# Micro Politics in Schools: A Narrative from Two Perspectives on School Politics

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**Abstract**

In the literature of school leadership, two perspectives often conflict. The first is a rational perspective that focuses on the truth-seeking and truth-accepting nature of humans, while the second is a political perspective based on the premise that different groups within a school have varied interests and desires, which they pursue through power struggles. This research aimed to examine these two perspectives in schools to determine which can explain the mechanisms of the school. To achieve this goal, an explanatory mixed-methods strategy was employed. In the first phase of the research, quantitative data were collected to compare and measure the effectiveness of school principals in regular and gifted schools in Kashan. For this purpose, one exemplary school and eight public (regular) schools were selected using stratified sampling. The quantitative data collection tool was Parsons' standard questionnaire for school management effectiveness. The results of the quantitative phase indicated that the management of exemplary schools was more effective than that of public schools. In the second phase, a phenomenological strategy was used to explore whether public school principals accepted that these findings could be utilized in educational policy-making. In this section, eight public school principals were selected and interviewed. The results showed that none of the public-school principals, contrary to the assumptions of the rational perspective, accepted these findings, and they employed various political strategies to defend their performance. These findings suggest that the political perspective can explain many realities of school management.

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## Introduction:

School management deals with two interconnected domains: one is the realm of theory and research, and the other is the realm of practice. The distinction between these two domains is significant because the first scientific movement aimed at professionalizing educational management sought to establish this distinction and advance the scientific management of schools in both practical and theoretical realms.

This movement, known as the theory movement, aimed to go beyond mere experiential learning in school management and equip it with scientific knowledge (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002). In fact, at the beginning of the 1950s, there was a belief that the literature on educational management was dominated by practitioners and managers who were primarily action-oriented, leading to the reduction of educational management to a collection of advice and personal beliefs of experienced managers. On the other hand, it was believed that, given the achievements that social sciences had made up to that time, this knowledge could be utilized to produce theories and knowledge in educational management (Oplatka, 2010).

This was while experiential learning and knowledge accumulation were the only management models in educational systems for years until educational management scholars launched a movement in the 1950s. Proponents of this movement held a genuine belief that contemporary managers could not adequately confront the issues and challenges facing schools solely by relying on their experiences (Calberston, 1981).

These advocates sought to give the actions of managers a scientific and specialized form, meaning that decision-making should be based on theories derived from scientific management methods rather than merely on the personal experiences of the managers. This was also why Griffith aimed to create a management theory that was separate from personal experiences (Oplatka, 2010). Historically, the achievements of this movement led to the emergence of a perspective in educational management known as the rational perspective.

This perspective is based on several assumptions. First, it posits that science is a reality external to the minds of actors, and only through quantitative and statistical methods can these realities be unveiled.

Second, organizations are seen as coherent and unified entities that must continuously align their mechanisms with the external environment to remain effective and legitimate. In the first generation of educational management theories, politics, and power were also limited to formal structures and organizational power (Oplatka, 2010), leading to any resistance against formal changes being perceived as an organizational threat (Hatch, 2018).

This concern for maintaining order results in the recognition of only formal hierarchical power, while powers that often emerge informally and collaboratively within the organization are viewed as threats to organizational order. Third, it assumes that humans are logical and truth-seeking beings, meaning they always strive to make decisions that are rational and based on reasoning and common sense (Hoy, Miskel, & Tarter, 2018), thus submitting to the truth. Consequently, humans are always in pursuit of discovering reality through reliable evidence, which can compel an actor to accept a given reality. Overall, the fundamental assumption of the rational perspective on organizations is the scarcity of resources and the unlimited nature of human needs. This perspective regards organizational resources as scarce and limited, while the expectations placed on organizations are seen as unlimited and insatiable. The rational perspective, relying on such assumptions, speaks of rational and logical choices. Assuming limited resources and unlimited needs necessitates making a logical choice—one that is efficient and effective. In this view, management is also a conscious and logical effort to mobilize resources and coordinate all organizational forces to achieve goals.

The rational approach is based on the premise that the strategic direction of organizations is determined by planners and policymakers; they are the intellectual minds of the organization who can choose the most rational and well-considered strategies (Mohammadi, 2022).

Various pieces of evidence indicate that the rational perspective has gained widespread dominance in the theory and research of school management.

On one hand, the most popular and best-selling textbooks in school management have adopted this rational perspective, often overlooking the political dynamics and power struggles among different groups within schools (Mohammadi, 2022).

This popularity of textbooks written from a rational perspective is not limited to school management in Iran; global research has shown that such a perspective has broadly influenced educational management (Harris and Jones, 2018). On the other hand, research in the field of school management has practically accepted the assumptions of the rational perspective and has conducted studies on various topics based on it. This has reached a point where research on school leadership has shown that despite advancements in the concept of leadership, 89% of educational leadership research has utilized quantitative and positivist logical methods (Naimati & Shirbaghi, 2022).

Despite the widespread dominance of the rational perspective in theory and research in school management, there have been challenges in practice. There appears to be a certain ambiguity and division. On one hand, some researchers analyzing the current state of schools have shown that schools and their leaders continue to use the rational perspective in their decision-making (Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, Brown, and Ahtaridou, 2011). This mindset has led some critical researchers and theorists, such as Foster (2005), to accept that the prevailing practices in schools are indeed rational and based on logical traditions. On the other hand, another group of researchers believes that the rational perspective has not adequately identified the realities of schools (for example, Greenfield &Reibens, 2005). Such research can also be observed in Iran, where some researchers have deemed the assumptions and metaphors of the rational perspective for understanding school management as inadequate and inappropriate (for example, Mohammadi, 2020).

