

## Organizational Culture at High Schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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**ABSTRACT:-** The purpose of this study is to investigate the organizational culture of by using influencing aspects of metaphors and images, physical environment, values and beliefs, norms, rituals and ceremonies, language, stories and legends, and reward systems. A qualitative study, namely interview was used as an instrument to collect data. 10 teachers in a high school in the Akre district, Kurdistan Region of Iraq were participated in this study. The results of the study revealed that the teachers' perspectives of the organizational culture of the school were positive by claiming that the school was like a second home for them, the building was quite new, there was respect and a sense of responsibility between teachers, every teacher willingly followed the rules of the school, rituals were important for them and participated in the events took place in the school, they all had a motivated language, and national heroes were important figures to them. In terms of the reward systems, most of the teachers were not satisfied the policy of rewarding.

**Keywords:** Organisational culture. Cultural factors

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, organizational culture has become the issue of multi-disciplinary research as result of numerous factors such as globalization and information revolution that get the continents closer (Silman & Sismek, 2009), increasing the size of organizations by having too many employees from different cultures compared to the past, and having various departments within organizations that contribute to the process of management for accomplishing their mission and goals. Recently, one of the disciplines that many researchers have continuously attempted to study its organizational culture is educational institutions in general and schools in particular, and to improve the consistency and productivity in the workplace (Schein, 1992). For instance, Efeoglu and Ulum (2017) claims that the study on organizational culture in educational fields has drawn the attention of scholars. Furthermore, researchers are interested in the study of organizational culture of schools in order to provide managerial effectiveness (Beytekin, Yalçinkaya, Doğan, & Karakoç, 2010).

As the organizational culture has been an important subject of studies in anthropology, sociology, management, and organizational theories, it has been defined differently. According Schein (2004, p. 17), the organizational culture is "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems". To further clarify, any organization cannot adopt a culture in a very short time, on the contrary, it might take quite a while because the employees experience different changes, adjust to the external environment, and solve problems. From what the employees learned in the past and started practising them daily in the organization form the culture of the organization. Similarly, Brown (1998) states that "Organizational culture refers to the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organization's history, and which tend to be manifested in its material arrangements and in the behaviours of its members". More importantly, the shared assumptions are invisible, taken for granted beliefs, and values that form the culture of the organization determine the performance of the organization (Johnson, 2016). Marquardt (2002) defines the organizational culture as "an organization's values, beliefs, practices, rituals and customs". Şahin, Silman, and Özenli (2009) define the organization culture more in-depth as "the culture of an organization is the shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values". Besides the aforementioned, the culture of organizations also includes vision, systems, symbols, language, and habits (Needle, 2004). According to Schein (1992), the culture

of every organization divides into three levels, the first level is artefacts which are the physical features of an organization which can be easily noticed such as furniture, dress codes, office layout, décor, awards, logos, language, stories, ceremonies, rituals and myths. Second level, beneath artefacts are espoused values which encompass values, beliefs, norms, vision, mission, goals, philosophies, and rules of behaviour. The third level is basic assumptions which lie beneath one's awareness, moreover, they are unconscious and taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, feelings, thoughts and behaviours that so deeply embedded and that cannot be easily noticed. Interestingly, all three levels with their features should be taken into account collectively by the employees of the organization because they are interrelated and interinfluencing (Fard, Rostamy & Taghiloo, 2009).

Every organization has its own distinct culture and they have their own means of understanding as well as solving problems (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). According to Huber (1996), to understand and examine the culture of an organization, there is a number of elements make up the culture of an organization, including:

#### Image, Metaphor

Morgan (1998, p. 4) defines metaphor of organizations as “a comparative figure of speech often used to add a creative flourish to the way we talk, such as when we say that ‘life is a game or that ‘the world is a stage’”. Metaphors are viewed as organizing tools which are used for explaining complex phenomena (Huber, 1996, p. 62). Similarly, Davenport (1998) states that metaphors allow individuals to speak about difficult phenomena in organizations. Metaphors are tools which are used to identify and facilitate change within organization (Marshak, 1996). Metaphors and organizations are closely connected (Short, 2000). Gareth Morgan (1998, 2006), in his book *Images of Organization*, suggests eight metaphors for organizations, which are; machines, brains, organisms, cultural systems, psychic prisons, political systems, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination.

#### Physical culture

Physical culture is a system of environmental experience that includes the social, cultural, and personal characteristics of activity in an environment (Rafaeli & Worline, 1999). The physical environments of an organization directly affect its work performance and productivity. It is believed that individuals who are comfortable with the physical environment of their organization can work better and produce a good outcome. More specifically, physical environment of an organization includes the layout of building, lighting, noise conditions, etc. that have a great impact on the productivity of organization, and also it affects the behaviour and perceptions of employees. Many studies have been conducted in this regard, for example, Şahin, Silman, and Özenli (2009) claim that the building's physical structure of an organisation can affect the practical aspects of every day behaviour. There is an important relationship among the quality of physical environment, students' performance, and the staff. Both professionals and their students will more likely execute their jobs in an efficient and successful way if the organization has a good physical culture (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012).

