

## Interview with Mr. VM

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### Partner introduction:

**Why I interviewed this school principal? I did not know him in person when I decided to take the interview. Two years ago, suddenly, I got a message from a school Facebook page. I started studying it. I have never been to that school before. But its Facebook surprised me. It had 5000 followers. First, the school principal was running it: adding the content, posting photos, raising own questions and responding others' questions. The school Facebook page was full of videos made in classroom lessons. That surprised me even more because, based on my own experience, I know how difficult is to get a permission to make classroom observations. Parents in conferences, teachers in classes, children in the school-they all looked sincere. The school principal also was posting his own photos as well. I remember two photos in particular. In one he was gardening a school garden in a work clothes. I remember, one of the followers was asked him why he – a principal – is gardening alone, why doesn't he ask pupils or technical staff to do this? His answer was that he does not push anyone; whoever wants and cares to will join. In another picture he was hugging his wife and two daughters. That was also surprising for our society and especially men revealing publicly his family and feelings towards it. And a final note to conclude. After I interviewed him, I took a taxi near the school. The taxi driver – he was a local – wondered why I was there. When I explained the purpose of my visit to the school, he shared with me the following: "He is a very good person. He respects everyone in this settlement, he says hello to everyone. He cares about pupils and does not take bribes." With this I would like to invite you to look at the transcript of my interview with VM.**

### Transcription of the interview

Respondent: **Mr. VM (VM)**<sup>1</sup>

*Principal of the General Secondary School in a Baku suburban area*

Interviewer: **Ulviyya Mikayilova (UM)**

*Assistant Professor, ADA University*

Date: **July 08, 2019**

Duration: **1 hour and 05 minutes**

**UM: Can you recall your school memory? Did you like your school? What were your favorite activities at school? What kind of activities did you enjoy at school? Describe your school life/experience? How was it? What about teachers?**

VM: So, in 1987, I went to the first class of school No. 64; at that time we used to go school after kindergarten. I mean, I've always loved to study, in my family both my mother and father are educated and that always gave us a stimulus to decide our future. My first primary school teacher was Kifayet muallim<sup>2</sup>, and then Atamoglan teacher in primary school, he was a male teacher. Sometimes, it happens. I remember when I finished 3<sup>rd</sup> class in 80s-90s, the transfer from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> class happened for the first time and I never studied 4<sup>th</sup> class; I've finished primary school earlier and during the schooling years I loved my school, my teachers, and respected them a lot.

**UM: What about your school principals? What kind of memory do you keep of them?**

VM: I have a good impression. After 5<sup>th</sup> grade there was a teacher called Behbut-he was a principal of our school. He passed away. He always used to care about us, about classes. There were several groups for

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the school principal asked for a list of questions I was planning to ask during the interview. He was keeping the list, and was answering without me asking these questions

<sup>2</sup> Teacher in Azerbaijani language, further in the transcript a word teacher will be used

different types of extracurricular activities at school, and I remember that my brother and I used to join those groups after school and spent the whole time there from 8 o'clock in the morning till 5pm. I can say that all of my feelings were about school. I would like to share one of my memories about school, though it's a little bit out of the topic of our interview. We had a math teacher-Adilkhan teacher who was a successful mathematician. Although he quit teaching afterwards but he was the one who made us love math. At the time of the exam, I used to finish my assignment within 15 minutes, and he used to tell me to go and walk through the hall or the other students would copy my paper. So, from that time I had an interest in math and other subjects. I studied at school No. 64 till 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and in this school I had a history teacher. He is now the chairman of Khatai district council of elders, 92 years old now. I was invited to his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I had a speech there about my respect and feelings about him. He was the first one to make me love history. My further education at the university was related to history.

In 1994, I was the only pupil from the Khatai district that had been chosen to Baku Turkish lyceum. My 4-year activity was connected with that school and I'd say that was the milestone of my life. There we also had some Azerbaijani teachers who taught us Azerbaijani language, history, literature, but the primary language of instruction was English, for example, chemistry, biology, physics, math were taught in English. Although I was at the class with a particular focus on studying humanities, we had to study other subjects in-depth, as well, to have a higher total grade. I have never seen such relationship between pupils and teachers anywhere. Maybe they all had an effect on my current activities, I mean that relationship, a system, they built there, the desire to help us. And my family had financial difficulties at that time, but they helped me to study with full scholarship. I entered to the history faculty at Baku State University and then I continued with teaching, then I went to military service.

