# Defining an empowering school culture (ESC): Teacher perceptions

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The purpose of this study was to determine the profile of an empowering school culture (ESC) with respect to the perceptions of teachers. Qualitative methods and techniques were used in the study, which is phenomenological in terms of research designs used in qualitative researches. The participants in the study were 43 secondary school teachers working in the Gaziantep province of Turkey. Study data were acquired via a semi-structured interview technique. Content and frequency analyses were applied on the acquired data, finding that the dominant characteristics of ESC emphasise a sense of confidence, change, innovation and collaborative management. Teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, strong social relationships and leadership of the school principal are the primary generated characteristics of ESC as results of the reflections of empowerment. Therefore, it is concluded that ESC is both change and pragmatism oriented. Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that school principals should not refrain from sharing their responsibilities with teachers and should build close relationships with them in order to gain their trust.

#### Introduction

Developments in the fields of technology and knowledge compel all kinds of organisations to have an awareness of change and to implement different managerial practices for responding more rapidly to changes. Empowerment is becoming a necessity for responding to these developments and changes (Baird & Wang, 2010; Darling, 1996). Empowerment can be considered either as a goal or as a process. Empowerment as a goal emphasises having control, but empowerment as a process emphasises determining the goals and means necessary to create professional relations (Tengland, 2008). Empowerment brings people into decision-making (Darling, 1996; Rowlands, 1995) as a process and provides future-oriented management instead of dealing with daily routines (Baird & Wang, 2010) as a goal.

Teacher empowerment of course has a scope different from the empowerment of other school shareholders or staff working outside the education sector, and it enables the acquisition of different results. Teacher empowerment is defined according to the power that teachers have in participating in the decision-making processes related to school wide learning and teaching processes (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2005). Short and Rinehart (1992) explained teacher empowerment under six dimensions: participation of teachers in decision-making processes, professional development of teachers, teacher status, self-efficacy of teachers, teacher autonomy, and teacher impact on others and educational issues at school. The level of teacher empowerment is measured by how well teachers shape the operational and pedagogic culture (Talbert, 2003). Empowerment is used for expressing the appreciation and support of the organisation leaders regarding their employees (Bogler & Nir, 2012). School leaders may encourage the cooperation of

teachers in school reform with an understanding of distributive leadership, thus empowering by enabling them to evaluate their own learning environments (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). The inclusion of teachers in the decision making processes by way of participative leadership understanding enables teacher empowerment (Sarafidou & Chatziioannidis, 2013).

In the context of educational changes, teacher empowerment is an important tool for carrying out educational reforms at schools (Heck & Brandon, 1995). Carrying out the reforms requires consideration of both administrative and behavioural changes. Empowerment provides a new administrative framework and its outputs create changes in the behaviours of teachers. The outputs of teacher empowerment facilitate the adoption of changes, as well as implementation of new necessities by teachers at schools. There are many studies indicating the benefits of empowering teachers at schools. Empowerment has positive effects on organisational and professional commitment (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Keiser, 2007; Park, 2003), organisational citizenship behaviour (Aksel, Serinkan, Kızıloğlu & Aksoy, 2013; Bogler & Somech, 2004) and job satisfaction (Hung, 2005; Martino, 2003; Meng & Han, 2013). Teachers can feel that their work is more meaningful if principals emphasise the importance of the individual roles of teachers, as well as the work they do which supports school objectives during their interactions with other teachers (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005). In accordance with these findings, Beach (1996) stated that members of organisations feel a greater desire to take action when they are empowered. Teacher empowerment contributes to sustainability of the professional development of teachers, via the autonomy it supplies to the teachers and the positive impacts it makes on their job satisfaction. Enabling teachers to make their own decisions related to teaching processes within the scope of teacher empowerment also serves their professional development (Hine & Lavery, 2014). The establishment of professional learning communities that contribute to professional development of teachers as well as their progressive behaviour are also supported by empowering behaviours of school leaders (Hollingworth, 2012).

Studies carried out in Turkey on teacher empowerment have observed that it is an application that helps in the professional development of teachers, increasing student success as well as supporting the development of the school and the educational region (Kuzu, 2009). Even though these positive outcomes from teacher empowerment are emphasised, when findings on what is done to empower teachers are examined it is seen that these applications are not sufficient. Studies in this field indicate that teachers are seen as disempowered individuals who work devotedly with no thought of any personal gain (Yıldırım, Ünal & Çelik, 2011); that they are empowered in issues related only with the development of their effective behaviour, whilst they are not empowered in issues relating to autonomy, status and decision making as well as professional development (Mete, 2004).

