



Uluslararası Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalarda
Mükemmellik Arayışı Dergisi (UENAMAD)
International Journal of the Pursuit of Excellence
Qualitative Research in Education (IJPEQRE)



<https://ijpeqre.elapublishing.net/tr>

Examining Teachers' Experiences on Organizational Isomorphism

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to understand teachers' experiences regarding organizational isomorphism processes and to examine these experiences in depth. In this research based on qualitative research design, the opinions of 20 middle school teachers were sought. In the research, participants were selected from middle school teachers working in schools with different socio-economic levels through maximum variation sampling. Three semi-structured interview questions structured on three main themes were used as data collection tools. The data obtained after the interviews was analysed with descriptive analysis technique. The data obtained in the research was analysed within the framework of coercive, imitative, and normative isomorphism themes. In the coercive isomorphism theme, teachers stated that they adopted certain practices in line with the legal regulations of the institutions they were affiliated with, curriculum changes and administrative expectations. In this context, it was determined that especially official inspections, performance evaluation systems and central exam-oriented practices created a guiding pressure on teaching processes. In the imitative isomorphism theme, teachers stated that they imitated the practices in schools that had achieved success or were shown as examples in situations where uncertainty and risk perception were high. The widespread adoption of good practice examples was among the prominent findings under this theme. In the theme of normative isomorphism, it was observed that teachers developed similar attitudes and behaviour patterns in line with the professional training they received, the seminars they attended, and professional ethical norms. It was observed that pre-service and in-service training in particular contributed to the establishment of a common professional standard among teachers. The findings show that teachers developed similar behaviour patterns through both external obligations and professional norms in the face of organizational structures and environmental factors.

Keywords: Organizational isomorphism, secondary school, teacher

Article History	Received: 06.10.2025	Accepted: 30.06.2026	Publication:30.06.2026
Article Type	Research Article		
Recommended Citation	Dağdeviren Ertaş, B. (2026). Examining Teachers' Experiences on Organizational Isomorphism <i>Uluslararası Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalarda Mükemmellik Arayışı Dergisi (UENAMAD)</i> , 5(1), 1-11.		

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Introduction

Educational systems play a critical role in the reproduction of social structures. Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasize that educational institutions are not only mechanisms that transmit information, but also institutional structures that legitimize social norms, values, and hierarchies. In this process, the increasing resemblance of schools to each other is explained by the concept of "organizational isomorphism", one of the basic arguments of the new institutionalist theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). In other words, organizational isomorphism is the situation in which different organizations in a system or organizational field begin to resemble each other in terms of their structures, processes, and behaviours over time (Ghoshal, 1988).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that isomorphism consists of three dimensions: coercive, imitative, and normative. Coercive isomorphism is the forcing of schools to conform to a certain structure through state policies, legal regulations, and control mechanisms. The curriculum, standardized exams, and teacher assignment policies determined by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in Türkiye reflect this type of pressure (Öztürk, 2011). Similarly, policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the United States have forced schools to conform to performance-based standards (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This can limit the pedagogical autonomy of teachers and lead to "one-size-fits-all" practices (Ball, 2003).

In situations of uncertainty, institutions imitate models that are considered successful, which is expressed through mimetic isomorphism. For example, the Finnish education model or Singapore's mathematics teaching strategies are adopted as "best practices" in other countries (Sahlberg, 2011). International rankings such as PISA and TIMSS accelerate such a process of imitation. However, transfers out of context can create incompatibility with local needs (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The other dimension of organizational isomorphism, normative isomorphism, is related to the growth and impact of professions and professionalization, which also make organizations similar. Professions, entrance exams; continuing education credits; or limit the actions of its members by determining educational criteria such as the need to conduct research, write, and present at conferences to maintain their professional status. Teacher training programs, professional standards, and in-service training foster normative isomorphism (Katopol, 2016).