After military service, I applied for work again to the State agency for employment. In 2003 I took a 12-hour course in the Surakhani district school No. 101. It didn't even take two months; the school offered me a 21-hour course. I was a young man, I was single at that time and there was a need for male teachers in the school. Our principal was Allakhverdi teacher. I'd like to say that probably, I was lucky, or my faith was lucky that all the people that I've met were kind, all of them were human teachers, showing me the right way; if you go this way you will gain success. After 2-3 years passed, I became an assistant to the principal being 27 years old. And I worked at this position until 2014, when a school principal's selection was announced for the first time, I still remember it was 25<sup>th</sup> November - the deadline for applying, I was so scared to try; I had some stereotypes. You know, before it was different time, I did not believe that I could be promoted and appointed as a school principal. So, I would like to say that until today I move relying on my own knowledge, my own strength.

**UM: How did your experience shape you as a leader? What is your perception of yourself as a leader?**

VM: I have been working as a vice-school principal for 7 years and it's the assistant teacher who communicates with the teachers the most, dealing with their problems both in terms of time, class schedule, their professional development and so on. At that time, as I was young, I was interested in learning new things like what was innovative in education system, and always tried to read something new about international best practices in education. For example, about education in Russia, or in Finland. I was wondering why everyone is valuing their experience so much, and does it deserve this high evaluation or not, what are cons and pros of their education. I was reading a lot and trying to form my own evaluation. As I wrote on my Facebook page, "I am on my way to the school of my dreams." I believed, that one day my dream will come true, because I have an idea about a school I want to build.

**UM: What kind of school it is? What kind of school it must be?**

VM: There are 4500 schools in Azerbaijan and each of them has their own characteristics. I worked as a vice-principal in a school No. 101, and then I got a school principal appointment to the Khazar district school No. 117, and started building foundations for my idea in that school. First of all, my approach was

different. What do people think about leader-everyone thinks that it is a dictator, a person who insists on what he/she says, who shouts, punches a table, and behaves a way that what he/she says is a law. But I added a bit of democratic leadership, and even liberalism to my leadership-it is also sometimes needed-so people can see-look, this kind of leadership is also possible, such principals also can be. A society accepted this differently.

**UM: Is this kind of principalship possible in Azerbaijan?**

VM: Yes, possible, a new type of school leadership has already formed in our country. These are the people who are leading schools completely different way – without raising a voice, without dominating, just teaching those who do not know, explaining, showing different ways of doing things, inviting people-look, go a right way, and you will succeed then, and so on.

**UM: How successful are you in communication with others as a principal?**

VM: First of all, I analyzed what I could do in this school. For this, school infrastructure plays a main role. The infrastructure of school No. 117 was great - the gym, the hall, everything could be done there. First of all, I started coordinating students' out-of-school activities/extracurricular activities, because the more and the better they are organized, the stronger the students' interest in school becomes. If a pupil comes to school for 6 hours just to learn a mother tongue, math and so on and then leaves a school – it makes him tired. The pupil needs for additional activities to integrate those subjects, to synthesize with those activities. How to do this? For example, we have created a Progress cinema club. The school has a conference hall to with a capacity to accommodate 250 people. We organized a cinema club for the pupils. For example, once a week for 5<sup>th</sup> graders (their total number is approximately 200 people) we started demonstrating documentaries on Azerbaijani literature, theater, cinema, history, geography, geography of other countries– we were doing this for free and voluntary. You may think we needed an equipment for this cinema club - we organized it through a laptop projector, and we were putting the video on a white wall-that's it. The pupils were so excited that they were taught a topic about the Earth and then watched a movie about the creation of the Earth. This had a strong impression on the pupils' minds that maybe would last until the end of the school year, and even further, to upper grades. We were doing this not only in this direction, we were doing the same on sport, on science. For example, we have established a small academia. It was functioning on both biology and history for about a year.