The most important tool used in Turkey for teacher empowerment is in-service training, since professional development plays an effective role in development of teacher empowerment. However, serving teacher empowerment through this training is dependent on the arrangement of the school in line with the needs of the teacher.

Examining professional development activities carried out in Turkey shows that seminar participation activities are included in these types of activities, and that activities during which the teacher becomes active within the school are not sufficient (İlğan, 2013). Modular training programs have been prepared by the Ministry of Education (MoE) Teacher Training and Development Directorate in order to put forth a standard for inservice training, and ensure easy access to such training when required (MoE, 2013). According to the general evaluation results of the in-service training needs determination survey carried out in 2014 by the MoE Teacher Training and Development Directorate, teachers need training mostly in the fields of teaching technologies and material development, guidance, and class management. However, personal development topics such as conflict and stress management, communication skills and problem solving methods are also among the areas for which teachers need training. When the determined training needs are examined, it is observed that they may differ according to the attributes of teachers, schools and students. Thus, it is not possible to state that including every teacher in a standard training session will yield effective results. Hence, the best method for ensuring teacher empowerment under the current conditions of Turkey can be identified as school based applications carried out under the coordination of the school managers, addressing also the attitudes of the school managers regarding these issues.

Teachers' perceptions of empowerment are affected by different factors. The personalities of teachers, their positions in the school, the leadership style of the principal and their relationships to the principal can affect the empowerment perception of teachers (Lim, 2007). School culture is among the most important factors with impact on teacher empowerment (Baird & Wang, 2010; Edwards, Green & Lyons, 2002; Hill & Huq, 2004; Hokanson Hawks, 1999; Johnson, 2009; Maher, 2000; Rondeau & Wagar, 2012; Shakibaei, Khalkhali & Nezgad, 2012; Turro, 1996). Empowerment may be considered to be a result of organisational culture (Demircan Çakar & Ertürk, 2010). It is found to be a contributor to empowerment as well (Johnson, 2009). Therefore it can be said that empowerment is both a result and a characteristic of organisational culture. The culture of an organisation should be successful in empowering members of the organisation and it should also have strong connections with empowering teaching behaviours (Hokanson Hawks, 1999). Peterson and Speer (2000) stated that "ecological specificity" (p. 52) is important to ensure empowerment of members in an organisation and that it emphasises the fact that "organizational characteristics are uniquely important for members' empowerment within specific settings" (p.39). All initiatives regarding empowerment cannot reach the desired point, since there is no "one size fits all" approach in applying empowerment for every organisation, due to cultural differences among organisations. Each organisation should have its own empowerment philosophy and approach (Peterson, 1993).

In addition to cultural differences between organisations, speed of change and characteristics of knowledge-based communities require different re-organisations in each workplace. Corresponding to new necessities is possible through empowering members of the organisation in the scope of re-organisation implementations (Joo & Shim, 2010). Social patterns, in other words cultures, are also among the important dimensions of these re-organisational implementations for carrying out empowerment in organisations. On the one hand, social patterns of organisations make a major contribution to applying

empowerment practices; while on the other hand these are affected by the outcomes of empowerment practices. Empowerment has three dimensions, namely: "personal, close relationships and collective" (Rowlands, 1995, p.103). The collective dimension of empowerment requires taking culture into consideration, when seeking to empower teachers effectively. Similarly, Schwartz (2001) stated the importance of collaborative teacher empowerment rather than individual teacher empowerment on this topic. These issues point out the role of culture in empowerment practices.

Strength of organisational culture and empowerment are concepts that belong with each other. Culture is a factor determining the level of empowerment attainable in an organisation. Thanks to a strong culture, mission statements and content of communication may become clearer. Culture contributes to building relationships based on trust and communication, and therefore work can be carried out without any effects upon authority in an organisation (Mallak & Kurstedt, 1996). Empowerment can be strengthened by organisational culture. Organisational activities carried out with dependence on relationship structures reflect the characteristics of organisational culture. Organisational culture may be conducive to empowerment, if these characteristics are perceived positively by members of the organisation (Turro, 1996). Outcome oriented culture facilitates decisions on the ways that members of organisations work to reach their goals relating to autonomy in decision-making. This type of culture can more easily implement empowering practices (Baird & Wang, 2010). Having supportive culture along with a high-involvement in workplaces brings out positive outcomes related to the members of organisation. In case empowerment and letting members participate in decision making processes are included in an organisational culture, involvement of members occurs in a more easy and effective way in organisations. Enabling members of organisations to take part in decision making is an important component of an empowerment culture (Rondeau & Wagar, 2012).

