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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AS A PREDICTOR OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT[4]

Abstract: The aim of this research was to investigate the effect of principlas' transformational leader behaviors on teachers' organizational commitment. In the research, causal-comparative and relarional survey methods were used. The study group, defined according to convenient sampling method, was composed of 260 public school teachers working in five provinces in the Central Anatolia Region in Turkey. The data was gathered with "Transformational Leadership Scale" and "Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale", in the spring semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Descriptive statistical analysis, independent groups t-test, test of variance (ANOVA), Pearsons' corelational analysis and regresion analysis were employed in the analysis phase. The findings showed that both principals' transformational leadership levels and teachers' organizational commitment levels were moderate. It was observed that teachers' perceptions about their principals' transformational leadership behaviours and organizational commitment levels didn't show a significant difference among the groups of gender, age and work experience. It was found that there was a significant relationship between principals' transformational leadership behaviours and teachers' organizational commitment, and the former was a significant predictor of the latter. It was concluded that principals' transformational leadership behaviors might be effective in enhancing teachers' organizational commitment. In this frame practical, theoretical and research recommendations were developed.

Key words: organizational commitment, principal, regression analysis**,** teacher, transformational leadership.

1. Introduction

The significance of education and schools is on the rise, particularly in developing countries. National and international exams evaluate the academic performance of schools and students. As education outcomes affect parents and citizens, there is a collective expectation for schools to be accountable

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for the investments made in education. Moreover, global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic have underlined the importance of educational institutions even more. In this context, it is more important than ever to question the factors affecting teacher performance and student success in schools. Studies conducted in schools show that school leadership is an effective variable for teacher-related outcomes and student success, albeit indirectly (Ross & Gray, 2006). One of the leadership styles that positively affects teachers' attitudes and behaviors is transformational leadership. As a leadership style that can carry the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of followers to a higher level of motivation (Burns, 1978), the effect of transformational leadership on positive outcomes in many different organizational settings, including educational institutions, has been confirmed (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leadership characteristics are mostly displayed by the principals of high performing schools (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009); it has been found that transformational leadership affects many positive outcomes such as teachers' motivation (Normianti, Aslamiah, & Suhaimi, 2019) and job satisfaction (Kouni, Koutsoukos, & Panta, 2018). Among other effects, there is a widespread consensus that the most consistent effect of transformational leadership is on teachers' organizational commitment (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Organizational commitment can be effective on many work outputs; it has been observed that organizational commitment, which can be defined as a sense of belonging to the organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974), is correlated with higher job commitment, stronger organizational citizenship, lower withdrawal thoughts and intention to quit (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). In education teachers who feel committed to the school play a key role in creating quality education (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020). Given the impact of organizational commitment on teacher-related variables that could influence student achievement, it is crucial to identify the factors that could impact teachers' level of commitment. In this context, this study aimed to explore the impact of school principals' transformational leadership behaviors on teachers' organizational commitment by addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the level of transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and organizational commitment of teachers according to teacher perceptions?
2. Is there a significant difference in the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and the organizational commitment of teachers based on their gender, age, and professional experience?
3. Is there a relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and teachers' organizational commitment?
4. Do school principals' transformational leadership behaviors predict teachers' organizational commitment?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Transformational Leadership

Downtown (1973) introduced the idea of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990). However, the systematic definition and use of the concept was by James MacGregor Burns (1978) in his book, Leadership. In the book, transformational leadership was developed to describe a process in which leaders and followers work together to increase their motivation and virtue (Anderson, 2017). The concept was constructed by comparing transactional leadership and transformational leadership styles, first by Burns (1978) and later by Bass (1985). Transformational leaders enhance the morale, motivation, and ethical values of their followers, whereas transactional leaders prioritize exchanges that cater to the immediate self-interest of both leaders and followers. The latter could manifest in various forms, such as contingent reward, management by exception, or laissez-faire leadership (Bass, 1999). In contrast, transformational leadership characterizes a leader who uses idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to guide followers beyond their immediate self-interest.

