Teachers' Opinions on Excellent School[1]

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Abstract

The search for excellence in education has always existed from the past to the present. One of the places where excellent education is provided systematically and in the best way is relatively schools. Schools where students are provided with excellent education are excellent places. This study aims to reveal the views of teachers on the concept of excellent school. Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the research. The participants of the research are teachers who are receiving postgraduate education in the 2023-2024 academic year. Criterion sampling method was used in the research. The research data were collected with a semi-structured interview form. The data were analyzed with the content analysis technique. As a result of the research, indicators related to the excellent school and metaphors related to the excellent school were revealed. Indicators related to the excellent school were revealed as student characteristics, administrator characteristics, teacher characteristics, education and training characteristics, environmental relations, financial management, school culture, school climate and ethical behaviors. Under the themes that an excellent school is a place focused on development, where work is done in harmony, where differences are kept together, that contributes to the society, supportive, trustworthy, goal-oriented, loving, solution-oriented and that provides a sense of belonging, 25 different metaphors such as clock, family, ship, spring and rainbow were produced. Based on the results obtained, various suggestions such as creating excellent schools, creating basic indicators for excellent schools and disseminating excellent school research were presented to policy makers and researchers.

Keywords*:* Excellent, school, teacher, indicator, metaphor.

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Introduction

Throughout history, humans have always desired to possess better things and have continuously strived to improve what they already have. The current state of the world is a result of humanity's relentless pursuit of excellence. This unyielding desire to achieve the best is a significant indicator of humankind's quest for excellence. At its core, the aspiration to reach the best and the efforts made in this pursuit represent a search for excellence. The search for excellence is limited by the resources of the seeker and is a relative concept. For some, excellence signifies flawlessness, perfection, and completeness, while for others, it embodies striving for the best, making sacrifices, and finding happiness in what they achieve. To reach excellence, one must push their potential to its limits and utilize it effectively. For some, excellence might mean performing at their best and surpassing others, whereas, for others, it could be perceived as outdoing their previous performance and consistently making progress. Naturally, for another individual, excellence may involve attaining the highest personal qualities and discovering the secret to living a virtuous life (Kıral, 2021b). However, in general terms, the concept of excellence denotes continuous improvement and reaching the best. Excellence necessitates the development of knowledge and skills through innovative methods. People achieve excellence by doing the right things. Indeed, individuals can attain excellence by mastering activities they perform continuously. In this context, Ferrari (2002) describes excellence as a progression marked by the steps taken to acquire specific skills. As an evaluation-focused concept, excellence is defined by valuable skills and outcomes necessary for functioning effectively in society.

Excellence is defined as the relentless pursuit of never-ending improvement in all aspects of performance (Deming, 1986). Also, excellence is viewed as an ongoing journey of continuous improvement, where organizations consistently strive to reach higher standards (Oakland, 1993). It can be said that the efforts of both individuals and organizations to continuously develop can make it possible for society to develop. Ensuring the continuous development of society is possible through education. Of course, this is possible by providing the best education to individuals in the education process and by seeking excellence in education. Excellence is a continuous process for human beings. This process covers the entire life of human beings. Indeed, human beings strive to reach the best of everything throughout their lives. The point that human beings have reached is a product of this search. Human beings owe this search to the qualified education they receive. As the qualified education that human beings receive increases, their development also increases. The most important element of human beings' progress is education. The better the education, the better the points that human beings can reach. This continuity is essentially human beings' search for excellence (Kıral, 2022). Excellence in education, despite years of legal initiatives and international evaluations, is not defined clearly and precisely. Especially in countries such as the USA and the UK, which are leading the discourse and pursuit of excellence in education, governments constantly emphasize excellence but have difficulty determining concrete criteria to achieve this goal (Almagro, 2023). Terzi (2020) states that excellence in education is a relative and difficult concept to define, and that excellence should not only encompass mastery of knowledge and skills, but also originality and creativity. Society must be able to keep up with the constant development and change in the world, and schools must also aim to achieve the best for society to achieve the best. Schools can achieve the best by providing excellent education. According to Kıral (2021a) excellent individuals are raised in excellent schools, and excellent individuals raised here form an excellent society. Individuals, society, and schools need and complete each other. Individuals go to school for a more systematic education. They graduate from school and are now educated individuals contributing to society becoming more qualified. So much so that more qualified individuals constantly improve themselves for both their social development and strive to add something to what already exists.

The search for excellence in education has always existed from the past to the present. One of the places where excellent education is provided systematically and in the best way is relatively schools. In fact, schools where excellent education is provided are excellent places. Excellent schools are schools that have a clear vision of what students should know and be able to do. In these schools, teachers apply methods that aim to continuously increase the quality of education, and school

administrators support them in this regard and keep expectations high(Lipsitz & West, 2006). In addition, excellent schools offer teachers the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues, expand their professional knowledge, share and develop their teaching skills. Teachers take an active role in decision-making processes regarding curriculum and teaching methods (Fisher & Seroussi, 2018). In excellent schools, everyone acts together in harmony to achieve excellence with a common sense of purpose, makes decisions together, and tries to achieve the best by completing the school's deficiencies together. For schools to achieve the best and become excellent schools, the school administration must always strive to achieve the best and exhibit excellent leadership behaviors. As an excellent leader, the school administrator provides opportunities to empower his staff and does his best to make his school an excellent school (Kıral, 2020). An excellent school is a school where there is no inequality in terms of success for all students and where a common quality and equality in student success can be achieved. The excellent leadership of the school administrator is also very important in the formation of excellent schools (Syarwan Ahmad, 2014).

Ng (2003) the effects of the School Excellence Model (SEM), developed in Singapore within the framework of the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" vision, on school management and leadership in the country, and emphasized that school leaders should focus on the essence of SEM rather than its form. It explained that SEM aims to increase school leadership and the quality of teachers and to give importance to student-centered processes. This model emphasizes not only the academic success of schools but also the provision of quality and holistic education. According to SEM, a successful school should achieve sustainable and continuously improving results. In this direction, schools should have a systematic, integrated approach for continuous improvement, regular monitoring and analysis of results and activities, and planning and implementation of improvement activities. As can be seen, excellent schools operate in a constant search for the better in every field and increase their performance. In excellent schools, there is a common vision that all stakeholders accept. Everyone is constantly working towards that vision and the new vision will be formed afterward. Lipsitz and West (2006) have identified three characteristics of high-performing, successful secondary schools in order to create a common vision for excellent schools: academic excellence, developmentally responsive, and socially just. The academic excellence characteristic consists of two criteria. The first criterion is to set high standards for students and to ensure that students exceed these standards through teaching methods that include interesting and varied activities. The second criterion is to provide teachers with professional development opportunities that they can choose and to ensure that they collaborate and participate in decisions to develop effective teaching methods. The developmentally responsive characteristic consists of two criteria: the school provides access to services that promote physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development and collaborates with families to enhance student well-being and includes families in the decision-making process. The first criterion of the socially just characteristic is to support students in producing high-quality work by providing equal access to activities and information for all students. The second criterion is to have a low rate of interruption from school and not to have students from certain demographic groups who are not disproportionately interrupted from school. Aldaihani (2014) investigated the applicability of school excellence models in the Arab world and Kuwait. The study proposed a school excellence model to improve the status and qualifications of teachers, establish a good governance system, and promote transparency among all stakeholders. This model encourages continuous evaluation to balance the needs of local and global environments and creativity and innovation to create learning organizations. In the proposed school excellence model; teachers use creative teaching methods and support students; students exhibit commitment and creativity; parents participate in decision-making and monitor school activities; leadership determines goals, culture, and vision and manages the process; stakeholders provide effective participation and funding; infrastructure consists of technological and physical infrastructure. The school excellence model is fed by student results and system results and creates expectations. Thus, continuous development is achieved.