Teacher empowerment is affected by various factors as mentioned before. Management (Gal-Or & Amit, 1998; Hill & Huq, 2004) and leadership (Blase & Blase, 1997; Donalson, 2001; Dono-Koulouris, 2003; Estep III, 2000; Heck & Brandon, 1995; Kirgan, 2009; Lim, 2007; Maher, 2000; Martino, 2003; Park, 2003; Peterson, 1993; Randolph, 1995) are other important factors, since management structures each aspect of the school and leadership guides the practices of school members. Empowerment is used as a managerial tool for adapting to the changing and complex structure of environment (Hill & Huq, 2004). Empowerment is seen as an effective strategy in modern management practices. Managers should pay attention to thinking 'outside of the box' regarding decision making processes, while deciding on which management style to use. Delegating responsibilities in decision making processes or having authority may be true management styles depending on the characteristics of conditions (Gal-Or & Amit, 1998). However, the changing of organisational culture towards empowerment is an issue that requires leadership (Randolph, 1995) rather than management. Studies that examine teacher empowerment psychologically examine how social factors such as the empowering behaviour of school leaders affect the work related output of teachers (Lee & Nie, 2014). Donalson (2001) and Kirgan (2009) determined a relationship between principal leadership and the teachers feeling empowered.

A workplace enabling teachers to work in a collaborative environment, while providing trust among teachers, can be created by school principals in the context of school culture (Edwards, Green & Lyons, 2002). School principals must shape school culture to empower teachers and distribute their leadership roles to teachers in line with this purpose (Peterson, 1993). Maher (2000) found that school culture acts as a kind of facilitator for principals to empower teachers via their principal leadership. The sense of empowerment of teachers is related to the facilitative leadership regarding issues that are related with the school as well as classrooms (Blase & Blase, 1997). Empowering leadership enables employees to make their own suggestions in addressing work-related issues. Leader trust can provide necessary facilities for hearing the voices of employees. "Participative decision making" and "informing" (p.789) are empowering leader behaviours, providing trust in leader-employee relationship. Participative decision making shows that leaders give importance to the opinions of employees and the informing behaviours of leaders ensure that employees are aware of the conditions and developments in the workplace (Gao, Janssen & Shi, 2011).

Determining which characteristics of school culture are necessary to enable teacher empowerment and reflection of teacher empowerment on school culture is important for shaping school culture in the direction of an empowering structure. At this point, it should be considered that empowering school culture (ESC) is not a concept that comes up by itself at schools. Characteristics of school culture that enable teacher empowerment and the effects of teacher empowerment on school culture create ESC over time. Therefore, characteristics of school culture related to empowering practices and the reflections of empowerment on school culture determine the profile of ESC. In this study, ESC is considered as a type of culture in which teachers are empowered by school administrators and practices of school and professional development of teachers, and thereby encouraging teacher participation in decision-making processes regarding school issues. A shaping of school culture in a way that enables teacher empowerment can be attained with the collaborative efforts of school principals as leaders, together with the contributions of teachers. In this study, the profile of ESC is characterised as leading to initiatives that create an empowering culture at schools, based on the opinions of teachers. Teacher opinions regarding school-wide processes, school aspects and school principal behaviours present a framework for describing the profile of ESC.

#### The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the profile of ESC according to teacher perceptions, seeking answers to the questions:

- 1. What are the characteristics of ESC?
- 2. What are the reflections of teacher empowerment on the current school culture?

#### Significance of the study

The final purpose of the educational processes conducted at schools is improving the success of both students and schools. The most significant role in improving school

success certainly belongs to teachers. Professional performance of teachers and their willingness to take responsibilities are among the most important indicators of school success. Teacher empowerment is the primary way to ensure the sustainability of teacher professional development within school processes, as it provides an opportunity for improving teacher performance, by relating the improvement of performance to school practices and problems at any time when the need arises. However, teacher empowerment at schools can be possible only with a school culture which facilitates empowerment. A circumstance that values and beliefs of teachers and school principals, and past experiences of the school, do not support the notion of empowerment may preclude teacher empowerment. This study inquires into characteristics which should be included in ESC, as well as the overall profile of ESC that contributes to improving both the performance of teachers and the school.

