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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TURKISH PRINCIPALS: THREE CASES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide a Turkish perspective on school leadership and give a description about characteristics of successful principals. Three cases of successful school principals in urban and rural secondary schools in Turkey are described as part of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP). Purposive sampling was used in a multi-perspective research methodology employing a semi-structured interview protocol. The findings of the case studies formed the basis of a framework of successful school leadership.

Keywords: School Leadership, Principals, Principalship, Successful Principals

BAŞARILI TÜRK OKUL MÜDÜRLERİNİN ÖZELLİKLERİ: ÜÇ ÖRNEK OLAY

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul liderliğine ilişkin bir Türk bakış açısı sağlamak ve başarılı okul müdürlerinin özelliklerine ilişkin bir betimleme yapmaktır. Türkiye’de kentsel ve kırsal bölgelerdeki üç ortaöğretim kurumundaki başarılı okul müdürleri uluslararası başarılı okul müdürleri projesinin (ISSPP) bir bölümü olarak betimlenmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniğinin kullanıldığı çok yönlü araştırma yöntemi çerçevesinde amaçlı örnekleme yapılmıştır. Örnek olay çalışmalarının bulguları başarılı okul liderliği çerçevesi temel alınarak sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okul Liderliği, Okul Müdürleri, Okul Müdürlüğü, Başarılı Okul Müdürleri

1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

The current piece of research aims to provide a Turkish perspective on school leadership and give a description about characteristics of successful principals. More specifically, the focus has been to identify the characteristics and the understanding of school management of Turkish principals based on the opinions of teachers, parents, students, and their own opinions. In this article, the educational context of Turkey is firstly presented followed by a discussion about school leadership findings from previous research. The findings of a multi-perspective research presenting the case studies of three secondary school principals in urban and rural areas of Turkey are described while the results emanating from the case studies are discussed.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALISMANIN ÖNEMİ)

The purpose of this article is to provide a Turkish perspective on school leadership and give a description about characteristics of successful principals. Three cases of successful school principals in urban and rural secondary schools in Turkey are described as part of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP). Purposive sampling was used in a multi-perspective research methodology employing a semi-structured interview protocol. The findings of the case studies formed the basis of a framework of successful school leadership.

3. THE TURKEY AND TURKISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM (TÜRKİYE VE TÜRK EĞİTİM SİSTEMİ)

Turkey has a population of approximately 70 million, 30 % of which are aged 1-14, with there being relatively high migration from rural to urban areas. The annual population growth rate is 1.8 %, based on the 2000 census [1]. The highly centralized formal educational system in Turkey provides education to a total of 20 million students in 57 837 schools with 774 363 teachers and administrators. There are 10.9 million students in 32 797 primary schools taught by 503 328 teachers and secondary schools provide training for a further 4.7 million students in 9 281 schools with 222 705 teachers [2]. The higher education system consists of about 2 million students over 150 universities with more than 100000 faculty members [3]. The compulsory schooling is eight year in Turkey, from first grade up to 8th grade. The 52.3% of teachers are female while the majority of administrators are male [2].

Turkey has centralized education system, which at the top of is Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The Turkish Education System is centrally regulated by The Basic Law of National Education, which sets the framework for the activities of the school. This means that all school have common aims, common provisions for the subjects that are to be taught at the different form levels, common provisions for the central knowledge and proficiency areas of the subjects and common provisions for the organization of the school system. The Ministry of Education publishes curriculum guidelines for the individual subjects.

There are 81 provincial levels of educational administrators, which at the top of is Ministry of National Education. In order to transfer authority and responsibility to the provincial organization of the Ministry of National Education, modification must be made in the Law of Organization of the Ministry of National Education no 3797.