In the study conducted by Yuan and Chayanuvat (2022) on the development of excellent schools in Hunan, China, a model proposal was presented for schools that aim to be excellent schools. This model also recommends that school principals adopt a transformational leadership style,

encourage teamwork, and use information and communication technologies. The five-star model consisting of five themes suggested for an excellent school is given in Figure 1.
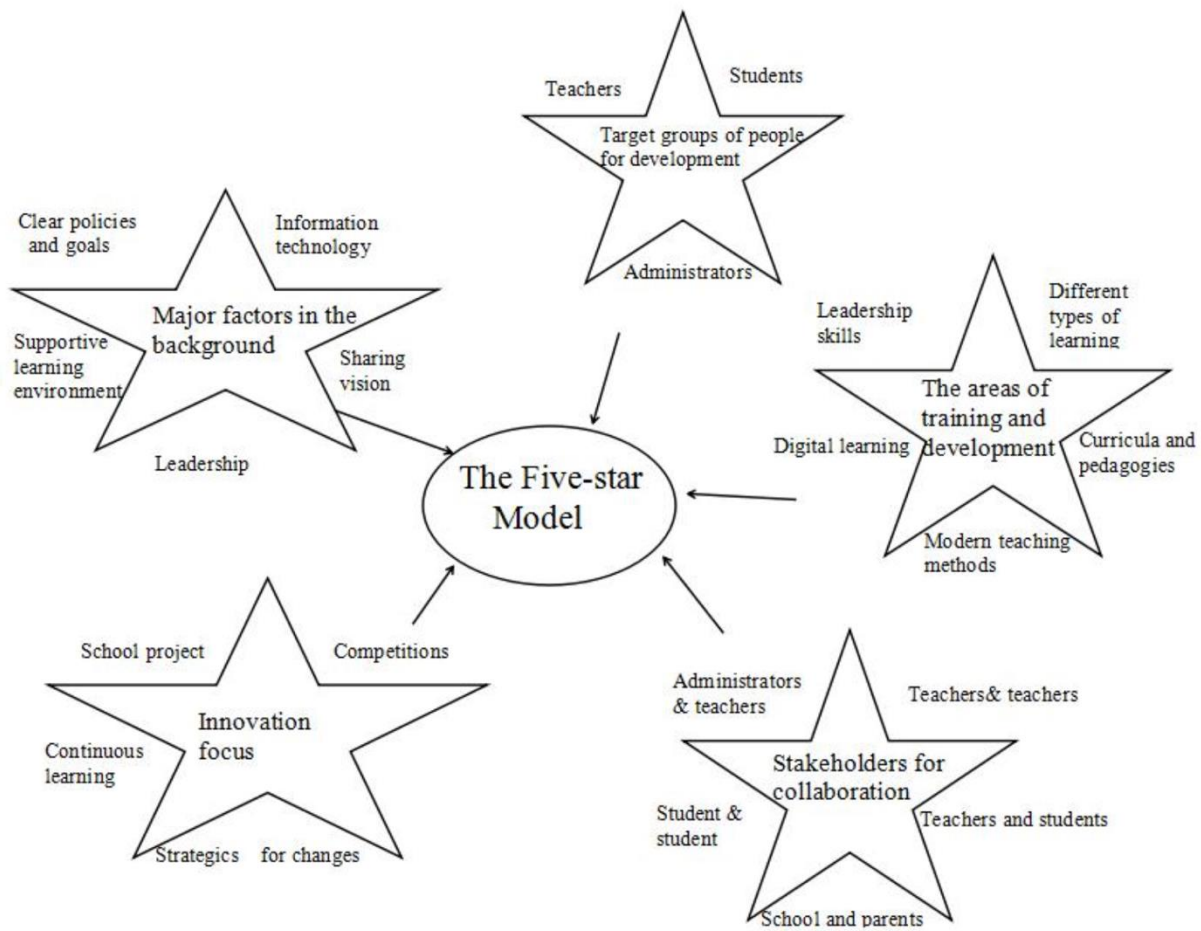

Figure 1: *A proposed model for excellent schools (Yuan & Chayanuvat, 2022)*

As seen in Figure 1, according to findings of Yuan and Chayanuvat's (2022) study, the elements that make up the proposed excellent school model are; targeting the development of teachers, students and school administrators; determining the education and development areas as leadership skills, different types of learning, curriculum and pedagogy knowledge, modern teaching methods and digital learning; school administrators, teachers and students cooperating with each other and the school cooperating with parents; the school focusing on innovations such as competitions, change strategies, continuous learning and school projects; the main factors behind the excellent school are information technology, shared vision, leadership, supportive learning environment and clear policies and goals. As can be seen, the excellent school models presented indicate that all stakeholders are in constant search of the better for education and training and the environments offered to be better. For all of these to be done, excellent leadership plays an important role in the school and makes the school excellent. In addition, teachers have a special place and are an important factor in schools becoming excellent schools. Indeed, teachers are at the center of education and training, and they provide one-on-one education and training with the student.

In this context, it is important that teachers' views on the excellent school are at the center of education and training. How teachers make sense of the excellent school is important for understanding the excellent school phenomenon. The views of the excellent school to be obtained from them can contribute to excellence in education. Indeed, the aim of this study is to reveal how teachers make sense of the excellent school. To reveal the views of teachers on the excellent school,

questions were asked to reveal how they define the excellent school, what they experience in the excellent school and what they compare the excellent school to. It is thought that the results to be obtained will provide researchers and practitioners with a different perspective on the excellent school and will make significant contributions to the excellent school literature.

Method

In the study, qualitative research method was used to reveal teachers' views on excellent school. Qualitative research method is used to reveal how people construct the world they live in and how they interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2009). In order to understand how teachers experienced and make sense of excellent schools, the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods was adopted. Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research method designs, was preferred to make sense of the concept of excellent school in line with teachers' experiences and thoughts and to reveal the characteristics of excellent school. Phenomenology examines entities from different perspectives and approaches the phenomenon holistically (Moustakas, 1994). It is to describe people's perceptions and experiences regarding the phenomenon. Phenomenology is a design used to clarify phenomena that are known but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding and to gain perspective on them. As a matter of fact, phenomena can emerge in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts and situations (Patton, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In addition, metaphor-focused data were collected and analyzed from the participants in the study to better understand their experiences about the excellent school phenomenon. Based on the subjective experiences of the participants, their perceptions and the meanings they attributed to the events were tried to be revealed. In fact, in metaphor-focused studies, when the participants' views on the phenomenon are expressed together due to the use of metaphor, it provides a rich content about the phenomenon. In addition, the reason for the meanings that the participants attribute to the same metaphor may differ (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Attention was paid to the meanings and selection reasons that the participants attributed to the metaphor, and themes were created for the metaphors by conducting content analysis.

