



## Components of The Culture of Obedience In Iranian Schools

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### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

The role of culture in planning and implementing educational reforms and in impacting the quality of the education system has rarely been discussed. This study aims to identify the features of culture in governmental primary schools for girls in Iran aged 7–12 years. Using an ethnographic approach, qualitative data were collected and analysed. The data were collected based on a triangulation strategy, through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, and content analysis of the *Document for Fundamental Transformation of the Education System*. Thematic analysis was used to discover, analyse, and interpret the pattern of data meanings.

The findings reveal that specific components represent the culture of these schools: a uniform education system, bureaucratic structure of schools, square-shape architecture of schools, national curriculum, arbitrary relationships between members of the school community, and the professional development of teachers based on the top-down command. The shared values of school members and behaviour norms are concerned with the exact execution of policies and plans issued in the form of circulars from the Ministry of Education, which shape the daily activities of school members; this has led to the emergence of a culture of obedience, wherein the members comply with the expectations, prescribed policies, and plans set by the Ministry of Education. Although studies acknowledge the importance of identifying cultural context, school culture has rarely been investigated in governmental primary schools for girls in Iran. This study highlights the role of education policymakers in maintaining and solidifying the existing culture in these schools.

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## Introduction

Owing to scientific developments to respond to social transformations and socio-cultural changes, education reforms are common phenomena in education systems (Chen & Kompf, 2012). In Iran, consecutive education reforms are also ratified by the authorities and then announced to schools. Several educational reforms have been undertaken since 1979, and these are shown in Table 1.

Despite their implementation, these reforms did not enhance the quality of Iranian education system. Even in recent years, the quality of the education system has declined instead. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015), the educational system of Iran ranked 51<sup>st</sup> amongst 76 countries. These reforms were often a repetition of plans belonging to the pre-revolutionary era, prior to 1978. For example, the funding of schools has been important from pre-revolutionary times, but the responsibility for it has rotated between family, private, and government financing. Before the official education system, funding of schools was the duty of families. *Maktab khaneh*, which were people-founded institutions, held the responsibility of educating children. With the ratification of *Mashruteh*, according to the 19th Principle: 'the establishment of schools is financed by national and governmental entities' and now, based on the rule, (Act 44 of the Constitution), the privatisation of schools is stressed. However, most of the reform plans have impacted the superficial aspects of our education system, such as the plan for a change in students' uniforms or education stages. In general, these plans are disconnected from other aspects of the education system and are not reflective of changes in society. More importantly, these plans do not take the success and progress of the students into account; hence, their necessity remains questionable. Researchers consider these changes

in the education system as failed attempts (Nazemi, 2009) and regard them as impractical and superficial (Iravani, 2014). Indeed, these plans do not consider education as a system; although different types of research acknowledge the necessity of identifying the cultural context for any kind of change, the school culture has rarely been considered in the planning of educational reforms.

Sergiovanni (1984) defines school culture as values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings between students, teachers, parents, and other members whose thoughts, feelings, and behaviour reflect school culture. Study findings show that culture affects all other affairs at the school (Lightfoot, 1983; Fisher et al., 2012). For instance, a school's culture influences its image and is linked to students' disciplinary issues and academic performance (Lightfoot, 1983). It also has a role in operationalising the school's mission (Fisher et al., 2012) and impacts the students' learning and other members of the school community as a whole (Fisher et al., 2012; Smith, 2014). It influences the practice of education, cooperation, and professional development of teachers; supports or suppresses informal learning; facilitates change (Zhu et al., 2013; Harris, 2016); and is an important component in any agenda for reform in the education system (Hinde, 2005; Schoen and Teddlie, 2008; Louis and Murphy, 2017), while being crucial to the success of any individual or governmental initiative (Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex, 2010). Having collected literature on the failure of education reforms, Hargreaves (1997) believes that changes in education will be futile unless the school culture is examined both before and during the process of change.

Despite these findings, research on the nature of school culture and its role in the quality or success and failure of education reforms in Iran has rarely been conducted. Furthermore, despite its

importance, school culture has been afforded little attention in education research. Seemingly, reformers of the education system consider the abidance by reforms and their detailed implementation as inevitable; therefore, by merely issuing some orders, they demand that principals and teachers operationalise change at schools.