The general characteristics of the education system include democracy, rationality, scientific basis, secularism and co-ed education. The purpose of the Turkish Education System is to increase the welfare and happiness of the Turkish citizens and Turkish society,

to support and facilitate economic, social and cultural development in national unity and integration and to make the Turkish nation a constructive, creative and distinguished partner in modern civilization [4]. Overall, while the goals of education in elementary level place more emphasis on societal values, the goals of secondary level include largely societal values with some individual and universal values. Higher education tries to strike a balance between individual, societal and universal values.

3.1. Schools and School Leadership (Okullar ve Okul Liderliği)

Schools provide a structure for gaining basic skills, knowledge and efficiencies as well as the values, norms and attitudes need to be acquired during a lifetime. Schools can act as a support for the role of parents, can help individuals to improve their skills and help them to increase their potential in affective and cognitive development. In order to achieve successful outcomes with regard to these important roles, schools need to be managed effectively and principals' leadership is the key for effective schools [5]. The schools reach educational goals with principals' leadership understanding.

According to Leithwood [6]. six factors that hinder or enhance success such as student background, school location, school level, school size, type of school (government or non government) and extent of trust between leaders and teachers and between teachers and students. It is widely assumed that principals have both direct and indirect effects on teaching and student achievement, particularly with their structuring of teachers' working conditions [7].

School leadership plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment [8 and 9]. Leithwood and his colleagues [10] provide a concise and useful definition of leadership in schools. According them, leadership involves: building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation, and last but not least managing the teaching and learning program.

Most of countries are looking for adapting their education systems to the needs of contemporary society and expectations for schools and school leaders also are changing. In addition it is observed that many countries have moved towards decentralisation, making schools more autonomous in their decision making and holding them more accountable for results. As a conclusion of these changes, the function of school leadership around the World is defined as a set of roles, which include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning.

According to a relatively a new OECD research, it could be diagnosed as following issues related to school leadership [9]:

- *The role of school leaders has dramatically changed*
- *The preparation and training of leaders is no longer appropriate*
- *Working conditions are not attractive enough*

As a conclusion, it can be said that principal leadership is a key factor on improvement of educational quality. In this context, a study was designed as a part of the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP). The aim of this study is to provide a Turkish perspective on successful school leadership determining principals' leadership understanding and effectiveness. The study focuses on three case studies from three geographically different regions (south, north and east) of Turkey. Based on this aim, it was dealt with the following subaims:



- How do principals shape their roles, scripts, and styles of interaction in a context of challenging changes?
- How do principals respond to external and internal expectations?
- How do they argue for their priorities?

4. METHOD (YÖNTEM)

The method employed in the current study, which is part of the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP), is based on a multi-case study methodology [11 and 12]. Case studies, which are a one of the types of qualitative research, are different from other types in that 'they are intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time' [13]. According to Hakim [14], case studies are capable of providing a rich, detailed and precise account of processes at work within a particular case. Topics often examined in case studies include individuals, events, or groups [15]. In this study, as case study schools, three successful public secondary schools from three geographically different regions in Turkey were selected on the basis of two following criteria:

- Schools the results of which show continuous and increasing improvement in countrywide University Entrance Exam (UEE).
- Schools where the principal had been in the principalship position at the school for at least three years.

These two criteria partly followed those set in the ISSPP. The empirical data were gathered by the four researchers, who visited three schools. The researcher teams, consisting of two or three researchers (two researchers in the small schools and three researchers in the big school) in each team, spent 3 days in each school between May 2008 and December 2010. On theTable 1, there are some information about the schools.

Table 1. Case study schools' information
 (Tablo 1. Örnek olay okullarına ilişkin bilgiler)

Schools	Environment	Level	Type	School size	Number of directors	Number of teachers
I	Rural	Public	Secondary	600	1 (4)	30
II	Rural	Public	Secondary	438	1 (2)	45
III	Urban	Public	Secondary	1703	1 (6)	86

During the case studies, it was seen that each case study school differs in: size, school development, leadership structure, and culture. These differencies have effects on school achievement levels. On the Table 2, some information could be seen about achievement levels of the schools.

