



**NEWLY APPOINTED SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES IN THEIR  
EARLY YEARS IN RURAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF AZERBAIJAN**

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Every single page of a book is full of precious words if we can see and read them consciously, as well as in life. Life is also full of opportunities to observe our surroundings, analyze happenings and then look inside to be aware of ourselves. In this sense, with several obvious facts and hints, the course *Leading Educational Organizations* also demonstrated the importance of leading organizations and giving directions to people which comes from real situations from life. Management styles, experiences, insights differ from each other through the way which is lived in various culture and environment by leaders.

The appointment of school directors in Azerbaijan is subject to specific regulations, which include the "Sample Statute of the General Education School" and a presidential order. An annual competitive process is conducted by the Ministry of Education to designate school directors. The Ministry has established a timeframe within which candidates must submit their applications online. Permanent positions are awarded to those who obtain the highest scores in the competition. Applicants must possess a minimum of five years of strategic management experience in order to be considered.

The prosperity of every community or institution depends on efficient management. In the educational setting, the school principal occupies the essential position of an educational leader. This role entails substantial legal accountability and the obligation to guarantee the seamless and effective functioning of the entire school. In acknowledgement of this vital function, the Ministry of Science and Education amended the professional duties of school principals in 2014. Ensuring the quality of the learning and teaching process entails providing high-quality education to all students and successfully implementing the curriculum. Supporting and assessing educators encompasses mentoring, coaching, offering professional development opportunities, and executing performance reviews.

Encouraging active engagement in school governance structures highlights the significance of including essential stakeholders, such as the School Pedagogical Council, in critical decision-making processes, including goal formulation, evaluation, and accountability. Supervising school planning and reporting include formulating and executing extensive school enhancement strategies, in addition to guaranteeing precise and prompt reporting on academic achievement.

The procedure for the recruitment and appointment of school principals is delineated in the "Regulations for Recruitment to the Position of Director of State General Educational Institutions," published by the Ministry of Science and Education in 2023. This competitive procedure consists of two separate phases: a written assessment and a face-to-face interview. The written examination phase evaluates applicants' knowledge and comprehension via a thorough assessment. This examination often has 60 questions including many fundamental subjects. Pedagogy and Methodology: Assessing the candidate's comprehension of successful teaching and learning principles. Evaluating the candidate's capacity to analyse and understand material with discernment. Assessing the candidate's comprehension of pertinent educational statutes, rules, and policies. Evaluating the candidate's comprehension of successful leadership theories and practices relevant to educational environments. Mathematical Logic: Assessing the candidate's analytical and problem-solving abilities. Candidates who correctly respond to a minimum of fifty percent of the exam questions are thereafter provided with essay themes. The candidate must get a minimum score of 5 out of 10 on the essay component to qualify for the in-person interview stage.

A notable characteristic of Azerbaijan's educational governance framework is the "rotation" system, which requires the regular reassignment of school principals to other schools. This system, formally instituted for newly appointed principals during a five-year term, seeks to provide novel viewpoints and creative methodologies: The method promotes the sharing of best

practices and cultivates a dynamic educational environment by relocating principals to other schools. Regular reassignment prevents school leaders from getting entrenched in their roles and fosters ongoing professional growth and development. The rotation method guarantees that all schools benefit from proficient and skilled leadership, fostering a more fair allocation of talent and knowledge throughout the educational framework. This structure is essential for sustaining a vigorous and dynamic leadership environment in the Azerbaijani education sector.

Individuals between the ages of 26 and 60 can voluntarily participate in the competition to become a school director. The selection process involves evaluating candidates' knowledge and skills in various areas, including finance, statistics, law, and school administration. This evaluation typically includes a series of inquiries designed to assess their expertise. Following this initial assessment, candidates are required to write an essay on a predetermined topic. A panel of experts then evaluates these essays based on various criteria, such as adherence to proper Azerbaijani language grammar and spelling, the quality and depth of content, the organization of ideas, and the logical flow of arguments. Successful candidates then proceed to an interview stage, where their professional competencies and overall performance, including their essay presentation, are thoroughly assessed. It's important to note that both newly appointed principals and those reassigned through the rotation system are required to complete a probationary year before their appointment is officially confirmed, as per the Ministry of Science and Education's guidelines (2015).

The overall performance of any educational institution is significantly influenced by the competence and excellence of school administrators. Schools that have a robust community collaboration can rely on the involvement and support of parents and community members. Consequently, these institutions are amenable to recruiting parents and community members to

participate in school planning and decision-making (Haugh, 2015). According to Lee (2019), the most significant potential to transform underperforming schools into effective ones is possessed by experienced principals. The process of school leadership involves the dissemination of a vision and guidance to individuals in order to attract followers. This is achieved through the implementation of a variety of innovative educational strategies that contribute to the success and development of students (Medford, 2022). This study investigates the manner in which recently appointed principals consider and endeavour to create value in their leadership capacity, as well as the effects of this for their relationship with school members of the new school (Gentles, 2015).

### **Purpose of the study**

The primary objective of this project is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how school principals adapt to and shape the culture of a new school environment. This research focuses on the experiences of educational leaders in both urban and rural public schools across Azerbaijan. The project aims to gather insights from these leaders on how they navigate the challenges of adapting to a new school culture, the strategies they employed during this process, and the transformative changes they successfully implemented within their new settings. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for professionals working in the field of education. These insights can be instrumental in equipping future leaders with the essential skills and qualities necessary to effectively navigate the complexities of their roles and positively impact the teaching and learning environment within their respective schools.

This research examines how newly appointed school leaders acclimatise to the distinctive cultural dynamics of their new educational settings. This study acknowledges the significant

influence of school culture on the efficacy of educational leadership, drawing on prior research, especially Silpe (2019), which emphasises the need of comprehending and manoeuvring within school culture for effective leadership.