To the best of my knowledge, thus far, no research has been conducted on school culture in Iran. While the existing body of literature on school culture emphasizes the role of school members in creating culture, this study has challenged the role of circulars and education policies in the formation of school culture.

### **School culture**

The concept of 'way of life' was introduced by Waller (2014). He argues that every school has its own culture, and a set of regulations, customs, traditions and ethical codes that shape the school's behaviour and relationships. Principals, teachers, students, and parents discover the soul or culture of the school as soon as they enter it and then conform with it. They repeat the acceptable manners and avoid undesirable ones, and participate in maintaining the culture. They absorb the dominant soul of the school, and other unwritten positive and negative expectations, before they understand the regulations and procedures. Williams (1961) categorised the different definitions of culture into three groups: culture as an ideal, culture as a documentary, and culture as a social matter. Bates (1987) sees the first two definitions of culture in the education system as unproblematic, while, in the third definition, there might emerge various types of culture, and therefore there is a likelihood of some cultures being seen as superior to others. Culture as a social matter describes a particular way of life that explains the institutions' meanings and values. In this meaning, culture is invisible but influences all dimensions of life. By understanding

it, we can see and interpret ourselves and our surrounding worlds and act based on that understanding, or respond to actions that do not conform to the cultural norms and act to transfer cultural values to others.

Based on these definitions of culture, this study focuses on culture as a way of life transmitted through organisational and social structures. Examining this domain helps us understand the rhythms of daily activities of students, teachers, principals, and other school members. It helps us contemplate how these people learn patterns of behaviour at schools and how they shape their lives in the surrounding world, as this determines how they choose to act or react in their lives. Considering this definition, and that our education system is centralised and gender-segregated, the question raised here is: what meaning is hidden in the different daily activities of principals, teachers, and students of government schools at the primary level in Tehran?

### **Method**

This study was conducted based on an ethnographic approach. Fatemeh, one of the deputies in the chosen areas, helped me access the schools. With a work record of 26 years in the education system, Fatemeh was quite familiar with the topic under investigation. As a gatekeeper, she provided me with the opportunity to be present at schools for an entire educational year to observe the relationship between the members of the school community as well as study the schools' operations. I interviewed some teachers and principals in depth. To complete the data, I studied the related policy in DOC. Then, the relationships between the teachers, principals, students, and their parents were observed. The physical environment of schools was also considered, and principals and teachers who applied the related policies were interviewed. I conducted triangulation to discover

the meaning behind the events that occur in schools and to interpret them. The data-collection strategies are as follows:

### **Observation**

The relationship between the members of the school community and the physical environment of the schools was observed. I also observed the environment and the schools' facilities, activities, behaviours, and interactions. Observations about the manners and the members' speech were recorded and reported. To this aim, based on the research literature, I prepared a guide for observation. The schools for observation were selected based on the principle of gradual sampling (Flick, 2012). It was not set from the outset which or how many schools would be observed, as data collection would continue until saturation. However, based on pre-determined criteria, the schools chosen had to be just for girls, primary level, and governmental. With the principal's permission, I entered the school at about 7:30 am and would stay there until the end of the school day. In each school, I observed and recorded the activities of the members and the information on the facilities up to the point of emergence of repetition in the behaviour patterns. In other words, I continued the observation until data saturation was achieved (Flick, 2012, p. 242). I was present for two working weeks on average in each school and managed to observe 11 schools.

### **In-depth interview**

To understand the viewpoints of principals and teachers on their jobs, I conducted deep and detailed interviews with them. To select interviewees, snowball selection was used to interview those with deep experience of the way of life at schools. Finally, I interviewed 26 women teachers in the government primary schools for girls (Table 2). Face-to-face interviews were conducted inside the schools; each interview was

recorded with the consent of the participants to adhere to research ethics.

### **Reviewing documents**

To attain more knowledge about the organisation of the schools and the duties of the school members, I studied DOC. This document 'has been codified and ratified to respond to the needs of the time, and is based on the philosophy of the Islamic education aimed at achieving an education system in obedience with Islamic Republic laws'. It is noteworthy that this document was written by a group of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education (2011, p. 15) without consultation with any representatives of parents, students, or educational bodies.