Therefore, these researchers advocate for alternative perspectives to explain the mechanisms of schools. One of these alternative perspectives is the political perspective. The political perspective, by providing a new view of organizational mechanisms, has significantly aided in understanding the actions within the educational system. This perspective has replaced the traditional view that equated management with logical functions such as planning, organizing, and administering. The rational perspective was based on the assumption that managers act beyond the demands of power groups and strive to make decisions based on logical calculations. Accordingly, the primary concern of educational managers was the effectiveness of schools, thus viewing power relations as obstacles to effectiveness.

However, the political perspective holds that if we accept that various groups within schools have different and diverse demands, then being a rational manager may lead to failure, necessitating a political manager who relies on political skills to implement policies that lead schools to effectiveness.

Thus, what remains unanswered is whether, despite the heavy focus of research and textbooks on the rational perspective in management, the mechanisms of schools also proceed based on this perspective. This study aimed to provide a clear response to this issue based on quantitative and qualitative data. It is worth noting that this research only addressed a small part of the school mechanisms, specifically the dilemma between believing in science and defending it versus defending the interests and possessions of various individuals and groups.

**Research Background**

Various studies have examined the mechanisms and policies of schools. In a study conducted by Bolandhamtan and Ghadermazi (2021) titled "Representation of School Principals' Experiences of Educational Policy Quality in Sanandaj," the findings indicated that several major factors can influence the policy-making of principals, including political, social, economic, cultural, human, technological, or professional and legal factors. The results also implicitly suggested that a principal's success in school policy-making depends on utilizing political tactics.

Furthermore, the findings showed that principals who can coordinate regulations and sometimes conflicting communications from teachers and other school stakeholders, and who can foster constructive interactions with various sectors of education, will improve the quality of their schools.

ParastehGhambavani (2016) conducted a study titled "The Role of Educational Policy-Making in the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Managers, with a Greater Emphasis on Public Schools." The findings revealed that both groups of school managers consider the role of educational policy-making to be significant in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, the research showed that managers of private schools had a higher average efficiency compared to their public-school counterparts, which could be attributed to the greater ability of private schools to utilize technology and have more financial resources. In fact, public financial contributions have not been insignificant in the efficiency of managers, whereas this difference does not exist in the effectiveness of school managers. This result implies that all managers strive to plan and organize uniform services for all students. Raising awareness among education officials and policymakers to address this disparity could influence future educational policies. Chekandi et al. (2016) investigated the role of micro-policies on the professional interests of English teachers in schools for gifted students in Iran in their study titled "Micro-Policy Interests of School English Teachers: A Case Study of Schools for Gifted Students in Iran." The interview results indicated that teachers are engaged in competition, collaboration, and coalition-building to establish their professional interests. Moreover, the micro-political actions of teachers were linked to their efficacy beliefs.

Personal interests, such as public recognition and visibility, were pursued through positive feedback regarding teachers' professional behavior and demonstrating their effectiveness. Material interests, such as the use of smart boards, the internet, and additional resources, were other tools through which they could present their informed and effective personalities to others. Organizational interests also validated teachers' effectiveness, as only effective

teachers were employed in schools with gifted students. The social interests of teachers, established through dependency and relationships with others, particularly managers, were prerequisites for creating all other professional interests. The findings highlighted the importance of fostering political literacy and the impact of information on micro-policies in schools on teachers' abilities to develop appropriate coping strategies.

Bondy, Ross, and Webb (1994) explored the impact of cultural differences on participatory decision-making and distributed leadership in schools in their research titled "Participatory Decision-Making in Schools in Individualistic and Collectivist Cultures: Micro-Politics Behind Distributed Leadership." The results showed that in collectivist cultures, micro-political strategies are often collaborative, while in individualistic cultures, they tend to be competitive. These cultural changes significantly affect the understanding and implementation of leadership and decision-making processes.

Brihamal (1993), in his study titled "Micro-Politics of Teacher Induction: A Narrative-Biographical Study," examined the actions taken by novice teachers when faced with micro-political challenges while navigating their new roles. The results indicated that these teachers employed various strategies to cope with power dynamics, such as seeking mentorship, forming alliances, and strategically positioning themselves within the school hierarchy. Ultimately, he concluded that understanding these micro-political tactics is essential for supporting novice teachers and enhancing their professional development.

Blas and Blas (2001) discussed in their article "Micro-Politics in Schools: Teacher Leaders' Use of Political Tactics" how teacher leaders navigate the micro-political landscape of schools by employing various political tactics, such as forming alliances, utilizing informal networks, and strategically sharing information to influence decision-making and school policies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for strengthening effective leadership and achieving educational goals. Furthermore, in another article (2002) titled "Micro-Politics of Educational Change and Reform: Breaking the Black Box," they concluded that

educational reforms are profoundly influenced by micro-political processes within schools. These processes involve negotiating power and interests among various stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Recognizing the micro-political dimension is essential for understanding the complexities and challenges of implementing educational changes.

Bjork and Blas (2009) conducted a decade-long case study from 1998 to 2008 to explore how decentralization and the use of distributed leadership encounter micro-political mechanisms. The findings revealed that when a school district implemented a government-supported decentralization policy that included adopting distributed leadership and Total Quality Management (TQM), middle managers faced a dilemma. On one hand, they risked dismissal if they did not implement the reform policies and directives from their supervisors. On the other hand, if they successfully implemented such policies, their positions were jeopardized. Consequently, as the decentralization plan accelerated, the scope and intensity of resistance from middle managers increased. These findings implicitly suggested that the success of supervisors in implementing decentralization policies at the district level is related to the nature and structure of micro-policies at the middle management level.

Additionally, the research indicated that internal evaluation processes used to assess the success of the district's change process were compromised by middle policies. Understanding that those who implement policies can reshape or even prevent execution, as considered by higher-level officials, may contribute to reframing evaluation methods and enhancing the understanding of oversight policies.

