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Quality Culture and Impact Dynamics in Educational Institutions: A Qualitative Analysis Based on the Experiences of School Administrators

Abstract: This study highlights the role of leadership in shaping quality processes within educational institutions, focusing on the development of a quality culture in schools in the K-12 system (from kindergarten to 12th grade). It explores the connection between leadership discourse and organizational transformation. Using a qualitative, phenomenological design, the study involved 22 school principals from preschool to high school, selected through purposive sampling. Data collected through semi-structured forms were analyzed using content analysis. Findings show that school leaders believe quality processes positively influence instructional quality, student development, organizational success, and culture. Leadership communication, shared values, and stakeholder involvement were seen as key to embedding quality in school functions. The study emphasizes the importance of quality culture in areas such as management processes, teaching practices, human resources, and quality control. Strategies like reward systems, promoting innovation, and effective talent management were identified as essential for fostering a quality culture. Challenges faced by administrators in this process were also revealed. To overcome these, suggestions include using positive reinforcement and offering training in quality management. Overall, the study integrates theoretical perspectives on leadership with practical insights into communication and strategy, concluding that a strong quality culture has a significant impact on educational policy.

Keywords: quality, quality culture, educational policies, school administrators

Introduction

As education systems undergo significant changes in response to increasing demands driven by socio-economic, technological, and cultural transformations, they are increasingly becoming a "product" associated with multiple stakeholders. These changes and transformations, accelerated by the effects of globalization and digital technologies (Moravec & Martínez-Bravo, 2023), have led educational stakeholders to demand greater satisfaction and higher expectations from schools. This change also necessitates a re-examination of how quality is communicated, negotiated, and institutionalized in the organizational discourse of schools. This demand compels educational institutions to achieve a certain level of quality through evaluations, accreditations, rankings, and ratings, and to improve outcomes in order to gain a competitive advantage by becoming more efficient, effective, and student/parent-oriented. As a result, an environment has emerged where emphasis is placed on quality rather than on merely quantitative growth, such as the number of schools or student enrolment. In this changing environment, school principals are emerging as key figures who not only drive organizational change but also play a pivotal role in creating a sustainable culture of quality through symbolic leadership, inclusive dialogue, and strategic communication with all stakeholders. Particularly in higher education, education systems have found themselves in a market-oriented environment in response to increasing demands and pressures from their stakeholders. In this environment, customer satisfaction has come to be seen as the key to long-term survival (Sahney et al., 2008). Consequently, education systems have been forced to undergo deep and rapid changes aimed at improving stakeholder satisfaction (Maguad & Krone, 2012). However, research indicates that the needs of parents and students in terms of customer satisfaction are not sufficiently considered, and there is a lack of participation in decision-making and activities at the school level (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016). Stakeholder satisfaction necessitates achieving success in education and reaching certain standards, as well as implementing quality processes on a continuous basis. Leadership emerges as an indispensable element in making this process effective and developing a quality culture within organizations. It is emphasized that without the guidance of top management,

quality initiatives are likely to be short-lived, and leadership is considered the driver of strategy implementation (Sallis, 2014). Leadership significantly influences the quality of education and is linked to successful teaching and learning outcomes, school improvement, and overall educational quality (Akert & Martin, 2012; Crisol-Moya et al., 2020).

In order for leaders in educational institutions to make decisions aimed at developing a quality culture, they need to have a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations of quality management approaches in education (Berry, 1997). In his book investigating the role of leadership in transforming "good" companies into "great" ones, Collins (2001) states that leaders make a critical difference in improving quality. Similarly, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) emphasize that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing the educational quality of schools. Leaders' values, beliefs, and behaviours form the foundation of organizational culture, which, in turn, determines the overall performance and quality of the organization (Schein, 2010; Tienari & Savage, 2024). Leadership involves important roles such as inspiring others and providing them with resources, while also addressing and meeting the needs of all stakeholders—a critical function of leadership. Research shows that leadership is a fundamental variable in successful schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005). In this context, the emphasis placed on leadership is consistent with research findings on school improvement. Therefore, leadership is regarded as a key factor in spreading quality processes throughout the school and, consequently, in determining the success of schools.

It is known that the role of leaders in quality management processes affects organizational performance; for instance, transformational leaders enhance the organization's competitive advantage by successfully implementing quality management systems (Prajogo & Sohal, 2004). Indeed, quality management practices have been noted to enhance employees' job performance by promoting innovative practices within organizations (Cheah et al., 2022). Since organizations are limited not by their opportunities but by their leaders, the effectiveness of leadership has a positive impact on organizational efficiency or success (Gümüşlüoğlu & İlsev, 2009). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) emphasized that school

leaders have a critical impact in roles such as setting a vision, fostering school culture, managing curricula, and supporting teachers, while also stating that leadership improves the overall performance and quality of schools. According to Sharma et al. (2016), drawing from Mohammad Mosadeghrad (2006), improving quality in higher education depends largely on the organization's ability to create a culture of change, which is greatly influenced by the effectiveness of leadership.

The functions and duties set to promote and sustain quality in education largely fall under the responsibility of school and school leadership management (Aspin et al., 1994). Various findings proving the impact of leadership on improving quality in organizations demonstrate that leaders play a critical role in quality management and significantly enhance organizational performance (Daft, 2020; Dahlgaard & Dahlgaard-Park, 2006; Goetsch & Davis, 2021; Northouse, 2018; Taş & Aksu, 2011). The visionary, motivating, and supportive roles of leaders have a decisive effect on quality management and overall performance in organizations (Akparep et al., 2019; Aksu, 2010; Amtu et al., 2021; Barbosa et al., 2017; Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Yatkın, 2007).