Participants were selected using the criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. In the criterion sampling method, situations that meet predetermined criteria should be studied in the research (Patton, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this research, the criterion was determined as the participants continuing their postgraduate education and working in an educational institution. The study group of the research consists of teachers continuing their postgraduate education in the field of Educational Administration in the 2023-2024 academic year. The study group consists of a total of 27 teachers, 14 female and 13 male teachers, from various branches. Although there is no standard number for the size of the participants in phenomenological studies, it is expected to keep the number small since in-depth analysis and resolution will be made in general (Patton, 2018). Postgraduate students who wanted to participate in the research voluntarily were accepted to the study. The participants were given code names such as Elif and Halit, independent of their own names, based on the characteristics of the participants, the culture they live in, and ethical principles, and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

No.	Participant Code	Education Level	Gender	Professional Experience	Duration at Current School	Subject Area
1	Asya	Bachelor's	Female	18 years	1 year	Science Education
2	Burak	Bachelor's	Male	21 years	8 years	Primary Education
3	Ceren	Bachelor's	Female	10 years	9 years	Visual Arts
4	Çağla	Bachelor's	Female	21 years	16 years	English Language Teaching
5	Defne	Bachelor's	Female	24 years	4 years	Preschool Education
6	Elif	Bachelor's	Female	7 years	1 year	English Language Teaching
7	Filiz	Bachelor's	Female	15 years	8 years	English Language Teaching
8	Gökay	Bachelor's	Male	22 years	2 years	Primary Education
9	Halit	Bachelor's	Male	1 year	1 year	Guidance and Psychological Counseling
10	Işıl	Bachelor's	Female	2 years	2 years	English Language Teaching
11	İsmail	Bachelor's	Male	23 years	15 years	Primary Education
12	Kenan	Bachelor's	Male	24 years	5 years	Physical Education
13	Leyla	Bachelor's	Female	11 years	2 years	English Language Teaching
14	Murat	Bachelor's	Male	9 years	2 years	Preschool Education
15	Nevzat	Bachelor's	Male	5 years	1 year	Legal Studies Teaching
16	Orkun	Bachelor's	Male	20 years	2 years	Primary Education
17	Ömer	Bachelor's	Male	28 years	4 years	History Teaching
18	Pelin	Bachelor's	Female	24 years	12 years	Preschool Education
19	Rıza	Bachelor's	Male	5 years	1 year	Mathematics Teaching
20	Sedat	Bachelor's	Male	20 years	5 years	Physical Education
21	Şirin	Bachelor's	Female	14 years	4 years	English Language Teaching
22	Tarık	Master's	Male	20 years	6 years	Turkish Language Teaching
23	Umay	Bachelor's	Female	17 years	4 years	Primary Education
24	Ümit	Master's	Male	16 years	4 years	German Language Teaching
25	Vildan	Bachelor's	Female	5 years	1 year	English Language Teaching
26	Yeliz	Bachelor's	Female	15 years	1 year	English Language Teaching
27	Zeynep	Master's	Female	14 years	7 years	Guidance and Psychological Counseling

As seen in Table 1, the study group consists of 27 participants in total, 14 female and 13 male. There are 24 participants with a bachelor's degree and three participants with a master's degree. The professional experience of the participants varies from a minimum of one year to a maximum of 28 years. The distribution of the study group's subject areas is as follows; eight people from English language teaching, five from classroom teaching, three from preschool teaching, two from psychological counseling and guidance, two from physical education teaching, one from science

teaching, one from visual arts, one from mathematics teaching, one from Turkish teaching, one from history teaching, one from justice teaching and one from German teaching.

For data collection, a structured interview form designed by the researchers was utilized. The interview form consists of the participants' demographic information and two open-ended questions. In the "Demographic information" section, participants were asked about their education level, gender, professional experience, working duration at current school, and their subject area. Then, for participants to express their experiences and opinions about excellent schools, the questions *"What is an excellent school like for you?"* and *"An excellent school is like/similar to… because…"* were asked. Data analysis was done using the content analysis technique. Content analysis is a technique used to reach conclusions from texts. In content analysis, data is systematically analyzed to create codes, and these codes are collected under subthemes, which are then collected under more general themes (Krippendorff, 2004). First, written texts were examined, codes were created by determining statements related to the scope of the study. The codes created were checked, the similarities and differences between the codes were examined, and the codes were grouped, and a subtheme was created. A superordinate theme was determined for the subthemes created within the scope of the relevant literature and placed under it. The resulting themes were checked by researchers and experts in the field, and validity and reliability studies were conducted. In qualitative research, validity refers to credibility and transferability, while reliability refers to consistency and confirmability (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The credibility of the research was ensured by obtaining participant confirmation by having the collected data read and approved by the participants. The transferability of the research was ensured by explaining the study group, data collection tool, process and findings in detail, by selecting purposive sampling and by supporting the codes obtained from the data with direct quotes from the interviews. To ensure the consistency of the research, a draft was determined for the codes and themes based on other studies in the literature. The codes and themes obtained from the interviews were created separately by the researchers. Then, the researchers discussed the codes and themes, made comparisons and decided on common codes and themes. Expert review was used to ensure the confirmability of the research. In this direction, the created codes and themes were presented to the opinions of faculty members working in the same field, incompatible codes were edited, and the codes and themes were finalized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (2016) was used in calculating the agreement percentage between the researchers. According to the researchers in question, reliability calculations of 70% and above are considered reliable. The percentage of agreement calculated in the study was found to be 85%.

Findings

In this section, within the scope of the purpose of the research; the teachers' experiences with excellent school and the findings regarding what they liken excellent school to are included. As a result of the analysis, the participants' experiences with excellent school were grouped under nine themes: education and teaching characteristics, school culture, school climate, environmental relations, financial management, ethical behaviors, school administrator characteristics, teacher characteristics and student characteristics. The metaphors used by the participants for excellent school and their reasons were analyzed. When the metaphors used by the participants for excellent school were analyzed, ten themes emerged: "Development-oriented", "Working in harmony", "Coexisting with differences", Contributing to society", Supportive", "Confident", "Goal-oriented", "Loving", Solution-oriented" and "Making you feel a sense of belonging". The findings are given below, together with the participants' opinions, in order.