Transformational leadership involves elevating the maturity and aspirations of followers by addressing their concerns regarding achievement, self-fullfilment, and the welfare of the organization and the broader community. With the idealized influence and inspirational motivation, leaders envision a desirable future; articulate how to achieve it, set an exemplary model and high performance standards, and exhibit determination and confidence. Followers identify themselves with the leader. Through intellectual stimulation, the leader helps his followers to be more innovative and creative. The leader pays attention to the developmental needs of the followers and guides them in their development via individualized consideration. The leader presents tasks as development opportunities to his/her followers. Transactional leadership can sustain the status quo, whereas transformational leadership is geared towards initiating change and promoting growth (Bass & Avolio, 1990). As Burns' (1978) argue, transformational leadership comprises these four essential components that are interrelated and must coexist to represent transformational leadership. Only by integrating these components can transformational leadership generate a synergistic effect that leads to performance that exceeds expectations (Hall, Johnson, Wysocki, & Kepner, 2002). In other studies, transformational leadership was explained with three (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999), five (Bass, 1985), or six components (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). However, Anderson (2017) suggests that as the components of transformational leadership are closely interconnected and each one is essential for transformational leadership, a composite factor that integrates all the components can be employed in research.

Studies conducted around the world and in many different organizations have shown that transformational leadership affects the attitudes and behaviors of employees at individual and organizational levels, such as job satisfaction, effort, organizational citizenship behaviors and organizational commitment (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Numerous scholars assert that transformational leadership is the right style of leadership for contemporary educational institutions, and its positive impact has been witnessed in various educational settings (Anderson, 2017). In one of the initial studies carried out in the school context, Leithwood (1994) proposed that transformational leadership enhances the capability of school leaders to foster change in initiatives aimed at restructuring schools. In a study conducted by Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015), it was discovered that school principals' exhibition of transformational leadership style is highly valued by teachers, who view them as models that inspire confidence among school staff. Hallinger and Heck (1998) found that transformational leadership affects teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their commitment to change, organizational learning, and student outcomes. Finnigan and Stewart's research (2009) suggests that transformational leadership practices are most frequently witnessed in high-performing schools, indicating that transformational leadership may be the most efficient style of leadership. As research shows that transformational leadership increases teachers' extra effort (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003), motivation (Lee & Kuo, 2018; Normianti, Aslamiah, & Suhaimi, 2019), performance (Normianti, Aslamiah, & Suhaimi, 2019), job satisfaction (Kouni, Koutsoukos, & Panta, 2018), classroom practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Koh Steers & Terborg, 1995; Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996), the most consistent effect among teacher attitudes and behaviors seems to be on teachers' organizational commitment (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

2.2. Organizational Commitment

The term "organizational commitment," as per Porter et al.'s (1974) definition, refers to the act of embracing the values of an organization and feeling a sense of affiliation and unity with it. Organizational commitment describes a mental state that enables a person to bond with the organization, thereby reduces the risk of leaving the organization. According to Angle and Perry (1981), Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian 's (1974) definition of organizational commitment consists of three critical elements; first, a deep belief and acceptance of the goals and values of the

organization; second, a willingness to devote significant effort to the benefit of the organization; third, a strong desire to maintain one's affiliation with the organization. According to Mowday, Porter, and Steers' (1982) definition, organizational commitment represents the extent to which a person associates with an organization and feels a sense of belonging to that organization.

Organizational commitment, which is classified in various ways, has been discussed by some researchers in two types as value commitment and continuance commitment (Angle & Perry, 1981) or in three types as affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment refers to the emotional bond, identification, and sense of membership that employees have with an organization. Employees who have this type of commitment choose to remain employed in the organization out of their own free will. In the case of continuance commitment, an employee may feel compelled to stay with the organization due to the costs of leaving. The employee continues to work because they feel a need to remain in the organization. Normative commitment refers to the sense of obligation an employee feels to remain with the organization.