It has been identified that academic studies focusing on quality processes in educational institutions have mostly concentrated on higher education institutions (Ataman & Adıgüzel, 2019; Balcı, 1998; Belenli et al., 2011; Gümüş, 2018; Güney, 2019; Hamutoğlu et al., 2020; Kalaycı, 2008; Özer et al., 2011; Özen, 2022; Şimşek et al., 2019; Yıldırım & Yenipınar, 2022; Taştan & Yılmaz, 2022; Tezsürücü & Bursalıoğlu, 2013; Toprak et al., 2016), whereas studies addressing other educational levels are limited (Aksu, 2010; Bozdoğan, 2019; Güleroğlu, 2005). From this perspective, this study aims to emphasize the impact of leadership on quality processes in educational institutions while contributing to filling the gap in the literature on educational institutions other than higher education.

In this regard, the research seeks to answer the following questions from the perspective of school principals:

1) What does "quality" mean?
2) What are the opinions on the necessity of establishing a "quality culture" in schools?

3) What strategies should be determined to establish a quality culture in schools?

4) What are the obstacles, problems, and solutions encountered in the process of establishing a quality culture?

5) Is there a determining impact of quality culture in shaping educational policies?

These questions are explored to fulfil the study's objective.

Conceptual Framework

Quality

Quality is a philosophy focused on systematically improving organizational performance and processes to consistently meet customer expectations and requirements and enhance satisfaction (Langabeer II, 2018). It can be said that the precursors of the concept of quality are rooted in the industrial processes of the 19th century, where standardization, conformity, and mass production became norms. These processes spread from Britain to Germany, France, much of Western Europe, and the United States, particularly under the influence of 'Fordism' in the early 20th century (Hounshell, 1984; Nye, 1990). Modern understandings of quality also emerged in the context of Japan's industrial renewal after World War II (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010). As Japan prioritized quality to rebuild its economy, W. Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran became prominent figures in the field of quality management in Japan and later globally. Deming is known for his philosophy of process control and continuous improvement, while Juran is recognized for his broader approach to quality management, known as the "Juran Quality Trilogy". Ishikawa, by introducing the concept of "Quality Circles" aimed to encourage worker participation in quality improvement processes (Aktan, 2012). However, in post-industrial knowledge societies, especially in educational settings, quality has evolved from a technical standard to a culturally embedded discourse. It is now jointly

constructed by educational actors through the creation of shared meaning, collaboration, and dialogue.

In the 1980s, quality management, under the name Total Quality Management (TQM), began to be widely adopted in the United States and Europe. During this period, Philip Crosby, with his principle that "quality is free", argued that investing in quality reduces costs and increases profitability in the long run (Crosby, 1979). Today, TQM is applied not only in the manufacturing sector but also in various fields such as the service sector, public administration, and education. Methodologies such as ISO 9000 standards, Six Sigma, benchmarking, core competencies, lean production, and outsourcing have emerged as new approaches to enhance the effectiveness of TQM (ISO, 2015). It is important to note that Total Quality Management is a comprehensive management approach that integrates strategic, human resources, and performance-focused dimensions with process improvements like reengineering and continuous improvement (Kaizen), all underpinned by a commitment to ethics and responsibility (Aktan, 2012).

Quality in Education and Leadership

While this approach has broad applications, its adaptation to the educational sector has become a priority topic in contemporary research. Indeed, various studies are conducted to understand the conceptualization, evaluation, and measurement of quality in education (Harvey & Green, 1993; Tam, 2001). To understand quality management in education, it is necessary to view an educational system as a combination of subsystems and processes that include inputs, processes, and outputs. Inputs include factors related to students, teachers, administrative staff, physical facilities, and infrastructure, while processes cover teaching, learning, and management activities. Outputs encompass exam results, employment, earnings, and satisfaction. Research has shown that students' academic success is directly related to teachers' pedagogical competencies and ongoing professional development activities (Golob, 2012). Since different parts of a system must work together to produce a synergistic effect that results in customer and stakeholder satisfaction (Sahney et al., 2008), the elements within an educational system also need to be managed holistically. Quality in educational systems is

a multi-dimensional concept that includes the objectives of education, students, parents, infrastructure, teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, standards, and learning outcomes (Sarangapani, 2018). Cheng and Tam (1997), with their process model analyzing quality in education, see quality as an intrinsic process of transformation.

When examining the impact of quality processes on success in education, an effective example is the Brazosport Independent School District (ISD) in Texas, USA, a district that successfully applied quality management philosophy, tools, and methods. The approach implemented here aims to improve student achievement through system alignment and improvements in instructional processes. Brazosport ISD, which includes a school that won the Texas Quality Award in 1998, achieved greater equity and higher student performance by using quality management approaches in its educational transformation process. The district offers an educational model that enhances student performance by restructuring its goals and processes to ensure the success of every student (Goldberg & Cole, 2002).