Findings on Education and Teaching Characteristics at Excellent School

The findings regarding the education and teaching characteristics at the excellent school, as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Findings on Education and Teaching Characteristics at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Education and Teaching Characteristics	Educational environment	Supporting academic achievement	*Orkun, Sedat, Vildan, Yeliz*
		Valuing interests and talents	*Pelin, Sedat, Ümit, Ceren*
		Contributing to students' personal development	*Nevzat, Sedat, Yeliz, Ümit*
		Encouraging creativity	*Orkun, Rıza, Halit*
		Providing equal opportunities	*Pelin, Halit, Ceren*
		Ensuring a safe learning environment	*Yeliz, Pelin*
		Supporting individual learning	*Pelin*
		Delivering quality education	*Nevzat*
		Providing effective learning environments	*Asya*
	Educational activities	Activities supporting student development	*Rıza, Defne, Pelin, Sedat, Vildan, Ümit, Yeliz*
		Comprehensive and strong curriculum	*Pelin, Orkun, Rıza, Asya, Ümit*
		Teaching life skills	*Kenan, Rıza, Nevzat*
	Teaching methods	Effective and diverse teaching methods	*Pelin, Halit, Asya, Yeliz, Ümit, Ceren, Zeynep*
		Student-centered methods	*İsmail, Asya, Yeliz, Halit*
	Educational Goals	Developing students with 21st-century skills	*Pelin, Ümit, Çağla*
		Acting in line with the goals and principles of Turkish National Education	*Işıl*
		Preparing students for life	*Kenan*

As seen in Table 2, the education and teaching characteristics of the excellent school, according to the participants, consist of four sub-themes: "Educational Environment," "Educational Activities," "Teaching Methods," and "Educational Goals." Among these, participants expressed the most opinions related to the "Educational Environment." Participants' perspectives on the sub-theme of the "Educational Environment" include supporting academic achievement, valuing interests and talents, contributing to students' personal development, encouraging creativity, providing equal opportunities, ensuring a safe learning environment, supporting individual learning, delivering quality education, and providing effective learning environments. Some participant opinions regarding the findings are as follows:

*"It provides an environment that supports students' **academic achievement**." (Sedat)*
*"It understands students' **interests and talents**." (Pelin)*
*"The excellent school is a gateway to the infinity of knowledge. Students who pass through this infinite door can benefit from it in the best way and **improve themselves**." (Nevzat)*
*"It has an environment that **encourages creativity**." (Rıza)*
*"It offers an educational environment where **each individual can develop their potential** to the fullest." (Ceren)*
*"It is a school that provides a **safe learning environment**." (Yeliz)*
*"An excellent school focuses on the **individual learning needs** of students." (Pelin)*
*"It is a school that **offers quality education** to students." (Nevzat)*
*"It is a place that provides **effective educational and learning environments**." (Asya)*

The participants' opinions on educational activities include activities supporting student development, a comprehensive and strong curriculum, and teaching life skills. Some participant statements related to the findings are as follows:

*"It is a school where activities **supporting social and emotional development** can be implemented."* (Rıza)
*"It stands out with its **achievements in artistic or sports activities**."* (Vildan)
*"An excellent school **offers a broad curriculum**. A rich curriculum, including STEM (Science, technology, Engineering, Mathematics), is essential."* (Pelin)
*"In my opinion, an excellent school is one that **can implement a strong academic program**."* (Orkun)
*"Students receive **education about life through the experiences** of their teachers."* (Kenan)
*"**Practical skills** can be systematically provided through the curriculum by educators."* (Rıza)

The participants' opinions on teaching methods include effective and diverse teaching methods and student-centered approaches. Some participant statements related to the findings are as follows:

*"Technological tools such as computer labs, interactive whiteboards, and digital resources provide students with **various learning opportunities**. Programs are developed in this direction, and **teaching strategies suitable for different learning styles** are applied."* (Pelin)
*"**Different methods and techniques** that meet **the requirements of the era** are used, distinguishing them from classical teaching methods and techniques."* (Zeynep)
*"It is based on a **student-centered approach**."* (Asya)
*"Teaching is conducted using **methods tailored to the individual learning** needs of students."* (Halit)

The participants' opinions on educational goals include developing students with 21st-century skills, acting in line with the goals and principles of Turkish National Education, and preparing students for life. Some participant statements related to the findings are as follows:

*"Through **project-based learning,** students are provided with environments that contribute to their entrepreneurship, openness to learning, and personal development."* (Ümit)
*"It is an institution that **trains equipped, modern, creative, successful, peaceful students who understand and recognize life**."* (Çağla)
*"What matters in an excellent school is that education and instruction are carried out successfully **in accordance with the goals and objectives of the National Education system**."* (Işıl)
*"It is where students are **prepared for higher education and, consequently, for life through the education and instruction** they receive."* (Kenan)

Findings on School Culture at Excellent School

The findings related to school culture at the excellent school, obtained from the analysis of the data from the participants, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Findings on School Culture at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
School Culture	Basic Assumptions	Collaboration	*Işıl, İsmail, Rıza, Şirin, Umay, Elif*
		Continuous self-improvement	*Pelin, Zeynep, Elif, Gökay*
		Striving for excellence	*İsmail, Şirin, Zeynep, Leyla*
		Working as a team	*İsmail, Zeynep*
		Being an inspiration	*Filiz*
		Efficient working	*İsmail*
	Core Values	Social responsibility	*Zeynep, Elif, Filiz*
		Valuing cultural differences	*Orkun, Umay, Ceren*
		Adaptability	*Gökay, Ceren, Umay*
		Innovativeness	*Pelin, Gökay*
		Feeling special and a sense belonging	*Leyla, Kenan*

As seen in Table 3, the participants' views on the excellent school culture are categorized into two sub-themes: "Basic Assumptions" and "Core Values." The participants primarily expressed their views on the "Basic Assumptions" related to the excellent school. The views of the participants on basic assumptions include collaboration, continuous self-improvement, striving for excellence, working as a team, being an inspiration, and efficient working. Some participant views on the findings are as follows:

*"Managers, teachers, students, parents, and cleaning staff **all work in collaboration**." (Elif)*
*"An excellent school is a living school. It is **constantly developing and renewing**..." (Gökay)*
*"In an excellent school, all stakeholders work **towards the goal of achieving excellence**."*
(Şirin)
*"At an excellent school, work is done **with a team spirit**." (Zeynep)*
*"They are schools that serve **as an inspiration for other schools."** (Filiz)*
*"There is **efficiency** in the school." (İsmail)*

The participants' views on core values include social responsibility, valuing cultural differences, adaptability, being innovative, and making individuals feel special and a sense of belonging. Some participant views on the findings are as follows:

*"They are schools that nurture **individuals who are beneficial to society**." (Filiz)*
*"A school where individuals from different cultures coexist, **fostering intercultural harmony and interaction**, can be considered excellent." (Umay)*
*"In my opinion, an excellent school is where people from very different backgrounds come together and **create a beautiful harmony.** In an excellent school, students, teachers, and other staff work together **in harmony**." (Ceren)*
*"It is a school that renews itself and **produces new values** in the light of science." (Gökay)*
*"It is a school where each of its administrators, teachers, students, parents, all education workers, and stakeholders **feel special and excellent**." (Leyla)*
*"It is a school where students **feel a sense of belonging**." (Kenan)*