West, in his article (2010) "Micro-Politics, Leadership, and Everything Else... The Need for Increased Awareness and Political Skills of School Leaders," succinctly recounted the impact of micro-political factors on school organization and management. He noted that schools are contexts where micro-political activities are inevitable and approached this from an organizational behavior perspective.

The chosen perspective—small group theory—essentially stems from Edgar Schein's early

contributions. The results demonstrated how analyses of micro-political dynamics could serve as tools for enhancing school leaders' understanding. Therefore, he suggested that micro-politics is a valuable area of study for those wishing to engage in school management, yet it is often overlooked.

Hog and Smith (2012), in their study "The Possibility of Reform: Micro-Politics in Higher Education," argue that while teacher education is a crucial aspect not only within the educational system but also in curriculum reform, the increasing expectations for educational reforms have inevitably made this institution more political. This situation implies that studying micro-politics is vital for understanding how organizations change or fail to change at the onset of reform. Any effort to reform an organization necessitates examining the fundamental assumptions of the reforms, the social and historical context of the reforms, and how these reforms align with the values, ideologies, and goals of the stakeholders. Schools are vulnerable to a range of powerful external and internal forces, caught in a vortex of government mandates, social and economic pressures, and conflicting ideologies among administrators, faculty, and students. Efforts to reform schools are often complicated by competing political agendas. Reforms provide at least some opportunity for political action by those in power. While the literature promotes effective schools, strong leadership, and shared values, the research data reveal fundamental differences across five constituencies: curriculum, teachers, students, and teacher education, supporting the claim of micro-politics that systemic reforms are often unattainable.

Yordanidis and George (2013), in their research titled "Micro-Politics and Secondary Education: Teacher Evaluation in Greece," found that the development of micro-political perspectives on evaluating teaching work is positively associated with teachers' age, their educational background, and their experience in the same school, while negatively associated with their graduate education. Furthermore, teachers' micro-political perspectives in a specific category of professional interests reflect the overall micro-political behavior regarding the evaluation of teaching work. The findings highlighted the informal—and thus

fundamental—realities of schools concerning the issue of evaluating teaching work. Therefore, the findings could be useful in educational policy planning regarding acceptance by teachers, effective implementation, and achievable outcomes of teaching evaluations.

Piet Gert and Kelchtermans (2015) examined collaboration among managers in four federations of schools in Flanders in their study "Micro-Politics of Distributed Leadership: Four Case Studies of School Federations." Analysis of interview data from managers using a micro-political perspective revealed that a core idea in micro-political theory is that the actions (and sense-making) of organizational members are largely driven by their interests. This perspective allows for understanding how managers' interests influence collaboration within the federations in practice. In three federations, alignment of managers' interests, based on collaboration, was found to contribute to the improvement of the federation and also enhanced the professional development of the managers. However, in the fourth case, due to conflicting interests between the federation and a member school, such dynamics did not exist. Thus, it can be concluded that the balance of managers' interests plays a crucial role in developing collaborative relationships and practices within school federations.

Lachmiller and Paulicki (2017), in their study "Leadership and Resource Allocation in Schools: Employing Micro-Political Perspectives," conclude that resource allocation presents a compelling leadership dilemma for school administrators across the United States. The reduction in school budgets necessitates an active re-examination of existing resource allocation decisions. This rethinking often generates micro-political challenges with school staff. The existing micro-political challenges include three common dilemmas that administrators frequently address in their leadership: reallocating classroom teachers to better support student learning, reallocating school-based resources to support new school improvement priorities, and challenges related to preparing staff for impending reductions in school resources.

Estrella and Pat (2018), in their research "Micro-Politics and Meritocracy," which examines the impact of perceived micro-politics on academic careers in two universities in Spain and Ireland, state that although universities present themselves as meritocratic organizations, there is evidence suggesting that such claims are "rational myths." Their focus is on two aspects of micro-politics: issues related to job experiences, particularly networks; and those related to candidate evaluations, especially double standards. The research findings indicate that informal social networks are perceived as facilitating career advancement, particularly noted by Spanish male respondents. Double standards in evaluations are used to favor specific candidates: locals in Spain and men in Ireland. Men in the Spanish context more explicitly refer to these double standards than their Irish counterparts, arguably reflecting the influence of discourses other than meritocracy in that context. The results highlight that informal structures impact formal structures regardless of the governing model and raise fundamental questions about the nature of universities and the limitations of structural changes.

Kari (2018), in his research "Exploring the Political Literacy Practices of Beginning Teachers in Professional Inquiry Communities," investigates how novice teachers collectively understand and respond to the micro-political environments of their schools. The results show how novice teachers practiced "political literacy" and demonstrated a shared understanding of the organizational structures and professional cultures of their schools while participating in inquiry groups.

Kyrin (2018), in his article "Towards a Broader Understanding: A Formal Conceptual Analysis of School Micro-Politics," notes that school micro-politics is a key factor determining changes in the interactions of members within a learning organization, necessitating careful study to create a conducive school environment.

The aim of this research is to analyze the concept of micro-politics in a school by highlighting its essential characteristics. The research method—Formal Concept Analysis (FCA)—was used to identify implicit relationships among described objects through a set of features. An analysis of the scientific literature reveals six sets of objectives: micro-politics as a dimension of

leadership; micro-politics as part of macro policy; micro-politics as the life and work of teachers; micro-politics as interactions within an organization; micro-politics as the daily life of an organization; and micro-politics as the darker side of institutional life.

O'Malley et al. (2018) in their topic "School Improvement" aimed to identify common micro-political challenges faced by new administrators and the strategies they employ to effectively respond to these challenges. The findings suggest that alignment between school vision and school culture aids both in developing the reputation of an effective administrator and in managing the micro-political challenges faced by administrators and educational leaders. The findings also indicate that when administrators involve staff in developing school change protocols, micro-political challenges can be minimized.