#### Method

Qualitative methods and techniques were used in the study. It is a phenomenological study, being focused on the description of a phenomenon through the eyes of people who experience it, and their shared experiences in investigating the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this study, the phenomenon of ESC was investigated through the eyes of teachers who experience it at schools.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study comprised 43 secondary school teachers working in the Gaziantep province of Turkey. Snowball sampling was used to determine the participants. To get clearer data, it was considered that participants in in-service programs about school culture should be sought. With this aim, the researcher reached 3 teachers participating in these kinds of programs at the beginning of the study. After interviewing these teachers, the researcher continued to reach other participants of the study, by getting information from interviewed teachers about other teachers participating in in-service programs on school culture. Of these, 9 were math teachers, 11 were Turkish language and literature teachers, 12 were English teachers, 2 were music teachers, 2 were guidance teachers, 3 were biology teachers and 4 were history teachers. Their ages ranged between 24 and 46, and length of service ranged from 2 to 23 years.

#### **Data collection**

The data of the study were acquired via semi-structured interview technique. Questions of interviews were prepared by examining relevant literature after which they were presented for expert review. Interview questions prepared prior to expert review were intended to describe ESC directly based on the teachers' perceptions. However, it is considered after expert review that two dimensional examination including the means of becoming an empowering culture as well as the changes in school culture due to teacher empowerment can provide more detailed and richer data. On the one hand a culture may have empowering characteristics; on the other hand empowering implications may foster the structure of empowering culture by shaping the current culture. There are therefore two

dimensions in determining the profile of empowering culture. The first dimension is determining characteristics of ESC and the second dimension is examining the reflections of empowering on current school culture. Analysing these two dimensions together provides a two-dimensional point of view regarding creating ESC.

After receiving the expert suggestions regarding the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with two teachers and necessary changes to the questions were made. It was observed during the pilot study that some technical concepts were not understood by the teachers, so sentences and words were refined in line with the inferences obtained from the pilot study. No addition or deletion was applied on the questions; types of expression were changed only after the pilot study. Questions used in the interviews are given below.

- 1. How should the school culture be in which you are given tasks and responsibilities in accordance with your skills and knowledge?
  - 1.1 What are the characteristics of a school in which you think that you are confided in your skills, knowledge and experiences?
  - 1.2 What are the characteristics of the school required for completing your appointed tasks and responsibilities?
- 2. What type of school culture will be formed if teachers are given tasks and responsibilities in accordance with their knowledge and skills? What kind of change will occur in the culture of school by empowering teachers in this manner?
  - 2.1 How will the relationships at school be affected by empowering teachers?
  - 2.2 How will the performance of teachers be affected by empowering them?
  - 2.3 How will the school principal be affected while empowering teachers?
  - 2.4 How will the working environment be affected by empowering teachers?

A short informative speech of about 20-25 minutes regarding empowerment and school culture was given to each participant, one by one prior to the interviews. Interviews were conducted between September and November in 2014. The participants' answers were audio recorded and transcribed into script via computers for analysis. Each participant was given codes P1, P2, etc, during the interviews and their opinions were transferred into script with these codes. Length of interviews ranged from 38 to 74 minutes.

#### Analysis of data

Content and frequency analyses were applied to the acquired data. Content analysis was carried out at two levels, namely theme and sub-theme. While themes were determined in line with the interview questions, sub-themes were determined based on the data acquired during the interviews. The coding process was performed under the themes of "characteristics of ESC" and "reflections of empowering on current school culture" in content analysis. The unit of analysis was determined both as words and sentences in the process of creating sub-themes. Interviews were conducted in Turkish and therefore coding was done with Turkish transcripts. Quotations from participants, themes and sub-themes were translated into English from Turkish.

Frequency analysis was performed for sub-themes based on the repetition frequencies of sub-themes by teachers. Mean scores of sub-themes repetition frequency were calculated for each theme and sub-themes, with scores greater than the mean score of theme on which they depend considered in presenting data in the findings section. Since qualitative data were coded at two levels by using themes and sub-themes rather than multi-level coding and data sets were not complex, qualitative data were coded by the researcher without using any software tools.

#### Validity and reliability of the study

In order to provide internal validity/credibility, expert review was conducted on consistency between raw data and codifications as well as on the results. Attention was given to the length of interviews so that there are long-standing interactions with participants during interviews. Confirmations were taken from the seven participants about whether results of the study reflected their perceptions after the coding process was completed and the interpretation studies were carried out (Creswell, 2009). In order to provide external validity/transferability, the statements of participants that include subthemes were quoted directly. A method which is among purposive sampling methods, snowball sampling, was used to transfer the results to similar groups. The processes of participant determination, data acquisition and data analysis were also explained in detail (Creswell, 2009).