Table 2. Schools' achievement
 (Tablo 2. Okulların başarı durumları)

Schools	UEE 2005	UEE 2006	UEE 2007
I	466	386	376
II	936	763	563
III	624	513	432

The data collection in all three schools included interviews, questionnaires, on-site-observation, and official data. A brief overview of the key characteristics of each of the three schools is as follows:

- **School I: Nedim Tugaltay High School (Okul I: Nedim Tuğaltay Lisesi):** Nedim Tugaltay High School is a public high school

located in Alaca district of Corum province. Alaca district is located in the Black Sea region of Turkey. Alaca is also famous for Alaca Höyük which is a name of old Hittite settlement. Nedim Tugaltay High School was started its educational services in 1951. This school was moved in it's current service building in 1977. The high school has currently 600 students, 30 teachers and 4 deputy principals. Most of the students are from the families, which have low income.

- **School II: Erdemli 700. Yıl High School (Okul II: Erdemli 700. Yıl Lisesi):** Mersin Erdemli 700th Anniversary High School is a public high school, located in Erdemli district of Mersin province in the Mediterranean Region of Turkey. The socio-economical status of the school can be described as moderate. Mersin Erdemli High School was moved in it's new school building which is located in Kocahasanlı town in 2010- 2011 academic year. Currently the high school has 438 students, 45 teachers and 3 deputy principals.
- **School III: Malatya High School (Okul III: Malatya Lisesi):** Malatya High School performs as a lower secondary school until 1933. High school is builded in 1933-1934 academic year in the East part of Turkey. It is known that the school starts education with 17 teachers and 256 students in its first year. As time passes the number of the students increases. Currently, the number of students is 1703 and the number of teachers is 86. The socio-economical status of the school can be described as low.

During all the case studies, three one-to-one interviews conducted with each school principal; Focus group studies conducted with teachers, parents and students seperately. All interviews recorded with sound recorder and put in detailed written form. After checking all written forms, Nvivo 8 was used in the qualitative data analysing process. Beside conducted interviews, documents relating to school were collected and also some photographs were taken from school environment .

5. FINDINGS (BULGULAR)

To complete Turkey studies were initially reported as leadership stories as a way of bringing to life the rich data that were collected. This report provides an analysis of all three research studies to determine similarities and differencies of the schools. Three thematic areas are used as an organising framework for reporting case study findings:

- The personal characteristics of Turkish principals,
- Their understanding to cover internal and external expectations and
- Their priorities.

5.1. Personal Characteristics of Turkish Principals (Türk Okul Müdürlerinin Kişisel Özellikleri)

Turkish literature related to educational management and leadership has a lot of examples of personal influences. The gender of principals was examined by Turan and Ebiclioglu [16]. They reported that male principals have a facility on taking risk on the administrative issues more than female principals, however the female principals use effectively the communication skills than male principals. On the other hand, Sisman [17] pointed out that the age and seniority of principals are important determinants on the instructional leadership practices. The educational program and the

administration of the training process of the primary school administrator, and training process and the evaluation of students show significant differences in accordance with seniority and branch in the scope of instructional leadership [18].

Table 3. Some personal characteristics of principals
(Tablo 3. Okul müdürlüğünün bazı kişisel özellikleri)

Characteristics Leaders	Gender	Age	Management Experience (Year)
I	Male	43	7
II	Male	38	4
III	Male	60	36

As it can be seen that on the Table 3, all of three are male; two of them at the 40s, however one of them is 60 years old; correspondingly they have 4, 7 and 36 years management experiences. According to the results of interviews, which were made with principals, teachers, students and parents, and the school-side observations, the principals play the following roles in their schools: leadership, fatherhood, friendship and fraternity, mentorship, source of knowledge, and facilitator. They use "we" language almost all interactions on the schools. Therefore they could easily motivate their staff to achieve the school vision and mission. The teachers, students and parents see them as a persuasive leaders and trusted people. All of three school have positive atmosphere and the principals are loved and respected by the other people. One of the principals said that:

"In all my speech in the school, I prefer 'we' instead of 'I', because we are a team and I feel myself as a part of this team. Now I'm principal, but first of all I'm a teacher and learner always. I learn a lot of things from my team."

