CULTURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (COTL): THE ROLE OF THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF ROLE PLAYERS IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to identify the level of Culture of Teaching and Learning (COTL) in Lorestan province, Iran, and to investigate the relationship between the character traits of role players and COTL based on students' view. The researchers employed multivariate regression analysis to explore the relationship between the characters of role player and COTL. The participants in this study included 400 secondary school students in Lorestan province, Iran. The findings of this study showed that students' view of the practice of COTL at their schools is at medium level. The researchers also found that there is a moderately strong relationship between character traits of role players and COTL. In spite of various researches on COTL in education, no research has been found to demonstrate the relationship between character traits of role players and COTL. Therefore, this research is a unique study of the educational system to explain a new path of future research in relation to character traits of role players and COTL.

Keywords: *Culture of Teaching and Learning (COTL), Teaching and Learning (T&L) process, students, role player, Iran*

INTRODUCTION

The excellent culture of teaching and learning (COTL) is considered as positive COTL (Smith & Schalekamp, 1997). Van Deventer and Kruger (2003) referred to positive COTL as the attitudes of all role players (principals, teachers, students, and parents) towards teaching and learning (T&L) and the current quality of management in T&L process in school. They also stated that schools with positive COTL present some characteristics such as an attractive classroom climate, teachers who are committed to teaching, students are involved in T&L activities, order and discipline prevail, existence of good relationship between school staff and students, effective management, and teamwork in school and classroom. Subsequently, the necessary infrastructure and facilities are in place and are neat and safe for T&L. Lastly, principals and teachers maintained high professional standards (Rampa, 2004).

One of the principal's tasks is to build and create a quality culture in schools (Oakland, 2003). Bond (2001) argues that it is the responsibility of principals to

inspire, support, sustain, promote, and improve a culture of performance excellence. Rampa (2004) pointed out that, excellence performance in the school context would mean principals ensuring teachers and students doing their best in managing T&L respectively; representing commitment to a culture of performance; providing support and appropriating resources and assistance; and creating cooperation with teachers, students and parents.

The primary task of a teacher is to teach but for teaching tasks to be didactically and pedagogically effective, teaching has to be properly managed. Teachers must know their students and also students' needs. They must try to focus on establishing a relationship with their students. Consequently, they build a relationship of trust in which students are respected, understood, and recognized for what they are. Teachers prepare themselves to identify students' expectations. The creation of an environment conducive to T&L strategies such as learning tools and methodology to provide the chance for students to practice their skills and to establish a cooperative learning climate in which they understand the activities of team work and are able to give and take in a team situation (Rampa, 2004). Teachers who create such classrooms contribute to the creation and maintenance of an environment, atmosphere or spirit, conductive into COTL. Through the teachers' dedication and commitment, students' negative attitudes can be changed and they can be motivated to take charge of their learning through diverse cultures that need to be connected by common values (Miller, 2011).

In positive COTL, students are regarded as the primary customers (Silins & Murray-Harvey, 2000). Consequently, self-concept student is valued as an element that facilitates the attainment of outcomes related to academic achievement since it determines academic self-concept. The latter, if good, may lead to ownership of learning by learners. Even the quality of school life as experienced by learners is influenced by their perceived academic success and the extent to which they feel good about themselves as students. Silins and Murray-Harvey (2000) found that there is evidence to suggest learners' feelings about their experience of school environment that shapes their future plans and influences their learning. Therefore, a sense of achievement and a positive attitude towards the quality of school life are crucial to improved school performance. Belonging to a school community and learning how to learn are also regarded as important indicators of quality schooling, with students' approaches to learning and studying being linked to the quality of their learning and to their academic achievement. If students want to be successful in learning, they must be punctual at school, listen to and be tolerant of others' opinions, accept responsibility for securing their own safety, possessions and respect the personal property of others, and not damage school properties.

Parents play a major role in positive COTL (Cronje, Jacobs, & Murdoch, 2002). However, parents' contribution to the quality of T&L is hard to detect and often goes unrecognized. Parents could help to sustain positive COTL by keeping students busy during teachers' absence, assisting in practicing skills such as reading and writing, checking work and revising homework. Parents may eventually assist with

administrative tasks such as completing stock lists and drawing up budgets, filing forms such as applications for excursions and fundraising. Involvement of parents in the education of their children in the new education dispensation is necessary for full partnerships in education (Rampa, 2004). Brannon (2008) believed that parents are primary teachers of their children; they are responsible for the care, development and education of their children. However, they may not have time, knowledge or training to provide all that to their children. Schools are therefore established for planned and specialized T&L.