In Türkiye, teacher training standards jointly determined by the Council of Higher Education and the Ministry of National Education lead teachers to develop similar pedagogical approaches (Özoğlu, 2010). At the global level, the OECD's teacher competency frameworks standardize teacher training in different countries (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Isomorphic pressures deeply affect teachers' professional identities and practices. Standard curricula and performance-oriented assessments can restrict teachers' in-class decisions. Ball (2003) argues that a "performativity culture" alienates teachers from creativity. Hoyle and Wallace (2005), on the other hand, state that excessive standardization reduces teachers to the position of "technicians." Isomorphic pressures can negatively affect teachers' job satisfaction. A study conducted in Türkiye shows that the pressure of centralized exams increases stress and burnout in teachers (Demir, 2025). Similarly, studies conducted in the United States after NCLB have revealed that teachers tend to leave the profession due to increased workload (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The similarity of schools to each other may prevent the development of educational models that are sensitive to local needs. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argue that "standardized education reforms" blunt teachers' flexible and innovative approaches. The different needs between village schools and urban schools in Türkiye indicate that uniform policies may be inadequate (Aksit, 2007).

Education policies are expected to strike a delicate balance between standardization pressures and contextual flexibility. Granting teachers pedagogical freedom will facilitate the adaptation of the curriculum to local needs, thus partially offsetting the homogenizing effect of isomorphic pressures (Ball, 2003). Similarly, the transformation of in-service training from uniform practices to a needs-sensitive, modular structure is considered an important step in paving the way for institutional adaptation (Darling-Hammond, 2017). On the other hand, reinterpreting foreign education models by

integrating them into Türkiye's socio-cultural context, rather than directly transferring them, stands out as a functional approach in terms of reducing the risk of incompatibility created by forced isomorphism (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). For all these processes to transform into a sustainable transformation, it seems largely dependent on strengthening teacher representation in school administrations and effectively including teachers in policy-making mechanisms (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This situation may cause schools to move away from contextual originality and tend towards similar organizational structures. However, there is limited information based on teachers' experiences on how isomorphic processes are perceived in schools, in what forms they emerge and how they are reflected in practices. However, teachers, as actors who directly experience the functioning of schools, offer an important perspective in understanding the reflections of isomorphic tendencies in the field. In this context, revealing how isomorphism occurs in schools according to teachers' views may contribute to a closer understanding of structural similarity in the education system. In this context, the aim of this research is to understand teachers' experiences regarding organizational isomorphism processes and to examine these experiences in depth. Therefore, the sub-objectives are determined as follows;

- 1- What are teachers' experiences of coercive isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?
- 2- What are teachers' experiences of mimetic isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?
- 3- What are teachers' experiences of normative isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?

Method

Research Model

This research was conducted based on qualitative research design, and a phenomenological design was used. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that attempts to describe in depth how phenomena that we are aware of but do not have detailed information about are perceived, experienced, and understood by different people through the eyes of individuals (Sığırı, 2021). In this research, phenomenological design was preferred since it provides the opportunity to reveal in depth the perceptions, experiences and meanings that individuals attribute to events.

Study group

The study group of the research was determined by using purposeful sampling methods; criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling methods. Within the scope of the research, it was tried to determine how organizational isomorphism occurs in schools by consulting the opinions of 20 secondary school teachers. Participant information is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Socioeconomic Level of School Location	Experience
P1	Male	Low	10 years
P2	Male	Low	6 years
P3	Female	Medium	15 years
P4	Female	Medium	21 years
P5	Male	Medium	17 years
P6	Male	High	23 years
P7	Male	Medium	10 years
P8	Male	Medium	6 years
P9	Male	Low	15 years
P11	Female	Medium	18 years

P12	Female	High	17 years
P13	Male	Low	7 years
P14	Male	High	11 years
P15	Male	High	6 years
P16	Female	Medium	15 years
P17	Male	High	20 years
P18	Female	High	19 years
P19	Female	Low	9 years
P20	Male	Low	8 years

