

Research Paper

# Investigating the impact of school organizational culture on educational innovation and students' social development with emphasis on the mediating role of social competencies

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to "investigate the effect of school organizational culture on educational innovation and social development of students with emphasis on the mediating role of social competencies". This is a descriptive-survey and applicable research, and of correlational type in terms of the relationships between variables. To achieve this goal, a statistical population consisting of administrators and staff of secondary schools in Rudbar city and a sample of 155 people were studied by random method. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by experts and its reliability by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. SmartPLS3 statistical software was used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. The findings of this study show that school organizational culture has a significant effect on students' social development and educational innovation. Social competencies also play a mediating role in the relationship between school organizational culture and social development, and school organizational culture and educational innovation.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

School organizational culture is a fundamental basis for all interactions, learning, and the formation of behavior among school members. Organizational culture is a set of shared beliefs, values, norms, and behavioral patterns among members that determine how they think, judge, and act in the school environment (Anarinejad et al., 2019). Research indicates that schools with a positive, open, and supportive organizational culture create a safe and trust-based environment that facilitates students' individual and social growth and acceptance of new educational changes (Fitria, 2018).

In recent years, the attention of researchers and educational administrators to the role of organizational culture in facilitating educational innovations has increased. Educational innovation is defined as the use of new methods, techniques, technologies, and mechanisms in the teaching and learning process with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of education (Caliskan & Zhu, 2020). Schools with a flexible, learning, and participatory culture encourage teachers and students to test and accept new ideas, which is considered a driving force for professional and personal growth. Conversely, a conservative, bureaucratic, and distrustful culture creates an obstacle to innovation and all-round growth (Gorzelay et al., 2021). On the other hand, the social development of students is one of the most fundamental goals of education. Social development is considered to mean acquiring communication, collaboration, problem-solving, conflict management, and responsibility skills; that enable students to live a successful life in society (Marshall, 2016). But the fundamental question is: what factors and by what mechanisms can organizational culture and educational innovation shape students' social development?

In this regard, students' social competencies play a key mediating role. Social competence refers to a set of skills necessary to establish effective and coherent relationships with others, including self-awareness, empathy, conflict resolution skills, effective communication, and group cooperation (Kersavi et al., 2020). Research shows that schools with a strong cultural context and an innovative atmosphere are more conducive to the development of students' social competencies. Schools with an open and supportive culture increase learning opportunities based on social interactions, teamwork, and real-life social experiences; these experiences promote social self-efficacy and prepare students to manage different social situations in the future (Sharov et al., 2021).

### Theoretical Basis

#### The Relationship between School Organizational Culture and Educational Innovation

An open and learning organizational culture allows teachers to freely express their innovative ideas and not be afraid of failure in the process of trying new teaching methods. In such schools, collaboration between members is fortified, knowledge and experience exchange sessions are held regularly, and the environment actively supports constructive feedback. This atmosphere increases teachers' enthusiasm for professional development and the use of technology, which improves the quality of teaching. In contrast, schools with conservative or hierarchical cultures are more inclined to maintain the status quo and are less receptive to change (Fuad et al., 2022).

From a practical perspective, administrators who play a role as a role model for other teachers and increase team trust by building supportive relationships can facilitate the process of educational innovation. In this case, school culture is not only a passive platform, but also an active and strategic driver in creating educational change. Domestic and international studies have confirmed that even if sufficient hardware and resources are available, educational innovations will not be institutionalized unless a conducive culture is created (Morales, 2021).

Therefore, for the real development of innovation, it is necessary to internally build a dynamic organizational culture and accept change and growth.

### **The relationship between school organizational culture and students' social development**

In a supportive school culture, mutual respect is promoted among members, and social competencies such as self-confidence, conflict resolution skills, effective communication, and responsibility are institutionalized. Creating such an environment not only lays the foundation for students' mental health and social adjustment, but also strengthens positive interactions with teachers and peers, and promotes a culture of responsibility and active participation. In contrast, cultures lacking integrity and lacking support lead to social harms such as isolation, aggression, and indifference (Uğurlu, 2009).