Reviews by three experts were sought on examination of the raw data, codings of data, conclusions and descriptive memos about the process of data acquisition, within the scope of studies on internal and external reliability/dependability and confirmability. Two experts studied the topics of organisational culture and empowerment, and another expert on qualitative techniques and methods. Experts conducted consistency analyses regarding data acquisition and analysis processes as well as confirmation analysis, by comparing raw data and conclusions regarding judgments and interpretations (Patton, 2002). Data were coded during the study by two different researchers and the correlation between two raters was calculated as r = .92.

## **Findings**

#### Findings on characteristics of ESC

Sub-themes depending on the theme of characteristics of ESC and sub-themes' repetition frequencies are shown in Table 1. The characteristics of sense of confidence, support for risk-taking, encouraging autonomy, freedom, flexibility, participating in decision-making and non-bureaucratic structure are dominant characteristics of ESC.

The participants mostly mentioned sense of confidence and support for risk-taking as the most dominant characteristics of ESC. The participants think that ESC should provide autonomy to the teachers for risk-taking and should make teachers feel safe in this respect. P6 expressed his opinions regarding this issue in the following way:

I should feel myself safe in a school in which I am empowered. I definitely cannot show a good performance and cannot have the courage for being innovative in a culture where I am called to account for my works. It is not possible to say that a school culture is empowering where teachers are not holders of a right for risk-taking.

Table 1: Sub-themes of characteristics of ESC theme and repetition frequencies of sub-themes

Sub-themes	Frequency
Sense of confidence	102
Support for risk-taking	95
Encouraging autonomy	89
Freedom	86
Flexibility	77
Participating in decision-making	74
Non-bureaucratic structure	71
Sharing management	59
Absence of fear	56
Output orientation	54
Professional development facilities	50
Rich instructional environment	45
Innovativeness	44
Change-orientation	42
Positive professional relations	39
Team work	36
Collectivism	34
Dominance of pragmatist understanding	33

Note: Mean score of the repetition frequencies of sub-themes = 1086/18 = 60.3

As it can be understood from the opinions of P6, a sense of confidence provided by ESC can especially encourage teachers to take risks in trying innovations. Opinions of the participants indicated that teachers do not perceive current school cultures as empowering when they do not believe that school management and their colleagues stand behind the decisions they make when empowered.

Support for risk-taking is considered by the participants only when they are sure that their colleagues and school management stand by them in case of failure, and when they have the courage to try innovations. P7 stated the necessity for embracing not only achievements but also the failures:

What is the meaning of being empowered if I am accused of my failures? First of all, the culture of fear should not be present in the school. I should not be afraid of being in charge and making a mistake. If these characteristics are present at a school, empowerment is really present in that school"

The opinions of the participants on risk-taking point out that teachers do not want to be empowered in a school environment where there is no tolerance for failure.

The sub-themes mostly mentioned together as characteristics of ESC are encouraging autonomy and freedom. While some of the participants substituted the concepts of autonomy and freedom for each other; others considered freedom in a broader context by discriminating between these two concepts. P32 expressed his opinions on the requirement that ESC must give teachers autonomy to make their own decisions and implement these decisions:

... I should be autonomous to be empowered. Being empowered has no meaning if I am not autonomous when I make decisions about educational issues and implement these decisions both at the school and in the classroom.

P22 emphasised the necessity of a free environment created by ESC:

First, a free school environment comes to my mind when I think of ESC. That is, I should be autonomous to realise my intended implementations and I should also have the right to freedom of expression and thought. But in such a school environment, everybody must be conscious to not cause any problems.

P22 and the participants with similar opinions thought that good results can be obtained if ESC encourages autonomy and provides a free school environment, depending on the knowledge and skills of teachers whether they are conscious individuals or not.

According to the participants, ESC does not encourage a bureaucratic structure. They state that flexibility is given a place in practices and that teachers are regular members of decision-making processes in a non-bureaucratic school environment. P16 defined non-bureaucratic structure of ESC as such:

If the culture of a school has empowering characteristics, there is no place for bureaucracy in that school. The biggest obstacle to creating ESC is the school principal behaving in a bureaucratic manner. Everybody should be supported and be charged in accordance with their skills and interests without discriminating between superior-subordinate and senior-junior in ESC.