In Table 1, firstly, schools were divided into low, medium, and high according to different socio-economic levels. One school was determined for each level from these schools determined in accordance with maximum variation sampling. Then, interviews were conducted with volunteer participants who met the criterion that teachers whose opinions were received regarding isomorphism should have at least 5 years of seniority. Purposeful sampling allows detailed examination of situations that are assumed to have rich information (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014; Patton, 2002). This method plays a critical role in the discovery and explanation of events and facts in many cases (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool in the study. The data collection tool was created in accordance with the literature by the researcher after a comprehensive literature review. In this regard, three main themes were determined in the literature; coercive isomorphism, imitative isomorphism and normative isomorphism. 9 questions were created for the participants to deeply elucidate the determined main themes. The semi-structured interview form was presented to expert view (5 experts), and the final form of the form was created in line with the views of experts. Pilot interviews were conducted with 2 teachers to determine the clarity of the questions. After determining the clarity of the questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the interview form that was made ready for implementation. 9 research questions prepared in line with the three objectives created within the scope of the research are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Alignment Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What are teachers' experiences of coercive isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?	-To what extent do you think the decisions and practices taken in your school are determined by external pressures (MONE, regulations, inspections, etc.)? - How do the directives and practices coming from the ministry or provincial/district directorate affect the functioning of the school? - How effective or restrictive do you think these external decisions are?
What are teachers' experiences of mimetic isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?	-What kind of work do you think is being done in your school that is taken as an example from other schools or that is similar to their practices? - What do you think triggers such examples or imitations? - What is the role of teachers or administrators in this process?
What are teachers' experiences of normative isomorphism in relation to organizational isomorphism processes?	How do vocational training, in-service courses or teacher training processes affect the formation of

isomorphism processes?

common norms in schools?

- Do you think teachers have similar values, attitudes or habits?

- How do you think teachers' professional roles are shaped?

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection was carried out using a semi-structured interview form created by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who volunteered to participate in the study by visiting the schools determined in the sample. The interviews were conducted outside of class hours, in times when teachers felt comfortable, away from noise, and in school libraries. The interviews lasted an average of 20-30 minutes. The opinions of teachers who did not want to provide audio recordings were personally noted by the researcher. The data were analysed with descriptive analysis, summarized and interpreted according to previously determined themes. In this study, the themes were also determined in advance according to the research questions created. The opinions discussed under the determined sub-themes were re-evaluated by a different expert. Sub-themes were determined under three main themes in the research.

Validity and Reliability

To provide the credibility criterion, the participant confirmation process was meticulously applied. During this process, the obtained data were shared with the participants, and the accuracy and representativeness of the statements were confirmed in line with their opinions. In addition, rich and diverse data regarding the phenomenon within the scope of the study were obtained by using in-depth and focused data collection techniques. This approach increased the reliability of the study by capturing different perspectives. To meet the transferability criterion, the purposeful sampling method was preferred. The participants were selected considering their suitability and diversity for the research topic; thus, the opinions of individuals with different characteristics were included in the study. In addition, the demographic and professional characteristics of the study group and the research context were described in detail, thus establishing the basis for the applicability of the findings to other studies with similar environments and conditions. To support the confirmability criterion, the researcher carefully based the obtained data on a theoretical basis and conducted the coding and analysis processes. In this way, it was ensured that the findings were based on data sources, independent of the researcher's personal opinions and prejudices. In addition, reflective notes were kept during the research process and analysis decisions were systematically documented; These practices is thought to have strengthen the objectivity and verifiability of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Findings

This section of the research includes the findings and interpretations resulting from the analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted to understand teachers' experiences regarding organizational isomorphism processes and to examine these experiences. The data obtained from the study were analyzed, the findings were interpreted, and thus the research question and sub-questions were answered. The first question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the research questions was aimed at determining teachers' coercive isomorphism experiences regarding organizational isomorphism processes. The findings regarding teachers' experiences regarding coercive isomorphism regarding organizational isomorphism processes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Teachers' Views on the Theme of Coercive Isomorphism

Theme	Category	Code	f
Coercive Isomorphism	Legal Regulations	Official Inspections	8
		Regulations	20
		Guidelines	20
		Centralized Rules	14
	Curriculum Change	Transition to New Program	3
		Compliance with School Rules	5
	Administrative Expectations	Participation in Activities	1
		Participation in Projects	2
		Compliance with Decisions	6

The most repeated code in the legal regulation category in the theme of Coercive Isomorphism is the code of regulations and directives (f:20). Some of the statements of the teachers about this code are as follows:

“The letters coming from the Ministry and the governor's office are implemented with more priority and sensitivity. There is a serious situation in the attitude of the principal. Incoming letters are meticulously implemented. Since they are within the framework of the law and regulation, care is taken to implement them.” (P1)

“Our school acts within the framework of the Ministry of National Education and regulations, and the bureaucratic attitude of the Ministry of National Education in some activities negatively affects student development. Instant decisions coming from the Ministry limit educational activities. There is difficulty in implementing unplanned and sudden decisions.” (P3)

“In general, I can say that all decisions are taken according to procedures and regulations. We try to fulfil every request such as doing a TUBITAK, participating in poetry and composition competitions. Although this sometimes turns into involuntary practices, I can say that it is important for increasing the quality and success of the school. In this way, it also ensures that students actively participate in the educational processes and gain different experiences.” (P16).