The main aim of this research is to get a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and problems encountered by school administrators in their first years of a new leadership position. This study tries to elucidate the intricacies of the adaption process by concentrating on the initial phases of their tenure. It aims to investigate the diverse circumstances and obstacles students face as they start to comprehend the prevailing school culture, informal norms, and established behavioural patterns within the school community.

This research seeks to examine the techniques and methods utilised by these principles to navigate and influence the emerging cultural landscape. What methods do they employ to collect data on the school's culture? What strategies do they employ to cultivate connections with staff, students, and parents? How do they recognise and mitigate cultural norms that may impede student learning or obstruct effective leadership? It aims to identify and suggest answers to the issues and barriers faced by principals during this critical adaption phase. This research attempts to provide valuable insights and practical guidance for future principals by examining the experiences of these leaders, thereby equipping them with the necessary expertise and abilities to effectively manage the intricacies of school culture and lead their institutions effectively.

### **Problem statement**

The efficacy of every educational institution is profoundly affected by the proficiency and quality of its leadership. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that seasoned administrators have the most capacity to convert poor schools into successful institutions (Leithwood, 2000).

Nevertheless, even seasoned principals, upon their appointment to new schools, encounter the problem of acclimatising to a foreign environment and school culture. The adaptation process, regardless of whether for novice or experienced leaders, might profoundly influence their capacity to lead and execute successfully in their new position.

Each school has a distinctive culture, defined by its specific dynamics, surroundings, and established traditions. Consequently, newly appointed principals may face numerous challenges during their transition, such as managing the expectations and requirements of diverse stakeholders (teachers, students, parents), conforming to established administrative regulations, and comprehending the school's historical performance and current academic status (Hallinger, 2010). Although many studies have explored the difficulties encountered by school principals and the methods they utilise to cultivate effective schools, research specifically addressing the adaptation process of newly appointed principals—especially their strategies for comprehending and manoeuvring through the distinct culture and stakeholder dynamics of their new institution—remains scarce.

Additional study within the Azerbaijani context is essential to yield significant insights for seasoned professionals in the education sector. This research will provide future leaders with the critical skills and knowledge required to adeptly manage the challenges of their new responsibilities and foster successful, supportive learning environments for all students.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What are the newly appointed school principals' experiences during their early stages of leadership in a new environment?

a) What strategies do the newly appointed school principals employ to explore and get to know their new environment?

### **Significance of the study**

Effective leadership is fundamental to the success of schools. Although research underscores the pivotal role of principals in enhancing school performance (Leithwood, 2000), there is a limitation of studies that particularly investigate the experiences of newly appointed principals in rural contexts. Rural schools frequently have specific problems, including resource scarcity, isolation, and a distinctive community setting (Fullan, 2001). These characteristics can profoundly influence the leadership experiences of newly appointed principals. Comprehending how these leaders manoeuvre through hurdles and adjust to their new positions is essential for enhancing educational performance in rural regions.

This study seeks to examine the experiences of newly appointed school administrators in rural areas of Azerbaijan. The results will guide professional development initiatives for both prospective and existing school leaders, and offer essential insights for policymakers and educational administrators aiming to enhance the performance of rural schools.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Effective school leadership is creating a persuasive vision and motivating people to embrace that goal (Spillane, 2004). This exemplary leadership is crucial for promoting creativity and establishing a conducive learning atmosphere that facilitates student growth and achievement (Leithwood, 2000).

This literature study analyses the experiences of beginner and seasoned school administrators, emphasising the tactics they utilised over their employment. It examines how newly appointed principals perceive and endeavour to create value in their leadership responsibilities, and how these attitudes affect their relationships with school stakeholders (Day, 2009). The main aim of this study is to consolidate existing academic studies about the experiences of principals in newly established school environments. This encompasses comprehending how new principals acclimatise to their environment, manage relationships with various stakeholders, and formulate successful ways for engaging with the school community.

Despite the fact that novice principals were appropriately provided to a new school, as previously mentioned, they will be appointed to a new school five years later under the "rotation" process. It is anticipated that the research findings will give valuable insights to professionals in the field, thereby assisting future leaders in the acquisition of the necessary skills and characteristics to positively influence the teaching and learning environment in their institutions. The primary objective of the research is to gather the principals' reflections and memories regarding their experiences during the adaptation period to a new environment, investigate the strategies they employ to comprehend and influence the culture of a new school, and suggest solutions for avoiding potential obstacles. School principals are not the primary source of advice for principals regarding curriculum, evaluation, teaching techniques, and support strategies (Gümüş, 2021). Analysing the roles and responsibilities that various actors play in overseeing a system's educational facilities and how their interactions impact the system's ability to adapt to shifting student requirements and educational demands is the focus of *Governing the School Network* (OECD, 2018). Wise school leaders acknowledge the mutually beneficial effects of parents on the academic achievement of their children, as well as the significance of these relationships in the operation of high-functioning schools (Letuma, 2023).

This literature evaluation emphasises publications published in the past five to ten years to guarantee the incorporation of the most contemporary and pertinent research findings. The analysis also examines studies undertaken in adjacent countries, including Turkey, Georgia, and Kazakhstan. Analysing the experiences and techniques utilised by principals in these nations provides significant insights into the problems and possibilities encountered by newly appointed principals in Azerbaijan, considering the common socio-cultural and educational settings of the area.

### **Assessment of Principals Post-Appointment in Azerbaijani Public Schools**

The Ministry of Science and Education (2015) stipulates a probationary term for all newly appointed school principals, irrespective of their assignment to a new school via the rotation procedure. The principal's performance undergoes stringent evaluation during this period. To guarantee openness and impartiality, a duo of independent assessors conducts a visit to the institution. The evaluators conduct thorough talks with the principle, deputy principals, teaching staff and students to acquire a complete knowledge of the principal's performance.