According to interviews and observations, it could be said that, the principals have some managerial skills. They share works with their staff delegating them and the feedback about their works related to school management process is very important for them. All of three principal are in the schools not only during the workdays but also weekends, use their time effectively and focus on instruction. The staff of Malatya High School pointed out that their principal has close relations with external stakeholders, therefore he could create new financial sources for school. During the interview, he said:

"There are associations and institutions the members of whom are graduated from here. They came here and we invited them to classes, they talked with our students. Some of them are lawyers and doctors. They will come again next week. We are supported like that and they also support us in activities and organized dinners."

Similarly the words of a teacher from this school support to the words of the principal:

"We are organizing different activities in order to increase school income. Via these activities we are building communication with parents."

On the Table 4, it can be seen that the roles, communication skills and managerial skills of the principals as summary.

Table 4. Summary of the roles, communication skills and managerial skills of the principals
 (Tablo 4. Okul müdürlerinin rolleri, iletişim ve yönetsel becerileri)

Roles	Communication Skills	Managerial Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * leadership * fatherhood * friendship * mentorship * source of knowledge * facilitator * fraternity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * "we" language * motivating * persuading * reliability * positive atmosphere * love * respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * delegation * feedback * focus on instruction * effective time management * close relations with school environment * creating new financial sources

Based on these roles and both skills, all of three principals could be called as transformational leaders. Transformational leaders support followers to develop self-reliance with the aim of transforming them [19]. The notion of mission-driven leadership is at the heart of transformational leadership [20]. Transformational leadership is a type of leadership style that leads to positive changes in those who follow. It is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. McShane [21] argued that transformational leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic and passionate. They are concerned and involved not only in the process; they are also focused on helping every member of the group succeed as well. The Transformational Leaders clearly utilize more engaging interpersonal communication skills during their coaching discussion which it is believed contributes to the positive organization.

5.2. Understanding of Turkish Principals to Cover Internal and External Expectations (Türk Okul Müdürlerinin İç ve Dış Beklentilerin Karşılmasına İlişkin Görüşleri)

All schools have internal and external stakeholders and these stakeholders have some expectations from the schools. If a school covers these expectations, it could be achieve the educational goals easily and could be successful [22 and 23]. Because of that this study aimed secondly to determine the understanding of Turkish principals to cover internal and external expectations.

During the interviews and observations at the schools, it is observed that expectations of school members are social activities, restoration of physical conditions and technological facilities. One of the principals' words may show the approaches of them regarding to internal expectations:

"When I come here first the school is in bad condition. We need to paint the school. I get the paint catalogue and went to the teacher's hall. I asked them to look at the catalogue and say their opinions about new colour of the school. They surprised and they had thought that these kind of ideas and preferences are not consulted to the teachers, they can only be ideas of principals. I always consult them. The aim of this is to develop the feeling of belonging."

It is also observed that teachers have requests for in service training and principals organize school based in service trainings in order to enhance professional development. Principals state that they support teachers for master degree. They also state that they have collaboration with NGO's in order to develop facilities of schools and they yield this collaboration with their entrepreneurship skills. Principals organize school fests in order to meet the expectations of

school members for outdoor activities. Principals have strong communication with parents and the other stakeholders, so they try to meet the expectations. Two of the schools are well established and their principals state that they are in continuous contact with the old alumni and they organize "profession presentation days" by inviting them to the school. Growing qualified people for life and Turkish society and meeting expectations are their aims. One of the principals said that not only for the staff but also for the students:

"We are trying to grow up self confident individuals equipped with skills and knowledge in accordance with our mission. I think, If individuals are self confident, they can success everything easily. We are trying to give them confidence with taking culture in to consideration."