Achieving quality in education is possible through the effective management of all dimensions related to quality processes. In this context, leadership skills come to the forefront as school administrators play a significant role in applying and developing Total Quality Management (TQM) in schools (Taş & Aksu, 2011). Leaders are regarded as those directly responsible for the development of a quality culture through their abilities to manage resources effectively, clarify roles and responsibilities, establish networks, and optimize human and process management (Poerwanti et al., 2021).

Leaders play an essential role by inspiring those around them, providing the necessary resources for employees to fulfill their duties, and identifying and meeting the expectations and needs of all stakeholders. It is emphasized that leaders enhance motivation by creating a vision and inspiring their followers while also supporting them in achieving goals by providing the necessary resources (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2018). Deming (1986) emphasizes the critical role of leaders in improving quality, highlighting their responsibilities to create vision, motivate employees, and encourage continuous improvement. Leadership has also been proven to be a key variable in successful schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005). In

this context, the emphasis on leadership in quality processes and research is important, as it aligns with findings from studies on school improvement processes (Harris, 2004; Robinson et al., 2008); this transformation also reflects the change in the "creation of quality through dialogue" in schools and emphasizes the impact of leadership narratives, symbols, and routines in strengthening quality-focused practices.
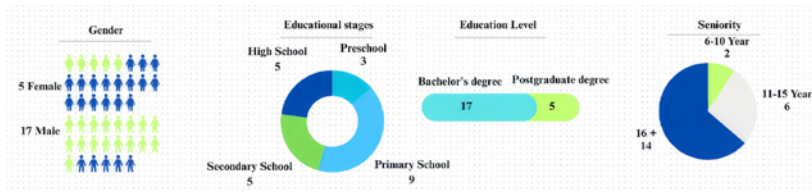
Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological design. In phenomenology, meaning is hidden within human existence, or more specifically, in the essence of individuals' lived experiences (Diekelmann, 2005; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014). The purpose of this study, utilizing a phenomenological design, is to reveal the perceptions of school administrators working in primary and secondary education levels, who play significant roles in establishing a quality culture in schools. Additionally, the study aims to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of the processes that influence their thoughts on educational policies and their leadership behaviours in this context.

Study Group

The study group consists of 22 school principals working at the preschool, primary, middle, and high school levels. In phenomenological studies, the study group typically includes 5 to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). However, qualitative research focuses more on the adequacy of the study group rather than generalizability (Bowen, 2008). Participants can be added to the study group until data saturation is reached. Data saturation is a crucial criterion in qualitative research, as it signifies when interviews can be concluded (Namey et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). The interviews with school principals were completed when responses

no longer varied, indicating that data saturation had been achieved. Figure 1 presents the demographic data of the study group.

Figure 1. Demographic Information of the Study Group

Source: Developed by the Authors.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Semi--structured interviews are considered an effective data collection method for phenomenologically based research (Maxwell, 2018; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The interview process aims to uncover the participants' experiences and perceptions related to the phenomenon, with the researcher adopting a listener role. Participants are encouraged to reflect in detail on the questions posed, and efforts are made to accurately interpret their experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

A semi-structured interview form consisting of five questions was prepared by the researchers. This method allows researchers to pose both standard questions and reflective queries, enabling them to further elaborate on participants' views or clarify their perspectives (Charmaz, 2006; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The semi-structured interview form comprises two sections. The first section includes questions aimed at collecting demographic data from the participants. The second section contains five questions designed to elicit detailed and in-depth insights into school administrators' perceptions of quality culture and the processes that influence their thoughts on established educational policies and their leadership behaviours.

In qualitative research, internet-based applications can be utilized for interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In this study, online interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and completed within a two-week timeframe. All participants consented to audio and video recording during the interviews. The average duration of each interview was 14 minutes, with a total interview time of 303 minutes recorded. The interview forms were coded according to the participants. The coding for school administrators was denoted as "Y", along with a number corresponding to the order of the interview and the participant's gender. The final coding format was structured as "Y1-M, Y2-F, Y3-F...".

The data obtained in the study were analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis allows for a detailed and systematic examination of the content to identify patterns and themes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA 24, a qualitative data analysis software. To ensure that the data analysis process was systematically followed, the data analysis spiral developed by Creswell (2013: 226) was employed, as illustrated in Figure 2. The first stage involved organizing the data. In this phase, audio recordings were transcribed into text, converting all interview recordings into electronic documents. In the second stage, the document was read by the researchers to ensure comprehension. Following this verification, the data document was uploaded to MAXQDA 24 software.

In the third stage, researchers developed codes, categories, and themes based on the data. Finally, in the last stage, the codes and categories related to the identified themes were visualized and reported using MAXQDA 24.

Figure 2. The Data Analysis Spiral
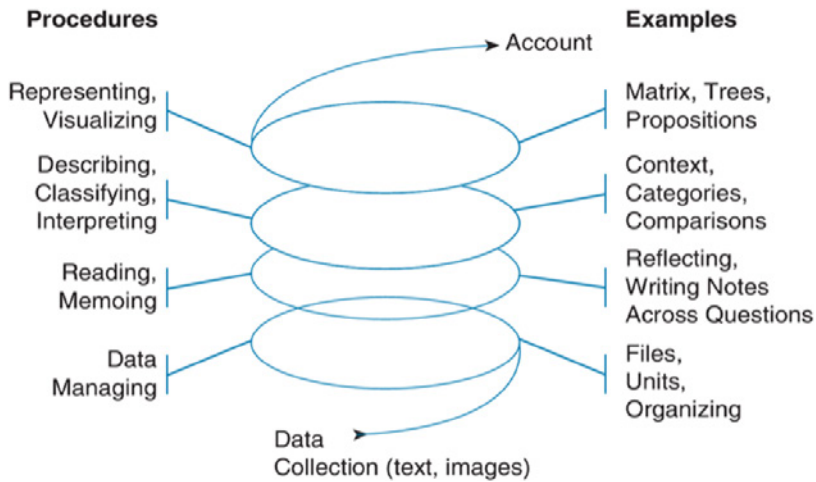
Source: Creswell, 2013: 226.