To analyse the data, I used the thematic analysis strategy. First, I carefully transformed the data from observations, interviews, and the contents of documents into texts. Then, these texts were studied and investigated. Since the units of analysis in this study were phrases and sentences, I only kept those relevant to the concepts under investigation and omitted those that were irrelevant or similar in meaning. Thus, the categories and subcategories were identified and grouped.

### **Findings**

Through the contents gathered from observations, interviews, and policies, an understanding of the way of life in government primary schools for girls in Tehran was gained. Based on these findings, the meaning for values and activities were named as: the uniform system of education, the bureaucratic structure of school, the square-shaped architecture of schools, the national curriculum, arbitrary relationships between members of the school community, and professional teacher development based on the top-down command (Figure 1). Overall, these components form the culture of obedience at the studied schools, in which the members of schools

work only as the executors of the prescribed plans of the Ministry of Education. In the following, all these factors will be discussed.

The uniform system of education

Based on DOC, the subsystems of education consisting of leadership and management, curriculum, teacher training, and human resources, financing, equipment and technology, and research and evaluation (p. 366) all strive for the realisation of the mission of education, which is 'Hayat Tayabeh' roughly translated as 'Pure Life' (p.155). The document shows that the Ministry of Education makes all the decisions about different school affairs such as the curriculum design and method of teaching; selection of teachers and their salaries and perks; and budget spending in the schools. These decisions are then announced to the schools across the country and required to be implemented. Regulations and procedures exist for all school matters.

The square-shaped architecture of schools

The observation of schools and classrooms in the primary grade demonstrates that the school building houses some square or rectangular rooms connected by long corridors (Figure 2). In the following, the details of this subject will be discussed.

The public space and the corridors had no natural light or windows. Students did not have any place to sit or interact. During break time, they often would sit on the ground or stand together. A few of them would sit in the prayer room to study. Teachers had no separate room to interact with students or to assist them with problems.

The classrooms were small, with opaque windowpanes and bars on the windows. The colour of the walls was generally white. Some classrooms had air conditioners installed on the windows, while others had ceiling fans. Some classes had a projector and a laptop. There were also some

heating systems. The chairs were arranged in rows with little space between them. On average, the number of pupils in each classroom was 33; the classrooms had no pretty posters or decorative objects.

The libraries were often closed, and there was no librarian.

The laboratories at the schools had no person in charge, neither did they have the necessary equipment.

Although the Computer sites in some classrooms had some computers, printers, or fax machines, none of the schools had an internet connection.

A Prayer room was present in almost all schools.

There was usually no interaction between the teachers, the principal, and the students, except some basic daily greeting exchange. The students had almost no interaction with principals, and communication with teachers was limited to teachers asking questions and students answering them. Likewise, parents' interaction with teachers or principals was limited to when they wanted to object to their child's grade.

The bureaucratic structure of school

Bureaucratic organisation of schools is one of the other components of the culture of obedience which encompasses a strict hierarchy and observation of laws and regulations in the studied schools.

Hierarchy, defined as obeying a person in a higher position, was the most prevalent characteristic in the studied schools. Based on this principle, teachers stated that:

'the principals are appointed by the Ministry of Education. They are service-rendering principals who just perform routine tasks such as controlling the school uniform. For all schools, there is only one set of uniform instructions'.

Laws and regulations is another sub-theme of the bureaucratic organisation of schools, which establishes and maintains the coordination in a hierarchical order by imposing discipline. Most school-related decisions are taken outside the school, in the Ministry of Education, and then are announced to the schools in the form of a circular. These circulars are often not compatible with the school atmosphere and have changed the role of principals from a decision- and law-maker based on the school conditions to that of an obedient person only monitoring the execution of the circulars. Thus, teachers believe that:

‘Our principals are not experts, and they just have a conservative character. They are only focused on the implementation of the circulars’.

School principals' main duty is to obey the Ministry of Education and monitor the observation of laws and regulations at schools. The DOC defines the duties of a principal as:

‘monitoring the proper performance of all school staff; checking the roll-call of the employees, recording it in the related file, and reporting it to the Ministry of Education; trying to substitute other teachers or the deputy for absent teachers in the classes; being present at schools at least half an hour before starting of the classes and exiting school after all the staff and students’.