We have a very good history teacher here, İndji teacher, and she decided to focus on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (*UM: first Azerbaijani independent state was established after the World War I and after the end of a Russian Empire*). She distributed research topics among pupils, and they did good studies, and they were proud of the work they did. They even were bringing their studies to us-look what we did, this is our research. Mostly, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade pupils participated in these studies. You know, what I still can't do-how to attract 11<sup>th</sup> grade pupils to this kind of activities-they all go to private tutors to get prepared for university admissions examination. That is why they stay a bit outside of this. But we still have children who have even reached the title of “scientists of tomorrow” (*UM: it is a special initiative of MoE to attract pupils' interest to science*). The first time I did this was in school No. 165. I wanted to do it in school No. 117 as well, but it was too late. I got an appointment to this school, school No. 165. And you see, I brought the ideas of management here. So, if you have an idea, it can be applied to any school.

This school was also a bit of a difficult school, difficult to manage. About 30% of people in this settlement rent a housing here, they are socially dynamic population from the regions, different regions of the country (Tovuz, Gedebe, Guba, etc.). They come, they leave, they come again and rent here, then change their rental housing. And you know, the houses in this settlement are a little cheaper than in a city of Baku. The school location is very important. For example, there were some activities that I used in school No. 117, but when I brought them here, but they didn't work. This school needed some innovative, some very different approach. Here, for example, in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade there was not a teaching at

all. How to make those pupils interested in science? Student comes, sits in a school, and there is weak teaching. There are the same teachers now, and nothing has changed. You know how, we did not dominate over them. We just said: you know, this is what we have to do now, we have to develop citizens, we have to develop pupils, we have to develop people with a vision for future. For example, this school No. 165 was always proud that we had pupils who got 600 points on the university admission examinations (*UM: max score is 700*); we had many pupils who got 500 points there. But I looked at grades of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students – they all were poor, all were low. Only because pupils in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade were getting private tutoring, the school's total score was getting higher. So, there are no achievements up to 9th grade. Even now when we have a school average rating as 44%, I am not satisfied. If the maximum score for 3 subjects is 300%, the average score per subject is somewhere between 120-130 points, which is less than 50%, which is a low result. But, nevertheless, we are in the first 500 school list in the country.

**UM: Aren't you criticized for these results? What do they offer to you?**

VM: With regards to offers, we now have a quality control sector at the Baku city education department, a new one. A little over a year ago it was created, before it was a sector of development projects. We work in partnership with this department. What is our partnership about? For example, I never expected them to offer me anything, but a new package of suggestions was created based on what we have done. What is this about? We were doing a small pre-test for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students at the beginning of a teaching year-in September, and were finding that 30% of our students were weak, and their achievements must be increased. How can we improve these results? We voluntarily invited our teachers and informed them, they also agree with us that we should raise the grades of 9<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>3</sup> We started organizing two extra-curricular activities two to three times a week, both on mother tongue and math. Now foreign languages have been added. And to those pupils who only showed poor pre-test results, we started doing extra work, for free, and during the year we tested them 8-9 times, examining the subjects that they had learned from 5th grade to this day every month. Since pupils were low achievers, we do not teach them very complicated things – there is no need for this – only the most basic ones. We teach them programs of 5th, 7th, 8<sup>th</sup> grades, they don't know the multiplication table, no need to do with them the complicated things. Looking at the results of those groups at the end of the year, we see an increase in their performance for 20-30%. This is a huge increase. The student answering initially only one question, now could answer 7 to 8 questions. In this school this process is a little bit harder. But at school No. 117, I applied this practice for the first time; in several years we moved from the 27th place among 31 schools in the district to the 4th place. And the 166 Management (*UM: of Baku city dept*) was looking at that and was wondering, how did you achieve this. Other schools have been laughing at us, saying that you are pushing involving pupils to out of school activities.

I would also say that we are not forcing them to do this; it is voluntary, who wants to come, and sit, and learn. Of course, there have been those who wanted to run away, but the preventative work with parents that we did helped. I want to emphasize this particularly: every month we hold parents' conferences, separately with parents of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, then 8<sup>th</sup> graders, etc., and were explaining to parents that this is for your children. It is for them to let them find a place in society, for this they have to gain elementary mathematical knowledge, elementary skills in Azerbaijani language. They must have proficiency in language skills. So this message was very positively accepted. In two years the dynamics were very positive, and it is moving forward. In a previous time school dynamics was more positive, but here not so much. We have to consider the school context: here attitude towards school education is different.