Giudici (2021), in his research "Teacher Policy from the Bottom Up: Theorizing the Impact of Micro-Politics on Policy Production," states that educational policy is generally understood as a multi-layered process consisting of interconnected phases, raising the question of how top-down formal policy influences micro-political policy, i.e., how teachers experience and enact their work. The assumption that policy is widely influenced in the reverse direction has rarely been studied empirically. It also identifies mechanisms linking teachers' micro-political actions to macro policies. Analytically, it combines concepts from the literature on teacher participation in macro and micro policies to develop a framework that connects the two.

Empirically, it leverages the theoretical potential of Swiss language education policy and tracks reform processes through which teachers, although formally distanced from policymaking, were able to influence language choices and incorporate them into official curricula. The analysis identifies three mechanisms through which they exert their influence: expressive experience, subversive enactment, and overt resistance. None of these depend on higher levels of teacher unions or specific governmental institutions. The findings also highlight the importance of engaging with the processual dimension of policy to advance theories of educational policy.

**Methodology**

The present study aimed to provide a suitable response to the question of which perspective—political or rational—can offer a more realistic explanation of school management. To this end, an explanatory mixed research method was employed in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative phase utilized exploratory factor analysis, while the qualitative phase employed thematic analysis.

**Research Instruments**

In the qualitative section, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and in the quantitative section, Parsons' standardized questionnaire on school management effectiveness was used. This questionnaire was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very high to very low. A total of 115 questionnaires were distributed, all of which were utilized.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were principals and teachers working in the public and witness high schools in Kashan. The statistical population included all high school teachers in Kashan, from which 110 were selected using stratified sampling, and the questionnaires were distributed to all teachers. In the qualitative section, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data.

The participants were principals of public schools, and eight were selected using theoretical sampling. Initially, the participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, and with their consent, their voices were recorded, ensuring that their details would remain confidential. The interviews began with several general questions regarding the educational managers' policies towards public schools, and probing questions were used when necessary. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 50 minutes, which were transcribed manually. Finally, the researcher analyzed the findings using thematic analysis. In this type of analysis, information was collected from participants and then coded without considering or influencing the researcher's opinion.

**Findings**

A) Quantitative Findings

**Research Questions:**

1. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of principals of regular and Shahed high schools in    Kashan regarding the effectiveness of teachers' performance in terms of innovation?

**Table 1: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Witness and Regular Schools Regarding the Effectiveness of Managers' Performance in Terms of Innovation**

| The significance level of the T-test | t-test statistic | Public | | Shahed | | innovation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | standard deviation | Mean | standard deviation | Mean | |
| 0/39 | 2/08 | 4/17 | 12/35 | 4/87 | 14/01 | |

The research findings in Table 1 indicate that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of innovation between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be above 0.05. Thus, there is no significant difference in the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of innovation.

2. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of principals of regular and Shahed high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of teachers' performance in terms of Organizational commitment?

**Table 2: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Witness and Regular Schools Regarding the Effectiveness of Managers' Performance in Terms of Organizational Commitment.**

| The significance level of the T-test | t-test statistic | regular | | Shahed | | Organizational commitment |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | standard deviation | Mean | standard deviation | Mean | |
| 0/11 | 1/34 | 3/60 | 11/88 | 3/40 | 12/76 | |

The research findings in Table 2 indicate that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of Organizational commitment between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be above 0.05. Thus, there is no significant difference in the opinions of teachers from Shahed and publichigh schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of Organizational commitment.

3. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of principals of regular and Shahed high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of teachers' performance in terms of job satisfaction?

**Table 3: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Witness and Regular Schools Regarding the Effectiveness of Managers' Performance in Terms of job satisfaction.**

| The significance level of the T-test | t-test statistic | regular | | Shahed | | job satisfaction |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | standard deviation | Mean | standard deviation | Mean | |
| 0/003 | 3/03 | 4/03 | 12/20 | 5/95 | 15/05 | |

The research findings in Table 3 indicate that there is significant difference in the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of job satisfaction between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be lower 0.05. Thus, there is significant difference in the opinions of teachers from Shahed and publichigh schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of job satisfaction.

4. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of principals of regular and Shahed high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of

teachers' performance in terms of organizational health?

**Table 4: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Witness and Regular Schools Regarding the Effectiveness of Managers' Performance in Terms of Organizational Health.**

| The significance level of the t test | t-test statistic | regular | | Shahed | | Organizational health |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | standard deviation | Mean | standard deviation | Mean | |
| 0/003 | 4/05 | 3/87 | 11/68 | 6/45 | 15/67 | |

The research findings in Table 4 indicate that there is significant difference in the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of Organizational health between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be lower than 0.05. Thus, there is significant difference in the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers' performance in terms of Organizational health.

5. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of principals of regular and Shahed high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of teachers' performance?

**Table 5: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Witness and Regular Schools Regarding the Effectiveness of Managers' Performance**

| The significance level of the T-test | t-test statistic | regular | | Shahed | | Effectiveness of Managers' Performance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | standard deviation | Mean | standard deviation | Mean | |
| 0/003 | 2/93 | 13/97 | 46/51 | 19/34 | 56/69 | |

The research findings in Table 5 indicate that there is significant difference in the effectiveness of managers' performance between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be lower than 0.05. Thus, there is significant difference in the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers' performance.

6. Is there a significant difference between the opinions of teachers from Shahed and public high schools in Kashan regarding the effectiveness of managers based on gender (male-female)?