Non-bureaucratic school structure is related to flexibility and participation of teachers in decision-making processes. Flexibility is considered as a result of a non-bureaucratic and collaborative structure of ESC. P29 presented an opinion in this direction with the following words:

The existence of non-bureaucratic structure at schools will enable more active participation of teachers in given decisions... There is a need for flexible management process to realise empowerment. Flexibility in management can be possible by minimising bureaucracy and including teachers in the process of management. Unless there is a school culture fostering flexible management style, the formal structure of the school management makes happenings of these difficult.

## Findings on reflections of empowering on current school culture

Sub-themes that depend on the theme of reflections of empowering on the current school culture and the repetition frequencies of sub-themes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sub-themes of reflections of empowering on current school culture theme and sub-theme repetition frequencies

Sub-themes	Frequency
Job satisfaction of teachers	104
Teacher efficacy	102
Increased professional performance	98
Fostered professional development	96
Shared responsibilities	83
Developed leadership performance of principal	81
Administered change process	72
Confidence in principal	67
Intrinsic motivation of teachers	57
Supported teacher leadership	51
Fostered relations	47
Confidence for colleagues	45
Developed teacher competencies	43
Decreased complexity of organisation	32
Internal justification	9

Note: Mean score of the repetition frequencies of

sub-themes = 987/15 = 65.8

As can be seen in Table 2, empowerment mainly reflects on the school culture as job satisfaction of teachers, teacher efficacy, increased professional performance, fostered professional development, shared responsibilities, developed leadership performance of principal, administered change process and confidence in the principal, and shapes the school culture in line with these characteristics.

Participants thought that the most important reflection of empowerment is job satisfaction of teachers. It is thought that teacher efficacy and professional performance are improved and professional development is fostered when empowerment provides job satisfaction. P11 explained observed improvement in teacher job satisfaction in consequence of empowerment and fostered professional development as a result of improvement in teacher job satisfaction:

Teachers feel satisfied about their profession in two different ways. The first one takes place when they see the success of their students; and the other one takes place when they feel that they are trusted and given a chance on decision-making and implementation. I believe in my knowledge and skills more and my self-esteem is improved when I am empowered. The feeling of being more active in my profession and having authority for decision-making surely improves my job satisfaction. Improvement of my job satisfaction makes me more eager to develop myself in my profession.

P23 drew attention to the determinative effect of empowerment on values and beliefs of the school culture:

... improvement of teacher job satisfaction puts notions of taking pleasure in teaching and the requirement of professional development into school culture.

According to the perceptions of the participants, improved teacher job satisfaction results in changing of the facts that are appreciated and believed at school. Beliefs regarding the necessity for professional development and job satisfaction have become a part of the school culture as a consequence of teacher empowerment.

Participants expressing that teacher efficacy is improved thanks to empowerment consider teacher efficacy within the frame of both development in professional performance, and the willingness to take responsibilities depending on the improvement in self-esteem. P28 pointed out that empowerment improves teacher efficacy and explained his opinions on the reflections of this argument on school culture:

Teachers will become more effective in every aspect at school when they are empowered. They will become more successful in their professional careers and will want to take more part in every aspect of their school. Thus being successful and taking responsibility will become more important in school culture.

Participants thought that teacher efficacy and professional achievement become prized notions in school culture by means of teacher empowerment.

Participants indicated that responsibilities are shared between teachers and school principals and that through empowerment teachers trust the school principals more, and see them as leaders rather than managers. P42 explained her opinions regarding these issues:

In my opinion, empowerment means sharing responsibilities. If a school principal can share his/her responsibilities with teachers, he/she has the leadership characteristics. He/she further develops his/her leadership in this manner. Teachers thereby trust in him/her more in every respect.

P33 emphasised the importance of leadership for school culture and stated the following about this issue:

Creating school culture depends substantially on the school principal. If leadership does not exist in a place, it cannot be possible to talk about culture in that place. Teacher empowerment above all brings leadership to school culture.

The participants think that teacher empowerment develops the leadership characteristics of school principals who play the most important role in creating school culture and correspondingly a sense of confidence dominates the school culture.

Another prominent sub-theme puts forth administration of change processes as another reflection of teacher empowerment in school culture. The participants think that teacher

empowerment encourages teachers in pursuing and implementing innovations and therefore awareness of change increases at schools and change management is carried out more easily. The opinions of P2 on this issue were:

Being aware of change is too important for a school culture. You cannot achieve anything in a culture in which change is not considered important. The empowerment of teachers encourages teachers to develop and renew themselves with regard to professional aspects. This encouragement ensures the management of change at the school.