Validity and Reliability

In this study, a data collection instrument was developed based on a review of similar research, leading to the creation of an interview form draft. This draft was evaluated by two field experts and one language expert, and after incorporating their suggestions, the final version of the interview form was established. To enhance the credibility of the findings, several measures were taken. While transferability (the applicability of findings to other contexts) is not a primary goal in this type of qualitative study, we have provided a detailed description of the study group and its context. This allows readers to assess the potential relevance of the findings to their own settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; as cited in Sharts-Hopko, 2002). Furthermore, the adequacy of the participant sample was ensured not by its size, but by the depth and richness of the data obtained, confirming that the research topic was comprehensively explored from the participants' perspectives (Morse et al., 2002). In this context, the participants in the study were determined using the maximum variation sampling method, a purposive sampling technique. The study group included

school administrators who had received professional training related to quality processes across preschool, primary, middle, and high school levels. Furthermore, a pilot implementation was conducted with three school administrators just before the interview process commenced. No issues were noted during the pilot study, and the interview form was deemed ready for implementation. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with necessary information to ensure they could express their views candidly within a supportive dialogue.

To prevent data loss, audio and video recordings of the interviews were made with the participants' consent. After the interviews, participants were contacted to confirm their statements, ensuring accuracy in the data. To enhance the consistency of the data, direct quotations from participants were incorporated.

In this study, the "Agreement Percentage = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was utilized, with the results presented in Table 1. According to these data, the reliability rate of the study was calculated as "Agreement Percentage = 65 / (65 + 5) x 100 = 92.85". An inter-coder agreement of 80% or higher is considered necessary for internal consistency (Patton, 2002). Thus, the obtained agreement percentage indicates that the internal consistency of the data is sufficient.

Table 1. Inter-Coder Agreement Data

	CODER				Total Codes
	Agreement		Disagreement		
	A	B	A	B	
Question 1	15		-	-	15
Question 2	10		-	1	11
Question 3	16		1	-	17
Question 4	15		2	-	17
Question 5	9		-	1	10
Total Agreement	65		Total Disagreement	5	70

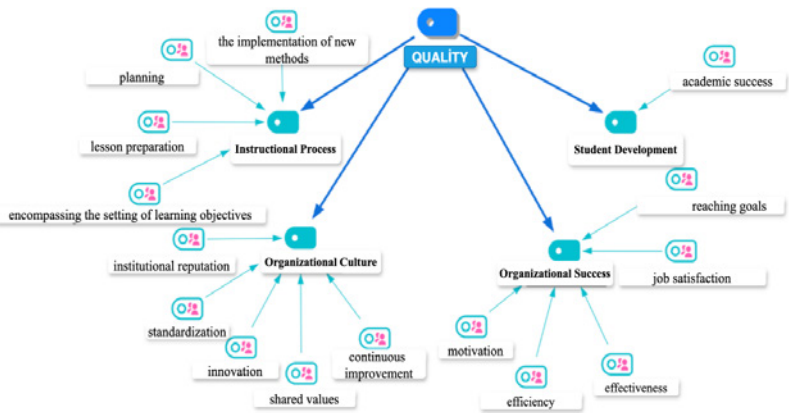Source: Developed by the Authors.

Findings

This section presents the findings obtained from the qualitative analysis of school administrators' experiences. To enhance clarity and focus, the findings are structured around the five main research questions that guided this study. Each research question is presented as a main heading, followed by a detailed analysis of the administrators' responses and illustrative quotations.

Research question 1: What does "quality" mean?

To answer the first research question, "What does 'quality' mean to you? How would you explain this concept based on your experiences?", an analysis of the school administrators' responses revealed a multifaceted understanding of 'quality' in educational settings. While no single definition emerged, administrators consistently described quality through four interconnected dimensions: (1) instructional processes, (2) student development, (3) organizational success, and (4) organizational culture. The key categories derived from their definitions are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Code Map Related to the Quality Theme

Source: Developed by the Authors.

The most prominent dimension identified by administrators was instructional processes. They defined quality as the meticulous planning and execution of teaching, from setting clear learning objectives to implementing innovative methods. For instance, one administrator stated, "For me, quality in our school primarily means aiming for excellence in instructional processes. In this context, I believe it is crucial for our teachers to clearly define specific learning objectives while preparing for their lessons..." (Y4). Another administrator reinforced this by linking the achievement rate of these objectives directly to educational quality, emphasizing that "Quality signifies the clear definition of learning objectives set in education and the process by which students are guided to achieve these goals. The rate of achieving learning objectives is directly proportional to our educational quality..." (Y8). The preparatory stages, such as lesson planning and material design, were also highlighted as foundational to a quality educational experience:

Quality means meticulously carrying out the lesson preparation process in education. Lesson preparation involves our teachers planning their instructional materials, teaching strategies, and in-class activities in advance. This preparation process ensures that lessons proceed more smoothly and effectively... (Y14)

While I find it challenging to provide a single definition of quality, when considered, it means effectively managing the planning process in education. Good planning enables our teachers to manage their classes more efficiently and allows students to gain the best learning experiences. Preparing weekly and monthly lesson plans ensures the instructional process progresses regularly and smoothly... (Y16)

The second category, student development, was frequently framed in terms of academic success. As one administrator succinctly put it, "I evaluate quality from the perspective of student development. Therefore, when I think of quality, I consider maximizing our students' academic achievements..." (Y2). This view positions student outcomes as a primary indicator of institutional quality.