Findings on School Climate at Excellent School

The findings related to the school climate in an excellent school, based on the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Findings on School Climate at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
School Climate	Educational Environment	Students feel happy	*Ömer, Filiz, Sedat, Leyla*
		Positive energy prevails	*İsmail, Şirin, Ceren, Defne*
		A place of attraction for everyone	*Işıl, Kenan, Defne*
	Interpersonal Relationships	Trust exists	*İsmail, Şirin, Defne, Orkun*
		Effective communication	*Asya, Burak*
		High level of collaboration	*Şirin, Burak*
		Solidarity exists	*Burak, Ceren*
		Sincere relationships	*Ceren*
		Make individuals feel valued	*Pelin*

As seen in Table 4, the theme of school climate related to the excellent school, based on participants' views, consists of two subthemes: "Educational Environment" and "Interpersonal Relationships." Participants primarily expressed their views on the "Educational Environment" regarding the excellent school. Their opinions about the educational environment are categorized as follows: a place where students feel happy, where positive energy prevails, and where it is a center of attraction for everyone. Some participants' opinions on the findings are as follows:

*"It provides a **classroom environment that prioritizes students'** personal development and happiness." (Sedat)*

*"Kindness and beauty are contagious. Ensuring everyone's peace and success elevates the school to excellence. This **makes them happy individuals**." (Leyla)*

*"It has a **positive school climate**." (Şirin)*

*"It should have **a positive and vibrant atmosphere**. An excellent school should also exude **positive energy**." (Ceren)*

*"An excellent school is a place where students, teachers, administrative staff, and other personnel **come willingly and joyfully and miss when they are away**." (Işıl)*

*"It is **a place where students want to be**." (Kenan)*

Participants' views on interpersonal relationships include the existence of trust, effective communication, high levels of collaboration, solidarity, sincere relationships, and making individuals feel valued. Participants expressed their opinions as follows:

*"It is a school where **mutual respect and trust** exist between students and teachers." (Orkun)*

*"It is a school where **communication is at its highest level**." (Burak)*

*"An excellent school has a **collaborative** and positive school climate." (Şirin)*

*"In an excellent school, students, teachers, and other staff come together to **show solidarity** and achieve success together." (Ceren)*

*"There are **positive and sincere relationships** between students, teachers, and staff." (Ceren)*

*"An excellent school **values every student**." (Pelin)*

Findings on Environmental Relations at Excellent School

The findings regarding environmental relations at the excellent school, based on the analysis of data obtained from participants, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Findings on Environmental Relations at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Environmental Relations	Communication and Collaboration	With civil society organizations	*Yeliz, Pelin*
		With parents	*Pelin, Orkun*
	Stakeholder Interest	Satisfaction with education	*Vildan*
		Enthusiastic and determined	*Leyla, Vildan*
	Sensitivity	Awareness towards the environment	*Pelin*
		Leading in environmental protection	*Zeynep*
		Supporting the development of the environment	*Ümit, Pelin*

As seen in Table 5, according to the participants' views, the theme of environmental relations related to the excellent school consists of three subthemes: "Communication and Collaboration," "Stakeholder Interest," and "Sensitivity." Participants most frequently expressed their views on "Communication and Collaboration" in relation to the excellent school. Their opinions about communication and collaboration include being in communication and collaboration with civil society organizations and parents. Some participants' views on the findings are as follows:

*"The institution has **strong communication with civil society organizations**." (Yeliz)*

*"It interacts with communities and is **in effective collaboration with civil society organizations**." (Pelin)*

*"It involves parents in school processes and ensures regular communication. It is in **effective collaboration with parents**." (Pelin)*

*"My school **encourages parental involvement**." (Orkun)*

Participants' views on stakeholder interest include the satisfaction, enthusiasm, and determination of all stakeholders with educational activities. Some participants' views on the findings are as follows:

> *"The administrators, teachers, students, parents, **all educational staff, and all stakeholders are satisfied** and happy in this school." (Leyla)*
> *"An excellent school is one where **all external stakeholders are happy, enthusiastic, and determined.**" (Vildan)*

Participants' views on sensitivity include environmental awareness, leadership in environmental protection, and providing necessary support for the development of the environment. Some participants' views on the findings are as follows:

> *"An excellent school values **sustainability principles and environmental awareness**." (Pelin)*
> *"There are environments that can **raise awareness** among students about various **environmental issues.**" (Ümit)*
> *"On the one hand, it distinguishes itself from its surroundings while **considering the needs of the environment and enables the environment to change and develop**." (Zeynep)*

Findings on Financial Management at Excellent School

As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, the findings regarding financial management in an excellent school are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Findings on Financial Management at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Financial Management	Financial Usage	Infrastructure and equipment	*Pelin, Ümit Rıza, Defne*
		Cleaning activities	*Ömer*

As shown in Table 6, according to the participants' views, the theme of financial management in an excellent school consists of the sub-theme "Financial Usage." The participants' views on financial usage are related to infrastructure, equipment, and cleaning activities. The participants most frequently expressed their views on "Infrastructure and Equipment" in relation to the excellent school. Some of the participants' views on the findings are as follows:

> *"The **technological equipment** is very good. The school does what is necessary for this. (Ümit)*
> *"It has a **well-equipped**, secure physical environment." (Rıza)*
> *"It is a school where parents are sure **of the hygiene of the educational environmen**t. The school uses **its resources for cleaning activities**." (Ömer)*

Findings on Ethical Behaviors at Excellent School

As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, the findings related to ethical behaviors at the excellent school are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Findings on Ethical Behaviors at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Ethical Behaviors	Behavioral Ethics	Responsibility	*Asya, Burak, Zeynep*
		Merit	*Çağla*
	Climate Ethics	Equality	*Pelin*
		Justice	*Zeynep*
	Ethics in Decision-Making	Democracy	*Zeynep*

As seen in Table 7, the theme of ethical behavior in the excellent school, according to participants, consists of three sub-themes: "Behavioral Ethics," "Climate Ethics," and "Ethics in Decision-Making." The participants most frequently expressed opinions about "Behavioral Ethics" in relation to the excellent school. The participants' views on behavioral ethics are focused on responsibility and merit. Some of the comments from participants regarding these findings are as follows:

> *"It is a school that **instills a sense of social responsibility**." (Asya)*
> *"In an excellent school, **responsibility** is shared by involving students, teachers, and families in the decision-making process." (Zeynep)*
> *"An excellent school is a place where the school principal is appointed **based on merit** and is knowledgeable in their field." (Çağla)*

As per the participants' views on climatic ethics, they are related to equality and justice. Some participant views are as follows:

> *"It provides **equal opportunities** to every student and prevents discrimination." (Pelin)*
> *"It fosters **a sense of justice** for those involved in decision-making, making them feel valued." (Zeynep)*

As for the participants' views on ethical decision-making, they reflect a democratic attitude. One participant's view is:

> *"**A democratic attitude** is displayed in decision-making at the school." (Zeynep)*