Additionally, the Ministry obtains weekly performance statistics from "Məktəblinin Dostu," offering objective and transparent insights on the principal's efficacy. The data, along with the observations and feedback collected by the evaluation team, enables the Ministry to evaluate the principal's capacity to effectively execute educational reforms and initiatives while complying with all pertinent Azerbaijani laws and regulations, including the Law on Education (Ministry of Science and Education, 2015).

Assuming a new school leadership position poses considerable hurdles for principals. They must swiftly acclimatise to the distinct culture, protocols, and dynamics of their new workplace

(Bottom, 2003). This encompasses recognising the school's strengths and areas needing enhancement. Although soliciting guidance from educators on curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical methods is essential, administrators frequently neglect the significant perspectives that may be derived from their teaching personnel (Gümüş, 2021).

By actively collaborating with their educators, administrators may proficiently tackle school difficulties, pinpoint opportunities for professional growth, and assist underperforming instructors. This may be accomplished through several techniques, including facilitating focus group talks and participating in individual meetings with instructors. By attentively considering their teachers' viewpoints, administrators may utilise the combined knowledge inside the school to cultivate a culture of development and efficiently tackle everyday obstacles (Marks, 2003).

Effective school leadership requires more than just administrative skills; it demands visionary leadership that inspires and motivates the entire school community (Spillane & Diamond, 2004). This visionary leadership is crucial for fostering a positive and supportive learning environment that empowers student success (Leithwood, 2000). This literature review examines the experiences of both novice and experienced school principals, focusing on the strategies they employ to navigate the complexities of their roles (Day, 2009).

A key aspect of successful leadership is understanding and adapting to the unique culture and context of a new school environment. This involves building strong relationships with teachers, staff, students, and the wider school community (Sergiovanni, 2009). Newly appointed principals must actively seek to understand the school's strengths, weaknesses, and the existing norms and expectations within the school community. This literature review focuses on articles published within the last five to ten years to ensure the inclusion of the most current and relevant research findings. To gain a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by

newly appointed principals, this review also considers research conducted in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, given the shared socio-cultural and educational contexts within this region. By examining the experiences and strategies employed by principals in these diverse contexts, this review aims to provide valuable insights for aspiring and current school leaders in Azerbaijan, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities of their leadership roles.

According to Marks (2003), a good school must promote high academic accomplishment while simultaneously nurturing a welcoming and helpful learning atmosphere. This entails cultivating robust ties within the school community, upholding elevated standards of education, and persistently endeavouring to enhance school culture. Acknowledging the essential role of parents in their children's education, astute school administrators proactively endeavour to forge collaborative ties with families (Letuma, 2023). This frequently entails establishing a purposeful and inclusive strategy for parent participation, including the organisation of regular and substantive parent-teacher meetings. Schools that successfully engage with their communities gain significant information and support from parents and other community stakeholders (Oudat, 2021). These collaborations cultivate a feeling of collective accountability and enable parents to engage actively in school planning and decision-making activities.

Regular parent-teacher conferences offer a crucial forum for transparent communication and cooperation. These sessions provide administrators the opportunity to hear parents' concerns, respond to their enquiries, and clearly convey the school's vision and objectives. By offering parents consistent and comprehensive feedback about their child's academic advancement, administrators exhibit a dedication to individual student achievement and cultivate a robust sense of trust and collaboration within the school community. This method not only improves

communication but also fosters a more pleasant and engaging learning atmosphere for all students (Moran, 2015).

### **Key Responsibilities and Challenges of School Principals**

School principals in Turkey are required to adhere to the core values and objectives of Turkish National Education. Their tasks include cultivating robust relationships with parents, students, and teachers, ensuring the school have the requisite resources and facilities for effective education, and proactively tackling new difficulties (Tüzel, 2017). Moreover, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2013) underscores the significance of leadership across several domains, such as the advancement of teachers and students, promoting cooperation and productivity, connecting the school with the community, and nurturing a constructive school culture. A primary objective for newly appointed principals in Turkey is to improve student academic performance and promote their moral growth. This strongly fits with the primary objectives of Turkish National Education.

In Kazakhstan, school principals possess considerable power, encompassing the oversight of the entire institution and the approval of the school timetable and class schedules (OECD, 2015). A significant distinction in the appointment process is the selection of educators, which is predominantly the principal's duty in Kazakhstan, whereas in Azerbaijan, the recruiting process starts with the dissemination of the MIQ (MoE, 2022). In Georgia, principals are anticipated to function within the distinct cultural and value framework of each school. This requires a significant focus on developing and maintaining connections with all stakeholders in the school community (Felecia, 2016).

### **Mentorship, Networking, and Advancement in Academic Career**

In the evolving realm of academia, effective career advancement depends on a combination of essential criteria. Networking, mentorship, and advancement possibilities are essential components. These interrelated characteristics significantly affect an individual's academic trajectory, directly influencing their self-efficacy, cultivating confidence, improving performance, and promoting professional development. Mentors give essential insights, provide constructive criticism, and assist mentees in manoeuvring the intricacies of academic life, including research obstacles, funding acquisition, and career advancement.

Networking offers essential opportunity to engage with peers, foster partnerships, and access a variety of viewpoints and research prospects. It cultivates a feeling of community inside the academic realm, enabling the exchange of ideas, information, and support. Mentorship provides essential insight and assistance from seasoned experts. Career progression, encompassing promotions and leadership possibilities, serves as a concrete indicator of success and inspires individuals to pursue excellence in their research and teaching activities. The collaborative interaction among networking, mentorship, and promotion cultivates a dynamic atmosphere that enhances professional development, stimulates creativity, and ultimately advances knowledge within the academic community.