**UM: I have a question regarding extra-curricular/out of school activities. Many school principals complain that now it is very difficult to attract students to these activities because all students are**

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<sup>3</sup> Basic School graduation examinations are held at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and students must be given a school graduation diploma

**committed to test/examination preparation. And also, many school principals complain that teachers are difficult to involve as well. Everyone says, I do not have time to stay after class. I also would like to ask you about your family experience, how did your family influence you to become a leader? For example, what was the atmosphere in your home, what was your parents' style when you were a child, what values did they have, how did they influence you, what was their education, and what was the biggest impact of your family environment from childhood on you?**

VM: Obviously, in general, the family is something that plays a positive or negative role in the life of any student. In other words, although I have been a director for 5 years, I have also worked as a teacher and have seen many families over the past 15 years. It is the family which is interested in education of a child, and it is the family which makes a child leave behind. For example, if you ask about my family, let me start with my grandfather. My grandfather got a religious education, always was providing religious services in the villages, and it is also a kind of leadership because it is about capturing people. My father has eight sisters and 1 brother, all of whom got higher education. It is very interesting that their house was small, and like a half of my office (shows to his office). They lived in a mountain village, my father graduated from an industrial technical college, later he received a higher education in Ganja city, then a second higher education. My mother was a technologist, my father worked as a civil engineer at a Baku knitting factory, leading a large contingent of 5,000 people. When we were 7 or 8 years old we were visiting with my brother my father's work place and we were always very interested in the attitude of the staff towards my father. How is it that everyone greeted him in a person there, asking: "Jafar muallim, how are you?" You know, communication, goodwill, that is, it is to some extent also a way of managing, and this communication was kept in my memory. My mother was also a technologist and managed about 500 employees. She was in charge of the production of socks, ropes, and she had her own asset book, which she was brought home to work, and this also created some interest to management. And interest to education has almost passed on to us genetically. In truth, my brother got a higher education, but he is not so much interested in this. But I was a little bit fortunate to be a teacher because I could not find a job for 6 months after returning from military service, and when I got a job there, they said that there is a teaching job, that maybe God's destiny was coincidental. And when I got into the classroom on the first day of class, I said, "I must be a teacher," that's all. And the kids are probably my ideal. When pupils talk to me, to make them love me, and to make them love studying at school.

You know, I have worked with the hardest school – I worked at the Surakhani district, where 50% of people don't think about studying at all. The school initially was a 9-year school and then became 11-year school; it was very difficult. Then we changed that system. There are still pains, but it's getting better. And when I worked with the students there, I was in big trouble because I was a young boy, I was 23 years old, and I taught to 17- to 18-year-olds. And I had to find a language with them, and I had to be a brother for them, because there is nothing to gain by domination, nothing. Sometimes we have teachers who say no, everything should be as I said. No, it is necessary to find a way with the student, maybe he will tell us a truth or correct things. We need to think about it, and you know, I saw that my attitude towards my students has led to creating a self-image of myself as a teacher. And I put aside things strange for a teaching, that is, despotic behavior, speaking with a high-tone, etc. I put all of that aside and started working slowly on creating an image of ideal teacher. Now I do not know, it is the society which can say how good I am as a teacher, or how good I am as a leader....Even when I came to this school I was not treated badly, but I was not well received as well.

Young man, 36 years old, he will come and rule us: people get irritated with this. But then the relationships, conversations, talks change the situation. Even now the deputy says, Mr. VM, the teachers love you so much that they don't even want you to leave that school (*UM: a new regulation of rotation of school principals was introduced recently*). Rotation can happen, but a person should be able to make people love himself, and first of all in school you should make yourself loved. If you succeed in this, your word will be going through. You asked me how I involve teachers in out of school activities. Look, if I invite a teacher now and tell you have to lead out of school activity. There are out of school groups that