Findings on School Administrator Characteristics at Excellent School

The analysis of the data obtained from participants reveals the findings related to the characteristics of school administrators in an excellent school, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Findings on School Administrator Characteristics at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
School Administrator Characteristics	Personal Characteristics	Leadership	*Pelin, Şirin, Yeliz, Elif*
		Visionary	*Elif, Ömer*
	Behavioral Characteristics	Treating equally	*Pelin*
		Being fair	*Zeynep*
		Involving stakeholders in decision-making	*Zeynep*

As seen in Table 8, according to the participants' views, the theme of "School administrator characteristics" in the excellent school consists of two sub-themes: "Personal characteristics" and "Behavioral characteristics" The participants most frequently shared their opinions about "Personal characteristics" in relation to the excellent school. The views of the participants regarding personal characteristics include possessing leadership qualities and being visionary. Some participant statements related to the findings are as follows:

> *"Excellent school is one where **the entire management team exhibits** instructional, transformational, strategic, and servant **leadership qualities**." (Elif)*
> *"The school management is **visionary** and is able to achieve its goals." (Ömer)*

The participants' views on behavioral characteristics include treating everyone equally, being fair, and involving stakeholders in decision-making. Some participant statements related to these views are as follows:

> *"Treats every student **equally** and **does not discriminate**." (Pelin)*

*"The school administrators are **fair** in their decisions." (Zeynep)*
*"The management **involves stakeholders in the decision-making process**." (Zeynep)*

Findings on Teacher Characteristics at Excellent School

Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, the findings related to teacher characteristics at excellent school are presented in Table 9.

Table 9
Findings on Teacher Characteristics at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Teacher Characteristics	Professional Competencies	Being qualified	*Orkun, Pelin, Asya, Rıza, Şirin, Yeliz, Halit*
		Being experienced	*Pelin, Orkun, Yeliz*
		Continuously improving oneself	*Çağla, Elif*
		Showing respect for one's work	*İsmail*
	Personal Characteristics	Being supportive	*Pelin, Elif*
		Being guiding	*Kenan, Yeliz*
		Having effective communication skills	*Elif*
		Being full of life	*Halit*

As shown in Table 9, according to the participants' views, the theme of teacher characteristics in the excellent school consists of two sub-themes: "Professional Competencies" and "Personal Characteristics." Participants mostly expressed opinions regarding "Professional Competencies." Their views on professional competencies include being qualified, experienced, continuously improving oneself, and showing respect for one's work. Some participant statements related to these findings are as follows:

*"There are **highly qualified teachers**." (Rıza)*
*"It is a school where **teachers are experienced**." (Yeliz)*
*"They **have teachers who are always open to innovation and updates**." (Çağla)*
*"There are **teachers who do their job in the best way and respect their work**." (İsmail)*

Participants' views on personal characteristics include being supportive, being guiding, having effective communication skills, and being full of life. Some participant statements related to these findings are as follows:

*"Teachers **support students**, guide them, and provide an effective learning environment." (Pelin)*
*"They have teachers **who guide students**." (Yeliz)*
*"There are teachers who value students' and parents' needs and **maintain constant communication** with them." (Elif)*
*"Teachers are **full of life**, and there is **positive interaction** between teachers and students.(Halit)*

Findings on Student Characteristics at Excellent School

The findings related to student characteristics at the excellent school, based on the analysis of data obtained from the participants, are presented in Table 10.

Table 10
Findings on Student Characteristics at Excellent School

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Participants
Student Characteristics	Personal Characteristics	Being happy	*Ömer, Filiz*
		Being curious	*Orkun*
	Academic Characteristics	Being successful	*Filiz*
		Participating in the decision-making process	*Orkun*

As shown in Table 10, according to the participants' views, the theme of student characteristics at the excellent school consists of two sub-themes: 'Personal Characteristics' and 'Academic Characteristics.' Participants most frequently shared opinions about 'Personal Characteristics' in relation to the excellent school. The views of participants regarding personal characteristics are related to students being happy and curious. Some of the participant views on these findings are as follows:

*"It is a school where students are **happy and enjoy attend**ing." (Ömer)*
*"It is a school where good and **happy individuals** are raised." (Filiz)*
*"It is a school where students are eager, enthusiastic, and **curious to learn**." (Orkun)*

The participants' views on academic characteristics are related to students being successful and participating in the decision-making process. Some of the participant views on academic characteristics are as follows:

*"These are schools where **high academic success** is parallel to high social and emotional development levels." (Filiz)*
*"In an excellent school, **students are involved in the decision-making processes** of the school." (Orkun)*

Findings Related to the Metaphors of an Excellent School

When the data obtained from the participants were examined, it was determined that the participants had presented a total of 25 metaphors. The metaphors were categorized and presented in Table 11.

Table 11
Findings Related to the Metaphors of an Excellent School

Themes	Metaphors
Development oriented	Clock, Workshop, Mother, Determination, Ocean
Collaborative	Machine, Clockwork, Türkiye, Beehive, Living organism
Inclusive of differences	Flower garden, Fruit orchard, Rainbow
Contributing to society	Clear water, Fertile field, Sun
Supportive	Soil, Spring, Sun
Trustworthy	Peaceful home, Rooted tree
Goal-oriented	Car, Ship
Loving	Gardener
Solution-focused	Laboratory
Creating a sense of belonging	Family

As shown in Table 11, according to the participants' views, the metaphors for the excellent school are grouped into ten themes: "Development-oriented," "Collaborative," "Inclusive of differences," "Contributing to society," "Supportive," "Trustworthy," "Goal-oriented," "Loving," "Solution-focused," and "Creating a sense of belonging." The participants most frequently presented metaphors suggesting that the excellent school is development oriented. Below are some participant views regarding the metaphors related to the development-oriented nature of the excellent school.

*"An excellent school is like a **clock**; it should never be allowed to stop. This is because a clock is crucial for managing time. In an excellent school, the students' progress over time should be constantly observed and adjusted. It must ensure continuous improvement for the students' development." (Ümit)*

*"An excellent school is like a **workshop**. This is because it is similar to an environment where students develop their creativity, share ideas, and learn new things together. It is a place where they can discover and develop their talents." (Sedat)*

*"An excellent school is like a **mother**. This is because it supports the child's development in every aspect." (Defne)*

*"An excellent school is like **determination**. Because in the feeling of determination, alongside wanting the best for oneself, there is also a desire to want the best for everyone. To develop continuously, one acts patiently and resolutely. An excellent school operates with team spirit, grows by working together, and everyone helps each other develop." (Zeynep)*

*"An excellent school is like an **ocean**. Because it is boundless, when we look at the ocean, we see an endless expanse of blue, and we always want to chase after it. With every step, we want to go further and discover every unexplored particle. For me, an excellent school is like an ocean, infinite and boundless, containing countless pieces of new knowledge waiting to be discovered." (Nevzat)*

The participant opinions regarding metaphors representing the collaborative nature of an excellent school are presented below.