Third, administrators associated quality with tangible markers of organizational success, such as increased motivation, efficiency, effectiveness, reaching goals, and job satisfaction. One participant articulated this connection by stating, "I believe that adopting quality processes has a positive effect on increasing teachers' job satisfaction. From what I've observed, embracing quality processes motivates my teachers and enables them to work more efficiently. Therefore, I can summarize quality as motivation, efficiency, and job satisfaction..." (Y13). This suggests that for administrators, a quality environment is one where operational effectiveness and a positive work atmosphere are mutually reinforcing.

Finally, the concept of quality was deeply embedded in organizational culture. Administrators linked it to the school's institutional reputation, the establishment of clear standards (standardization), a commitment to innovation, shared values, and a philosophy of continuous improvement. One participant noted that quality processes facilitated management and elevated overall quality: "Thanks to quality processes, all operations become defined, replacing a variable work approach with institutional standards. I see this situation as significantly facilitating our management processes and elevating quality to a serious degree..." (Y5). Another key cultural aspect was the philosophy of continuous improvement, which was seen as a proactive approach to achieving educational goals. As one administrator explained,

> I can define quality based on the philosophy of continuous improvement. Building on the quality management training I received in the past, I believe that as long as we operate within the continuous improvement philosophy, we can minimize obstacles on the path to achieving our educational goals and managerial success. In our school, we regularly conduct evaluation meetings based on the understanding of continuous improvement, allowing us to promptly identify our shortcomings... (Y6).

In summary, the school administrators' definitions of quality transcend simple metrics, painting a holistic picture where effective instructional processes, positive student development, overall organizational success, and a proactive, improvement-oriented organizational culture are all essential components.

Research Question 2: What are the opinions on the necessity of establishing a "quality culture" in schools?

To explore the second research question, "Do you believe it is necessary to establish a 'quality culture' in your institution? Can you explain your reasoning?", the responses from school administrators were unanimously affirmative. They justified this necessity by highlighting its positive impact on four key areas of school operations: (1) management processes, (2) instructional processes, (3) human resources, and (4) the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms. The themes emerging from their reasoning are detailed in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Code Map Related to the Necessity of Quality Culture
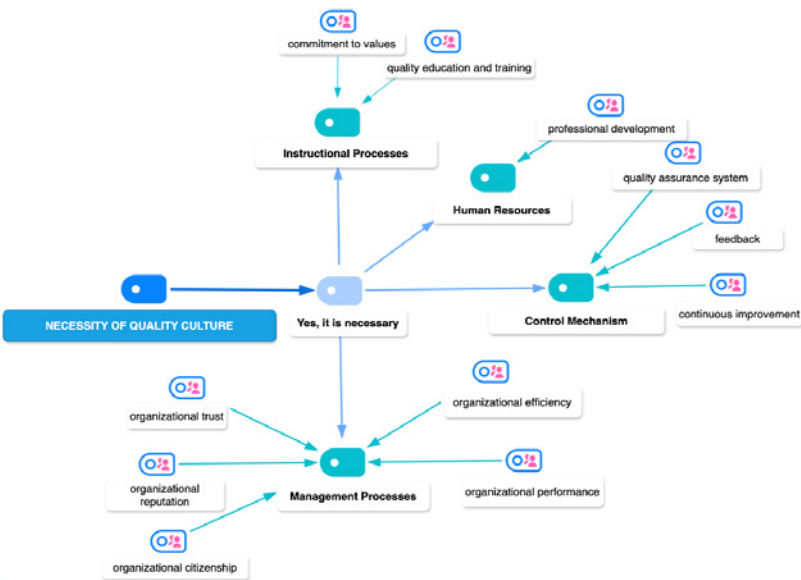
Source: Developed by the Authors.

Firstly, administrators argued that a quality culture is fundamental to strengthening management processes. They explained that such a culture improves organizational health by fostering trust, encouraging proactive citizenship behaviors, and boosting overall efficiency. One administrator

emphasized the role of trust, stating, "I think that ensuring trust within the organization is essential for creating a sustainable quality culture. With a quality culture, a climate of trust will develop among all employees in the school, thereby enhancing our success in administrative processes" (Y6). Another linked it to staff commitment, predicting that "a sense of organizational citizenship will develop within the school, fostering a search for responsibility, taking on responsibilities, and a spirit of teamwork" (Y2). Furthermore, it was seen as "a significant variable that increases the efficiency of the school" (Y10).

Secondly, a quality culture was seen as essential for reinforcing the core instructional processes. This was primarily linked to strengthening a commitment to shared values, which supports both the academic and social development of students. As one participant explained,

> Creating a quality culture strengthens commitment to values within the instructional processes. In our school, emphasizing not only the academic curriculum but also ethical and moral values supports our students' academic and social development. Values form the common language and understanding of our school community. Instilling these values in our students enables them to exhibit positive behaviors both within and outside the school (Y3).