The second question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the research questions is aimed at determining teachers' experiences of imitative isomorphism regarding organizational isomorphism processes. The findings regarding teachers' experiences of imitative isomorphism regarding organizational isomorphism processes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Teachers' Views on the Theme of Mimetic Isomorphism

Theme	Category	Code	f
Mimetic Isomorphism	Risk Perception	Competition	4
		Exam Results	4
	Best Practice Examples	Social media	11
		Recommendations from administration	5
		Colleague Recommendations	4
	Managerial Expectations	Appreciation	10
		Advertising	7
	Activities	Competitions	5
		Parent Expectations	3

In the theme of mimetic isomorphism, teachers stated that in situations where uncertainty and risk perception are high, they imitate the practices of schools that have achieved success or are shown as examples. The widespread adoption of good practice examples was among the prominent findings under this theme. Some of the statements of the teachers about this code are as follows:

“Especially in order to spread good examples, activities, programs and trainings done in other schools are started to be done in our school. Similarly, what is done in our school can be imitated by other schools. The participation of the director of national education in these activities and appreciation of teachers, administrators and students and sharing them on social media accounts are effective in terms of spreading. Teachers and administrators can come together to examine other examples and put similar ones into practice” (P12)

“I have witnessed many times that similar practices are requested to other schools. If an application is liked and appreciated by the district directorate of national education, other current school administrators also want to implement the same application in their own schools in order to be appreciated or to improve the current progress of the school. In this process, teachers approach this application with prejudice because they are afraid that it will cause extra workload” (P13)

“Other schools’ practices are copied one-to-one due to the desire of higher authorities to advertise. Things done in other schools, including our school, are done under the pressure of higher authorities. The reason for this pressure is the desire to advertise and take photos. Teachers act as intermediaries for this desire It is evaluated. When the school does something on its own, the fact that the upper authorities are only interested in the image breaks the motivation.” (P15)

The third question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the research questions is aimed at determining the normative isomorphism experiences of the teachers regarding the organizational isomorphism processes. The findings regarding the normative isomorphism experiences of the teachers regarding the organizational isomorphism processes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Teachers’ Views on the Theme of Normative Isomorphism

Theme	Category	Code	f
Normative Isomorphism	Education	Pre-service Training	5
		In-service Training	6
		Vocational Training	3
	Organizational Structure	Hierarchy	8
		Shared Norms	3
	Environmental Structure	School Climate	6
		Similar Cultural Characteristics	3
		Student Socioeconomic Status	4
		Administrative Behaviour	2

In the theme of normative isomorphism (Table 5), it was observed that teachers developed similar attitudes and behavioural patterns in line with the professional training they received, the seminars they attended, and professional ethical norms. It was determined that they stated pre-service and in-service training in particular contributed to the establishment of a common professional standard among teachers. The findings obtained indicate that teachers developed similar behavioral patterns in the face of organizational structures and environmental factors through both external obligations and professional norms. Some of the statements of the teachers about this code are as follows:

“Although teachers have different personal characteristics, a common value judgment is formed within the organization. Contributions are made to the professional development of teachers.” (P7)

“The climate of the school where teachers start working, the attitudes of the school principal, the socio-economic status of the students, and many other variables such as the teachers’ personality traits are positively and negatively affected in shaping their professional roles.” (P5)

“Both written and unwritten norms are formed. The fact that we have gone through the same educational processes causes a common language to form. Since we have received the same training, we exhibit common attitudes and behaviours.” (P1)

“I think that special vocational trainings for branches can be effective in having a common understanding.” (P16)

“I think that vocational training seminars and in-service trainings create a social bond between teachers. Each teacher has different values and attitudes. Thanks to these trainings, everyone creates a common norm, and an environment is created where everyone can learn new things from each other. In this way, teachers have the opportunity to develop themselves in different areas.” (P18)”