*"An excellent school is like a well-oiled and well-maintained **machine**. This is because all parts of the machine (in this school, input-process-output will exist) work in coordination with each other. It is clear when and what will take place in terms of time. In an excellent school, internal guidelines clarify who will do what and how." (Tarık)*

*"An excellent school is like a **clockwork**. This is because the school, family, and teachers work harmoniously." (Pelin)*

*"An excellent school is like **Türkiye**. This is because, in an excellent school, there is harmony, collaboration, and interaction between differences, just like in Turkey." (Umay)*

*"An excellent school is like a **beehive**. This is because, in a beehive, there is organized and harmonious activity." (İsmail)*

*"An excellent school is like a **living organism**. This is because every structure that forms the school can continue to exist as part of a whole. Each part can be meaningful to one another. Plato's concept of the state is similar to this structure. If there is any disease or negative situation in any part of a living organism, it causes problems throughout the whole organism, and the same can be considered for a school." (Gökay)*

The participant opinions regarding metaphors representing the inclusiveness of differences in an excellent school are presented below.

*"An excellent school is like a **flower garden**. This is because a flower garden contains flowers in different colors, shapes, and sizes. Each flower has its own unique beauty and characteristic. The flowers in this garden are like students from different cultures, social, and economic backgrounds." (Orkun)*

*"An excellent school is like a **fruit orchard** with different fruit trees. When a gardener is found and suitable conditions are provided for these trees, all the trees will bloom at the right time and bear the best fruit. Each tree is happy and responsible for being itself. The olive tree does not feel sad, jealous, or compete with the cherry tree because it is not a cherry tree. What it knows and needs to do is to give delicious olives, provide shade for people, and offer a home to birds. The coexistence of differences is a great richness." (Filiz)*

*"An excellent school is like a **rainbow**. This is because a rainbow contains different colors. An excellent school also offers diversity and richness in terms of students, teachers, and staff. The colors of the rainbow come together to form a whole, and in an excellent school, everything forms a complete unity." (Ceren)*

Participant opinions regarding the metaphors representing the contribution of an excellent school to society are as follows:

*"An excellent school is like **clear water**. This is because in clear water, there is no turbidity or trash. The creatures within it can be nourished safely. In an excellent school, there is nothing useless for its individuals. Everything in an excellent school, every piece of knowledge, serves the people within it and affects them. In an excellent school, administrators, teachers, students, and other members, as well as the external environment, are nourished by the inputs of the school. Students benefiting from the inputs of an excellent school become good individuals in society." (Elif)*

*"An excellent school is like a **fertile field**. Because the products that will come from this field will please everyone, and this situation positively affects the future. The environment in an excellent school is important for all stakeholders, and all stakeholders are necessary for the realization of educational activities. Its output affects everyone." (Vildan)*

*"An excellent school is like the **sun**. Because it is unique, the best, the brightest, and it illuminates the entire universe with its light." (Leyla)*

Participant opinions regarding the metaphors representing the supportive nature of an excellent school are as follows:

*"An excellent school is like **soil**. Because when nourished with the right methods, it allows every student to take root, develop their potential, and bloom their unique flower." (Şirin)*

*"An excellent school is like a **spring**. This is because, for students to receive equipped and effective education, all resources needed by school administration, teachers, students, and even support staff are provided without deficiency. If a spring finds an untouched, unsabotaged path, it will reach the places that need it flawlessly. Similarly, if a spring finds skilled and capable individuals in the place where it is needed, this resource will be used most efficiently and will achieve its purpose." (Çağla)*

*"An excellent school is like the **sun**. Because it both illuminates and gives warmth. It prepares students for life on one hand, while also preparing them for higher education on the other." (Ömer)*

Participant opinions regarding the metaphors representing an excellent school as a place of trust are as follows:

*"An excellent school is like a **peaceful home**. This is because individuals view their homes as the safest environment. It is seen as a protective shield against external threats. Individuals raised in a peaceful home feel psychologically more comfortable, which helps them be confident when forming their opinions." (Rıza)*

*"An excellent school is like an **old, rooted plane tree**. This is because an excellent school provides students with a strong academic foundation, offers a student-centered learning environment, supports student development in various areas, and has experienced teachers who guide students. It creates a safe and inclusive atmosphere, just like the shade of a plane tree." (Yeliz)*

Participant opinions regarding the metaphors representing the goal-oriented nature of an excellent school are as follows:

*"An excellent school is like a **good car**. This is because goals can be easily reached with a good car." (Burak)*

*"An excellent school is like a **ship**. This is because it aims to provide an environment for students to achieve their goals and carry them toward success, taking them to the harbor." (Işıl)*

*"An excellent school is like a **ship**. If we consider the ocean or sea as their living space, the ship can be thought of as the school. The education will be conducted on this ship in their*

living environment. The ship will determine its direction based on its chosen mission and vision. If it sails in shallow water, it will have a weak mission. If it sails in deep waters, it will be able to carry out its mission of preparing stakeholders for life." (Kenan)

Participant opinions regarding the metaphors representing the loving, solution-oriented, and belonging nature of an excellent school are as follows:

*"An excellent school is like the **careful, loving hands of a gardener**. This is because it provides an environment nourished by love for students and transforms their potential into a blooming garden. The education at this school creates an excellent garden, filled with positive interactions between teachers and students, growing into a community." (Halit)*

*"An excellent school is like a **laboratory**. This is because its primary purpose is to conduct scientific work in all its departments, and through its many researchers, it can find solutions to all problems." (Asya)*

*"An excellent school is like a **family**. This is because you spend half of your day with the stakeholders there. Over time, this helps students feel like they are part of a family. Teachers are like parents to the students, and students are like siblings to each other." (Murat)*

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

As a result of the content analysis of interviews conducted with teachers, the characteristics of excellent schools were categorized under nine themes: education and teaching characteristics, school culture, school climate, environmental relations, financial management, ethical values, administrator characteristics, teacher characteristics, and student characteristics.

Excellent schools are those that continuously improve themselves and strive to be the best. Therefore, these schools have distinctive characteristics that set them apart from other schools. In an excellent school, education and teaching characteristics are categorized into educational environment, activities, methods, and goals. In the educational environment of an excellent school, academic achievement is supported, students' interests and talents are valued, their personal development is encouraged, creativity is fostered, equal opportunities are provided, a safe learning environment is ensured, individual learning is supported, quality education is delivered, and efforts are made to provide effective learning environments. In (Kıral, 2022) study, similar indicators related to education in an excellent school include implementing programs that develop lifelong learning skills, fostering student creativity, and preparing students for the future. The educational environment in excellent schools is student-centered, allowing students to showcase their potential and achieve their goals. In an excellent school, students can observe that the educational environment helps their development, supports their academic success, values their interests and talents, appreciates their creativity, offers opportunities for better learning, and ensures a safe environment. Educational activities in excellent schools are organized to support student development, establish a comprehensive and strong curriculum, and teach life skills. According to the research by (Zou vd., 2022), in excellent teaching, teachers deliver instruction confidently and effectively, guide students toward achieving targeted learning outcomes, empower students holistically, and collaborate with them to ensure they become lifelong learners. Teaching methods in excellent schools include effective and diverse methods applied with a student-centered approach. For excellent teaching, teachers need to make lessons engaging for students, achieving active student participation (Chen, 2016). The educational goals in excellent schools focus on preparing students for life, equipping them with 21st-century skills, and adhering to the goals and principles of education. As demonstrated, the educational environment, activities, goals, and teaching methods in excellent schools are organized to maximize students' benefits. These schools help students unlock their potential and facilitate their self-actualization.