It has been observed that organizational commitment is effective on many attitudes and behaviors of employees; one of the clearest results of commitment is the employee's desire to stay in the organization (Guzeller & Celiker, 2019). Organizational commitment increases employee performance (Mowday, Porter, & Dubin, 1974; Riketta, 2002) and increases organizational success (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008). Organizational commitment ultimately affects job performance and production via job satisfaction (Wong & Spence-Laschinger, 2015), organizational citizenship behavior (Bakhshi, Sharma, & Kumar, 2012), service quality (Oshagbemi, 2000), and extra-role performance (Riketta, 2002). Although the effect on student success or school effectiveness has not been clearly confirmed, the relationship between teachers' organizational commitment and variables that may affect student success has been revealed. According to Anderson (2017), teachers' organizational commitment affects teacher efficacy, albeit indirectly, this positively affects student success and school performance. As a matter of fact, organizational commitment is related to teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Sesen & Basim, 2012), their participation in administrative decision-making (Somech & Bogler, 2002), compromising and problem-solving strategies (Balay, 2007), and perceived school effectiveness (Maroufkhani, Nourani, & Boerhannoeddin, 2015).

Leadership style is one of the most important predictors of organizational commitment (Mowday, Porter, & Steers,1982), moreover, in diverse settings, it has been observed that transformational leadership has strong relationships with organizational commitment (Bono & Judge, 2003; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995). It has been found that teachers' organizational commitment also increases when school principals exhibit transformational leadership characteristics (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

2.3. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Berkovich and Bogler (2020), examining 68 studies on teachers' organizational commitment, concluded that positive leadership styles, especially transformational and charismatic school leadership, are effective on teachers' organizational commitment as contextual variables, while other leadership styles (for example, instructional leadership) do not have this effect. In their research with vocational high school teachers in Jordan, Khasawneh, Omari and Abu-Tineh, (2012) discovered a significant correlation between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen (2006) conducted the research with primary school teachers in Tanzania and noted that transformational leadership was a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The similar results in Iran (Sayadi, 2016), Singapore (Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995), China (Dou,

Devos, & Valcke, 2016) and Turkey (Balay, 2007; Bektas, Cogaltay, & Sokmen, 2014) imply that transformational leadership impact on teachers' organizational commitment is generally consistent across various cultures.

According to Avolio et al.'s (1999) assertion, transformational leadership's influence on employee commitment results from the leader's capacity to encourage critical thinking through innovative methods, engage employees in the decision-making process, and inspire loyalty by acknowledging and valuing the unique needs of each employee to reach their full potential. Transformational leaders motivate employees to feel committed by encouraging them to find new solutions to challenges and by being aware of their needs (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003). Transformational leadership inspires employees to exceed their perceived limitations and emphasizes the importance of values and moral standards guiding their conduct (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Model

The research was conducted using the causal comparative and relational survey model. Within the scope of the relational research, it was aimed to determine the relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and the organizational commitment of teachers. In addition, the researchers employed the causal comparative research method to investigate potential differences in transformational leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals and organizational commitment among teachers, based on variables such as gender, age, and professional experience. In regression analysis, the independent variable of the study was transformational leadership and its dependent variable was organizational commitment.

3.2. Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of 260 teachers working in public schools in five provinces in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. The teachers working in the spring semester of the 2021-2022 Academic Year were included in the group according to convenient sampling method. The demographic characteristics of the 260 participants in the study group are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Participants

Variables	Group	n	%
Gender	Female	191	73.5
	Male	69	26.5
	Total	**260**	**100**
Age	35 years and under	63	24.2
	36-45 years	128	49.2
	46 years and over	69	26.6
	Total	**260**	**100**
Educational Level	Associate Degree	8	3.1
	Bachelor's Degree	178	68.4
	Master's Degree	66	25.4
	Doctorate Degree	8	3.1
	Total	**260**	**100**
Subject	Classroom Teacher (Preschool-Primary School)	104	40
	Subject Teacher	156	60
	Total	**260**	**100**