P16 stated his thoughts about the fact that non-traditional school culture which is open to development and change is an outcome of teacher empowerment:

Empowerment creates a school culture which is change-oriented, since everybody knows that they need to pursue innovations in order to be successful when they are empowered. School processes are always structured by a modern understanding under these circumstances.

When evaluating the perceptions of the participants on this issue; it is understood that teacher empowerment arises from the need of responding to change rapidly and creates a culture in which change is managed in such a way that it is beneficial for stakeholders of the school.

#### Discussion

In this study, the profile of ESC was determined in two stages. Characteristics of ESC and reflections of empowering on school culture were examined respectively. Characteristics of ESC which can be observed directly reproduce other characteristics of ESC by reflecting on the current school culture. Reflections are embodied in ESC as new values and beliefs which are components of the culture. Determined direct characteristics and reflections constitute ESC together. The profile of ESC is thereby described by extending the creation of culture over time.

When evaluating the characteristics of ESC and the reflections of empowerment on the current culture of the school, it can be said that school culture is a determinative factor for carrying out teacher empowerment at schools, and that teacher empowerment can be used as a tool to form school culture. It is not possible to empower teachers without a culture providing supportive conditions, physically and psychologically. There are many similar research results showing the relation between culture and empowerment in the literature. Edwards, Green and Lyons (2002) determined that there is a relationship between support from the culture and empowerment. Johnson (2001) and Johnson (2009) found that organisational culture is a contributor to empowerment. Shakibaei, Khalkhali and Nezgad (2012) found a relationship between type of organisational culture and staff empowerment. Hokanson Hawks (1999) determined a relationship between perception of organisational culture and empowering teaching behaviours.

The teachers stated innovativeness as a characteristic of ESC. Similarly, Baird and Wang (2010) determined that having an organisational culture including innovation that facilitates employee empowerment. Blase and Blase (1997) stated that encouraging innovation influences the sense of empowerment of teachers. Innovativeness of school culture encourages teachers to take risks. Teachers must have an innovative understanding to have a desire for risk-taking. This innovative understanding can be instilled in the teachers by school culture. ESC can be helpful for teachers to develop an understanding that is innovative and open to risk-taking, since it gives an opportunity to teachers for implementing their own ideas. Teachers participating in the study stated that supporting of risk-taking is a characteristic of ESC. In parallel with these findings, Peterson (1993) stated that "willingness to take intelligent risks, an openness to new ideas and the willingness to experiment" (p.14) are necessary to create an empowered culture. The willingness of teachers to take risks by being open to new ideas depends without doubt on being autonomous. It is not possible to say that an environment in which teachers do not have autonomy supports innovativeness and risk-taking. Therefore, the empowering culture should first enable an autonomous working environment. Encouraging autonomy was viewed as the third most dominant characteristic of ESC by the participants in this study. Similarly, Blase and Blase (1997) stated that encouraging individual teacher autonomy is among the strategies that influence the sense of empowerment in teachers.

Developed leadership performance of the principal and confidence in the principal are determined among the reflections of empowerment on school culture. Participants thought that the leadership of the principal and confidence in the principal become evident through teacher empowerment carried out by the principal. These findings point out that principal leadership and confidence in the principal are seen in school culture as results of empowerment and consequently become components of ESC. Teachers perceived their principals as a leader and confide in him/her when school principals give autonomy to them and support collectivism and team work at schools. In other words, different characteristics of ESC bring out principal leadership as a new ESC characteristic. In parallel with these findings, Moye, Henkin and Egley (2005) found that empowering teachers improves their interpersonal trust in principals. When they feel autonomy in their work and meaningfulness of their work, they have higher levels of interpersonal trust in principals. Gao, Janssen and Shi (2011) determined that in the case of higher empowering leadership, the relationship between leader trust and employee voice is more positive. Park (2003) found that principal leadership has effect on teacher empowerment dimensions named formal authority, autonomy, collaboration, and trust.

As stated above, school principals are perceived as leaders, depending on their empowering practices included in ESC. Results that are in accordance with this have been found in this study. Encouraging autonomy, team work and collectivism which mostly appear at schools with the efforts of school principals are determined as the characteristics of ESC. When teachers feel more autonomous and think that they are allowed to act in unison, they may perceive their principals as leaders and confide more in them. Regarding the relationship between collectivism, team work and empowerment culture, the study by Demircan Çakar and Ertürk (2010) has put forth that among the dimensions of organisational culture, collectivism was found to have a positive relationship with

empowerment. Baird and Wang (2010) also found a facilitative role for team work in their study.