In the Iranian education system, COTL refers to factors such as school climate (ensuring secure and healthy environments), attitude of principals, teachers, students and parents about the T&L process. It also involves using new teaching techniques, responsibility and commitment of principals and teachers, involvement of teachers, students, and parents in school decision making, ensuring the availability of stationery, books, laboratories, and library, and establishing a culture of punctuality at school. In this study, COTL refers to attitude of principals and teachers about T&L process, school environment and school process.

How the character traits of principals, teachers, students, and parents affect the level of COTL in Iranian schools, especially in the province of Lorestan is not clear. Therefore, this area is still open for more research. Thus this study tries to identify the level of implementation of COTL in school and also find the relationship between the character traits of role players in school and level of COTL based on students' view.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative descriptive research employed a survey instrument to answer the following research questions:
- What is the level of COTL among students in schools?
- Is there any statistically significant between the character traits of role players and level of COTL based on students' opinion?

The research respondents for this study were secondary school students in the Lorestan province, Iran. A total of 42870 students from 10 cities of this province formed the target population. For the aims of this study, the sample size was consists of 400 second and third grade secondary school students from 4 different cities (namely Khoramabad, Borojerd, Kohdasht and Azna) in Lorestan province, Iran.

Instrument used in the study was the 4 point Likert's scale questionnaire prepared by Rampa (2004). This questionnaire consists of 72 items, of which 7 are for measuring the level of COTL (part B_5), 9 are items related to character traits of principals (part B_1), 23 items for character traits of teachers (part B_2), 16 items for character traits of students (part B_3), and 17 items for character traits of parents (part B_4).

The questionnaire were first written in English, but since all the participants were Iranian and Farsi is the formal language used in Iran, the instrument was translated into the Farsi language by two experts from the field of education and English language. The Farsi version of the questionnaire was then back-translated into English and compared with the original version to ensure that translation and the Farsi version of the questionnaire were as clear as the English version. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.907, which showed that the questionnaire has an excellent reliability (George & Mallery, 2001).

FINDINGS

Of the 400 students who participated in this study, 172 respondents (43%) were in the second grade and 228 respondents (57%) were in the third grade. The majority of participants, i.e. 210 (52.5%) were female students and 190 (47.5%) were male students. The mean age of students in this study was 13.42 years old.

The level of COTL among students in different schools' cities

Table 1 presents the overall score of efforts undertaken by the students. Overall level of effort to improve COTL in Lorestan province is medium (Mean=2.80; SD=1.05). This indicates that the effort in improving COTL in schools is at medium level.

Table 2: *Mean Distribution of students' opinion regarding the level of COTL*

City	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
Khoramabad	3.00	.98	Medium	1
Kohdasht	2.97	.96	Medium	2
Borojerd	2.74	1.11	Medium	3
Azna	2.48	1.14	Medium	4
Overall	2.80	1.05	Medium	

Note: Low (1.00< M ≤2.00), Medium (2.01 <M ≤3.00), High (3.01 <M ≤4.00)

Table 1 also illustrates the mean score of efforts to improve COTL in different cities. As perceived by students, the highest level of COTL is in Khoramabad (mean=3.00; SD=.99), followed by Kohdasht (Mean=2.97; SD=.96), Borojerd (Mean=2.74; SD=1.11), and Azna (Mean=2.48; SD=1.14). This data means that in Khoramabad the efforts made to improve COTL is the highest compared to other cities.

The relationship between the character traits of role players and COTL based on students' view

The second research question of this study is: 'Is there any significant relationship between the character traits of role player and COTL based on students perception?' Multivariate regression analysis was used to investigate the correlation between the characters of role player as the explanatory variable and COTL as dependent variable. To check the multicollinearity among the independent variables, VIF (variance

inflation factor) was used. VIF values in this study are below 10.00 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010) (See Table 4). Thus, there was no multicollinearity problem between predictor variables in this study. As discussed earlier, role players are principals, teachers, students, and parents. In this study, B_1, B_2, B_3, and B_4 are serially used for character of principals, teachers, students and parents.

The regression analysis yielded a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .463, which means that there is a positive and moderate relationship (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006) between the character traits of role player and COTL (see Table 2).

Table 3: *The relationship between the dependent variable and the set of predictors*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.463	.214	.206	.753

The derived multiple coefficient of determination (R^2) is .214, which means that 21.4% of variations in the dependent variable are explained by the set of predictors. This also means that the accuracy of the variables of characters of principals, teachers, students and parents in predicting the level of COTL is 21.4%. The overall regression model is significant even at the 0.01 level (p=0.000) with F-ratio of 26.896 (see Table 3).