Discussion and Conclusion

In this section of the research, the findings obtained as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the aim of understanding the experiences of teachers regarding organizational isomorphism processes and examining these experiences are discussed. The first sub-objective of the research is to determine the teachers' views on coercive isomorphism. In this context, coercive isomorphism is determined as the theme. Under the coercive isomorphism theme, 4 categories and nine codes are determined, namely risk perception, good practice examples, administrator expectations, and activities. Of these categories, the most repeated code in the legal regulation category is the regulations and directives code. The study conducted by Mir et al., (2023) in the literature supports this finding and emphasizes that official laws cause isomorphism. Indeed, Marini (2021) also states in his research that administrator expectations lead to coercive isomorphism. Moreover, Puttick (2017) also emphasizes that regulatory rules cause isomorphism. The second sub-objective of the research is to determine the teachers' views on imitative isomorphism. In this regard, imitative isomorphism is determined as the theme. Under the imitative isomorphism theme, three categories are determined as legal control, curriculum change, and administrative expectation and nine codes are determined. In the imitative isomorphism theme, teachers have stated that in situations where uncertainty and risk perception are high, they imitated the practices of schools that have achieved success or are shown as examples. In fact, Puttick's (2017) research states that schools are imitative isomorphists to manage risk and supports this finding. The widespread adoption of good practice examples is among the prominent findings under this theme. In addition, the most frequently repeated code is that school administrators' actions towards advertising caused imitative isomorphism.

The third sub-objective of the research is to determine teachers' views on normative isomorphism. In this context, normative isomorphism is determined as the theme. Under the normative isomorphism theme, three categories are determined as education, organizational structure and environmental structure and nine codes are determined. In the theme of normative isomorphism, it has been determined that teachers develop similar attitudes and behavioural patterns in line with the professional training they receive, the seminars they attend, and professional ethical norms. Indeed, Elonga-Mboyoy (2018) states that tightly protected professionalization processes create an organizational structure consisting of individuals who occupy similar positions in various organizations and have similar orientations and tendencies, and who can almost replace each other.

Similarly, Puttick's (2017) findings that institutions are increasingly homogeneous due to the similarity of teachers' education and qualifications support the findings of the current research. It has been observed that pre-service and in-service training in particular contribute to the establishment of a common professional standard among teachers. The findings obtained show that teachers develop similar behavioural patterns in the face of organizational structures and environmental factors through both external obligations and professional norms. As stated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), normative isomorphism is related to professionalism. The isomorphism of secondary schools in Türkiye has been discussed in the study. The findings obtained indicate that schools have isomorphic structures. Indeed, research suggests that isomorphism attempts to lead to the homogeneity condition expected for the realization of quality national education (Zein, 2017).

Recommendations and Limitations

Future research could examine the interaction between the dimensions of compulsory, imitative, and normative isomorphism in more depth. In particular, the focus could be on how pressure in one-dimension triggers or suppresses the others. Comparative qualitative studies could be conducted to reveal how isomorphic tendencies differ among different school types or schools in different regions. Studies analysing the role of school administrators in isomorphic processes could contribute to understanding organizational change and resistance processes. Longitudinal qualitative studies could be recommended to monitor the transformation of isomorphic changes over time. School administrators and teachers should not only implement legal regulations imposed from above but also open up discussions about the suitability of these regulations for the local context of the school. Instead of directly copying successful school models, it should be evaluated how these practices can be adapted to the unique conditions of the school. In-service training and professional standards should be designed to meet the real needs of teachers; they should not only aim to "comply with the norm." To reduce the impact of isomorphic pressures in schools, the active participation of teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making processes should be supported. Practitioners should make room for pedagogical or administrative innovation at the local level, even under pressure from central policies, and encourage such efforts. The research is limited to the views of 20 teachers working in secondary schools in Yozgat province in Türkiye and its central district in the 2024-2025 academic year. The research is limited to the responses given to the questions in the semi-structured interview form called Organizational Isomorphism.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

This study adhered to the principles of scientific research and publication ethics.

The author was received ethical approval permission from Yozgat Bozok University,
17.09.2025 dated official letter.

Proportion of the Authors' Contribution

All stages of this research were conducted by the author.