Career progression in academia is closely associated with various critical criteria, with promotion acting as a major incentive. Promotions offer both material benefits and act as significant motivators, fostering diligence, ongoing professional growth, and, ultimately, enhanced employee achievement (Clarke, 2011). Although credentials, performance assessments, and skill development are essential for job advancement, one must recognise the possible impact of gender prejudice. The "glass ceiling" phenomenon denotes the unseen obstacles that impede women's progress in the workplace, potentially affecting their career paths substantially.

Establishing robust professional networks and fostering significant mentorship ties are essential for principals' career progression in academia. Clarke (2011) asserts that building social capital through networking and mentoring would thus appear to be one way of advancing their careers to senior management positions. Through proactive participation in networking endeavours and soliciting advice from seasoned mentors, school administrators may effectively address the complexities of the academic environment, enhance their professional reputations, and elevate their visibility within their domains.

This literature study offers an extensive examination of the challenges encountered by newly appointed school administrators in Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, especially during the initial stages of their leadership tenures in a novel setting. Utilising peer-reviewed literature, the study discerned similarities in the problems and triumphs encountered by principals in various circumstances. The assessment emphasised the vital significance of adaptability for newly appointed principals. This involves adeptly manoeuvring through the intricacies of a new educational setting, fostering robust connections with many stakeholders, and formulating effective approaches to comprehend the school's culture and community.

The study highlighted the importance of strategic leadership, which involves developing robust connections with teachers, staff, and the broader school community, as well as promoting a collaborative and supportive school environment. By actively involving stakeholders, considering their viewpoints, and resolving their issues, administrators may foster a more pleasant and engaging educational atmosphere for all students. This literature review offers essential information for newly appointed principals in navigating the obstacles associated with their positions. These findings may guide professional development initiatives, enhance effective leadership practices, and ultimately improve educational results for children across all four nations.

### **Gaps in the literature**

A considerable amount of current research about the experiences of newly appointed school leaders predominantly depends on studies performed in adjacent countries. This dependence on research from other settings highlights a significant deficiency in our comprehension of the distinct problems and possibilities encountered by school leaders in the Azerbaijani public education system. The absence of scholastic studies in Azerbaijan is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the data regarding newly appointed novice and previously experienced school principals is derived from articles from neighbouring countries. In order to address this gaps, additional research is necessary in the Azerbaijani context to gain a comprehensive comprehension of the experiences of school principals in new school settings.

Moreover, contemporary research frequently neglects to sufficiently tackle the distinct difficulties and possibilities faced by newly appointed principals in Azerbaijani public schools. This knowledge gap requires more study in the Azerbaijani context to provide a thorough grasp of the experiences and viewpoints of these educational leaders.

### **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This study utilised a qualitative methodology, acknowledging its appropriateness for examining intricate phenomena and obtaining profound insights into the viewpoints and experiences of educational leaders. Qualitative research, as articulated by Polkinghorne (2005), emphasises comprehending how individuals see and interpret their social reality. It aims to explore beyond superficial observations to reveal the fundamental reasons. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, which sought to examine and characterise the experiences of school leaders in an innovative manner, qualitative methodologies were considered most suitable. Exploratory research, as highlighted by Yin (1994), Rapley (2013), and Mohajan (2018), is essential for

acquiring a profound comprehension of intricate difficulties, producing novel insights, and developing new research enquiries. This study employed qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the viewpoints, behaviours, and experiences of school leaders within their specific circumstances.

This research study utilised a qualitative technique, as this methodology was most appropriate for the exploratory character of the research issue. Creswell (2014) emphasises that researchers must meticulously evaluate the characteristics of their study challenge when choosing a suitable research method. A qualitative method was considered most appropriate as it did not necessitate the measurement or statistical analysis of data. Qualitative research has several benefits, notably its flexibility and adaptability. In contrast to quantitative research, which often utilises organised questionnaires and fixed response possibilities, qualitative research permits enhanced spontaneity and flexibility in the interaction between researcher and participant (Corbin, 2014). Qualitative research often utilises open-ended questions that allow participants to articulate their views and experiences in their own language, yielding more comprehensive (Mack, 2005).

Moreover, qualitative research is especially adept at investigating study issues that encompass unknown factors or necessitate a comprehensive comprehension of intricate occurrences. Qualitative research facilitates a profound examination of individual viewpoints and experiences, yielding crucial insights that quantitative approaches may overlook.

### **Research Site and Population**

<b>Participant Information</b>
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<b>Rural Principal 1</b>	<b>Position: Principal</b> <b>Workplace: School located in Tovuz</b> <b>Age: 43</b> <b>Years of school leadership experience: 3 years</b>
<b>Rural Principal 2</b>	<b>Position: Principal</b> <b>Workplace: School located in Guba</b> <b>Age: 35</b>

This study entailed a joint initiative with school principals from several regions of Azerbaijan, encompassing both rural areas. To guarantee the participation of principals from geographically different regions, especially those in rural areas, online platforms like Microsoft Teams were employed for data collecting.

Although internet platforms enhanced communication and data gathering, the study team acknowledged the necessity of fostering human rapport and guaranteeing data collecting accuracy. Consequently, individual interviews were performed with all participating principals, irrespective of their geographical location. Administering these interviews in Azerbaijani, the participants' mother tongue, established a conducive and familiar atmosphere, promoting candid and sincere dialogue and motivating participants to express their opinions and experiences openly. This method facilitated the acquisition of comprehensive and intricate data while adeptly managing the logistical difficulties inherent in conducting research across varied geographical areas.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Strategy**

This study focused on novice and newly appointed school principals who had assumed their leadership roles within the past two to three years. This timeframe ensured that the

participants' experiences were recent and directly relevant to the research objectives. The selection process for participants adhered to a succession system, prioritizing individuals who had recently transitioned to a new school leadership role. This approach aligns with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasizes the importance of selecting "information-rich" cases that can provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002).