These duties are not in line with those of a school principal expected in literature on the best practices of school management.

#### National curriculum

National Curriculum is another component of the culture of obedience at schools. In other words, the printing and publishing of all the textbooks in all the school stages throughout the country is done by the Ministry of Education. The office of book compilation is the one that writes textbooks for elementary school and high school based on the national curriculum. This curriculum has been

written to achieve the purposes of education set by Iran's Islamic Republic's laws. As the cultural diversity of different regions is not considered, this method of writing books aggravates the centralisation of the education system in the country. In the following, the sub-themes of this subject will be discussed.

Powerless teachers. Since teachers are not involved in the writing of textbooks, they feel deprived of power. Shadi (teacher) says:

‘In writing of the books, nobody seeks teachers' or students' opinions, the authorities just talk about it but never practice it’.

School as a factory of learning. In the studied schools, the students are expected to merely learn from the textbooks, and no attention is paid to nurturing the emotional or ethical aspects of students' lives. Nastaran (teacher) says:

‘The students have become so aggressive, one of the things that the students should be taught is how to speak in the class. If they learn this skill at schools, they will know how to treat others when they grow up, and this is more important than learning math’.

Non-participatory Teaching. Due to class schedules and the high volume of textbooks, teaching at schools mainly occurs in the lecture style, and the students are only passive listeners. Akram (teacher) says:

‘Teaching is non-participatory and in general the school brings up students who are mostly dependent, irresponsible, and competitive. Education is not deep and is limited to memorisation; therefore, learning lacks proper depth and does not focus on analysis and understanding’.

Tyranny of exams. Since there is only one schedule for the starting and finishing of the school terms throughout the country, the exams take place in all regions of the country at a pre-arranged time.

The teachers, therefore, are under pressure and need to finish the books before the set deadline. Fereshteh (teacher) says:

‘I would love to take the students to the laboratory, but I am under the pressure of exams and have to finish teaching the book in a limited time. They should let the teachers decide and determine the time needed for each lesson by considering the class conditions’.

Voluminous books. The large volume of textbooks has impacted teaching and learning. The teachers state:

‘The information-packed books—and the exam pressure—do not allow me to teach ethical issues, educate children, or influence them in the best way possible’.

Time for education. The specified time for each lesson is not in proportion to the volume of the books. Teachers are required to prepare the students for uniform exams across the country. Hamideh (teacher) says, ‘Headteachers order us to teach rapidly to cover all the assigned subjects’.

Students’ learning measure. Focusing on grades is one of the common issues in these schools and influences the students’ and teachers’ efforts. Negin (teacher) says:

‘Both students and their parents only aim for an A grade in exams. The educational value of these grades does not matter to them, and this attitude is ruinous’.

Satisfactory report. Since one of the consequences of hierarchy is the distortion of information, the school principals avoid submitting a report which represents them as not good to the authorities, and they strive to depict the running of school affairs as flawless. Parvin (teacher) says:

‘As the average grade and the number of pupils passing exams is very important if the teachers give a real grade to the students, the average of the grades fall. Then, the principal asks us to give a

written report on why the grades have fallen. The only thing that matters to them is grades and figures. The higher the grades, the better’.

The arbitrary relationships between members of the school community

Friendly groups or teamwork rarely take place at these schools. Break time is the only time that teachers can meet one another, but this time is too short for the teachers to establish friendly relationships. Moreover, some other factors impede the formation of other informal groups. These will be discussed in the following sections.

School management in X style. McGregor (1966) describes management assumptions based on X style, in which the managers want to control everything; in the studied schools, the principals tried hard to control and guide teachers’ and students’ behaviour. The teachers say:

‘Our main duty is to be punctual and to return very soon to the class after the break time so that the principals control the affairs sooner. We must take great care that there should be no noise in the classroom and no student should leave the class. Otherwise, the school discipline would be at stake’.

School ethics. Under the pressure of the hierarchical order, each teacher made efforts to be considered competent in the principal’s eyes. Several teachers were irritated and complained about ‘the discrimination and disrespecting others’ rights, gossip in the office, and the lack of honesty’.

Giving diligent teachers a cold shoulder. In this fiercely competitive atmosphere of the schools and the lack of teamwork, each person is potentially considered a rival. Sepideh (teacher) says, ‘A teacher who works well is the thorn to the eyes of others’.