Table 4: *ANOVA result based on students' opinion*

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	61.007	4	15.252	26.896	.000[a]
	Residual	223.987	395	.567		
	Total	284.994	399			

Table 5: *Estimates of Coefficients for COTL based on students' view*

Coefficients[a]	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.213	.286		.747	.455		
B1	.282	.093	.166	3.039	.003	.670	1.494
B2	.249	.100	.145	2.491	.013	.588	1.700
B3	.063	.083	.042	.766	.444	.679	1.474
B4	.410	.082	.257	4.992	.000	.751	1.332
a. Dependent Variable: B5							

Table 4 shows the parameter estimates of the regression, which represent the regression coefficients or slope of each predictor variable. The t statistics indicate the significance of the constant and each of the parameter estimates. The regression model has a constant of .213 and is not significant at the 0.05 level (p=0.455). Parameter estimates for characters of principals, teachers, students and parents are .282, .249, .063 and .410 respectively. The t statistics provide the significance of each parameter estimate characters of parents is the most significant explanatory variable in predicting COTL in students' opinion. The significant level of 0.000 for this variable indicates 0% error. Principal characters are a significant predictor at the 0.05 level (p=0.003). Teachers characters are a significant predictor at the 0.05 level (p=0.013) while student characters are not significant at all (p=0.444). The derived model is:

Improving COTL= .213+ .282*B_1+ .249*B_2+.063*B_3+ 0.410*B_4

Therefore, COTL has a positive correlation with characters of principals (B_1), characters of teachers (B_2), characters of students (B_3) and characters of parents (B_4).

The prediction equation of perceive COTL is as follows:

$Y = b_0 + B_4(X_4) + B_1(X_1) + B_2(X_2) + e$
COTL= .213 + .410 (characters of parents) + .282 (characters of principals) + .249 (characters of teachers) + e

The prediction equation depicts overall contribution of three out of four character traits of role players including principals, teachers, and parents in predicting COTL in Iranian secondary schools based on students' view.

The perceive COTL model is presented in Figure 1. The model indicates that the remaining dimension (character traits of students) is not a significant predictor of perceived COTL based on students' opinion.
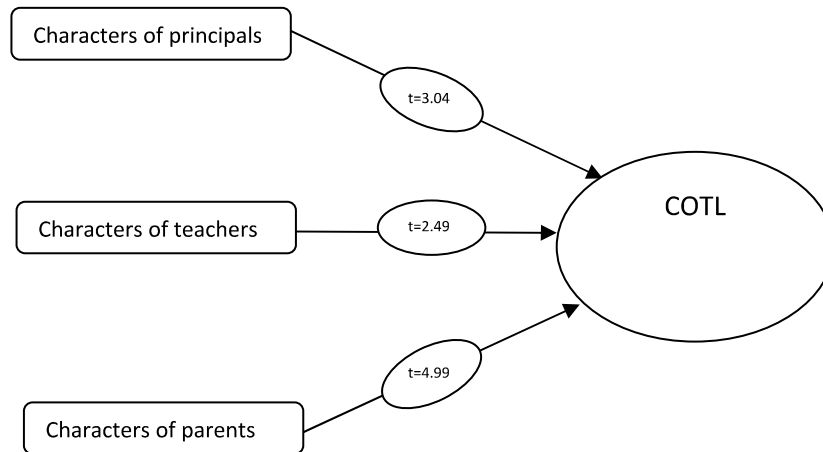
Figure 2: Perceived COTL model based on students' view

It can be concluded that, from students view, there is a moderately strong relationship (R=.46) between character traits of principals, teachers, students, and parents and COTL. It means students believed that character of role player can improve COTL and the characters of parents and principals have a more important role; the next variable comprises the characters of teachers and students respectively. All characteristics of role player have a positive relationship with COTL.

DISCUSSION

This study asked students to express their view on the level of COTL in their school. The results of this study illustrate that the level of COTL as viewed by students is medium (Mean= 2.80). Increasing the level of COTL is one of the factors to improve the quality of education (Kruger, 2003). All of the role players in school can be effective in improving the level of COTL. To increase the level of COTL, there are some responsibilities for teachers and principals that must be met. Teachers can try using correct evaluation methods. They can measure student learning in many ways, including but not limited to gains made on standardized tests, improvement on periodic classroom assessments, and performance in end-of-course exams (Alobiedat, 2011). This indicates that, school principals and teachers must understand the needs and expectations of students (Alobiedat, 2011) to achieve student-oriented system. Another reason for the perception of medium level of COTL among students is the overcrowded classrooms (Kruger, 2003; Owoeye & Yara, 2011). The average number of students in each classroom is 30 persons in secondary schools in Iran, instead of 1-20 students in each class (Owoeye & Yara, 2011).