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, including comprehensive interviews with six main questions. Participant selection was informed by intentional sampling, a method that prioritises people capable of yielding substantial and meaningful data (Cohen et al., 2007). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) assert that deliberate sampling emphasises the selection of participants who are most likely to yield significant insights and enhance the researchers' comprehension of the studied phenomena. This methodology is especially appropriate for this research, as it seeks to provide comprehensive insights into the experiences of rural school principal throughout their initial professional years. By deliberately choosing individuals capable of offering detailed and insightful narratives of their experiences, the researchers may obtain the most pertinent data for this study.

I aimed to gather extensive and pertinent data on the methods employed by principals from these specific backgrounds as they adapted to the culture of different schools. I sought to investigate the possible differences in these techniques across rural educational settings (Palinkas, 2013).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This research utilised semi-structured interviews as the principal approach for data collecting. Semi-structured interviews are seen very effective for examining individual viewpoints

and comprehending the reasons that drive human behaviour (Kvale, 1996). This methodology facilitated adaptability in inquiry, enabling researchers to respond to emerging themes and explore individuals' distinct experiences more thoroughly (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This adaptability guaranteed that the study stayed attuned to the subtleties of participants' narratives, facilitating a more comprehensive and profound knowledge of the phenomena being examined.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews enhanced the interactivity and engagement of the data collecting process, enabling researchers to establish relationships with participants and attain a more profound comprehension of their viewpoints. This methodology was very beneficial in this study, since it allowed researchers to investigate the research aims while collecting extensive and informative data from participants (Guest et al., 2012).

### **Validity**

This research utilised semi-structured interviews as the principal approach for data collecting. Semi-structured interviews are seen very effective for examining individual viewpoints and comprehending the reasons that drive human behaviour (Kvale, 1996). This methodology facilitated adaptability in inquiry, enabling researchers to respond to emerging themes and explore individuals' distinct experiences more thoroughly (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This adaptability guaranteed that the study stayed attuned to the subtleties of participants' narratives, facilitating a more comprehensive and profound knowledge of the phenomena being examined.

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study, since it allowed researchers to investigate the research aims while collecting extensive and informative data from participants (Guest et al., 2012).

### **Ethical considerations**

Prior to the interviews, participants received comprehensive information on the study's aims. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasised the need of prioritising research ethics, especially regarding participant anonymity. The respondents' readiness to sign permission forms was contingent upon their confidence in our capacity to safeguard their privacy. Consequently, the permission form served as both a procedural requirement and a sincere pledge to safeguard participants' confidentiality (Singh, 2014). This method was crucial for preserving study integrity and fostering trust with participants (Nahl 2020; Anderson 2007). Moreover, participant confidentiality was safeguarded by the use of pseudonyms and the secure storage of all data, including transcripts and recordings, ensuring that only the study team may access them. To enhance the protection of participants' identities, all personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts.

### **Study Limitations**

Recognising and comprehending various constraints is essential for a precise and dependable research investigation. In conducting the research, we may encounter restrictions like insufficient literature, issues of generalisability, and time limits.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

## Data analysis

### Research Questions:

1. What are the newly appointed school principals' experiences during their early stages of leadership in a new environment?

a) What strategies do the newly appointed school principals employ to explore and get to know their new environment?

Additional research is necessary in the Azerbaijan context to provide valuable insights for the experienced educators in this field and to assist emerging leaders in developing the essential skills necessary to establish a successful teaching and learning environment in their institutions.

Leadership in schools is the process of having a vision and an inspiration, and then sharing those qualities with others in order to acquire followers. In the same way, school leadership involves incorporating numerous creative parts of education in order to contribute to the growth and success of students. Two public school principals were selected for interviews, and information was gathered through those interviews. Based on the data, school leaders have publicly disclosed the diverse experiences they have encountered and the challenges they faced when transitioning to various educational environments. Both school principals are from Baku public schools.

Rural Principal 1 (F.M)	Rural Principal 2 (T.K)
<b>Position: Principal</b>	<b>Position: Principal</b>
<b>Workplace: School located in Tovuz</b>	<b>Workplace: School located in Guba</b>
<b>Age: 43</b>	<b>Age: 35</b>

<b>Years of school leadership experience: 3 years</b>	<b>Years of school leadership experience: 2 years</b>
<b>Educational background: ESL Teacher</b>	<b>Educational background: History Teacher</b>

The expertise of School Principal 1 encompasses a three-year tenure as a director. Furthermore, she has completed 13 internships throughout their professional duration. Presently, the principal is seeking a master's degree in educational administration from ADA University. She has actively engaged in a variety of pertinent development training courses to enhance her abilities further. The principal disclosed that she has been employed as an educator at Lachin District High School for a decade. She has been serving as the school principal for the past three years, a position she obtained by effectively completing the mandatory exam to pass for being school principal in 2020.

School Principal 2 completed secondary education at No. 180 in the Qizildash settlement and thereafter enrolled in the Mathematics Faculty of the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University named after N. Tusi. Possessing experience in the subject of education. One of principals emphasized the existence of a system in the institution. If there is a system that is well-organised at any institution, the process will be carried out in a sequential and smooth manner, and any problems that arise will be readily resolved. During the month that she was out from work due to illness two years ago, the principal claims that she was unable to go to work and maintain control over everything in the immediate vicinity. On the other hand, she was very certain that everything was completed and prepared for the appropriate structure. The most effective guardians of school guidelines, even in the principal's absence, were the deputy principals, educators, and students, exhibiting a significant level of accountability and discipline. Students were aware of school regulations and discipline, and they adhered to the norms.