Furthermore, the necessity of a quality culture was connected to the development of human resources, specifically through a commitment to professional development. This view was clearly articulated by an administrator who noted, "As part of our quality culture, we place great importance on the professional development of our teachers. We aim to conduct awareness training in our school by forming working groups with our teachers who are engaged in this field..." (Y11), indicating that such a culture institutionalizes continuous learning for the staff.

Finally, administrators viewed a quality culture as necessary for establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms. These systems rely on systematic feedback and a philosophy of continuous improvement. For example, one administrator described their process: "An important component of our quality culture is effective feedback mechanisms. We regularly collect feedback from our teachers, students, and parents. This feedback helps us evaluate our educational

processes and make the necessary adjustments" (Y8). This demonstrates a shift from top-down inspection to a collaborative cycle of evaluation and refinement.

In essence, school administrators perceive a quality culture not as an abstract ideal, but as a practical necessity for improving all facets of school life, from management and teaching to staff development and institutional self-evaluation.

Research Question 3: What strategies should be determined to establish a quality culture in schools?

When asked the third research question, "What strategies do you identify to establish a quality culture? Could you explain?", school administrators identified a wide range of interconnected management strategies. Rather than a single solution, they described a comprehensive approach requiring action on multiple fronts. These diverse strategies, all listed in Figure 5, can be organized into three overarching categories: (1) People-Centered Strategies, (2) System and Process--Oriented Strategies, and (3) Dynamic Leadership Strategies.

Figure 5. Code Map Obtained for the Strategy Theme
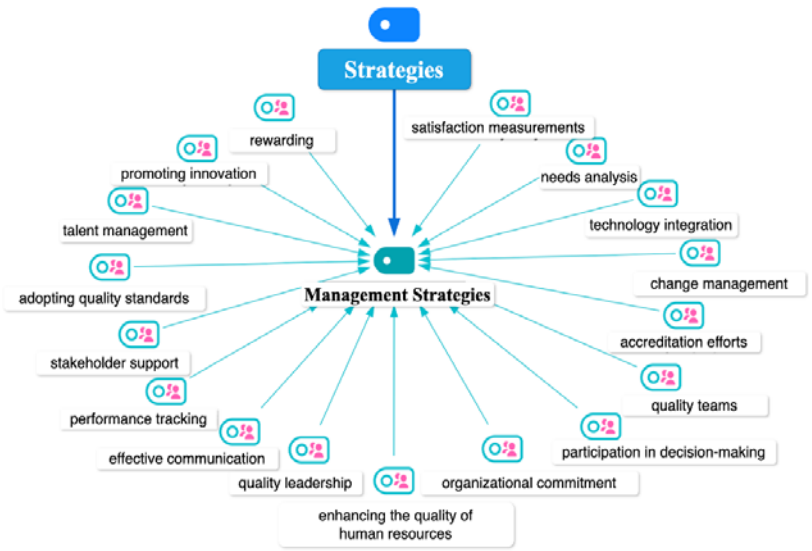
Source: Developed by the Authors.

The most frequently mentioned category was People-Centered Strategies, which focus on empowering and motivating staff and students. Administrators emphasized the importance of strategies such as fostering organizational commitment, enhancing human resources, and creating quality teams. A key tactic within this area is rewarding, which was seen as a direct driver of motivation and performance. As one administrator stated, "I prioritize the rewarding strategy for the establishment of a quality culture. Recognizing and rewarding the achievements of our teachers and students enhances motivation, leading to higher performance" (Y19-E). Another crucial strategy was ensuring participation in decision-making, which was linked to building commitment. One participant explained, "Establishing a quality culture is a process that takes time. I strive to create a shared commitment to common goals in line with our school's vision and mission. I believe that involving our teachers in decision--making processes will also increase their commitment to the school" (Y13-E).

The second category involves System and Process-Oriented Strategies, which aim to create a clear and consistent framework for quality. Administrators identified the need to adopt formal quality standards and pursue accreditation efforts as ways to institutionalize excellence. This category also includes systematic approaches like performance tracking, conducting regular needs analyses, and using satisfaction measurements to gather data for continuous improvement. These strategies ensure that the pursuit of quality is not arbitrary but is based on evidence and standardized procedures.

Finally, administrators highlighted a set of Dynamic Leadership Strategies that are essential for driving and sustaining change. This includes demonstrating quality leadership, ensuring effective communication, and managing the process of change management itself. Furthermore, they pointed to the importance of promoting innovation, securing stakeholder support, and leveraging technology integration as critical levers for building and maintaining a vibrant quality culture in the 21st century.

In conclusion, the administrators' perspectives indicate that establishing a quality culture is not achieved through a simple checklist but requires a holistic and integrated strategy. Success depends on simultaneously investing in people, building robust systems, and providing visionary and adaptive leadership.

Research Question 4: What are the obstacles, problems, and solutions encountered in the process of establishing a quality culture?

The fourth research question explored the "obstacles, problems, and solutions encountered in the process of establishing a quality culture". The analysis of administrators' responses revealed a clear duality, for nearly every identified problem, they also articulated a corresponding solution, detailed in Figure 6, can be broadly categorized into human/cultural factors and organizational/systemic factors.