School Level	Preschool	6	2.3
	Primary School	99	38.1
	Middle School	100	38.5
	High School	55	21.1
	Total	**260**	**100**
Professional Experience	5 years or less	22	8.5
	6-10 years	39	15.0
	11-15 years	61	23.5
	16-20 years	63	24.2
	21 years+	75	28.8
	Total	**260**	**100**
Marital Status	Married	216	83.1
	Single	44	16.9
	Total	**260**	**100**

As seen in Table 1, 73.5% of the study group was women and 26.5% was men. 24.2% of the teachers were aged 35 and under, 49.2% were aged between 36-45, and 26.6% were aged 46 and over. 3.1% of the teachers had associate degree, 68.4% had bachelor's degree, 25.4% were with master's degree and 3.1% with doctorate level of education. 40% of the teachers were classroom teachers and 60% were subject teachers. According to the school level, 2.3% of the teachers was working in pre-school, 38.1% in primary school, 38.5% in middle school and 21.1% in high school. 8.5% of the teachers had 5 years or less, 15% had 6-10 years, 23.5% had 11-15 years, 24.2% had 16-20 years and 28.8% had 21 years or more professional experience.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool consisted of three parts. In the first part, there were demographic questions (gender, age, marital status, etc.). The second part was "Transformational Leadership Scale" and the third was "Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale".

3.3.1. Transformational Leadership Scale
In the study, the uni-dimensional Transformational Leadership Scale consisting of 20 items, developed by Akan, Yildirim and Yalcin (2014) was used. The 5-point Likert type style scale has items such as "Our school principal is constantly in favor of change and innovation" and "Our school principal rewards our creative ideas". The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results of the scale, by Akan, Yildirim, and Yalcin (2014), the fit index values were within the acceptable values ($\chi2/df=2.59$; GFI=.92; AGFI=.90; NFI=.98). ; CFI=.99; RMSEA=.05). According to the reliability study by Akan, Yildirim, and Yalcin (2014), the Cronbach Alpha value of the scale (α=.96) was high. The Cronbach Alpha reliability statistical value calculated for this study showed that the scale had a highly reliable internal consistency (α=.87).

3.3.2. Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale
The 17-item, uni-dimensional Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale developed by Ustuner (2009) was used in the study. In the 5-point Likert-type scale, there are items such as "Our administrators encourage us to cooperate while making decisions and solving problems, it makes me feel committed to this place", "I feel committed because my suggestions are taken into consideration by the school administration". As part of the validity and reliability studies conducted by Ustuner (2009), the scale's CFA analysis was conducted and the fit indexes ($\chi2/df=2.86$; GFI=.89; AGFI=.85; CFI=.95; NNFI=.95; RMSEA=.078) were good. In the reliability study (Ustuner, 2009), the Cronbach Alpha value of the scale (α=.96) was high. The Cronbach Alpha value calculated for this study also showed that the scale had a highly reliable internal consistency (α=.98).

3.4. Data Collection

An online form was used in the data collection process in which the researchers were granted the permissions by the school directorates in the sampling provinces. Online forms were delivered to the participants via instant messaging applications and e-mails. The data collection phase started in March 2022 and finished in May 2022 and took approximately two months.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research conducted data analysis using the SPSS 26 program, which involved two phases: preliminary analysis and main analysis. The missing data and outlier data analyses were conducted as preliminary analyses and no missing data and outlier were found. In order to test the assumptions of the regression analysis, it was tested whether the scales showed normal distribution and a linear relationship. In the normality tests, it was determined that the mode, arithmetic mean, and median values of the scales were close to each other. It was observed that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the Transformational Leadership Scale (skewness: -0.293; kurtosis: -1.028) and the Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale (skewness: -0.104; kurtosis: -1.194) ranged from -1 to +1 or very close to this range. In addition, since the histogram, normal Q-Q and box-line graphs exhibited normal distribution, it was concluded that the scale scores had a normal distribution. For the test of linearity, a scatter plot was used and it was observed that there was a linear relationship between the scores of the Transformational Leadership Scale and the Teachers' Organizational Commitment Scale (R^2 Linear=0.655).