teachers are paid for running. It is different, a teacher leads, getting paid for that, we have a music club, other clubs, and such clubs create stimulus for teachers, let teachers be stimulated. However, I do not see here any teachers who would ignore my words. And this is purely dependent on relationships, correctly-built relationships. Because there is no liaison/or means between us, there is nothing between us in terms such as “look, do it for me, or for something, or look put this in your pocket, etc.” There are no such things here. When there is nothing like this, a mutual respect increases. My business moves forwards more effectively if there is no such thing between us. It means, that I am not dependent upon them. Sometimes, it happens, you are dependent, you are forced to do something, and if you do not do this, you become bad. However, it is a fact, that we are talking here, all our math teachers are upstairs making a class load division without my participation, by themselves. There is a problem with the math lesson load. Usually school principals say, go and get this lesson load, but my method is I delegated this responsibility to the head of methodological council. I told them please do this independently, then bring a final lesson load division to the table of my vice-principal, and then put it to my table, so I can see that a division is done, and I can see the results now. And you know, these are lessons of this school, and what I’ll do with them? I will not put them in my pocket, or take them home. Sometimes you may see that there are classes like 5a, everyone desires to teach that class. It’s a good class, an excellent class, parents are good parents. The truth is that after the recent introduction of e-enrollment, the process will not be accompanied with negative aspects anymore. But this year is the last year when school principals form classes on the basis of good pupils to this class, bad ones to another class. This is a positive thing, but some principals complain that it is not right to limit so much the say of the school principals. But in fact they have made our work easier. For example, a parent comes to school where I am, and the parent says I want my child to go to another school. I open the electronic system, see that there were two vacant places in another school, and without a doubt I transfer the student there and the child goes to that school. Actually, they made our job easier.

Yes, I may understand that school principals do not see a child at the admission, but it is needed? At the admission now, a school principal only looks at a child's health certificate. And a health problem might be for 1 child out of 100. The remaining 99 percent are normal, and can be admitted. I wonder why they need to see her parents. “I lost my role in the formation of a school culture” some principals say. For example, a boy came to us from 6th grade, the child was one of those with difficult behavior problems. He was from a difficult family, his mother came to me and was crying, saying “I can’t manage my son, please help me.” Let me tell you a very interesting fact-she told me that we are relatives, but I even did not know that before. I have built personal communications with this child for 3 months in such a way that I always taught him something, slowly, step by step. The child is already recovering. It means that the child needed some care. The father left the family, the mother is at work all day, and the grandmother screams all day, that is, the child is out of care. The child was crying that he had never seen anyone happy at home. This is a 6th grade kid, and look, how he thinks. But we accept him as a child in the classroom. I have already started seeing the changes after getting him under “our wings.”

Each school has a maximum of 10 such type children. We have 1,700 students in our school. I estimate 1% of such children in every school. That is, if we only work with “good children,” it is not difficult to work? For example, there are lyceums that choose the children to be admitted. For example, my best student this year went to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of a lyceum. He has a future there but it is us who put efforts to his development and growth. Our teachers were doing this for 4 years. We were examining those children several times a year. We were doing this by ourselves; the Baku city education dept was also giving us a paper, but we as a school were purchasing paper for doing this. Parents were not coming to us and saying do it. In order to be with a good face before parents, we were inviting teachers, and putting the results in front of the teacher that look, 12 out of 25 your students are good, but 10 are not, please start working with them. We start working with them in a Grade 2 already, with normal kids coming in at 3rd, 4th and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. And if this process continues up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, imagine how good results there will be. It is also our success, the state's benefit.

**UM: How do you view yourself as a leader? How successful are you and how is your school culture compared to others? Do you support it? How? What is your role? What makes you feel influential and successful as a school leader? Give an example and how do you demonstrate your authority?**

VM: Personal reputation is something that is important. I have been actively involved in social networks for 4-5 years and won as the best social ambassador for social media. Since the appointment of a new Minister (of Education) in 2012, I have been demonstrating what I have done. I do it and sometimes people say you do it for the show, but I say I can't make 1700 students love me for the show, you can't make 200 teachers love you for the show, you can't gain a respect of 30 technical people for the show. I just put the age aside. I never thought of it. If I am the principal of the school, if I am the eldest in my family, and if I am an elder in the house, and if I am a leader of this school, then every student, every employee should be treated with special care. I've been doing this for 5 years. I need to know every student. The minister recently said that we should know every student. I try to get to know every student, worry about discovering his talents, know his problems, why he does not come to school, maybe he is sick, how to help him.