**Table 6: The test of the significance of the difference between the control and normal schools regarding the effectiveness of the managers' performance in terms of gender (male-female)**

| The significance level of the T-test | | Women | | Men | | Components and total school effectiveness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | standard deviation | average | standard deviation | average | |
| 0/13 | 1/94 | 4/41 | 13/80 | 4/71 | 12/52 | Innovation |
| 0/04 | 2/02 | 2/99 | 12/93 | 3/93 | 11/61 | Organizational Commitment |
| 0/007 | 2/72 | 5/10 | 14/80 | 5/04 | 12/21 | Job Satisfaction |
| 0/005 | 2/86 | 6/00 | 14/98 | 4/74 | 12/07 | Organizational Health (spirit) |
| 0/01 | 2/47 | 17/48 | 56/51 | 17/46 | 48/43 | Effectiveness |

The findings in Table 6 indicate that there is no significant difference in the levels of innovation and organizational commitment between male and female teachers in Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be above 5% (0.04, sig = 0.13). However, there are significant differences regarding job satisfaction and organizational health (morale), with the t-test statistics for these two components showing very acceptable significance levels. Job satisfaction and organizational health among male and female principals in Shahed schools are higher than those in public schools. Overall, there is a significant difference in the effectiveness of school performance based on gender, as the t-statistic has an acceptable significance level.

**Table 7: Significance Test of Differences in Research Topics Between Shahed and Public Schools**

| The significance level of the T-test | | Women | | Men | | Components and total school effectiveness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | standard deviation | average | standard deviation | average | |
| 0/13 | 1/94 | 4/41 | 13/80 | 4/71 | 12/52 | Innovation |
| 0/04 | 2/02 | 2/99 | 12/93 | 3/93 | 11/61 | Organizational Commitment |
| 0/007 | 2/72 | 5/10 | 14/80 | 5/04 | 12/21 | Job Satisfaction |
| 0/005 | 2/86 | 6/00 | 14/98 | 4/74 | 12/07 | Organizational Health (spirit) |
| 0/01 | 2/47 | 17/48 | 56/51 | 17/46 | 48/43 | Effectiveness |

The research findings indicate that there is no significant difference in the levels of innovation and organizational commitment between Shahed and public schools, as the t-test statistic was calculated to be above 5% (0.11, sig = 0.39). However, for the two components of job satisfaction and organizational health (morale), there are significant differences, with the t-test statistics for these components showing very acceptable significance levels. Job satisfaction and organizational health in Shahed schools are higher than in public schools. Overall, there is a significant difference in the effectiveness of school management, as the t-statistic has an acceptable significance level.

**Table 8: Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Shahed and Public Schools) in the Component of Organizational Innovation**

| t-test to compare means | | | | | Lone test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Standard error of the mean | Difference of means | p-value | df | t value | p-value | f | |
| 0/84 | 1/75 | 0/03 | 113 | 2/08 | 0/25 | 1/31 | |

To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's F-test was used. According to the data in Table 8, the results of this test showed that F = 1.31 is significant at p = 0.25. This result indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the two types of schools holds. Based on the information in Table 8, t = 2.08 at p = 0.03 shows that there is no significant difference between Shahed and public schools regarding organizational innovation as one of the components of school effectiveness. In other words, the mean of 12.35 for innovation in public schools does not differ from the mean of 14.10 in Shahed schools. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the existence of a difference between Shahed and public schools in the component of innovation is rejected.

**Table 9: Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Shahed and Public Schools) in the Component of Organizational Commitment**

| t-test to compare means | | | | | Lone test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Standard error of the mean | Difference of means | p-value | df | t value | p-value | f | |
| 0/84 | 1/75 | 0/03 | 113 | 2/08 | 0/25 | 1/31 | |

To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's F-test was used. According to the data in Table 9, the results of this test showed that F = 0.74 is significant at p = 0.39. This result indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the two types of schools holds. Based on the information in Table 9, t = 1.34 at p = 0.18 shows that there is no significant difference between Shahed and publicschools regarding organizational Commitment as one of the components of school effectiveness. In other words, the mean of 11.88 for organizational commitment in public schools does not differ from the mean of 12.76 in Shahed schools, and the difference of 0.88 is due to error. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the existence of a difference between Shahed and public schools in the component of organizational commitment is rejected.

**Table 10: Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Shahed and Public Schools) in the Component of Job Satisfaction**

| t-test to compare means | | | | | Lone test | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Standard error of the mean | Difference of means | p-value | df | t value | p-value | f |
| 0/94 | 2/85 | 0/03 | 113 | 3/53 | 0/0005 | 8/29 |

To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's F-test was used. According to the data in Table 10, the results of this test showed that F = 8.29 is significant at p = 0.005. This result indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the two types of schools holds. Based on the information in Table 10, t = 3.03 at p = 0.003 shows that there is no significant difference between Shahed and publics chools regarding organizational Commitment as one of the components of school effectiveness. In other words, the mean of 12.20 for job satisfaction in public schools does not differ from the mean of 15.04 in Shahed schools.

**Table 11: Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Shahed and Public Schools) in the Variable of Organizational Health**

| t-test to compare means | | | | | Lone test | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Standard error of the mean | Difference of means | p-value | df | t value | p-value | f |
| 0/94 | 2/85 | 0/03 | 113 | 3/53 | 0/0005 | 8/29 |

To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's F-test was used. According to the data in Table 11, the results of this test showed that F = 16.43 is significant at p = 0.005. This result indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the two types of schools holds. Based on the information in Table 11, t = 4.05 at p = 0.003 shows that there is no significant difference between Shahed and public schools regarding organizational Commitment as one of the components of school effectiveness. In other words, the mean of 11.68 for organizational health in public schools does not differ from the mean of 15.67 in Shahed schools.

| t-test to compare means | | | | | Lone test | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Standard error of the mean | Difference of means | p-value | df | t value | p-value | f |
| 0/94 | 2/85 | 0/03 | 113 | 3/53 | 0/0005 | 8/29 |

**Table 12: Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Shahed and public Schools) in the Variables of Innovation, Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Health.**

To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's F-test was utilized. According to the data presented in Table 12, the results of this test indicated that F = 16.43 is significant at p = 0.005. This result signifies the absence of homogeneity of variances between the two types of schools. Based on the information in Table 12, t = 2.93 at p = 0.004 showed that there is a significant difference between Shahed and public schools in the four organizational components. In other words, the mean of 48.11 in the four components in public schools differs from the mean of 57.60 in Shahed schools.