Descriptive statistical analyses (frequency, percentage, standard deviation, mean, etc.) were used to examine the teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership and organizational commitment. In order to compare the groups based on gender, age and professional experience, independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance [ANOVA] were applied. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the scale scores. Simple linear regression analysis was used to examine the predictive effect of principals' transformational leadership on teachers' organizational commitment.

4. Findings

Within the scope of the sub-problems of the research, the transformational leadership behavior levels of the school principals and the organizational commitment levels of the teachers were examined. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Scales

Scales	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd
Transformational Leadership	260	3.35	1.19
Organizational Commitment	260	3.19	1.23

According to Table 2, teachers' perceptions of principals' transformational leadership (X̄=3.35, sd=1.19) and organizational commitment (X̄=3.19, sd=1.23) were at moderate level of the scale average. In other words, according to teacher perceptions, school principals' levels of transformational leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational commitment levels were moderate.

In the study, independent sample t-test was applied to compare teachers' transformational leadership perceptions and organizational commitment levels according to their genders. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Teachers' Transformational Leadership Perceptions and Organizational Commitment by Gender Variable

Scales	Group	N	$\overline{\mathrm{X}}$	Sd	Df	t	p
Transformational Leadership	Female	191	3.37	1.19	258	.473	.64
	Male	69	3.29	1.21			
Organizational Commitment	Female	191	3.18	1.24	258	-.19	.85
	Male	69	3.21	1.19			

*p<.05

When Table 3 was examined, it was revealed that teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership ($t_{(258)}$=.473; p>.05) and organizational commitment ($t_{(258)}$=-.19; p>.05) did not differ significantly according to their genders.

In the study, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare teachers' transformational leadership perceptions and organizational commitment by age. The findings can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of Teachers' Transformational Leadership Perceptions and Organizational Commitment by Age Variable

Scales	Group	N	X̄	Sd	Df	F	p	Significant Difference
Transformational Leadership	Under 35 years	63	3.16	1.25	2	1.054	0.350	-
	36-45 years	128	3.39	1.20	257			
	Over 46 years	69	3.44	1.14	259			
Organizational Commitment	Under 35 years	63	2.96	1.18	2	1.793	0.168	-
	36-45 years	128	3.21	1.26	257			
	Over 46 years	69	3.36	1.18	259			

*p<.05

As seen in Table 4, it was found that teachers' transformational leadership perceptions ($F_{(2-257)}$ = 1.054; p>.05) and organizational commitment ($F_{(2-257)}$ = 1.793; p>.05) did not differ significantly according to their ages.

In the study, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare teachers' transformational leadership perceptions and organizational commitment according to professional experience variable. Analysis results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of Teachers' Transformational Leadership Perceptions and Organizational Commitment by Professional Experience Variable

Scales	Group	N	X̄	Sd	Df	F	p	Significant Difference
Transformational Leadership	- 5 years	22	2.83	1.05	4	1.592	.177	-
	6-10 years	39	3.29	1.27	255			
	11-15 years	61	3.55	1.24	259			
	16-20 years	63	3.30	1.19				
	21+ years	75	3.41	1.14				
Organizational Commitment	- 5 years	22	2.62	1.16	4	1.887	.113	-
	6-10 years	39	3.07	1.13	255			
	11-15 years	61	3.39	1.29	259			
	16-20 years	63	3.12	1.26				
	21+ years	75	3.30	1.18				

*p<.05

In Table 5, it was observed that both the transformational leadership perceptions of teachers ($F_{(4-255)}$ = 1.592; p>.05) and their organizational commitment ($F_{(4-255)}$ = 1.887; p>.05) did not differ at a significant level according to their professional experience.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and teachers' organizational commitment. Analysis results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. *Results of Correlation Analysis between Teachers' Transformational Leadership Perceptions and Organizational Commitment*

Variables	Transformational Leadership	Organizational Commitment
Transformational Leadership	1	
Organizatonal Commitment	0.809** (p = 0.000)	1

* p<0,05, ** p<0,01

According to Table 6, transformational leadership and organizational commitment variables had a statistically significant correlation with each other at the p=0.01 significance level. It was revealed that there was a positive and high level (r=0.809) relationship between the two variables.