Figure 6. Code Map Obtained for the Theme of Management of Barriers
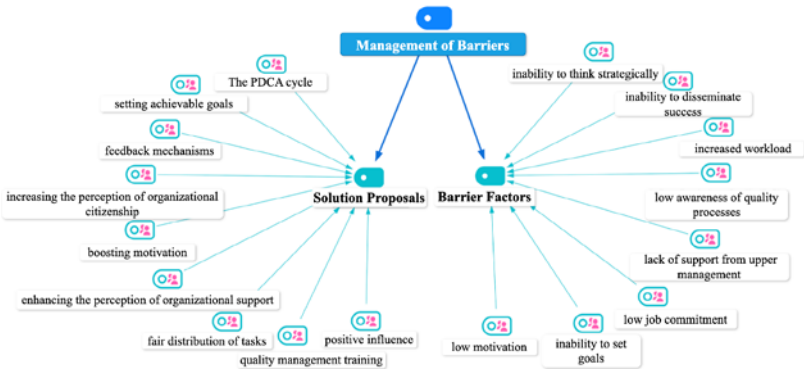
Source: Developed by the Authors.

The primary set of obstacles was human and cultural in nature, stemming from staff attitudes and perceptions. Administrators identified low motivation, low job commitment, and a low awareness of quality processes as significant problems. A key concern was potential resistance from teachers, who might perceive quality initiatives as simply an "increased workload". As one administrator noted, "I think a potential barrier could be the teachers in the institution not being receptive to the situation. Teachers may be unwilling in this regard because they believe it will increase their workload" (Y20-E).

To counteract these human-centered problems, administrators proposed a suite of corresponding solutions. To address low motivation and commitment,

they suggested strategies to boost motivation and enhance the perception of organizational support. To combat low awareness and resistance, they recommended providing targeted quality management training and fostering a sense of shared purpose to increase the perception of organizational citizenship. These solutions aim to transform resistance into engagement by focusing on professional growth and support.

The second set of problems was organizational and systemic. These included a lack of support from upper management, the inability to set clear goals, and a failure to disseminate success throughout the organization. These systemic issues can undermine even the most well-intentioned quality initiatives.

In response, administrators offered clear systemic solutions. The most powerful strategy mentioned was to create a culture of continuous improvement through effective feedback mechanisms and the implementation of frameworks like the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle. They also emphasized the importance of setting achievable goals to build momentum and ensuring a fair distribution of tasks to prevent burnout. As one administrator wisely advised, "Avoiding unattainable goals will also be beneficial. Additionally, attributing every successful step to the entire staff of the institution will serve as a stepping stone to overcome barriers" (Y9-E). This strategy directly addresses the "inability to disseminate success" by making recognition a collective and motivating force.

In essence, school administrators view the path to a quality culture as a continuous process of navigating challenges. Their responses show that finding solutions is not about addressing isolated problems, but about strategically pairing human-centered and systemic solutions to the specific obstacles that arise.

Research Question 5: Is there a determining impact of quality culture in shaping educational policies?

The final research question addressed whether a school-level quality culture has a determining impact on the formulation of broader educational policies. When asked, "Do you believe that the quality culture has a decisive effect on the formulation of educational policies?", administrators expressed a strong

consensus. They argued that a robust quality culture is not merely an internal school affair but a crucial driver that should inform and shape policy-making at a higher level. Their views suggest this impact manifests in two primary domains: (1) shaping instructional and curricular policies, and (2) guiding human resources and leadership policies. The specific areas of influence are detailed in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Code Map Obtained for the Theme of The Effect on The Formulation of Educational Policies

Source: Developed by the Authors.

Primarily, a quality culture was seen as a vital source of feedback for shaping instructional and curricular policies. Administrators explained that the data and insights generated within a quality-focused school—such as the effective identification of learning losses—provide a realistic basis for determining educational goals and developing relevant course content. This grassroots information helps ensure that policies are grounded in the actual needs of schools and students. One administrator described it as a "guiding principle", stating, "Quality culture is a guiding principle in the development of educational policies. I believe it creates a comprehensive roadmap across all aspects of education, especially for minimizing learning losses" (Y14-E). This suggests that a quality culture helps bridge the gap between policy-making and classroom reality.

Secondly, administrators asserted that a quality culture should directly influence human resources and leadership policies, particularly concerning appointments and professional standards. They argued that a commitment to quality should be a prerequisite for both teachers and managers, thus impacting teacher and management appointment policies. This focus on personnel is seen as essential for ensuring the "continuity of development" within the education system. This perspective was clearly articulated by an administrator who said, "I think it has a direct impact on educational policies. In my view, quality culture ensures the continuity of development. A quality-focused approach influences employment and appointment policies to enhance the effectiveness of education..." (Y17-E).

In summary, the school administrators do not view quality culture as an isolated, school-level phenomenon. Instead, they perceive it as a fundamental engine for systemic improvement, capable of providing the evidence and impetus needed to formulate more effective, responsive, and impactful educational policies at a macro level.

Discussion

This study examined how school administrators in the Turkish educational context perceive, implement, and cope with the challenges of establishing a culture of quality. The findings reveal a holistic and practitioner-oriented understanding of quality that goes beyond mere measurement to encompass instructional, organizational, and cultural dimensions. This section discusses key findings related to the existing literature and highlights implications for both theory and practice in this specific context.