To further elucidate the quantitative findings, a qualitative study was conducted to explore the perspectives of marginalized schools. In this research, marginalized

## B) Qualitative Findings

schools included public schools, where the findings from the first part of the study indicated that the effectiveness of management in these schools was lower than that in public schools. Focusing on these schools could help determine whether school staff can establish a logical connection with the findings from the first part of the study. Do they act based on the assumptions of a rational perspective and can they accept the realities emerging from the research? Consequently, eight principals from public schools were randomly selected and studied. The following are the findings obtained from the interview questions.

Regardless of the validity of the interviewees' claims, the basis was the political or logical techniques they employed.

Table 13: Cods

| Selective code | Axial codes | Open cods |
|---|---|---|
| Micropolitics in school | Politics of resistance to change | Denial, reasoning, accusing others, marketing |
| | Policies to create support | Acknowledging, expressing the negative consequences of the decision, making guilt sensitive, influencing the mind |

| Open cods | Quote from the interviewee | Interviewee code |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Denial<br>2. Reasoning<br>3. Acknowledgment<br>4. Expressing the negative consequences of the decision (assertiveness)<br>5. Defending the assets of the school (showing the importance of the school and marketing) | No: Most of the students enrolled in this school are those who do not meet the enrollment criteria for special schools (gifted schools due to lack of exceptional intelligence), witness schools (lack of conditions for Shahed schools), and model public and non-profit schools (lack of tuition fees and other general conditions). Some of them even have six signatures. In other words, these students are at the bottom of the screening process. Some cannot even afford a minimal tuition fee. It is unreasonable to move towards a direction where the government allocates less funding to education (in terms of collecting tuition from special schools), as it is a form of injustice towards the weak and marginalized classes. In fact, the government should allocate more resources to public schools (to maintain the appearance of schools and support the weaker segments). This contradicts the spirit of the constitution, even though many laws remain silent when they reach us.<br><br>In general, I oppose the segregation of students under any title, as it has caused significant harm to average and below-average students. The mental tranquility in our (public) school is high. The level of expectations aligns with the abilities of the students. Human relationships (among colleagues, between colleagues and management, as well as with students) are commendable, and this is one reason for the retention of teachers. Although some teachers work well, for others, it serves as a resting place; perhaps the lack of motivation among students also plays a role. In special schools, students are expected to work beyond their capabilities, or in other words, the expectations of teachers in special schools are high, requiring a specific type of teacher. | Interviewee 1 |
| 1.Denial<br>2. Acknowledgment<br>3. Reasoning<br>4. Defending assets (marketing) | No. The current evaluation method is quantitative, meaning they consider the maximum GPA in comparison to other schools (with a heavy emphasis on outcomes). Their perspective should be input-output. Most of our students enter with low GPAs (maximum of 12), and just reaching 13 is considered good. They need to look back and examine why our entrants have a GPA around 12 (assessing student performance in the first cycle of secondary education). The fact that special schools take in students with high GPAs, for example, 18, and raise them to 19 is not something extraordinary given all the financial and human resources they have. However, we have schools in very small towns and even villages where no screening takes place, meaning everyone studies in one public school, and we see that their university acceptance rates are commendable. | Interviewee 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Denial<br>2. Reasoning<br>3. Expressing the negative consequences of a decision (impact on minds)<br>. 4 Accused and blaming others<br>5. Creating guilt<br>6. Defending assets (marketing) | No. Most of our students do not have good financial conditions. Many of them turn to vocational training in fields like sewing and hairdressing during the afternoon shift or after school. Unlike special schools that receive family support, there is no such support here, and they either cannot afford tuition or pay it reluctantly. Most of the kids are weak and have six signatures. They lack motivation. They are not very concerned about the university entrance exam and prestigious jobs; they just want to obtain their diploma. We face challenges in attracting teachers, and even if a teacher wants to work well, the performance of the students can undermine their morale. This year, we decided to charge each student seven hundred thousand tomans as tuition, but some have not paid yet. For some, it is difficult, but others, even though they can pay, delay doing so. Reducing costs in this context is a form of injustice to these children. Our managers only think about themselves; I don't know if they are aware of the people's situation. This weakens our ministry as well. Their planning is weak; they lack foresight. Don't they know how much decline we have? This decline mainly affects the weaker class. How long must education be sacrificed for the politicians' agendas? Considering what I mentioned regarding the first question, our educational institution cannot be compared in a way that I would defend it. The principle of educational justice or social justice is somewhat questioned in these schools (pausing briefly, they say... racial discrimination prevails). However, there is a sense of calm among colleagues because there is no competition, and honesty prevails. The children are uniform and unpretentious, and the atmosphere is friendly and calm. The stress present in special schools is absent here. Parental pressure is not felt. There, in special schools, they pay amounts we cannot afford. They have extra classes, and the costs are covered by the school (parents), which we do not have, and thus we are somewhat deprived. | Interviewee 3 |
| 1.Denial<br>2.Acknowledgements<br>3. Accusing - blaming others | No. The current evaluation method is incorrect. They should have expectations of performance based on the inputs. If I were ever a minister, I would dismantle all these classifications or at least reduce them to a few types of schools. It costs money and invites accountability, but we must start somewhere. | Interviewee 4 |
| 1. Denial<br>2. Reasoning<br>3. Influence on minds<br>4. Marketing and defending assets<br>5. Acknowledgment | No. For various reasons, the students are weak. They are financially disadvantaged. Our students are at the bottom of the selection process. In some cases, even the principal and teachers are selected. Choosing their fields has been mandatory. If the government withdraws from the current situation, things will only get worse. We face difficulties in tuition payments. We will experience significant declines. The distance of the children from school brings many problems. Many of them have issues even when they come to school, and woe to the day they don't come. Today's parents do not supervise their children much, even though many of them are unmotivated. They have the right to feel this way; we tell them to at least study and enter the Teacher Training University. They respond, "With these salaries?" The students in our school are weak, and some are marginalized. This weakness affects the morale and performance of the teachers as well. The fact that a student enters with a GPA of 12 and exits with a GPA of 13 is defensible for us. The colleagues work well, and some teach in special schools too. However, the support that colleagues receive in special schools is not available here.<br><br>No. Everything is quantitative. They care about the output. How can a school with such poor facilities look at students with one eye? Those (special schools) have the best facilities and support. Students with GPAs of 18 and above enter the school with significant family support. If this GPA becomes 19, it doesn't matter. My opinion is that each school should be assessed against itself or against similar schools. | Interviewee 5 |