How was it before? For example, earlier in the summer when the big summative examination (BSG) is held, those who wanted to could go to the village to do agricultural work. Those who are from the west were going to collect potatoes, but now they don't. Parents now come and ask for permission to take their children. This is the change in the attitude of the parents to the school. We have no problem with anyone in that community. I'm not trying to create problems.

Even though I am observing the teacher's class, and find something, I invite them to my office to talk, with a smile. I share my observations, share my findings, explain that if this could be done differently, your lesson will be better, and you will be better teacher.

To build a personal reputation, you must own that reputation. We need to introduce ourselves to the community, both as a teacher and as a family leader, as a school principal and for nearly two years when I worked at a school #YYY, I used to go to school every day by bus number ZZZ with my bag. Everyone was seeing this as strange that a school principal uses a public bus. It is out of any framework, that a school principal uses public transportation. Even there were teachers of 30-40 years. I was criticized and they told me to buy a car or get in a taxi. I said that there was nothing abnormal, the ministers in Europe ride bicycles. I see nothing wrong in it. I do nothing to be ashamed of. This type of activity seems to have increased their respect to me. The principal of the school cares, the principal of the school is interested in everyone. When our teachers or technical staff have a birthday, we celebrate it. I do not mean anything special, but we acknowledge them with a bouquet of flowers or a certificate for good services.

The first day I came here was the 50th birthday of the technician here. I gave her a flower, gave her a certificate and posted it to the social networks. Believe me, there was an explosion in a social media. No one has done this yet. Maybe some school principals have done this too, but nobody was publicizing it through a social media. Maybe that's why I think my work is successful because I have been able to introduce it to my community. There are such directors, and I do not do this for myself only. Maybe it is necessary to change the attitude towards school principals, and for this it is necessary to change public opinion. And considering that a new image of school principals has not been formed yet, let's prove that there are such directors.

There are 109 newly appointed directors in Baku today if I'm not mistaken. Of these, I know at least 50 of them personally; they were appointed after us. I would say they are our followers. I see that they try to imitate, they try to learn from us, and even I have to learn from them. I look at what they are doing, and ask myself, why I've never seen it before, why I haven't done it. Maybe we could create something helpful by looking at each other.

Recruitment of new directors is still underway these days, and social networks are exploding. Then I say to myself, "I did it, I've gone through all these stages and became a principal. No one can tell that he has received or given 1 manat (local currency) to or from me." This means, it is possible. This means that today's education needs to change in values. Of course, problems arise when you bring in unnecessary people. There is management there, but it goes a wrong direction, and social relationships are not normally formed there.

I remember, once I wrote a post on my social network that a school principal should be an elder regardless of his age. He should be able to reveal his position, to respond even through social media to all the processes going on in society. A major problem of 99% of our school principals is that they toss themselves aside. True, they are good managers, they have good achievements, but society doesn't know them. One does not know the good, only the negatives. The good news should cover the bad but doesn't. The bad news is that someone has taken a bribe, someone has hit a kid, and a kid's broken bones are blamed on the principal. True, a school principal is responsible. I know every child, know what they are doing at school, after the school, collect information on their families, information on their social problems. I am collecting information about the student's negative behavior and identifying a risk group for myself. I say that these 100 children are at risk. No need for others, provide them with activities, and they will work for themselves. But you have to work with these 100 people separately. That's why the case of Elena<sup>4</sup> happened. That school was also managed, a psychologist worked there, but not at a required level. The newest feature now is that we do a lot, but do not document anything. That is why, they say, you do not work. However, the work has been done, but there is no evidence. In Azerbaijan, they say, let's see what the document shows. That is why that school management made the mistake that the paperwork was not done; nothing was documented. They made a mistake that did not prepare a psychological map of the girl. It should have been analysed and stated clearly that we have such a troubled student.