Individualism. The atmosphere of the schools was not supportive, and each person was trying to gain benefits without considering others. There

were almost no team efforts to resolve a problem in these schools. Batoul (teacher) says:

‘We do not know how to teamwork, and we see each other as a ladder to be used to climb up to a higher level of individual success’.

Arrogance. In this individualistic rivalry-generating atmosphere, each person sees themselves as more capable than the others. Thus, they often do not tend to speak with others. Mina (teacher) says:

‘Everybody here measures the world based on their standards, and does not value the others’.

Lack of trust. The hierarchy and feeling of insecurity have led to a mistrustful atmosphere at schools. Teachers often say: ‘I feel insecure, the human relationships are wrong and annoying. Here there is no honesty’.

Professional teacher development based on the top-bottom order

Planning for in-service education and professional development of teachers was not done based on needs analysis, but rather was carried out in the Ministry of Education and then announced to the schools. Teachers had no influence on their learning and professional development.

Lack of motivation for attending in-service education. As teachers had no role in planning in-service education, they ‘did not see such courses as any useful and considered attending them as a waste of time’.

Permission of the school principal. The school principal's permission was essential to attend these courses. However, due to the lack of substitute teachers, the teachers were not allowed to attend these courses. Maryam says, ‘the office staff attend these programs, while we are not allowed to’.

Educational needs analysis. The in-service education was not based on any educational needs analysis, and teachers did not regard these courses as necessary. Therefore, the principals tried to give

teachers incentives to persuade them to attend the courses. Zahra (teacher) says:

‘In-service education courses are not founded on any educational needs analysis. We attend them merely to gain some positive points in our record sheet’.

Motivation-killer principal. The principals in the studied schools did not encourage efficient and influential teachers. Narges (teacher) says:

‘Proactive and motivated teachers with great performance are totally and deliberately ignored’.

Evaluation of teachers. Since the number of students passing exams was the only thing that mattered, their school grade was more of a tool for evaluation of teachers than a reflection of the success and performance of students and the education system. Hence, the exam grades shaped the destiny of students and were also of high importance in the teachers’ career records. Somayeh (teacher) says: ‘I am judged based on the number of students passing the exams successfully’.

### **Discussion**

Based on evidence and views of the school members and some existing documents, this study revealed the way of life of the members of a primary school for girls in Tehran. The dominant culture in these schools is that of obedience. This section presents interpretation of the findings and the limitations of the study.

Interpretation of findings, DOC considers decentralisation as a direction towards reformation (a shift from the current situation to the desired situation) (2011, p. 133); further, education systems in some countries since 1970 have emphasised decision-making at schools or regions and have focused on responding to stated needs to improve the quality of the education system (Channa, 2014). Likewise, research findings also prove the incompetence of the centralised education system

in Iran in meeting the individual and local needs and learning and educating for life (Fatemi Amin and Fooladian, 2009). Despite these findings, the education system in Iran is still highly centralised; by adhering to the above-mentioned document, this centralisation has increased. The majority of ministers in the Education Ministry of Iran regard this amount of centralisation of the education system as harmful and have put 'decentralisation from education system' on the top of their agenda. For instance, Fani, the Minister of Education in the 11<sup>th</sup> government (the first term of Hasan Rouhani, 2013-2017), stated that:

'the institutional education is drastically centralised, so we strive for decentralisation so that the role of parents, students and teachers can be enhanced, and they can feel a sense of belonging to schools'. (Ministry of Education, 2017).

However, in practice, no action has been taken yet and whatever happens in our schools is determined by the plans and policies of government representatives in the ministries that must be implemented at schools to the letter. In such a case, disobeying the plans for the school invites punishment and reprimand. Furthermore, there is no clarity or response at the top of the education system pyramid for any such plans. Based on such a policy, a kind of uniform education system has been shaped across the country that does not pay adequate attention to students' local or regional differences, individual differences or talents, interests, and capabilities. In fact, for whatever must be done at schools, a series of pre-determined instructions exist, and the principals are expected not to adopt any other decisions and just execute those dictated programs and then report their execution to the Head Office. As Fullan (1997) states, the circulars can transform some school affairs but do not impact important matters. With the existence of these policies, the need for

contemplation has become irrelevant at schools; thus, school teachers and principals implement such policies blindly rather than being proactive and thinking actively about school affairs. This amount of centralisation in the country, which is more political than technical, has influenced all aspects of schools