In the study, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals predict teachers' organizational commitment. The findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results on the Prediction of Teachers' Organizational Commitment by Transformational Leadership*

Variables	Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	p
	ß	Standard Error	Beta		
Organizatonal Commitment	.407	0.134		3.046	0.003
Transformational Leadership	0.830	0.038	0.809	22.142	0.000
R = 0.809; Adjusted R^2 = 0.655; F = 490.282; p = 0.000					

As seen in Table 7, teachers' transformational leadership perceptions significantly predicted ($F_{(1-258)}$ =490.282, p<0.05) and positively affected (ß =0.830, Beta=0.809, t=22.142) teachers' organizational commitment. In addition, it was found that the transformational leadership perception explained 65% of the positive change in teachers' organizational commitment (R=0.809; R^2= 0.655).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on exploring the effect of school principals' transformational leadership behaviors on teachers' organizational commitment. In this context, it was observed that according to the teacher perceptions, the school principals' transformational leadership behaviors were at a moderate level. Therefore, it can be said that teachers do not think that the school administrators are not highly sufficient transformational leaders. Although there are studies supporting this finding (Celik & Eryilmaz, 2006; Okcu, 2011), there are contradictory studies (Balyer, 2012; Canbaz, 2019; Demir & Durnali, 2022) suggesting a comparatively higher teacher perceptions of principals' transformational leadership behaviors. These differences among the research results can be explained by the effect of different samples in those researches. It is clear that there is not a consistent perception about principals' transformational leadership behavior levels.

In the study, teachers' perceptions of their organizational commitment were also found at a moderate level. This finding is parallel with the results of many studies (Canbaz, 2019). On the other hand, researchers as Okcu (2011), Khasawneh, Omari and Abu-Tineh (2012), and Demir and Durnali (2022) found that teachers' organizational commitment is at a high level. Although teachers' perceptions of their organizational commitment are high in many studies in the literature, the fact that teachers' organizational commitment levels are moderate in the current study and in some other studies is noteworthy. The different results of these studies may be due to the individual characteristics of the teachers or the organizational variables in the schools they work.

It was found that teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership did not differ according to demographic variables such as gender, professional experience, or age. The fact that demographic variables do not make a difference in teachers' perception of transformational leadership is largely consistent with the literature. The finding that gender (Canbaz, 2019), age (Celik & Eryilmaz, 2006) or professional experience (Kilinc, 2013) does not make a difference in teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors seems to be a general result. However, studies pointing out that the gender of employees can affect their perceptions of leader behaviors, albeit in limited numbers, should be well considered (Akan & Kilic, 2019; Demir & Durnali, 2022). On the other hand, it is thought that the gender of the leader, not the followers, may be an important factor in transformational leadership. While Bass (1999) suggested that female administrators exhibited more transformational leadership behaviors, Reuvers, Van Engen and Vinkenburg (2008) observed that the male administrator had a more significant effect on transformational leadership outcomes. While some studies have failed to establish a substantial variance in leadership behaviors based on the gender of the administrator (Zeinabadi, 2013), theories and research that stress the significance of gender in leadership behaviors (Eagly & Heilman, 2016) recommend evaluating transformational leadership in the context of gender.