#### Values, Beliefs

Values, beliefs, and principles are very important to identify the culture of an organization where forms to guide the employees how to work within new environment. Generally, organizations write their own values, beliefs, and principles in a mission statement and share them for both internal and external users (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). It deserves to mention that there are some organizations prescribe their principles in a brief document that describes why they exist. therefore, it is important for an organization to determine the behaviours and performance that are required for employees to fit into the culture of the organization. According to Schachter (2005), employees adjust their behaviour according to the organization's values, accept and embody these values in order to be acknowledged in the organization. Like all other organizations, educational ones also have their own certain values and beliefs. In addition to that, the organization expects how its member behave and share these values for example, to what extent, both the students and the faculty perform their duty, record low absence and dropout rates, and high proficiency (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012).

#### Norms

Norms are a set of rules of conduct that identify what should or should not be done in specific situations. Every organization establishes a set of rules that all members of the organization are expected to follow and respect (Şahin, Silman, & Özenli, 2009). By norms, members of an organization are guided, controlled, and also acceptable behaviour is regulated (Meriam-Webster dictionary). As norms provide predictable behaviour and order in an organization, breaking them and disregarding them by members of the

organization might cause a serious unstable situation in the organization, worse than this, they would suffer disapproval and be outcast from the organization. For example, one of the norms of educational institutions that must be rigorously followed is dress code (Shein, 1992). More importantly, newcomers in general and newly qualified teachers in particular the organization must follow these rules in order to be accepted by the other old members (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012).

#### Stories and Legends

Stories and legends are really influential ways to reinforce the culture of organizations. Every organization has its own stories about the founders and people who have been in the organization before (Şahin, Silman, & Özenli, 2009). Stories are particularly effective when the members remember and recount them new comers. Educational institutions also have their own stories and legends about the people who graduated recently or a long time ago. Perhaps in the past or now, some of these people have held high positions in the government someday like president, minister, etc. or they might have been big writers, famous players of sports or actors. Thus, these are considered as heroes, leaders, symbols, role models to the institutions and their members follow them as standards (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 1996). The legends about the heroes create tradition of the institution and they become a source of values and identity for both insiders and outsiders (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012).

#### Reward Systems

The reward system plays a pivotal role in establishing a strong culture to an organization. The reward system, which has a great impact on the organization, is used for many various reasons such as job performance, attendance and retention, and commitment to the organization's rules (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). When one of the members of the organization is rewarded for achieving a certain goal or behaving in accordance to the organizations' rules, he or she feels more satisfied with his or her job and this administers honours to be enjoyed (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 1996). There are many types and shapes of rewards but the most important ones are; promotion for the members of the faculty and appreciation of students' achievement in the shape of certificates or awards (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). The rewards are considered as incentives for the individuals involving in the organization. Therefore, without rewarding them, they probably do not comply with the organization's rules (Milne, 2007).

#### Rituals and Ceremonies

The meanings of these two terms; rituals and ceremonies are often confused. Defining them, it surely shows the difference between them. In short, rituals refer to social actions and, in an organization, daily activities which are performed to characterize the organization while celebration act like appreciation of an achievement (Aron, 2011, Şahin, Silman, & Özenli, 2009). Rituals are important to organizations as they give structure, values and meanings to daily life, in which members of the organization know what action they need to do at a specific time, and they generally know what is expected of them (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). On the other hand, ceremonies are performed on a particular occasion such as graduation, birthday, marriage, etc. (Aron, 2011). By the fact that ceremonies are magnificent, many people are involved in but happen less frequently since they symbolize special occasions. Both rituals and ceremonies help the faculty to boost its members' moral, increase engagement, socialize the members of the institution, convey message to external communities, and also to bring members of the institution together which is important for achieving high goals (Ahmed, 2019, Bolman & Deal, 2003).

#### Language and clichés

Language and clichés are part of individuals' daily speech and play a vital role in the organizational culture as they express thoughts and ideas which are very common within the organizational culture. Hence, it is important to take into account language and clichés because some members of the organization might not like hearing some kind of language for example, repetition. Language and clichés help the organization convey its aspirations, perspective on life, believes and values to both its members and outsiders (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). It is noteworthy to mention that symbols are important in the organizational culture to create a set of ideas that members of the organization accept them and also affects their behaviour and opinions. Rafaeli and Worline (1999) emphasize this by claiming that symbols help the members cooperate within the organization.