During the focus group session with the teachers, a teacher said:

"I could say in meeting of school comitee and everywhere: The school atmosphere is based on mutual love and respect. This is a popular school. Relationships among the teachers are really good. A newly appointed taecher can easily accomodate. My colleagues build relationship and communication with the teacher quickly. He/She does not experince any difficulty and unfamiliarity. We celebrate school anniversary together. For example we have traditional rice day in crowded, full, school garden."

Similarly a principal said that:

"I think that staff love the school, they are working in peaceful and relaxing atmosphere, there isn't any conflict."

And the other one pointed out:

"Physical conditions of the school should be good in order to make teachers and students feel comfortable and come willingly to school. They should feel themselves valuable. These conditions should be built. If this happens, happiness, peace, efforts come true."

On the other hand, the views of parents and students are very important for the school [24]. During the interviews with parents and students, most of them gave enough information about the schools and the principals. The parents said that:

"...here (school) some seminars are organized to present the different professions for the students. Different professionals come to school and the students could ask their questions to them. Therefore, the students could learn a lots and they could choose their future directions..."

One of the students' feelings about his principal reflect most of the others:

"I'm very happy in this school and I love my principal and my teachers. Our principal chat with us frequently. Chatting with him is nice. I feel myself as a gem during the conversation with him. He is very good people."

As a conclusion, it could be said that all three principals act as a transformational leaders in their schools and they are making an all-out effort to cover internal and external expectations.

5.3. Priorities of Turkish principals (Türk Okul Müdürlerinin Öncelikleri)

The school principal is increasingly regarded as the primary factor in implementing reform and raising student achievement. However, principals, teachers, students and parents all have different ideas of what school leadership actually means. The principal is typically viewed as the main source of leadership within the school.

In realty, it is interesting to examine perceptions regarding the principal's priorities for the school [25]. Since 1990, there has

been largely agreed by scholars and policy-makers about what the priorities of school leaders should be [26]. In terms of the school leaders' priorities, there are some studies, which suggest organizational cultures [27 and 28] and some studies, which suggest strategic planing and marketing [29 and 30].

In this study, according to our findings, the common points of the principals are confidence, collaboration, effective communication, making staff to join decision making process, defining and evaluating strategies in meetings, and sharing vision. Because of that it could be said that their priorities are cultural part of their schools mostly. They try to increase confidence between school members. They make school members join decision making process. So they request contribution and collaboration of school members when trying to apply innovations. Principals also stated that they share the vision with school members, they argue and decide strategies together and so they make school members to have a commitment for school. While doing these, they are aware of being democratic and they are in effective communication process. They sometimes apply situational approach and the biggest support for school principals is from upper administrative staff.

One of the principal said:

"Specifying the unapproved opinion with a smiling face is a virtue. I respect the views of the others. I assess different opinions, but I give the final decision myself."

The other one said:

"Service continuity is essential. School management is an unending process. People can change, but jobs will continue under the responsibility of another principal. The important thing is to deliver a torch of success to the next principal. So the improvement can continue to evolve" and added:

"Transportation and comfort of my teachers is one of the my most important responsibilities. If teacher feel comfortable and happy, their happiness will reverberate to the students. As a wave of happiness, it will spread to all school."

"Our job is problem solving. If you couldn't solve the daily problems immediately, the snow ball turn into a avalanche and you will lost under it."

6. CONCLUSIONS (SONUÇ)

At the end of this study, it could be said that, all three principals are fair-minded, good-humored, decisive, and organized people, and they use mostly their effective communication skills in the school. They adopt and implement the sense of "togetherness" in their school environment. They are trying to work together with school staff on behalf of giving the warmth of the family and believe that being friendly would strengthen the sense of belonging to school. They are committed to teacher motivation and firstly try to improve the staff room when they started out their work. Last but not least, they are fulfilling their duties based on the philosophy of "a good thing is even going to be better." They firmly believe in lifelong learning; because of that they want to learn new knowledge in the areas of school management and communication.

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