



How Are the Leadership Behavior of School Principals Perceived by Their Teachers? A Case Study in Turkey

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In social psychology, the term “person perception” refers to the different mental processes that people use to form impressions of other people. This term includes how they form these impressions, and the different conclusions they make about other people based upon their impressions. Person perception can be a very subjective process that can be influenced by the characteristics of the person being observed, the context of the situation, and people’s own personal characteristics. Educational leadership increasingly gained importance in today’s world, because it is recognized that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners. In order for students to have high-quality learning each year, schools must be highly functioning, which means that they must be led by effective principals. Studies note that the greatest impact on school success can be determined through the leadership practices of principals. The principals and school leaders who are implementing their roles and duties should be constantly reviewed and assessed for transparency in school, because their leadership has an impact on “teacher morale, job satisfaction, and motivation”. Principals should have key skills related to communicating, facilitating, team-building, coaching, managing conflict, involving others in decision-making, and acting politically, also the development of technological advancement. This study aims to find the impact of school principals’ leadership behavior on teachers and teachers’ perceptions about the impact and the styles of their leadership. The survey is distributed in 10 public elementary schools in one region of Istanbul, Turkey. The sample consisted of 100 teachers; of which 64 were female teachers and 36 were male teachers. Questionnaire consisted of two parts: demographic information and questions about the perception of leadership behavior. The scale was developed by Demiray (2008) and validity and reliability tests proved that the questionnaire was reliable and valid. Analyses indicate that according to the teachers’ perceptions, the important outcomes of the principals’ leadership styles and behavior, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and coordination, were satisfying and effective some of the time. Furthermore, the results also provide evidence that the teachers believe they are not recognized for their achievements by their school principals. This case study will be the groundwork for a more comprehensive research about the teachers’ expectations of educational leadership.

Keywords: leadership, education, person perception

Introduction

People often form impressions of others very quickly and with minimal information. They also frequently base their impressions on the “roles and social norms” they expect from others. Therefore, although

subordinates' evaluations are perceptual and may well be subject to bias, learning the perceptions of those who they work with is vital for leaders to understand their effectiveness. One of the methods in assessing a principal's leadership is to examine the teachers' perceptions of their principals, because teachers work closely and directly with them. As pointed out by Scotti and Williams (1987), teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership is one of the many variables which affect a school's productivity. Teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behavior are also positively related to teachers' morale (Hunter-Boykin & Evans, 1995).

Educational leadership increasingly gained importance in today's educational literature, because it is recognized that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners (Kotter, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In social psychology, the term "person perception" refers to the different mental processes that people use to form impressions of others. This term includes how they form these impressions, and the different conclusions they make about other people based upon their impressions. Person perception can be a very subjective process that can be influenced by the characteristics of the person being observed, the context of the situation, and people's own personal characteristics (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996).

Today, improving school leadership ranks high on the list of priorities for school reform. In a detailed 2010 survey, teacher quality stood above everything else, but "Principal leadership came next, outstripping subjects including dropout rates, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education, student testing, and preparation for college and careers" (Simkin, Charner, & Suss, 2010, pp. 9-10). Good leadership, the study suggests, improves both teacher motivation and work settings. This, in turn, can strengthen classroom instruction (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). It is no wonder that the "School improvement movement of the past 20 years has put a great emphasis on the role of leaders" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2010, p. 32). Leadership studies show great evidence that school leadership has an impact on student outcomes next to the influence of teachers in the classroom (Day et al., 2010; Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010). A recent report found that nearly 60% of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to leadership and teacher effectiveness, with principals accounting for 25% of a school's total impact on achievement (New Leaders for New Schools, 2009).

In their research, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) noted that the greatest impact on school success can be determined through the leadership practices of principals, because their leadership has an impact on the morale, job satisfaction, and motivation of the teachers. Principal leadership directly influences teacher community as well as instruction (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).

In order for students to have high-quality learning, schools must be highly functioning, and this means that they must be led by effective principals (Day et al., 2010; Barber et al., 2010). Reviews of the past research on the degree of principal influence on students have shown that principals indirectly affect student learning through teachers (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998).

Principals should have key skills related to communicating, facilitating, team-building, coaching, managing conflict, involving others in decision-making, and acting politically, also the development of technological advancement (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006).

Based on the above discussions, this study aims to find the impact of school principals' leadership behavior on teachers and teachers' perceptions about the impact and the styles of their leadership.