This research attempted to understand the organizational culture of schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq by using the abovementioned factors. By asking participants to comment on these factors, they might provide some insight into the understanding of the organizational culture of schools in the region. The researcher used a specific question to gain the answers relating to the factors of the organizational culture which is: What is the nature of the organizational culture of the high schools in Akre district in Kurdistan Region of Iraq?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the organizational culture of a school in Kurdistan Region of Iraq by analyzing several factors related to the culture such as image and metaphors, physical culture, beliefs and values, rituals and ceremonies, norms, language and clichés, stories and legends, and reward systems.

### Research Design

In this study, a qualitative case study was used to analyze the organizational culture of the school.

### Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 10 teachers; 7 teachers and three administrators (one principal and two assistant principals). According to Patton (1987), it is important to use the maximum variation as a strategy of sampling, therefore, the researcher interviews teachers with different working experience, their subject areas and gender.

### Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in the form of open-ended questions. The researcher ensured that the participants were comfortable to be interviewed, and also he made sure that the interviewee was alone and had a suitable place in order not to be interrupted. Each interview took about 20 minutes. The questions were related to metaphors, physical environment, language, rituals and ceremonies, legends, norms, values and beliefs, and reward systems. While the interviewee was talking, the researcher took notes as speech coding.

## III. RESULTS

The metaphors which most commonly used by the teachers for the school are that of a second home. The principal described the school differently by saying that “the school is like a factory where produces a fruitful product, for example, it shapes the students into useful people for their society”. Similarly, two other teachers said that school “is like a family for us and we are like siblings here for a good purpose which is to educate our children”. This understanding holding by teachers is a strong factor for creating an environment where knowledge can be easily delivered to the students and making the school as “a platform of science and morality” in the words of the assistant. When a school is compared to a family, it implies that schools as same as families have complaints and problems. For example, one of the teachers said that “the school is the place of hope for me and I am curious to come to the school and teach the students but the problem is that the students do not study and even some of them hate coming to the school”.

The findings related to the physical culture of the school revealed that most of the participants were happy with the building of the school. According to the principal, the building of the school is “quite new and is built based on international standards”. It is clearly evident from their words that the building really serves the purpose of the education. Three teachers confirmed this by saying that the building is “technologically well-equipped”. In terms of the location, two teachers said that the school “is near the main street and the noise of cars frequently distracts the classes”. According to the participants, the environment of the school is generally conducive for teaching and learning.

The result related to values and beliefs of the organizational culture discovered that mutual respect and responsibility were main values of the organizational culture. All of the respondents agreed on prioritizing respect among themselves and responsibility over all other issues related to teaching. Seven teachers said that “we are teachers, we educate the children of the community, even we have problems, we shouldn’t stop teaching or even when we are sad, we shouldn’t show our sadness to our students in order not to affect their feelings, that’s why every teacher should take responsibility and show respect to one another”.

According to the results related to the norms of the school, there are two types of norms, the former, was a set of norms which was made by the Ministry of Education such as “the students must wear uniform to the school, teachers and students have to come to school on time” in the words of the assistant. The latter was a sort of guideline that the principal indicated them during the meetings every week. The principal pointed out that “every week, in every meeting I prepare some points relating to the teachers and protecting their personality and guide them to right path”. The assistant of the principal said “for example, there are a few newly teachers who weren’t well aware of the school’s rules and principles, smoked in the middle of the hall and in front of the children, but now they are getting used to the situation after they have been cautioned”. All other teachers stressed on the importance of their behavior and actions in the school in general and in the classroom particular. One of them said “we teacher are role models for the children”.

Rituals and ceremonies were considered to be very strong and important to the administrators and staff. All the participants said that they held several different events in the shape of social activities for the purpose of

helping the students to be more sociable. Five teachers said that “every week we teachers make food at home and bring it to the school”. The principal said that “We celebrate all national days in the school like Kurdish clothes day, Kurdistan flag day”. He further added that “We have also spring picnics, every spring we take the students to a mountainous area and there we barbecue and cook Kurdish food and dance”.

The findings related to language and clichés showed that the principal used language that enhances the teachers’ unity and students’ motivation such as “If we’re united, we will succeed” and “You are the future of this nation, dear students, study hard!”. Two teachers said that “I usually keep telling my students I love you”. All of the respondents believed that the use of clichés and language has a great impact on the relationship among teachers as well as students.

The results related to stories and legends showed that all the respondents highlighted the importance of stories, myths, and legends of the organizational culture. For instance, seven out of ten teachers said that “the students should be taught stories and legends at school as they are models for a way of life”. One assistant principal and two other teachers described how taught myths and legends to the children by saying that “we recount the stories of those students who have got high positions in the government and we tell them these as a way to boost their motivation”. The principal focused on the importance of national heroes and martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the country and this generation in order to live in peace, “every week, we line up the students in the school yard, and the students and the teachers sing the Kurdish national anthem, and the students read poems of the national poets like Faqe Tayran, and I and other teachers tell the stories of national heroes who strived to build a better life for their people” in the words of the principal.

