supervisory role. Generally, it can be said that the teaching methods are teacher-centered, student-centered, and a combination of both. Almost all participants believed that the teaching style is traditionally teacher-centered. The student-centered system is only used in schools for the gifted and a few public schools.

Additionally, some respondents believed that because students in gifted schools academically perform at a high level, they are naturally more active in the learning process, which drives the teaching method towards active and student-centered approaches. A few participants felt that the textbooks determine the teaching method; each book has its own method, and they use mixed methods for teaching. The school environment consists of two aspects: enriched and impoverished environments, along with teacher characteristics. These two subcomponents make up the school environment. It should be noted that only two participants had a positive view of school facilities; one regarding gifted schools and the other regular schools. Other

participants considered the school environment very limited and insufficient, believing that schools lack financial resources, and parents and donors are the main providers of educational facilities. As previously mentioned, it seems that only the gifted schools in the district of "Noor" had a relatively rich environment with educational facilities, whereas other schools had very poor facilities, which were also provided by parents and donors. Another of the few respondents also rated the school environment as satisfactory. Almost all participants rated the facilities of regular schools as weak, mainly due to the lack of sufficient resources. Some respondents believed that in public schools, the facilities and school space were standard and expressed satisfaction in this regard. There are five types of secondary schools in the district of Noor. Generally, from the participants' statements, it can be inferred that apart from the gifted schools, no other schools have a strong academic foundation among students, nor do they have a satisfactory educational situation, including the teachers' status. According to observations and interviews, regular schools have been evaluated as very poor in terms of the quality of learning, teacher motivation, and educational facilities, and the culture of teaching and learning in these schools is considered weak. Respondents emphasized the existence of discrimination in witness schools and the weakness of the foundation of model public schools. It can be said that gifted schools are in a good condition in most dimensions, and most participants acknowledged this. Participants believed that since students from a weak academic background enroll in vocational schools, as a result, the academic foundation in vocational schools is weak, and given the entry of students from a weak foundation, this is a natural occurrence and teachers are somewhat aware of this fact, even affecting their evaluation methods. The majority of respondents denied the use of physical punishment in all schools, and most of them even considered punishment methods ineffective, believing that the use of motivational methods has a more effective impact on the learning process. Four methods of obtaining commitments, imposing restrictions, referral to a counselor or administration, and negative grading are among the most common punitive methods in the schools of the Noor district. Only one participant considered the non-use of physical punishment as legally prohibited, not due to its effectiveness. Using body language (ignoring, turning away, frowning, staring with a reproachful expression) is another strategy used to control students' behaviors, which most respondents mentioned as commonly used and applied in schools. In some schools, students are tangibly encouraged. Some

participants also believed that the robust appearance of a teacher could act as a deterrent. Friendly teacher behavior is another positive reinforcement used in schools. Calling students by their first names is one manifestation of friendly teacher behavior used to control unruly students. The attendance method is almost similar to the primary level; teachers send the names of absentees to the office, and the office follows up on the reason for the absence by phone. Also, some parents announce the reason for the absence before the start of the school day. Celebrations in schools are of two types, national and religious, but school council meetings are also included in this category because their conduct results in teachers' absence from class, hence the similarity in the classification of these three codes in the school events category. It can definitively be said that most participants believed that national and local events are emphasized in primary schools, but in secondary levels, only religious events are given importance. They believed this has a very negative impact on students, causing them to have a negative view of religion and religious practices. According to the content of the interviews, the largest volume or the only ceremonies that are very well-organized, regular, and permanent in secondary schools are religious events. However, only one of the participants stated that the Yalda night ceremony is held in the school with the motivation to create a joyful environment. Some other teachers consider the celebration of the Decade of Fajr (national-religious) as an excuse to create a joyful environment in the school and try to make the most of this opportunity for their own beliefs. School council meetings are held in two types, school council and parent-teacher association. The frequency of meetings varies in schools, but on average, meetings are held twice a term, once at the start of a new academic term and once before the final exams. The content of these meetings includes criticism, suggestions, sharing experiences, and solving school problems. Another participant stated that the quantity of parent-teacher association meetings is higher, and the ultimate goal is only to help purchase and provide school facilities, believing that these associations should not interfere in the educational process. Some participants also believed that one of the functions of teacher council meetings is to emphasize solving teachers' problems and shortcomings in communication areas, or even some believed that the use of technology and educational technology is taught in teacher council meetings. The physical environment of the school, especially the proportion of classroom space to the number of students, is a factor that many respondents emphasized as important and