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|---|---|---|
| 1. Denial<br> 2. To blame and accuse others<br>3. Reasoning<br>. 4 influence on the mind<br>5. Acknowledgment<br>6. Defending assets (marketing) | No. This is unfair and unjust, and I don't think the law allows it, although administrators are known to circumvent the law. Most students are weak and have six signatures. If they do this, we will have a high dropout rate. In the current situation, some families cannot afford the registration fees. I'm not saying the students in our school lack talent; they are just weak and lack motivation. Many of them are just looking to get their diploma, and many of them learn technical skills alongside their studies. Of course, their weaknesses trace back to previous educational stages (elementary and middle school), but if they are not really inclined towards studying, we should guide them towards technical fields in vocational schools, which would require more funding from the government. They need to stop playing politics and consider the realities. I am not against special schools. Some people have money and want to attend such schools, but the government cannot neglect our schools and spend elsewhere. Although I believe some special schools do not do much of significance.<br><br>We need to attract the best teachers, provide necessary facilities, foster strong human relationships within the school community, and not force tuition payments (although ultimately, I do collect from them). Some students pay their fees when they graduate, and if someone genuinely cannot pay, we accommodate them. We hold supplementary classes at their own expense; if someone cannot afford it, we provide necessary discounts. Thankfully, our university entrance exam results are good. We may not have admissions to medical and related fields, but we have students accepted in chemistry, biology, and midwifery, as well as the Teacher Training University. Not all special schools are truly special; only the gifted schools have outstanding students and do significant work with them, leading to high-level admissions (though not all of them).<br><br>In this way, it is unfair to compare and rank our schools against special schools. Public schools should be compared with other public schools. They should consider both inputs and outputs. I do not appreciate having our final grades compared with those of special schools. | Interviewee 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Denial<br>2. Reasoning<br>3. Acknowledgment<br>4. Impact on minds<br> 5. Blaming others and accusing<br> 6. Defending assets and marketing | No. Public schools have their own specific conditions, meaning their students are unique, lacking effort and facing challenges. Families are underprivileged. The students are marginalized, although not all, as some have been within our registration area, but even these have lower GPAs. I have several students with six signatures. Their only goal is to get a diploma. Some of them are learning other trades like nail art, hairdressing, and sewing. The school building is old; if the government doesn't provide funding, who will? So, where does the focus on education go? What happens to the principle of free education? How long will our administrators ignore the realities? Education should never be sacrificed for politics. Where in the world is this customary? Why are they not realistic? They should come and see firsthand what has happened to public schools. Thankfully, in our city, benefactors build the schools, but they certainly expect the school expenses and salaries to be covered. So, what has happened to the government and the ministry?<br>Our school has several foreign students that we are obliged to enroll, and they pay fees. There are many problems here, and what problems they are. They have placed a public school next to a special school so that the leftovers go to the public school. This type of segregation is neither correct nor wise. I do not know what these officials are thinking; have they considered the consequences of their actions? They provide a very minimal per-student funding with great reluctance, and now they want to reduce even that. So, what will happen to the fate and future of these children?<br>What defense can there be for a school with so many problems? I, as a principal, face various challenges. Given the nature of the school's problems, we need a counselor, but they do not provide one, and we do not have the financial means to hire someone. Nevertheless, despite all these challenges, the colleagues are good and active. The atmosphere is good; everyone respects each other. There is not much competition. Parental expectations are relatively moderate. We are trying hard given the current situation and limited resources, but it does not show. The students' weaknesses stem from previous educational stages. The fact that students with this background come to us, and we manage to educate them and eventually help them obtain their diplomas is a good outcome. If they consider all aspects in evaluating public schools or our school, it would be beneficial, and I agree with this evaluation and ranking system. Otherwise, it is unjust. They do not provide resources but expect good outcomes. They do not provide counselors yet expect solutions to the students' academic and behavioral issues. Therefore, they should not expect solutions to these problems. Each school should be compared to itself, meaning within its own context. Then their ranking or judgment would be logical and fair. | Interviewee 7 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Denial<br>2. Justification<br>3.Influence on public perception<br>4.Blaming and accusing others<br>5.Defending the school's assets<br>6.Acknowledgment | No. This is not a wise action and is contrary to the constitution, which states that education is free up to the end of secondary school. This issue is not unique to our country; UNESCO has also pointed this out. It does not align with the infrastructure to accept that all schools should shift towards private status. Furthermore, we are in a difficult economic situation. For now, what matters most to people is their basic needs, and education comes third. The actions of the administrators represent a form of "educational apartheid." The wealthy attend elite schools while the poor go to public schools. Most university admissions come from special schools. If we make all schools special, where will the children go? Vocational schools require even more funding. This way, we also face issues with declining academic performance. It has become like the Sasanian era (where education was reserved for a specific class). By favoring special schools, public schools have been neglected. Although there is also a form of injustice among special public schools. Year after year, top students or relatively better students are separated from public schools, leaving behind a group of weak and unmotivated students, and we are gradually seeing the results of this. Many of them are waiting for school to close so they can find work and save some money for themselves. Most of them come from weak families. Obtaining a diploma is very important to them. In general, what we see in the current state of education is the result of the actions of the officials and education managers, or rather, their ill-considered and illogical planning and educational policies (it's all about daily routine and political games), and secondly, economic problems.<br><br>A) Graduating with a real score (we do not give grades for free).<br>B) Having an experienced and skilled staff.<br>C) Although our incoming students are weak, the performance of the outgoing students is satisfactory.<br>D) We maintain fairness in tuition fees (we support those in need, including both citizens and foreigners).<br>E) Our school used to be noteworthy, but we have recently fallen behind due to our good outputs.<br>F) Adhering to the registration area (both for citizens and foreigners).<br>G) Ultimately, our incoming students align with our outgoing students.<br>H) Holding supplementary classes with the help of students.<br><br>However, the sense of superiority seen in some special schools is not present here. The students are quite uniform, and in my opinion, each school should be judged against itself or within its own context, and ultimately against public schools. If one day I become a minister, I would direct short- and medium-term planning and funding towards public schools, although I know I would face resistance from those who seek their own interests by establishing special schools. I also know that the power of administrators is deeply rooted and influential everywhere (like those who conduct entrance exams; they are very powerful and influential). I would dismantle the foundation of the class system. However, one must be willing to bear costs; it might create many problems for you. But alas... they laugh and say perhaps beatings, etc. Many of these people are not logical. Their work is political; education should not be politicized. One must be realistic, logical, programmatic, and future-oriented, but unfortunately, education has become entangled in political games, which are driven by personal interests. | Interviewee 8 |