I always say, honorable school principals, let's face it if something happens. Let's just say for instance, if someone criticizes the state, let's give them adequate answers, real answers, not false answers. After all, so much work is being done in schools. How can we not present them? Our school page is posted daily. Every day we are doing something new. We do not lie there. It is either related to after-school activities or in association with children's academic achievements. Social projects, scientific projects, that is, hundreds of works per a year have been done over the years, and there are even projects that have come up with ideas. We have 2 projects that are the most memorable with our students. One of them is called: Let's read one book a week. Each week, we discuss a book with our students. We give the book to students who were all reading for example, in the 5A class. A week later, the deputy and I sat down together and discussed the book. We show up with a book every week, and then the ministry decided that anyone who reads it should post it with hashtags on the ministry page. So, we gave a new idea. We did it at the school level and the ministry did it nationwide and we are expanding it. We have already discussed this on Public TV (Ictimai TV).

Then we have a chemistry teacher, a very good person, and he has some very beautiful projects like "my mom's kitchen is a science center." As an example, he shows how to make salt at home. Sometimes it needs to be cleaned up, but parent doesn't know what it is and just uses it without knowing its scientific name. The student explains it at home. Let's say it is H<sub>2</sub>O. When the particular elements are added this element is occurred, and the student gives similar explanations. This is what we put on the page. Good videos. We put it on the school page and on YouTube. We have already directed hundreds of students to sports activities. We received 4 cups after I arrived. All of these certificates have just been

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<sup>4</sup> A case of a school pupil who made a suicide because of being bullied by schoolmates in April 2019. That story had a wide resonance in a country because it was first time when a society and education system recognized that bullying exists in Azerbaijani schools

purchased. One of our students took the 3rd place in the Republic competition in the country. He received an award signed by Kamaladdin Heydarov (a Minister of Emergency Situations). He made a fire extinguisher model. A beautiful model was created (VM shows a model). The child also made the tank. We have kept them (he shows a model). I discovered the student's talent and suggested he go in that direction, and told teacher to help him and give advice. He took a third place. This student can be a future engineer, space researcher, anything.

Last time I did an analysis for myself; I found that I have pictures with about 600 students in the last two and a half years. Pictures are in sports, science and other activities. I never say let's take a picture with me. The children themselves come up with me and say, VM teacher let's take a picture with you. That is, if I can give them that love, what can be better.

**UM: Leadership style. What behaviors, actions, and traits do you have as a leader that motivate and engage teachers? Do you generally involve parents in school achievements? An example? How successful are you in general? What are your strongest features as a leader with school teachers, students, parents, technical staff?**

VM: I have a strong sense of conviction. I can convince somebody about any innovation. For example, new assessment rules have been introduced. I gathered teachers together and I gave a good explanation. Teachers realized that it was a good thing, in fact. The grades in favor of the student were removed. Now there is some difficulty. We'll use the calculator to calculate points. Any update needed to be justified. If you don't convince them they will not follow you. I say to the teacher here to do something, but if my actions are contradicting my statement in that case teachers will not follow my orders. You have to be able to make an army follow you. If you do so, the teacher will follow you, and the student will follow your teacher. And the parents will follow both. Usually we say a triangle: parent-school-teacher. But I convert that triangle into rectangle. I set management as the fourth angle. I have not been teaching for almost 3 years, and I have been completely involved in management. That is, we need to form a rectangle where a manager manages a school, a teacher, a student, and a parent. If such management is implemented, the school will have very good results.

There will be problems, of course, if we look at our school, it's not bad school but it's not performing well. It will take us 3-4 years to fully move it forward. Generations that are coming, studying in 4-5-6 grades, they will display strong results after 3 years. If we look at the results of our 9th graders this year, they are weak. I'm expecting low results for the upcoming year as well. Even in the 7th grade, there are weak students. The school environment is not enough. The school teaches for 4 hours and leaves the student to the community in following 5 hours. The community should also be a school. There is a criminal area around us. Many children are prone to crime. Most of them are getting arrested by the time they finish 9-11<sup>th</sup> grades. We need to do some social research as to why this student is studying in school. School is a protection. We have been defending a student for 9 years. The child who is poorly educated, refuses to study in the 10th grade and goes out. He goes to a vocational school or anywhere, and we let him go to the community. But he is getting absorbed by the negativity of community. That kid can't adapt anymore. Neither the parent nor the other can help. I set a goal in front of the teachers. Many say we have to clean up a school from the 9th grade, keep all the good graders only. It's easy to work with them. You tell those children to go and read something and they will do it. Let's work hard. A true educator will know that you can work with those weak, difficult students. Your teaching ability will emerge when you're working with weak students.