The architecture in the studied schools is neither designed based on climate and culture nor according to the philosophy of learning, and is not suitable for seven to twelve-year-old children's activities. The square or rectangular shape of these schools and their classrooms, and the benches in rows demonstrate a factory-like approach in the schools, which hinders one-to-one learning. According to Nair and Fielding (2009), there is a correlation between the physical proportion and architecture of schools and the school members' behaviour; hence, the architecture of the classrooms impacts students' learning activities. Moreover, the school building has a defining impact on creativity and learning and plays a role in failure or success in informal learning (Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex, 2010). The message of such an educational environment is silence, inflexibility, and the tyranny of power, which teaches students only to obey (Nair and Fielding, 2009). The more our schools are under the dominance of government decisions, the further they separate from Iranian culture and an appropriate atmosphere for learning. Prior to the current national and uniform education system, Iranian schools used to work based on considering the local conditions. The architecture of Iranian schools in the Safavid era (1528-1769) was aligned with education goals and reflected the traditions of the society. Those schools had several entrances with different functions. In the design of these schools, there were two or four porches (Figure 3). The plants and trees in the schoolyard was a welcoming venue for the lessons and

discussions. Moreover, schools had a place for praying, and the classrooms were dome-shaped and had balconies and closets (Vasiq and Ghadrddan Gharamaleki, 2016). The decline in the proper designing of architecture for schools started from the Qajar era, where, by copying from industrial centres, the square shape of the classrooms became prevalent in our schools (Alaghmand et al., 2017). In this new design, there is no attention given to creativity and learning. The principle is to cram the highest possible number of students into a classroom. Indeed, to control children further, some iron bars were installed on the windows to cut off their connection to the outside world. This arrangement and design negatively impacts learning and the interaction between the school members.

The role of the studied school principals is far from what is expected from school principals in management literature. Instead of decision-making and planning, the studied school principals act as guards supervising school activities and monitoring teachers' and pupils' actions. In this highly micro-managed environment, there is no chance for negotiation and cooperation, which is the basis for learning and creating knowledge. The school members often complain about obstacles to establishing a relationship. Munro and Huber (2012) believe that building relationships is hard in these structures; the efforts for meaning creation are useless, and people do not participate in the activities, or are not encouraged to participate. Therefore, despite the importance of the role of the teacher in developing the curriculum (Elliott, 1994), teachers are not involved in writing textbooks but are required to accept the responsibility to fully teach them (Mehr Mohammadi, 2006). Further, as the textbooks for the primary level are all written in Persian language for the whole country, it seems that Persian has lost

its main mission and function and has turned into a language of dominance, changing from the role of creating national solidarity to breeding conflict and fury among different ethnicities. The matter worth considering is that parents and students are totally ignored in such an environment. During this study, it rarely happened that teachers or principals had a conversation with parents or even asked for their views. The fact is that the physical presence of students in the classes is obligatory, and the role of parents is restricted to a person picking up their child from school. In other words, parents drive their children to school at 7:30 am and then pick them up after the class ends.

These cultural aspects of our schools are a reminder of a 'toxic culture' (Peterson and Deal, 2002). This culture holds some negative beliefs about schools and students; further, a lack of management and leadership is evident in these schools. Individual-oriented actions are the norm; there is no social interaction between the members of the school community, and the staff usually seek meaning in external activities. The schools' plans are not supportive of students, and disappointment and hopelessness are rife at such schools. These values are in contrast with the purpose of education. In these schools, a survey on creating education reforms is rare. The main school actors do not participate in these transformations, and education reforms are announced to the schools through some bureaucratic hierarchies; the principal and teachers are the last ones to receive plans and circulars. Thus, the school members do not have a sense of owning change or reform and lack motivation or creativity to execute the plans.