School Principal 2 highlighted the significance of educating students for the welfare of our country and community as a foundation for national growth that would provide human capital for the future. She stated that students are our investment in becoming professional experts in the labour market, facilitated by a high-quality education system. Around the world, education is viewed as the key to empowering people and countries to adapt to quick social and economic change.

School Principal 1 stated that her primary purpose was not to assume the role of principal. She recognised that her job advancement was considerably influenced by her family, especially her father, who was an educator. She pursued a career in teaching, despite her initial ambitions to become a lawyer or journalist, as per her father's guidance. The principal disclosed her mother's long-standing aspiration for her to become a school principal and expressed their developing affection for the profession. Then she applied to this position, it was hard but she was satisfied.

The principal started her career at the school as an educator. Upon assuming a leadership position, she inherited a well-established system from her esteemed and experienced predecessor. She recognised the necessity for a more explicit differentiation between professional and personal connections within the educational setting. She instituted a policy prioritising a professional approach during school hours, but recognising personal interactions beyond the educational environment. This strategy aimed to cultivate a more concentrated and efficient work atmosphere, particularly in light of the enduring ties among the staff members.

School Principal 1 emphasised the importance of maintaining positive connections within the organisation on several occasions. She highlighted that she is not a serious person who has lots of boundaries between school community, rather she just maintains a clear boundary between her personal and professional situations of life.:

*“Upon my initial arrival, I requested the previous principal to maintain a professional attitude in the office and a personal one in his private life. However, within the school gates, we are merely colleagues, and we will, of course, expect each other to perform their duties within the restrictions of the law.” (F.M)*

Conversely, she wanted to establish a triangular relationship among parents, the school, and the student. Not only she kept her affection, but she also stick to her hard and serious standards. It is essential for a leader to have trust in the members of the team. According to her, whenever you have someone you can rely on, you can overcome any obstacle. It is comparable to climbing a mountain. The majority of parents lack formal education, are not aware of all the regulations in schools. Because their family had not allowed them to continue the educational life. In their tradition and mindset, especially women's top priority in life is to get married and have kids. When these girls grow up and have been a parent cannot reach innovations in education. They frequently gathered in the school hallway, engaging in conversation, gossip, and disturbing the instructional process. They monitored all comings and goings, exerting control over everyone, and she saw that their recreational activities. She limited parental access, allowing them to approach a designated door; nevertheless, meetings with the teacher or attendance at lessons require permission from the principal. They will invariably provide assistance. This is an open area. She is firmly opposed to attending and conversing during the day. Initially, they encountered challenges; nonetheless, they subsequently elucidated the matter, leading to comprehension.

The leadership journey of Principal 2 was significantly influenced by her school teaching experience. Not only did she improve her abilities, but she also gained invaluable insights into the intricacies of the Azerbaijani public education system as a result of overcoming initial challenges. She drew inspiration from the strategies of previous female leaders, analysing their successes and

failures. The principal is of the opinion that female leaders in Azerbaijan have the potential to serve as a powerful example for newer generations. They can motivate other women to pursue leadership positions by showcasing their capabilities and eliminating stereotypes. Additionally, female leaders can advocate for the needs and perspectives of all students, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment:

*“Women holding leadership positions prove that the role of women in society is undeniable. At first, there are many difficulties. But as you overcome them, you learn many things.” (T.K)*

Furthermore, School Principal 2 concentrated on the impact of female leadership on the Azerbaijani education system and more significant leadership challenges. This was in stark contrast to the previous school principal. Despite the absence of a direct discussion regarding familial engagement strategies, she underscored the importance of creating a learning environment that is both egalitarian and inclusive. Her leadership style was more student-centered and centred on the empowerment of others.

In the beginning of her career, School Principal 1 encountered a number of challenges, the most of which were mainly due to the fact that she was an older principal than the other members of her staff. Although some individuals were receptive, others found it challenging to accept supervision from a new principal. Nonetheless, she contends that they adapted to the circumstances with time. She asserted that leadership is not conditional upon age and that competent leaders may arise at any point in their lives. Due to her experience with the area, she expected certain obstacles. She observed that a significant impediment in Tovuz was parents being preoccupied with matters unrelated to their children's education which is the same situation with School Principal 2.

*“I made an organised effort to prevent it, namely by preventing my students from having the opportunity to marry and start families with other people. There were three families that made an effort to persuade me to allow them to withdraw their children from studying. When I saw that I was unable to complete the task on my own, I made a request for assistance from the Ministry of Science and Education. Due to the fact that in situations like these, they would assist me in including students in the educational process.” (F.M)*

School Principal 2 faced substantial obstacles upon assuming the position of school principal, particularly the lack of discipline among the student body. In order to resolve this issue, she implemented strategies to enhance the learning environment and restore order at the school. Furthermore, she prioritized the recruitment and retention of qualified educators to improve the quality of education. Because of her efforts, the academic atmosphere at the school was significantly transformed, which was a direct outcome of her actions. Following her appointment, she emphasised the significance of constructing a system in order to be seen as an experienced leader within the context of the implementation of educational policy.

*“If you want to be a leader, you need to have such power that even the most dissatisfied parents would be reluctant to raise their voices. First things first, we have to construct a system at the school. Every single student at the school has to be aware of their obligations and maintain control over their behaviour. The most important thing is to maintain an open and objective stance.” (T.K)*

The respondents both encountered challenging circumstances during their leadership roles; however, the nature and severity of these obstacles were significantly different. Social attitudes and age discrimination were the primary issues that School Principal 1 encountered, while School Principal 2's primary challenge was primarily related to the administration and development of the

school. Conversely, both individuals demonstrated resilience and effective leadership strategies to overcome these obstacles.