1. The Multifaceted Nature of Quality: A Holistic View in a Centralized System

The first major finding was that school administrators define 'quality' not through a single lens, but as a complex interplay of effective instructional processes, positive student development, overall organizational success, and a proactive

organizational culture. This holistic view strongly aligns with the core tenets of Total Quality Management adapted for education, which argue that genuine quality must be embedded in the daily processes and values of the institution (Goetsch & Davis, 2014; Sallis, 2014). Interestingly, while the Turkish education system is often driven by centralized, high-stakes examination results, the administrators in this study advocated for a much broader definition of success. This suggests a desire among practitioners to move beyond quantifiable metrics and cultivate a more comprehensive form of institutional excellence.

2. The Principal as the Architect: Leadership in a Hierarchical Culture

A recurring theme throughout the findings was the central role of the school administrator in driving a quality culture. This supports a significant body of literature that positions school leaders as the primary architects of quality (Bendermacher et al., 2017; Díez et al., 2020). However, our study extends this understanding by detailing the specific levers administrators believe they must pull: from fostering "organizational citizenship" to ensuring "fair distribution of tasks". This emphasis on the principal's direct role may reflect the hierarchical nature of the Turkish educational context, where leadership is often less distributed. While contemporary models advocate for distributed leadership (Harris, 2013), our findings suggest that in this context, it is the transformational leadership actions of the formal principal that are perceived as the most critical catalyst for change (Jung et al., 2003).

3. Overcoming Barriers: The Primacy of the Human Factor

The study also illuminated the duality of barriers and solutions. While systemic issues like "lack of upper management support" were noted, it was the human and cultural factors—such as low motivation and resistance to an "increased workload"—that were most prominent. An unexpected finding was the relative lack of emphasis on financial constraints, a commonly cited barrier in other studies. This suggests that for these administrators, winning the "hearts and minds" of their staff is a more immediate and significant challenge than securing

material resources. Their proposed solutions, which pair human-centered strategies (e.g., "quality management training") with systemic ones (e.g., "PDCA cycle"), echo the core arguments of change management theory: that successful change requires addressing both the cultural and structural dimensions of an organization (Kotter, 1996; Yukl, 2013). Supporting this perspective, Jentsch and König (2022) emphasize that the increased teacher competencies associated with professional development positively influence student success, thereby enabling schools to achieve their established learning objectives at a high rate. Furthermore, for proposed solutions, factors such as positive influence, quality management training, fair task distribution, enhancement of perceived organizational support, boosting motivation, increasing the perception of organizational citizenship, establishing feedback mechanisms, setting attainable goals, and applying the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle have been identified. Ultimately, quality management necessitates a specific leadership style described as "transformational leadership" (Spanbauer, 1992).

4. From School-Level Culture to System-Level Policy: A Call for a Bottom-Up Dialogue

Perhaps the most significant finding is the administrators' belief that a school-level quality culture should be a key driver of broader educational policy. In a traditionally top-down system, this represents a powerful call for a more symbiotic, bottom--up dialogue. Their assertion that grassroots insights on "identifying learning losses" or "teacher appointment policies" should inform macro-level decisions echoes the call by Saiti (2012) for more evidence-based policy. It also provides a practical counterpoint to the top-down agency models discussed by Garwe (2014), suggesting that for national quality assurance to be effective, it must actively listen to and learn from the practitioners it aims to support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative analysis reveals that for Turkish school administrators, a culture of quality is not an externally imposed program, but rather a holistic and internally developed environment. It requires visionary leadership that skillfully balances the needs of people with the demands of systems. The study confirms that creating a strong quality culture is not merely a management task but a transformative leadership effort that can make educational institutions more harmonious, effective, and responsive.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable information, its limitations must be acknowledged. First, its qualitative nature means that the findings are context-dependent and do not aim to provide statistical generalizations. Second, the sample was drawn from managers in Istanbul, and their perspectives may not reflect those in other geographical or socioeconomic regions of Turkey. Third, the study relies solely on managers' perspectives; including the views of teachers, students, and parents would provide a more comprehensive, 360-degree understanding. Finally, the use of interviews as the sole data collection method could be complemented by classroom observations or document analysis in future research to triangulate findings.

Implications

The findings of this study have various practical and theoretical implications:

Implications for Practice: We suggest that school administrators seeking to create a quality culture begin by forming a "coalition of the willing" consisting of effective teachers who will support the process. To alleviate fears of increased workload, administrators should model fairness and transparency in the distribution of tasks. Furthermore, providing ongoing and relevant professional development is not an optional extra, but a fundamental strategy for building capacity and commitment.

Policy Implications: Policymakers should consider establishing formal feedback channels through which high-performing schools can share best practices and data to inform regional and national policy. The "School Development Plans" guidelines could be revised to explicitly promote a balanced approach that combines both the human-centered and systemic strategies identified in this study. Implications for Future Research: Building on the limitations of this study, future research could conduct comparative studies between urban and rural schools to examine contextual differences. A longitudinal study tracking the implementation of quality strategies over several years would provide invaluable data on their long-term effectiveness. Finally, a mixed-methods study could quantify the relationship between the perceptions of quality culture described here and measurable student outcomes.

This study emphasizes that the pursuit of quality in education is an extremely human endeavor. This study is managed by determined individuals who navigate complex systems to create environments where both students and staff are empowered to succeed.

Disclosure

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