playing a role in the teaching and learning process. Additionally, factors related to smartening schools and educational technology are other factors that teachers insist play a role in facilitating and deepening the teaching and learning process. As inferred from the definition of learning elements, namely the student, teacher, and learning subject, the teacher and their characteristics broadly, and their teaching methods specifically, affect the teaching and learning process. When a teacher is involved with their basic needs, teaching is not their first priority and might be a lesser priority in their life; as a result, they cannot focus on the teaching process and might even be disorganized in the most basic stages of education, such as punctuality. The obstacles to creating an effective teaching-learning process are twofold: economic issues and social and cultural issues.

The economic issues axis encompasses six components: the lack of or decrease in teacher motivation, migration receptivity, shortage of educational facilities, absence of sufficient national resources, teachers having second jobs, and high student density. The social and cultural issues axis includes twelve components: the use of traditional teaching methods, lack of attention to the psychology of learning, absence of local and national celebrations, emphasis on budgeting, lack of in-service training classes, lack of family cooperation, administrative corruption, absence of a competitive culture among colleagues, and older teachers' unfamiliarity with educational technology, diminished social status and esteem of teachers. The loss of motivation is a significant factor impacting the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in Noor County. The living conditions of teachers and their inadequate salaries fail to meet their needs, resulting in reduced or absent motivation among teachers, which acts as an "antithesis" to this "thesis."

Another respondent compared motivation in regular and gifted schools, noting that the higher motivation in gifted schools is due to the income disparity between the two. One respondent identified the presence of migrants in Noor County as an intervening factor in the teaching-learning process. Influenced by financial problems and resources in schools, facilities are similarly lacking, except in gifted schools in Noor County. The majority of respondents emphasized the absence or shortage of defined and official financial resources. Some believed that 100% of their financial resources were provided through donations facilitated by the parent-teacher association. Others mentioned that even donors now contribute very little to schools, claiming financial incapacity. As a result, schools operate with minimal resources. Considering the known

amounts of teachers' salaries and taking into account inflation and cost of living increases in society, the challenge to teachers' daily lives is inevitable. Teachers turn to second or even multiple jobs to meet their basic needs. The result of such a situation includes excessive teacher fatigue, reduced or absent reading time, unpreparedness in teaching, failure to update teachers' knowledge, and reduced motivation or even physical and mental energy. Given the quotes reviewed from teachers, a weak educational output is not unexpected. According to data from interviews, many respondents defined the ratio of classroom space to student numbers as non-standard. One notable finding in this research was that teachers considered the creation, control, or reduction of stress as outside their professional domain, believing it pertained to school counselors, who are also understaffed in most schools, hence a weak educational output is not unexpected. The school's administrative chart emphasizes budget adherence, placing learning as a secondary priority. As a result, teachers insist on testing and emphasize evaluation without regard to students' psychological and emotional states. The output of this practice also leads to neglecting the emotional aspect of students. Given the constant absence of counselors in schools, this issue continues like a missing link in schools, and the defective cycle persists.