In an excellent school, school culture is defined by its basic assumptions and core values. Teachers' perspectives on basic assumptions in an excellent school include collaboration, continuous self-improvement, striving for excellence, teamwork, being an inspiration, and efficient working.

According to Schein (2010), basic assumptions are defined as the adoption of certain beliefs and values within a social unit, where behaviors aligned with these beliefs and values become a natural part of the organization. Based on the participants' perspectives, collaboration, continuous self-improvement, and striving for excellence have become integral parts of the culture in excellent schools and are perceived as adopted behaviors. Teachers' views on core values in an excellent school include social responsibility, valuing cultural differences, adaptability, innovativeness, and fostering a sense of feeling special and belonging. In a study by Konay (2024) involving school administrators, the themes of basic values and assumptions were similarly identified as part of the school culture in excellent schools. Additionally, artifacts such as traditions, stories, ceremonies, symbols, and the history of the school were highlighted in the findings. The school climate in excellent schools is described in terms of the educational environment and interpersonal relationships. Teachers' perspectives on the educational environment in excellent schools indicate that it is characterized by happiness among students, a predominance of positive energy, and being an attractive place for everyone. Research conducted on excellent schools has shown that school climate positively affects school performance (Raman et al., 2015). Furthermore, Ulkuşlu et al. (2023) reported that teachers described the school climate using concepts such as success, trust, mutual love and respect, harmony, communication, collaboration, and excellence. Teachers' views on interpersonal relationships in excellent schools include trust, effective communication, high levels of collaboration, solidarity, sincere relationships, and making individuals feel valued. Visone's (2022) study on excellent schools in the United States found that collaboration and teamwork were embraced by teachers, and interpersonal communication was strong and sincere. Environmental relations in excellent schools are characterized by communication and collaboration, stakeholder interest, and sensitivity. Teachers' perspectives on communication and collaboration emphasize working with civil society organizations and parents. Similar findings were highlighted in Konay's (2024) study, where collaboration with civil society organizations and parents was deemed crucial. Teachers' views on stakeholder interest include satisfaction, enthusiasm, and determination among all stakeholders in educational activities. Teachers' perspectives on sensitivity highlight environmental awareness, leading in environmental protection, and providing support for environmental development.

In Excellent schools, financial management is focused on the effective use of resources. Teachers emphasize the importance of infrastructure and cleaning activities as part of the financial management. According to Konay (2024) research, in excellent schools, financial resources generated by the school and allocated by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) should be used in an effective and accountable manner. The study points out that these resources should be managed responsibly and transparently. Regarding Ethical Behaviors, three aspects emerge: behavioral ethics, climate ethics, and ethics in decision-making. Teachers emphasize responsibility and merit in behavioral ethics, while equality and justice are central to climate ethics. In terms of decision-making, a democratic attitude is highlighted. A study by (Bulut & Alabaş, 2023) also identified values such as justice, responsibility, and equality as important in excellent schools, which are similar to the codes of ethical values found in excellent schools. In addition, merit and democratic attitudes are also expressed as key ethical values in these schools. School Administrator Characteristics are categorized into personal and behavioral traits. Teachers' views on administrators' personal characteristics highlight leadership qualities and visionary thinking. Regarding behavioral traits, teachers emphasize equal treatment, fairness, and involving stakeholders in decision-making. Kıral and Başaran's (2024) research also found that excellent administrators share similar qualities. Moreover, Jose (2023), revealed in his study that leaders in excellent schools are those who embrace innovative practices, foster change and help their schools to overcome challenges.

In Excellent schools, teacher characteristics are categorized into professional competencies and personal characteristics. Professional competencies include being qualified, experienced, continuously improving oneself, and showing respect for one's work. Personal characteristics include being supportive, guiding, having effective communication skills, and being full of life. In Sezer and Can's (2020) study on school happiness, it was found that teachers need to have professional competencies, love their profession, renew themselves, show interest in students, be role models, and

be experts in their fields. Similarly, in Üstüner et al.'s (2021) study, it was found that an ideal teacher should possess personality traits such as being open to change, good in interpersonal relationships, valuing ethics, being patient, tolerant, curious, unbiased, determined, and solution-oriented. In terms of professional competencies, teachers should value students, have adequate subject knowledge, value the teaching profession, consider individual differences, guide students, and be aware of rights and responsibilities. In Excellent schools, student characteristics are also categorized into personal and academic characteristics. Teachers' views on students' personal characteristics emphasize that students should be happy and curious. Contrary to the participants' statements, Chen's (2016) study highlighted that for excellent teaching, teachers should show care for students, possess high levels of responsibility and ethics, and be able to manage the classroom effectively. Teachers' views on students' academic characteristics include being successful and participating in the decision-making process. In Kıral and Akgün's (2024) study, excellent students were described as curious, goal-oriented, able to question, having high expectations, and contributing to their environment. Generally, teachers have shared their opinions mostly about the education and teaching characteristics of an excellent school, and the least about financial management. This may be due to the fact that the participants were teachers. In Konay's (2024) study, which aimed to reveal the characteristics of an excellent school through school administrators, participants provided more detailed opinions about financial management, environmental relations, and school culture. This could be because school administrators have more experience in these areas.

The teachers have used a total of 25 metaphors to describe an excellent school, These metaphors related to an excellent school can be categorized under ten themes, such as "Development-oriented," "Collaborative," "Inclusive of differences," "Contributing to society," "Supportive," "Trustworthy," "Goal-oriented," "Loving," "Solution-oriented," and "Making one feel at home." As can be seen, excellent schools continuously update their goals to be better and support all stakeholders to achieve those goals. Based on the metaphors,it may be said that the existence of excellent schools is not considered impossible. With the right change strategies, any school can be excellent. To become an excellent school, continuous development, collaboration with stakeholders, and openness to innovations are essential. To transform their schools into excellent schools, school administrators should be open to change, build sincere relationships with all stakeholders, involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process, and always aim for the best while continuously improving themselves. Teachers should continually develop their knowledge and skills, maintain communication with students and parents, and be supportive and guiding towards students. Since the participants were only teachers, the characteristics of an excellent school regarding official schools were revealed based solely on the teachers' perspectives, which may be limited to their experiences in public schools. For future studies, researchers are encouraged to explore the characteristics of an excellent school from the perspectives of different stakeholders, as well as examine the characteristics of excellent schools in private schools. Additionally, the research employed a phenomenological design, a qualitative research method. Quantitative research methods can also be used to explore excellent schools. Although there is no existing Turkish scale for an excellent school, a Turkish scale can be developed based on the characteristics of an excellent school, or adaptations of scales developed in other languages could be made.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval
In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.

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Proportion of the Author Contribution
Researchers contributed equally to this study.