Regarding the reward system, all the respondents emphasized the significance of rewarding teachers who had put their efforts to keep improving the quality of education of the school. The principal spoke obviously about the system of rewards by claiming that “there are two types of rewards, one reward is from the district directorate education which is usually in the form of certificate, and the other one is from the school administration”. The school rewarded those teachers who worked in the favor of the schools’ mission and achieved the goals of the organization and committed to their job. One teacher complained about the system of rewards used by the directorate education and said that “the rewards are often unfair because the evaluation on which they depend on are flawed. There are still a few teachers in this school have served the school from a long time ago but they haven’t been rewarded even for once”.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

This study was set out with aim of investigating the nature of the organizational culture of schools in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Most importantly, the study aimed to specify cultural features of a high school in Akre district, Duhok governorate. Concerning metaphors and images, all the respondents positively described the school and considered it as a second home for them. This implies that the teachers feel very comfortable at school where is like their home (Drew, 2019). It is also compatible with the results of the study conducted by Magno (2013), which revealed that “the teachers are eager to stay and they feel it is their second home, but there are many schools where teachers want to leave as soon as possible. The principal described the school as factory where produce beneficial products. It is agreed that the school was perceived as a factory (Cerit, 2006). Seeing the school as a family implies that the teachers have an essential place for the school in their lives. To support this result, Inbar (1996), Mahlios and Maxon (1998), and Cerit (2006) claimed that the school was seen as a family. The school was also perceived as a place of science and platform. In terms of physical culture of the school, all the teachers agreed with the building of the school and this is a positive point about the school. On the other hand, the results revealed that the location was near the main street and the class could be interpreted by the noise of the cars. Both the location and physical culture of the school must be appropriate in order to have an effective education and achieve the school’s goals. The sufficient quantity and quality of physical resources help to have a useful learning process, and on the other hand, unattractive school building, non-availability of playing ground, crowded classrooms, and school surroundings can negatively affect the academic performance (Lorton & Walley, 1979). Relating to values and beliefs, the result of the study revealed that all the participants had mutual respect and responsibility. Respect and responsibility among teachers have a great impact on the organizational culture of the school because they inform professional ethics and relationship that recognizes respect, cooperation, commitment, and professionalism (Tirri, 2010).

Concerning norms of the school, the results showed that the norms were made by the Ministry of Education and the administrative staff and all the participants stressed the importance of the norms because they help determine the culture of school and shape teacher and student relationships (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995, p. 103). In terms of the school rituals and ceremonies, all the respondents indicated that they were important to them and they considered them vital for identifying the school culture to outsiders, socializing, and understanding each other better. To support this claim, Pierce (2017) points out that rituals and ceremonies help differentiate the school community from others and they energize both teachers and students. Another aspect of the organizational culture of the school was language and clichés, all teachers used positive and motivating

language towards students and even among themselves. This implies that there was cooperation among teachers and students which can make an environment of unity, equality, and student-centered learning (Silman, Özmatyatli, Birol, & Çağlar, 2012). Furthermore, the result revealed that the school had stories and legends, and all the participants referred to national heroes, poets, and school graduates. It is believed that this can be a good way of arousing the students' interest in national values. Concerning the reward system, however, all the participants satisfied with reward system which was used by the administration, they complained about the reward system used by the directorate education of the district. Reward system is one of the most important elements of organizations as it raises the employees' motivation to perform better and enhances the organizations performance (Kikkoto, 2014).

## V. CONCLUSION

By all accounts and with proven findings, it was revealed that organizational culture of schools plays a pivotal role in achieving the schools' goals. Organizational culture refers to the beliefs, policies, ideologies, and practices of an organization. It provides the members of the organization with a sense of direction and direct them how they should behave with one another. Organizational culture brings all the members of the organization on a joint policy and bring them together the workplace. The current study emphasized the most important elements of organizational culture of an organization such as metaphors and images, values and beliefs, language and clichés, rituals and ceremonies, stories and legends, norms, physical culture, and reward system. The findings of this study showed that the participants should be familiar with the pre-existing situation in order to be accepted by the other members of the organization. To have a successful organization, all the aforementioned elements of the organizational culture should be taken into account. It was also found that the school had a positive and strong culture compatible with the literature which indicates that positive school culture helps academic achievement, namely, positive relationship between teachers from different viewpoints, and sharing in decision-making and having a common stance in defining solutions to problems. This study discovered several areas of concern which need attention of the administrative staff of the school and the education directorate of the district to be fair in reward system and this made teachers demotivated. There is need for carrying out same research in other towns and cities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Another recommendation is that this study qualitative and there is a need of conducting a quantitative study or can be a mixed study so as to reveal the nature of organizational culture of a school.

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