School Principal 1 clarified that the region in which she worked was socially disadvantaged, with a significant number of parents living in rented housing and working extended hours. This led to the frequent neglect of their children's education by these parents. Even going so far as to collect students from their homes, the staff at the school regularly took on the role of parents and assumed parental responsibilities. In spite of the prejudice she received from some parents, she persisted in her efforts to ensure that children were enrolled in school. She was notably resolute in her efforts to prevent young females from entering into early marriages, and she was willing to use legal action when necessary..

She was enquired about the extent to which her early teaching experiences influenced her leadership trajectory within the Azerbaijani public school system. She clarified that her teaching experience was indispensable for comprehending the intricacies of the educational environment. She emphasised the significance of practical experience, proposing that individuals appointed to the Ministry of Science and Education should possess an additional support by trainings in both teaching and school leadership. She acquired firsthand knowledge of the system and its challenges by beginning her career as a teacher. She observed that, in contrast to some of the more recent appointees, she was already acquainted with online systems, underscoring the importance of practical expertise in effective leadership.

School Principal 1 identified the unique obstacles that female leaders encounter in Azerbaijani public institutions, particularly during the initial phases of their careers. She stated that she has not personally experienced any substantial challenges as a result of her gender. She underscored the significance of strong character, irrespective of gender, and observed that certain

male leaders have demonstrated inferior leadership qualities in comparison to her own. The stereotype that women are more emotive, and males are more rational was also addressed by her, who contended that this is not always the case. She emphasised the significance of male instructors in schools, particularly for the development of male students, while also acknowledging the potential challenges women may encounter in specific situations:

*“When I appointed to this school first, there was a biased approach towards me that provokes the staff me like an emotional, sensitive and weak character as a leader because of my gender. They of course male instructors have also a crucial role for male students to grow up as a gentleman with strong character, but this is not correct attitude tor female leaders and instructors as well. (T.K)*

When School Principal 1 was enquired as to whether she had any mentors or role models who had a significant impact on her early career as a female leader in Azerbaijani public schools. She stated that her father was her primary role models. She drew inspiration from their positive attributes and benefited from their experience. She also mentioned that her familiarity with the staff facilitated her transition into a leadership role.

She responded that she is of the opinion that the region's socio-economic conditions and the educational disparities between urban and rural areas are the primary challenges. She emphasised the difficulties of working in a region where socioeconomic factors frequently result in parents' lack of involvement in their children's education. She has prioritised the enhancement of school infrastructure and the motivation of students in order to confront these obstacles. She frequently employed her personal assets to provide essential supplies and incentives. While acknowledging the benefits of urban schools, which include facilities such as computers, libraries, science rooms, and all subject books, as well as the opportunity to participate in olimpiads and

chess competitions, the principal emphasised the significance of addressing the specific needs of rural schools and making certain that all students have access to a quality education. After her appointment, she was concentrating on the next steps in the process of organising the school's internal topic competitions.

As a female leader, the principal's career path has been greatly impacted by the Azerbaijani public education system. Principal 2 clarified that obtaining respect and obedience might occasionally be more challenging for women in leadership roles, and that not everyone is immediately receptive of a female leader. She talked about how these encounters have influenced her leadership style and methodology, requiring her to adjust and come up with creative ways to encourage:

*“To become a leader, of course, it is not enough to hold a leadership position. For this, you need to constantly work, work on yourself. It had a direct impact. Because not everyone can accept a female leader, especially. For many, obeying her and carrying out her orders is unacceptable. I guess it also comes from their family. I am not sure, but I can say that teachers also accept men as an only strong character, not also women.” (T.K)*

She recognised that challenges are unavoidable in any new position. She encountered resistance from some more traditional teachers who were hesitant to adopt innovative approaches in her situation. She implemented strategies to cultivate a more structured learning environment as a leader who prioritised order and discipline. As she observed most teachers merely focused on teaching students in a traditional ways without modern methods, and they were not willing to learn new techniques and technological ways to educate. Therefore she requested them to join online sessions which organized by the Ministry of Education and Science. When School Principal 2 looked back on her early career, she found a number of important occasions and elements such as

educational forums in Sweden, Japan, France and training in Azerbaijan that had a big impact on her growth as a female leader in a public school in Azerbaijan. She underlined that in addition to having a leadership role, being a female leader necessitates constant self-improvement and commitment to one's career.

Initially, both school principals encountered obstacles in their capacities as leaders. Traditional teachers were hesitant to embrace new approaches, which prompted School Principal 1 to encounter resistance. In order to resolve this issue, she implemented strategies to establish a more structured and disciplined learning environment. In contrast, School Principal 2 concentrated on the more extensive influence of female leadership in the Azerbaijani educational system. She emphasised the significance of breaking down stereotypes and advocating for all students, drawing inspiration from previous female leaders.

Although both principals encountered obstacles, their leadership strategies and areas of emphasis were distinct. School Principal 1 prioritised the establishment of a structured and disciplined learning environment, while School Principal 2 concentrated on the empowerment of female leaders and the advocacy of student requirements.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

### **Creating a Culture of Trust and Respect in the School Environment**

Trust constitutes the foundation of effective organisations, promoting collaboration and facilitating favourable results. Its importance has grown significantly in today's dynamic and

linked society (Mackenzie, 2010). In the educational setting, fostering trust among staff members is essential for effective school leadership. By establishing trust and nurturing robust interpersonal connections, principals build a more positive and productive work environment. This, consequently, augments communication, fosters a more profound comprehension of school processes, and elevates overall school performance.