It was found that organizational commitment, the dependent variable of the study, did not differ significantly according to the gender, age or professional experience of the teachers. There is no consensus in the literature on how gender affects commitment. Some studies have indicated no significant gender differences (Canbaz, 2019; Demir & Durnali, 2022), while others have reported higher organizational commitment among female employees (Sarpbalkan, 2017) or greater commitment among male employees (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2011). Male employees' greater commitment can be attributed to women's higher commitment to their domestic responsibilities and greater ease in making turnover decisions. On the other hand, studies reporting higher commitment among female employees suggest that women must put in more effort to maintain their professional status than male counterparts, which leads to greater commitment (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013). In studies that deal with commitment in terms of age and professional seniority, in parallel with the findings of this study, there are findings showing that age or professional seniority does not make a difference in commitment (Bashir & Ramay, 2008; Iqbal, 2010), but there are studies which concluded that the older or more experienced the employees get the more committed they become. This can be explained with the career-stage model (Super, 1957), that is, the employees go through the stages of trial, settlement, protection and decline in their careers and that commitment can be observed at the highest at the settlement and protection stages. From another point of view, it is thought that the commitment of the older and experienced employees can be explained not by organizational variables, but by external variables, such as the expenses of a married life with children (Brimeyer, Perrucci, & Wadsworth, 2010).

Another finding in the study is that there is a positive and high-level relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals and the organizational commitment of teachers. In addition, it was concluded that transformational leadership is a significant predictor of the variability in teachers' organizational commitment. Many studies in the literature carried out both abroad and in Turkey (Balyer, Karatas & Alci, 2015; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bektas, Cogaltay, &

Sokmen, 2014; Demir & Durnali, 2022; Kilinc, 2013; Malik, Javed, & Hassan, 2019; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016) support this finding. The common point in the studies on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment is that transformational leadership positively affects organizational commitment. This situation can be explained by the components of transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. According to the transformational leadership theory, leaders with idealized influence and inspirational motivation imagine a desired future, express how to achieve it, create an exemplary model, set high performance standards, and display determination and confidence (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Thus, the fact that employees have a future vision that includes themselves and a leader they can take as an example can affect their positive feelings towards work. In addition, with intellectual stimulation, the leader helps his followers to be more innovative and creative, while with individualized consideration, the leader pays attention to the developmental needs of the followers and guides them in their development (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Providing intellectual stimulation, which can also meet the developmental needs of employees, with an individual level of attention, can provide reasons beyond the financial rewards the employees need to continue their work. Especially in the educational system, where the financial gains of the employees are relatively stable and which has to keep up with the constant changes and have to be more accountable for student success day by day, that the ability of school principals to respond individually to their developmental needs while presenting a vision for the future to teachers may be the background to the positive effect on teachers' commitment.

6.   Limitations and Recommendations

Considering the results, one should take the limitations of this study into account. The first limitation was the cross-sectional structure of the study, in setting the cause-effect relationship. In this study, only the results about the strength of the relationships between the variables were observed. In order to overcome this limitation longitudinal research methods can be applied in the future studies. Examining the direct effect of transformational leadership on teachers' organizational commitment is the second limitation of the study. More research is needed in the future to determine whether different variables have a mediating effect in explaining the relationship between the two variables. The third limitation of the study is that the study was conducted with teachers working in public schools at the K-12 level. In the future teachers working in private schools can be included in the sample. The fourth limitation is related to the size of the study group. This research was carried out in five provinces in the Central Anatolia Region. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the research findings to all schools in Turkey. In future studies, expanding the sample area and including provinces from different regions could be beneficial.

With this study, it has been revealed that the transformational leadership behaviors of school principals are an effective factor in increasing teachers' commitment to their schools. In this context, it is recommended that school principals receive theoretical and practical training regarding the nature, characteristics, and applicability of the transformational leadership approach in schools. These trainings can be conducted in collaboration with the higher education institutions and the academicians from the field of educational administration. It is recommended that school principals who want to increase their teachers' organizational commitment should include their teachers in the decision making processes; in order to reveal the talents and skills of their teachers and increase their motivation, they should encourage them to participate in in-service trainings. Finally, school principals should support the teachers by appreciating their successful work.

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