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explain the actual mechanisms present in schools using a mixed approach. Initially, school effectiveness was measured based on a quantitative approach, and subsequently, a qualitative approach was utilized to explain the reactions of school actors (principals of public schools). The findings revealed that school principals tend to react politically to

issues rather than logically accepting the findings and claims, defending their demands and possessions to the extent that they even question scientific and logical findings using denial mechanisms. These findings align with those of previous studies by Lhamtan and Qadermazi (2021); Chekandi et al. (2016); Brimehal (1993); Blaz and Blaz (2001); Blaz and Blaz (2002); Bjork and Blair (2009); West (2010); Hogg and Smith (2012); Yordanidis and George (2013); Piot Garret and Keltchermans (2015); Lachmiller and Pawlicki (2017); Estrella and Pat (2018); O'Malley et al. (2018), all of which have shown that micro-politics play a fundamental role in school mechanisms. Some of these studies have described attempts to impose a rational perspective in schools as illusory (Estrella and Pat, 2018), as school mechanisms are always subject to power struggles and conflicts (Yordanidis and George, 2013). Some researchers have also shown the role of micropolitics in strengthening private schools, and in this policy, public schools have less efficiency and political effectiveness.

A review of these studies reveals a broad wave of research, like the current study, challenging the rational perspective on organizations and deeming its assumptions unfounded and incorrect. However, a fundamental question arises: if the rational perspective cannot explain the mechanisms present in the educational system, especially in schools, why is it still used in textbooks and training programs? Moreover, senior organizational managers, assuming their staff are truth-seekers, continually strive to present their policies rationally and utilize rational decision-making methods.

To answer this question, we must adopt a political perspective that seeks to analyze a phenomenon based on the desires of the involved parties. To avoid complicating the discussion process, we will analyze the desires of three groups of school actors concerning this question. The first group consists of senior educational system managers, who are the main actors in formulating educational policies; the second group includes teachers and school principals, who receive educational policies; and finally, the third group comprises researchers, students, and professors in the field of educational management, who are the main players in the theoretical

realm. It seems that for the first group (senior educational system managers), the rational narrative reflects their desires, aspirations, and preferences. In the rational perspective, strategic decision-making power is granted to senior managers, who are considered the organization's intellectual leaders, while middle managers and school principals merely execute decisions. Naturally, such a perspective grants increasing power to senior managers, making them return the educational system to their own desires and preferences.

School principals and teachers are also audiences who are caught in social or organizational adversities and are constantly seeking to compensate for their shortcomings. This means that these audiences are attracted to a narrative that removes these adversities and presents a picture free from tension and discomfort. In critical thinkers' terms, a rational narrative from schools can only address a minor issue by ignoring power relations and underestimating them. Thus, audiences who are fatigued and disillusioned by organizational entanglements see such narratives as a remedy for all their fatigue and disillusionment. Therefore, the existing adversities in the organization are depersonalized in the rational perspective, presenting a view free from tension and discord.

The third group consists of academic researchers, students, and graduates in the field of educational management. Perhaps the most significant concern of this group is the effort to make educational management teachable, which can only be achieved through a rational perspective. This is because the political perspective naturally conflicts with human tendencies towards simplicity and pleasantness, which is why school management books strive to align with the natural human inclination to simplify. Consequently, organizational researchers have also attempted to portray the prevailing atmosphere in schools and educational systems as more beautiful and pleasant than it is. Therefore, audiences concerned with making university teachings, especially educational management knowledge, teachable are always in need of simplifying concepts and depersonalizing complexities and organizational adversities, leading them to be

attracted to the narrative of this book. In reality, these textbooks attract such audiences by depicting a simplistic narrative free from tension, discord, and power struggles.

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