### **Conclusion**

Uniform education system, bureaucratic structure of schools, the square-shaped architecture of schools, a national curriculum, the arbitrary relationships of school members, and professional

development of teachers based on the top-down order are the main factors that describe the way of life in these schools. Our school culture consists of a series of intertwined common values and beliefs between the school members concerning the exact execution of government policies and plans. In this kind of culture, the execution of educational policies has ignored school members' professional roles and skills (principal, teacher, student, parents, and others), creating an atmosphere of strictly controlling hierarchy. In this atmosphere, from the top of the organisation's pyramid to the bottom, each person controls the other. The principal and the teachers have been stripped of any possible authority and are merely involved in executing decisions and circulars. In this case, the circulars drive principals and teachers to act. In other words, they have to do everything according to these pre-planned circulars. Thus, school members have no authority in such conditions, and schools are under the control of government educational policies that control schools' behaviour via the circulars. Schools are void of any soul, feeling, or emotion. Moreover, some incentives such as attaining good grades have replaced real interactions; teachers' professionalism is defined based on students' success in exams and the percentage of those passing the exams. Covering the whole book by teachers is prioritised ahead of understanding and learning, and the high grades of students suggest that schools have attained their objectives. The role of school principals is to announce the grades for the students' success in exams. In this condition, effectiveness has found a new meaning: the percentage of students passing exams and their high grades in different exams. Instead of transferring and institutionalising positive values, schools only concentrate on students obtaining passing grades.

Based on this extreme centralisation, top-down relationship, pre-determined circulars, and

procedures, the school members have some common assumptions and only obey plans and circulars rather than strive to create ideas and share ideals focusing on students' educational growth. The circulars, indeed, have a controlling message, and students are lost amidst these circulars. In other words, principals' and teachers' activities are less focused on the transformation and learning of the students and more inclined to execute the delivered plans from the Ministry of Education. Based on this chain of obedience, teachers are submissive to the decisions made by school principals, who are in turn submissive to circulars. This chain of obedience is stretched to the Ministry. Obedience, which often lacks thinking, has become the keyword of our schools. In such conditions, instead of the transformation and creation of culture, principals and teachers are facilitating the culture of blind obedience to reproduce itself. The author calls this culture 'obedience culture'—passive and open only to the prescribed expectations, policies, and plans of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has put the propagation of the government's political ideology as its top priority. In such a case, the principals and teachers are not involved in decision-making and do not interact with politicians, but rather it is the dictated plans that shape the quality of the interaction between members and influence learning occurring at schools. Thus, parents are mere spectators and observe the execution of plans from behind the school doors.

Given that the detailed implementation of the Ministry plans shapes the basic value of the obedience culture at schools, this culture is therefore governmental and politicised and is in line with the government's policies. Such a culture is the offspring of these policies and is intertwined with political structures. In a nutshell, the political structures shape our schools' culture by force and

transfer it to the next generations, creating a culture of being submissive and not proactive, innovative, or creative in any possible manner. This study contributes to educational policies by emphasising the participation of principals and teachers in decision-making process. The participation of principals and teachers in decision-making leads to educational policies moving to improve educational processes instead of legitimizing government policies. Furthermore, the results of this study can help stakeholders in decision-making in schools by delegating authority to principals, which not only draws their attention to issues within the school but also leads to satisfaction. This paper also reveals the role of the policies of the Ministry of Education in creating and disseminating culture, such that school members, respond to these policies rather than being agents of cultural improvement and change.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. Studying only-girl schools is the main limitation in this study, which impedes research generalisability. Although the envisaged design was the study of girls' and boys' schools, in practice, the author was not allowed to enter the boys' schools. It is better that future research should be done with the help of a colleague to identify decision-making mechanisms in schools and focus on the formulation of a school-based policy making framework.

### **Conflict of Interest**

This manuscript has not been published or presented elsewhere in part or in entirety and is not under consideration by another journal. All study participants provided informed consent, and the study design was approved by the appropriate ethics review board. We have read and understood your journal's policies, and we believe that neither the manuscript nor the study violates any of these. There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the implementation of this research and the preparation of the article, all national laws and principles of professional ethics related to the subject of research, including the rights of statistical community, organizations and institutions, as well as authors and writers have been observed. Adherence to the principles of research ethics in the present study was observed and consent forms were consciously completed by all statistical community.

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### **Conflict of interest**

According to the authors of the present article, there was no conflict of interest.

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