Research has shown that students in schools with a positive organizational culture have greater self-confidence, better social interactions, and higher social skills, which not only leads to academic success, but also to success in their future personal and social lives. The role of school leaders is key in this regard; they provide the groundwork for rich social development by modeling and encouraging respectful behaviors, creating opportunities for social participation (such as student councils, group activities, and volunteer projects), and psychological support.

### **The Relationship between Educational Innovation and Students' Social Development**

Educational innovation is a vital component for improving the quality of learning and students' social development. Innovative processes in education, such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, the use of new technologies, and active teaching methods, transform the learning environment from a static and teacher-centered to a dynamic and inclusive space. Such approaches not only help improve academic performance, but also provide a suitable platform for developing social skills, cooperation, leadership, conflict resolution, critical thinking, and active participation (Visvizi et al., 2018). For example, in classes that emphasize teamwork and joint projects, students encounter more diverse social experiences through discussion, division of tasks, brainstorming, and conflict resolution practice, and these experiences increase their level of social performance. Also, the use of participatory technologies such as educational social networks and e-learning systems expands opportunities for cultural and social interaction and exchange and prepares students for a productive presence in the information society. From a research perspective, educational innovation directly improves students' social and emotional skills, increases resilience, facilitates adaptation and enhances their self-esteem (Kumari et al., 2019). In addition, educational innovation encourages students to express their opinions, listen to different perspectives, and promote democratic values. The role of innovative and supportive teachers is very effective in this direction, because they facilitate real social experiences, simultaneously creating individual and collective growth (Ramírez-Montoya & Lugo-Ocando, 2020). Finally, innovative schools are not only centers of knowledge transfer, but also the platform for the formation of healthy and responsible social citizens.

### **Research Method**

This research is applicable in terms of its purpose, and descriptive-survey in terms of its research method. The statistical population of the research consists of administrators and staff of secondary schools in Rudbar city, from which a sample of 155 people was randomly selected and a research questionnaire was distributed among them. The research data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire. In this research, structural equation modeling through the partial least squares and PLS software was used to test the hypotheses and verify the accuracy of the model. PLS is a variance-based approach that requires fewer



conditions compared to similar structural equation techniques such as LISREL and EMON, and its main advantage is that it requires fewer samples compared to LISREL modeling.

### **Research findings**

Modeling in PLS is done in two stages. In the first stage, the measurement model should be examined through reliability and validity analyses; and in the second stage, the structural model is analyzed by estimating the path between variables and determining the model fit indices. According to the results obtained from the path coefficient (indicating the intensity and type of relationship between two latent variables) and the t-statistic, school organizational culture has a significant effect on students' social development and educational innovation. Also, social competencies play a mediating role in the relationship between school organizational culture and social development, and school organizational culture and educational innovation.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the effect of school organizational culture on educational innovation and students' social development, emphasizing the mediating role of social competencies. The results showed that the organizational culture of schools, as an important and determining context, not only increases the tendency towards educational innovations, but also provides the basis for promoting the social development of students.

In fact, a strong organizational culture in which values such as trust, support, cooperation, mutual respect and individual motivation prevail, acts as a driving force for transformation and innovation. This culture encourages teachers and students to move away from traditional frameworks and apply new, creative and participatory approaches in the teaching and learning process. This finding is in line with the results of studies such as Fuad et al. (2022) and Caliskan & Zhu (2020) that emphasize that a dynamic and positive organizational culture can affect all aspects of the school and strengthen innovation at different levels.

In addition, the results showed that students' social competencies play an important mediating role between organizational culture and social development; this means that a positive organizational culture provides a platform for the development of social competencies (such as communication skills, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility) in students, and these competencies, in turn, facilitate their social development.

In schools with a collaborative and supportive organizational culture, students gain the space they need to experience positive social interactions, acquire communication skills, and increase self-confidence, which ultimately enhances their social development. Based on the results of this study, the cultural performance of schools and the enrichment of social relationships are key factors in developing students with strong social skills.