Methodology

Design and Sample

This study adopted the survey method of descriptive research design. The sample was selected on the basis of convenience sampling, from 10 public elementary schools in one region of Istanbul, Turkey. The participants were 100 school teachers, of which 64 were female and 36 were male.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: demographic information and 30 items for measuring teachers' perceptions of leadership behavior. The scale was developed by Demiray (2008) and validity and reliability tests proved that the questionnaire was reliable and valid.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of the respondents by frequency and percentage are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

As can be seen from Table 1, 28.0% of the teachers in the sample are 21-30 years old, 46.0% are 31-40 years old, 20.0% are 41-50 years old, and 6.0% are 51-60 years old.

Table 1

Teacher's Age Distribution

Age	<i>f</i>	%
21-30	28	28.0
31-40	46	46.0
41-50	20	20.0
51-60	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

As can be seen from Table 2, 1.0% of the teachers in the sample have been working for less than a year, 14.0% have been working for 1-5 years, 39.0% have been working for 6-10 years, 22.0% have been working for 11-15 years, 11.0% have been working for 16-20 years, and 13.0% have been working for over 20 years.

Table 2

Teacher's Work Experience Distribution

Age	<i>f</i>	%
< 1 year	1	1.0
1-5 years	14	14.0
6-10 years	39	39.0
11-15 years	22	22.0
16-20 years	11	11.0
> 20 years	13	13.0
Total	100	100.0

Respondents' Perceptions

Summaries of the respondents' perceptions by frequency and percentage are presented in Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7.

As can be seen from Table 3, 8.0% of the teachers in the sample perceive that principals "Always", 32.0% "Most of the time", 42.0% "Sometimes", 17.0% "Rarely", and 1.0% "Never" use effective communication skills.

Table 3

Frequency of Teachers' Answers for "Communication Skills" of Principals

	<i>f</i>	%
Always	8	8.0
Most of the time	32	32.0
Sometimes	42	42.0
Rarely	17	17.0
Never	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

As can be seen from Table 4, 8.0% of the teachers in the sample perceive that principals "Always", 31.0% "Most of the time", 45.0% "Sometimes", 13.0% "Rarely", and 3.0% "Never" use effective teamwork skills.

Table 4

Frequency of Teachers' Answers for "Teamwork Skills" of Principals

	<i>f</i>	%
Always	8	8.0
Most of the time	31	31.0
Sometimes	45	45.0
Rarely	13	13.0
Never	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

As can be seen from Table 5, 10.0% of the teachers in the sample perceive that principals "Always", 32.0% "Most of the time", 40.0% "Sometimes", 17.0% "Rarely", and 1.0% "Never" use effective problem-solving skills.

Table 5

Frequency of Teachers' Answers for "Problem-Solving Skills" of Principals

	<i>f</i>	%
Always	10	10.0
Most of the time	32	32.0
Sometimes	40	40.0
Rarely	17	17.0
Never	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

As can be seen from Table 6, 9.0% of the teachers in the sample perceive that principals "Always", 29.0% "Most of the time", 36.0% "Sometimes", and 26.0% "Rarely" use effective coordination skills.

Table 6

Frequency of Teachers' Answers for "Coordination Skills" of Principals

	<i>f</i>	%
Always	9	9.0
Most of the time	29	29.0
Sometimes	36	36.0
Rarely	26	26.0
Never	0	0.0
Total	100	100.0

As can be seen from Table 7, 18.0% of the teachers in the sample perceive that principals "Always", 29.0% "Most of the time", 26.0% "Sometimes", 24.0% "Rarely", and 3.0% "Never" appreciate them.

Table 7

Frequency of Teachers' Answers for "Appreciation Skills" of Principals

	<i>f</i>	%
Always	18	18.0
Most of the time	29	29.0
Sometimes	26	26.0
Rarely	24	24.0
Never	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Conclusion

The results show that for this study, the perceptions of the teachers related to communication, teamwork, problem-solving, coordination, and appreciation skills of the principals, which are important skills for educational leaders, are not perceived as effective by the teachers all the time. If there is not enough open communication between the principals and the teachers to talk about the issues, if there is not coordination and effective teamwork most of the time, and if the problems are not solved as expected and on time, the teachers will not be highly motivated and their performance will be affected, which in turn may affect the students' success and in turn the schools' success because schools depend on leadership throughout the organization to shape productive futures (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000).

This case study will be the groundwork for further research in understanding the perceptions of the teachers about their school principals, and maybe discuss issues and problems with them, who are their educational leaders and draw attention to how the educational leadership will help the schools perform at high levels.

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