Jack (2023) asserts that accessibility, robust interpersonal relationships, and professional support are vital for the success of leaders, instructors, and the entire school. Trust is crucial in cultivating these fundamental components, enabling cooperation and establishing a supportive atmosphere in which all members of the school community may prosper.

### **“Diverse Strategies to Resolving Potential Conflicts and Exercising Leadership in Educational Institutions”**

School principals utilise many ways to adeptly manage issues and demonstrate leadership within their organisations. In rural environments, administrators may prioritise temporary solutions, such as staff reassignments, to tackle urgent challenges while continuously addressing the root causes of conflict, including matters pertaining to school culture and communication. Utilising crisis management frameworks, several principals use a three-phase strategy: prevention, reaction, and recovery (Smith, 2017). This strategy prioritises preemptive actions to avert conflicts, efficient communication and decision-making in crises, and comprehensive post-crisis assessment for learning and enhancement.

In urban environments, a priority is frequently placed on the equilibrium of authority, equity, and transparency. This entails establishing a systematic and nurturing atmosphere that promotes collective accountability and empowers every member of the school community. Moreover, establishing trust and cultivating a supportive atmosphere are essential for efficient

dispute resolution. Certain administrators prioritise fostering a happy and inclusive school environment, whilst others underscore the significance of consistent discipline and explicit standards. Managing potential stress and burnout is essential for the sustained well-being and efficacy of educational leaders. Resilience is essential for effectively addressing the difficulties of leadership (Tait, 2008).

Resilience is intrinsically connected to personal effectiveness, defined as an individual's capacity to act and attain desired results (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Furthermore, emotional intelligence, which includes many personal and social competencies, is essential for effective leadership (Bradley, 2021). Emotional intelligence empowers leaders to regulate their emotions, cultivate robust connections, and adeptly manoeuvre through the intricacies of the educational setting.

### **Leading for Success: Examining the Strategies and Styles of Effective School Principals**

By maintaining consistent contact and involvement with parents and the broader school community, school administrators have cultivated robust and trustworthy relationships. This collaborative method guarantees that parental concerns are meticulously evaluated and addressed during the formulation and execution of school policies and activities. Supportive leadership has been a topic of much discourse in educational leadership literature. One viewpoint highlights the fluid and context-dependent characteristics of dispersed leadership, acknowledging that it emerges from the interactions among school leaders, their subordinates, and the distinct situations they encounter (Spillane, 2005). Another approach considers distributed leadership as a process in which decision-making is collaboratively undertaken by diverse stakeholders engaged in school leadership across several levels (OECD, 2014).

In rural areas characterised by cultural variety, it is essential for principals to exhibit respect for all constituents of the school community, including children and families from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This inclusive strategy enhances the school community and corresponds with the tenets of servant leadership, which underscores the significance of serving others and prioritising community needs (Herman, 2005).

Democratic leadership significantly influences teacher efficacy. By cultivating a constructive and supportive atmosphere, servant leaders motivate educators to adopt their professional responsibilities, refine their interactions with peers, and elevate their teaching methodologies (Cerit, 2009; Crippen, 2010). This therefore fosters a more pleasant and engaging educational atmosphere for all kids. Democratic leadership, or participatory leadership, prioritises collaborative decision-making and the active engagement of team members in shaping the organization's direction and objectives. In contrast to authoritarian leadership styles that centralise authority in one individual, democratic leaders promote open communication, appreciate multiple viewpoints, and proactively solicit feedback from their team members.

The success of any school ultimately relies on the collaborative efforts of all members of the school community. By cultivating trust, teamwork, and a collective sense of purpose, educational leaders may establish a constructive and supportive atmosphere conducive to the flourishing of all students.

### **STUDY LIMITATIONS**

This study possesses many limitations that must be acknowledged when analysing the results. Firstly, the sample size was quite limited, comprising only two participants (one female

principal and one male principal). This restricted sample size may not sufficiently reflect the varied experiences and viewpoints of the larger community of school leaders. As a result, the applicability of the findings to a broader educational setting may be restricted. Secondly, the interview procedure, albeit informative, at times surpassed the expected period, stretching past the first forty minutes. The extended duration of the interview may have unintentionally affected participant replies, thus injecting biases into the results. These constraints must be meticulously evaluated when interpreting and deriving inferences from the results of this study.

## CONCLUSION

This study effectively fulfilled its research aims by thoroughly investigating the experiences of newly appointed school leaders. The research, via comprehensive analysis, found significant problems encountered by these leaders, such as external demands from superiors, managing internal disputes within the school community, and adjusting to the distinctive dynamics of a new educational environment. The research underlines the significance for resilience and adaptation in addressing these difficulties. Effective leadership necessitates the capacity to manage intricate circumstances, settle disagreements proficiently, and cultivate robust connections with all stakeholders.

Effective school leadership necessitates a comprehensive strategy that includes promoting a welcoming and inclusive school environment, enhancing emotional intelligence, balancing authority with empathy, prioritising transparent communication, and formulating effective conflict resolution procedures. By cultivating an atmosphere in which all members of the school community feel esteemed and acknowledged, leaders may promote a sense of belonging and stimulate active engagement. Developing emotional intelligence enables leaders to successfully comprehend and regulate their own emotions while exhibiting empathy and compassion towards

others. Reconciling power with empathy guarantees that judgements are rendered with both decisiveness and equity, prioritising the welfare of students and the educational community. Moreover, transparent and courteous communication among all stakeholders is essential for establishing trust and promoting a collaborative atmosphere. By formulating and executing effective conflict resolution techniques, leaders may proactively tackle obstacles and sustain a pleasant and supportive educational atmosphere for everyone.

By successfully confronting these problems and executing these techniques, school leaders may proficiently manage the intricacies of their responsibilities, cultivate robust connections with stakeholders, and ultimately provide a good and supportive learning environment for all children.

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