Glasser (1992) pointed out that the majority of students in his study believed that the current academic curriculum is not worth the effort it takes to learn it. No matter how well the teachers manage them, if students do not find quality in what they are

asked to do in the classroom, they will not work hard enough to learn the materials. The answer is not to try to make them work harder, the answer is to increase the quality of what we ask them to learn. The level of COTL in Iran based on students' attitude, studied by Salimi and Godarzi (2002), found that the level of COTL was medium in Tehran.

The characters of parents are the most significant explanatory variable in predicting COTL in students' opinion. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. This role does not change when their children enter school. As children enter school, teachers join in the process of shaping children's minds, attitudes, and behaviors by forming a partnership with parents and principals. Parent involvement results in students attaining higher academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001), more positive attitudes about homework, and improved perceptions of their own competence (Brannon, 2008). Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, and Miller-Johnson (2000) found that parents involvement is necessary for students' success in school. Children develop much of their identity and their beliefs about right and wrong before ever formally entering school. However, schools and parents need to work together to continue developing students' character throughout their educational career (Brannon, 2008).

Epstein (1994, 1992) expanded the typology and defined six levels (types) of school-related opportunities for parental involvement: (1) assisting parents in child rearing skills, (2) school-parent communication, (3) involving parents in school volunteer opportunities, (4) involving parents in home-based learning, (5) involving parents in school decision-making, and (6) involving parents in school-community collaborations (Fan & Chen, 2001).

The characters of teachers and principals are significant explanatory variable in predicting COTL. But parents and teachers have the most time with kids, so they have more opportunities for impact (Brannon, 2008). The findings suggest that parents involve themselves in student homework because they believe that they should be involved, suppose that their involvement will make a positive difference, and perceive that their children or children's teachers want their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2001). Parents' involvement in activities takes many forms, from establishing structures for homework performance to teaching for understanding and developing student learning strategies. Operating largely through modeling, reinforcement, and instruction, parents' homework involvement appears to influence student success insofar as it supports student attributes related to achievement (e.g., attitudes about homework, perceptions of personal competence, self-regulatory skills). The perception that parental involvement has positive effect on students' academic achievement/success is so intuitively appealing that policy makers, school board principals, teachers, parents, and even students themselves, have agreed that parental involvement is critical for children's academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001).

In fact, students expect effective lessons and practices in value added environment. Such added value primarily consists of support to ensure well-equipped

library and laboratory, providing materials like as books, videos, maps (principals duty), adequate preparation for the final exam which needs good and knowledge teachers, to enable them to achieve the hoped-for grades (Barone & Franco, 2009). Therefore, a student who is satisfied with a course is pleased by the lessons and practices and is interested to study the related content. This satisfaction constitutes one of the outputs of the teaching process, a direct benefit to the students. In the case of teaching, in order that the process is effective, 'students are not passive consumers of services, but must be actively engaged in the learning process' (Barone & Franco, 2009). Here, students are perceived as customers of the modern educational system (Thakkar, Deshmukh, & Shastree, 2006). It is worth to pay attention to students' needs.

CONCLUSION

The purposes of the current study were to determine the level of COTL, as well as, investigate the relationship between character traits of role players and COTL. It was found that the level of COTL is medium for students. This shows that students are less satisfied with the current situation. There are so many way to increase the level of COTL. Principal and teachers must understand the needs and expectations of students to switch to a student-oriented system. Overcrowded classrooms could be another reason for this medium level. Teachers should be able to measure student learning using different method such as periodic classroom assessments and apply correct evaluation method accordingly.

The important finding in this study was a moderately strong relationship between character traits of role players and COTL based on students' view. This proved that there is a positive effect of role players on COTL. Student learning is everyone's responsibility: principal, teachers, students, parents, school staff, society, and media. Based on students' opinion the characters of parents play a more important role for COTL.

The principals and teachers are people who are available in the daily school life, and also they are academics who can guide students correctly, so the principals and teachers must try to have more effect on COTL for the sake of the students. There is therefore a need to give students what they need and what they expect. They expect useful lessons and practices, opportunities to add value to their education. Such added value primarily consists of support to ensure a well-equipped library and laboratory, materials like books, videos, maps (principals' duty), adequate preparation for the final exam, which needs good and knowledgeable teachers (teachers' duty). Principals must involve parents in school decision-making more than before; they must be a part of decision making in schools.

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