According to motivational theories, motivation and interest are the driving forces behind all human behaviors and actions. In this context, respondents believed that teachers and administrative staff are weak and incapable in fulfilling their commitments. They felt that this weakness and incapability are particularly noticeable among newer colleagues. According to interview output codes, older colleagues are weak in using new teaching methods and technology, while newer colleagues lack experience and motivation. This means that a significant number of educational staff face difficulties in fulfilling their commitments, which, when combined with living difficulties, results in learning and teaching outputs that deviate from necessary standards. The majority of respondents acknowledged the absence of national and local ceremonies in secondary schools; some others believed this indifference causes aversion to, and even hostility towards, religion. It can be confidently stated that one issue all respondents emphasized was the importance of budgeting and focus on evaluation. The majority recognized the incorrectness of this trend but attributed it to the school's emphasis on grades and evaluations, believing that from the administration's perspective, the output is not learning and

its improvement, but rather grades and evaluation. In their view, the importance placed on budgeting and the school's emphasis on adhering to it acts as a pressure lever on teachers, compelling them to execute the budgeting, which impacts learning and even the use of active teaching methods, placing them as a lower priority. In Noor County, in-service training classes are not held in person, or they are held virtually, which, according to participants, lack effectiveness and do not enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. As previously mentioned, due to the lack of training classes, experienced colleagues are unable to use modern educational technology tools. While some respondents acknowledged coordinated cooperation and proper interaction with parents, others complained of indifference, lack of supervision, or excessive parental control, considering it a major challenge in schools due to the absence of proper interaction with parents, preventing schools from achieving their primary goals. Administrative corruption is another barrier that reduces teachers' motivation and prevents meritocracy in education. Respondents, whether in the area of student registration or among colleagues, reported the presence of discrimination and inequality, considering it a factor that exacerbates indiscipline and commitment issues among colleagues. Several respondents emphasized the absence of a competitive culture among colleagues, believing that when competition is not fostered, no one will make extra efforts, thus preventing creativity and the implementation of new strategies in teaching. Many respondents believed that newer colleagues are knowledgeable about technology; however, despite their extensive skills and experience, older colleagues are not familiar with modern technology and are unable to use new teaching tools. They considered this one of the challenges in education and believed that education should address this problem by providing training classes for older and more experienced colleagues, otherwise the teaching and learning process will be affected. Some respondents noted the continuous absence or lack of a counselor in schools as one of the major challenges, as they believe that dealing with abnormal behaviors in some students requires professional handling, which they lack due to the absence of specialized skills. The cumulation of problems in Iran, including economic issues, has caused the social status of teachers in society to decline, damaging teachers' social credibility among students and indirectly affecting the teaching process.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

From the findings of this research, it can be stated that many participants believed that assessment in the schools of Noor County includes both continuous and final forms. Most respondents described the relationship between teachers as very positive, characterized by respect and constructive interaction. Some participants believed that to assess the quality of relationships among students, interviews should be conducted with the students themselves. Teachers in Noor County encourage students to learn through seven methods. In most public schools nearly unanimously, the teaching method is traditional and teacher-centered, whereas in schools for the gifted, it is student-centered with the teacher playing a supervisory role. Almost all participants believed that the teaching style is predominantly teacher-centered and traditional. As previously mentioned, it seems that only the gifted schools in Noor County had a relatively rich environment with educational facilities, while other schools suffered from very poor facilities, which were also provided by parents and donors. Based on observations and interviews, regular schools were evaluated as very weak in terms of learning quality, teacher motivation, and educational facilities, and the culture of teaching and learning in these schools was considered weak. There are five types of secondary schools in Noor County. The four most common disciplinary methods in the schools of Noor County are obtaining commitments, imposing restrictions, referrals to a counselor or administration, and negative grading. Loss of motivation is a significant factor affecting the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in Noor County. Influenced by financial problems and resources in schools, facilities also suffer from shortages and deficiencies. The only schools in Noor County that were exceptions to this were the gifted schools. In Noor County, in-person in-service training classes are not held, or classes are held virtually, which, according to participants, lack the necessary effectiveness and do not enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers.

Based on the results obtained, the following recommendations are suggested:

Utilization of training classes for experienced colleagues to familiarize them with modern educational technology tools.

Enhancing school interactions with parents to help students achieve their primary goals.

Avoiding discrimination and inequality, which are factors that exacerbate indiscipline and lack of commitment among colleagues.

Creating opportunities for teachers to become acquainted with technology.

Conducting research on a larger sample with other variables related to the teaching and learning process.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

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

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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