Various research results emphasise the relationship between leadership styles and empowerment as well. Lim (2007) found that the leadership style of the principal and the relationship between the teachers and the principal can affect the empowerment perceptions of teachers. Dono-Koulouris (2003) determined that there is a significant correlation between transformational leadership style and teacher empowerment. Maher (2000) found that instructional, transformational, and pedagogical leadership are necessary together for empowerment. Kirgan (2009) found a correlation between teacher-perceived transformational leadership and teacher-perceived empowerment. The relationships between empowerment and leadership styles point out that school principals should display leadership skills in order to be able to empower teachers. The thought that leadership development results from empowerment may arise from empowerment being carried out through leadership, and it may thus become a component of ESC.

Decreased complexity of organisation is among the reflections of empowerment on school culture and is included in ESC over time, according to the perceptions of teachers. As a supportive finding, Moye, Henkin and Egley (2005) stated that increased empowerment eases the effects of complexity of organisation. Teachers related the decreased complexity of organisation to non-bureaucratic structure of a school. Bureaucratic structures at schools constitute an impediment for many characteristics of ESC, such as innovativeness. Similarly Wang (2005) explained that top-down management and bureaucracies may prevent power sharing at schools. Such structures are an obstacle in the way of enabling teachers to be explorers and innovators. Empowering employees requires presenting equal opportunities for participation, without a hierarchic structure (Hughes, 1998). Teachers participating in the study considered the result of nonbureaucratic structure as flexibility within the context of ESC. Similarly, Logan (2002) determined that flexibility is the way school leaders can build empowerment. But flexibility does not mean that teachers are allowed to do whatever they want at schools. Empowering employees should be in the direction of the mission and vision of the organisation. It should not create a working environment in which employees do whatever they want. Responsibilities are determined in empowering implementations and empowered employees know their roles, but empowerment provides flexibility about undertaking different roles (Peterson, 1993).

One of the most important kinds of evidence about a non-bureaucratic structure is teachers having opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. ESC gives the chance to participate in decision-making processes to teachers by creating a non-bureaucratic school environment that enables teachers to feel that they have a right to speak about school decisions. Teachers taking part in the study shared their perceptions that are in this direction and emphasised the importance of participation in decision-making for ESC. In parallel of the teachers' perceptions, Heck and Brandon (1995) determined teachers' participation in decision-making as an empowerment implementation. Rowlands (1995) stated that empowered employees have more opportunities for taking part in decision-making processes without limitations regarding

organisational structure, and they therefore develop necessary abilities in order to be competent for making decisions.

Since ESC gives opportunities for trying new ideas at schools, and taking more roles in school processes, and therefore helps teachers in developing their competencies, and improves their job satisfaction. Therefore, a culture which attaches importance to working with high job satisfaction is formed. Job satisfaction of teachers is the most remarkable reflection of empowerment on school culture and is perceived as an important value included in ESC over time. In parallel, Hung (2005) determined a correlation between teacher empowerment and teacher job satisfaction. Martino (2003) found a significant relationship between three levels of teacher empowerment named impact, autonomy, and self-efficacy, and teacher job satisfaction. In the study by Edwards, Green and Lyons (2002), satisfaction with teaching as a career was found to be predictor of personal empowerment. Humborstad (2012) determined that empowerment plays a mediator role in the relationship between institutional context and job satisfaction. Vecchio, Justin and Pearce (2010) approached empowerment in the context of empowering leadership and concluded that empowering leadership may affect employees' satisfaction through increases in their performances.

## **Conclusion and suggestions**

When evaluating the findings of the study, it is observed that the majority of the characteristics of ESC emphasise change and innovation. It is also understood that majority of the characteristics are directed to enhance working conditions of teachers and improve professional performance of teachers. Therefore, it is concluded that ESC is both change-oriented and pragmatist-oriented.

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions can be generated in order to create ESC:

- Participation of teachers in training courses, seminars and conferences which can be helpful for following the latest developments in the field of education should be encouraged. Thus, professional development can also be included in school culture as a value.
- 2. School principals should organise decision-making meetings regularly in order to include teachers in decision-making processes.
- 3. School principals should know the interests and skills of the teachers and allocate responsibilities to them in line with their interests and skills.
- 4. Social activities and sharing meetings which can create a collectivism spirit at school should be organised to ensure teachers are working as a team.
- 5. Teachers should be allowed to make autonomous decisions about educational issues.
- 6. School principals should not abstain from sharing their responsibilities with teachers and should build close relationships with teachers to gain their trust. Bureaucracy may be felt less in organisational communication processes in this way as well.

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