As for myself, I can only say that not only this school follows me. It will not sound humble but I must say that maybe 5-6,000 people in Azerbaijan know me and follow me. Sometimes a teacher does not know something and ask me about it, it is not necessary to turn it down or insult, it is always necessary to help and I have always tried to help people in need. No matter what anyone asks me, I tell them everything I

know, and if I don't know the answer, I ask for 2-3 days to investigate. I study myself. I also learn with them.

Management is such a new trend and now we have it; there were no previous ones. Previous school principals had only 5 years of educational experience and no management experience. We were told at the time that 5 years of pedagogical activity would be enough, but I don't think so. In my opinion, the principals should be managers. Yeah, they must know how to teach, but management is completely different. If all the criteria are not met by the school in the next 5 years, if the principal does not see a future of his school in five years, the principal should not work anymore, it is not sufficient. If a school principal says I'll come and fix the school problems in 5 years, it is also not sufficient anymore. All these requirements left in 2014. If you are appointed, you should improve the school in 2 years. **How to do it?** It's so simple. You just have to feel empowered and believe in yourself, and if you make the teacher's army follow you, the school will go ahead. If you don't school will stagnate.

Since the beginning of the 2013 school year, subject-based monthly events have been implemented –this project is called "Subject month." For the first time, I have used it in my principal experience in the Surakhani district. Organized once a year, each month was a certain subject. Let's just say that October is a chemistry month. That month we were doing research. We held interactive lectures of teachers, conducted tests, conducted excursions, published newspapers, and all were made by students.

Another example is our school newspaper called 'Dayanat'. Our students are interviewing, arranging the paper. We're training future journalists.

Let's assume I tell Tarana teacher in advance and inform them that the teacher should be ready 1 month prior to changing classes. If a teacher teaches class 5a and I want her to go in Grade 5b, but she doesn't show the same performance as she shows in her class. But again the teacher tried. We need to see the teacher's weak points and make recommendations, so that great teachers emerge. We have a Tarana teacher who scored low on the initial exam<sup>5</sup>. However, I put my full confidence in her and she showed better results on the second exam. Now she is one of the best teachers at our school. During my seven-year vice principal experience, a large part of the school's teaching and management was concentrated in my hands.

When the Minister for Education announced the recruitment process of school principals in 2013, I submitted my documents on the last day because I had little faith in the process and I passed the first round. In the second round, we were asked to write an essay on 4 different topics, and we had to do 25 logical test questions. After the third round of interviews, we started training with 60 people for 6 months. We studied finance and statistics at the Qafqaz University. What is interesting is that although my result was not so high, I was assigned just because I have a better ability to express myself than others. I prefer to educate. I like sharing information. I want everyone to be aware of their responsibility.

#### **UM: How is the effectiveness of training programs assessed?**

It is assessed with the old rating system- I scored 4 out of 5. It didn't give us the upper hand. I would not have been able to do so much if I haven't had my seven years' experience. Law, informatics, statistics and other subjects have been taught that we do not apply them in practice.

At the end of the interview Mr. VM was asked to fill out the table indicating time dedicated to leadership duties during a week: What is the school principal doing during the week?

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<sup>5</sup> Since 2014, the MoE is conducting annual diagnostic assessment of teachers. Those who show low results are offered a training.

<b>Leadership Tasks</b>	<b>1-5%</b>	<b>6-10%</b>	<b>11-20%</b>	<b>21-30%</b>	<b>31%-50%</b>	<b>51%-100%</b>
Making classroom resources available	+					
Making teacher guides available	+					
Making learning aids available	+					
Classroom observations		+				
Follow-up to classroom observations		+				
Mentoring teachers			+			
Planning teacher training / professional development		+				
Collecting and analyzing school data					+	
Meeting with parents					+	
Meeting with community members					+	
Meeting with Governing Authority				+		
Writing reports to submit to Governing Authority				+		
Analysis of teaching's quality dynamics				+		
Measures to increase quality of teaching (seminars, meetings, monitorings)						+