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Distributed leadership and organizational trust: the case of elementary schools

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Abstract

This study aimed to reveal the relationship between distributed leadership and organizational trust perceptions of teachers. The study also aimed to find out if there are any differences among teachers’ perceptions about distributed leadership behaviors of principals and organizational trust, and that of their colleagues. Two instruments were used to gather data. The first instrument “Distributed Leadership in Schools” and second instrument “Omnibus T Scale” The surveys used in the analysis were gathered from 218 teachers working in elementary schools. The results suggest that participating teachers felt leadership in their schools was distributed, and that participants trust in their colleagues and principals.

1. Introduction

Distributed leadership is a current and one of the most debated issues in educational leadership literature (Beycioglu & Aslan, 2010; Goldstein, 2003; Gronn, 2002; Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2004; Harris, 2005a; Harris, 2005b; Harris, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Lakomski, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2006). Similarly, organizational trust is another important issue in educational researchers’ agenda (Bryk, & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Tarter, Sábo, & Hoy, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Assuming that there would be a positive correlation between leadership distribution and trust in schools, this study aimed to reveal the relationship between distributed leadership and organizational trust perceptions of teachers. The study also aimed to find out if there are any differences among teachers’ perceptions about distributed leadership behaviors of principals and organizational trust, and that of their colleagues.

Two instruments were used to gather data. The first instrument “Distributed Leadership in Schools” was developed by Özer and Beycioglu (2010) to reveal the extent of distributed leadership perceptions of teachers in schools. Second instrument “Omnibus T Scale” was developed by Hoy & Tschannen-Moran and adapted into Turkish by Özer et al. (2006) to determine the organizational trust in schools. The surveys used in the analysis were gathered from 218 teachers working in elementary schools. The data is now being analyzed using t-test, ANOVA, and correlation analyses, and the results will have been gathered by the end of October, 2011.

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Keywords: Distributed leadership, organizational trust, trust in colleagues, trust in principals, elementary schools;
We assumed that this study would be an asset to the literature of educational administration and leadership because it is one of the first studies in Turkish school context researching distributed leadership and organizational trust.

2. Methodology

The participants of the study comprised a total of 218 (F=118, M=100) primary school teachers working in Sivas province, an eastern city of Turkey, during 2011-2012 semester. Two instruments were used to gather the data. The first instrument “Distributed Leadership in Schools” was developed by Özer and Beycioğlu (2010) to reveal the extent of distributed leadership perceptions of teachers in schools. This scale consisted of ten items and estimated Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was “0.92”. Second instrument used in this study, entitled as “Omnibus T Scale”, was originally developed by Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Özer et al. (2006). Adapted version of T scale consisted of 20 items and three sub-scales namely, trust in colleagues, trust in the principal and trust in clients (students and parents). For the research purposes only trust in colleagues and trust in the principal sub-scales were used in this study. The data gathered were analyzed using t-test and correlational analysis. For the perceived team spirit variable, independent t-test was used. To determine the relationship between distributed leadership and faculty trust in principal and colleagues, correlation analyses were done.

3. Findings and results

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributed Leadership</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>16,00</td>
<td>50,00</td>
<td>41,15</td>
<td>7,57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Colleagues</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>10,00</td>
<td>35,00</td>
<td>29,48</td>
<td>4,90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Principal</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>9,00</td>
<td>25,00</td>
<td>21,74</td>
<td>3,52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table, participating teachers get a mean score of 41,15 from distributed leadership scale, 29,48 from trust in colleagues sub-scale, and 25.00 from trust in principal sub-scale. These results suggest that participating teachers felt leadership in their schools was distributed. Trust in colleague and principal was another concern of the study. These results showed that participants trust in their colleagues and principals.

Distributed Leadership, Faculty Trust in Principal and Colleagues by Perceived Team Spirit

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate whether there would be a significant difference between teachers’ views by perceived team spirit. Before the items, participants were asked to answer this question “Do You Perceive a Strong Team Spirit in Your School?” They marked the options “yes” or “no”. Then the items were analyzed. To this end a t-test was used. Results are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Do You Perceive a Strong Team Spirit in Your School?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributed Leadership</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>41,92</td>
<td>7,26</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>4,239</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35,46</td>
<td>7,44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Colleagues</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>30,24</td>
<td>4,43</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>6,888</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23,85</td>
<td>4,50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Principal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>21,89</td>
<td>3,53</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1,688</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20,65</td>
<td>3,24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<,05

As seen in Table 1, results showed that while teachers’ mean scores on trust in colleagues and distributed leadership differed significantly in terms of perceived team spirit variable, the mean scores did not differ significantly for the
trust in principal sub-scale. Considering the participants’ mean scores, it was revealed that compared to the teachers who did not feel a team spirit at his/her school, teachers who felt a strong sense of team spirit get higher scores from both trust in colleagues and distributed leadership.

Table 2. Correlations between teachers’ trust in colleagues, trust in principal and distributed leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Distributed Leadership</td>
<td>.566**</td>
<td>.790**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Trust in Colleagues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.606**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Trust in Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Correlation analyses of the data showed that teacher trust in colleagues was moderately positively related to trust in principal (r=.606) and distributed leadership (r=.566). Trust in principal, also, was highly positively related to distributed leadership (r=.790).

Conclusions & Recommendations

The results of this study revealed that participating teachers felt leadership in their schools was distributed, and that participants trust in their colleagues and principals. When the participants’ opinion on team spirit in their school was considered, results revealed that while teachers’ views on trust in colleagues and distributed leadership differed significantly. However, the mean scores did not differ significantly for the trust in principal sub-scale. Teachers who felt a strong sense of team spirit got higher scores from both trust in colleagues and distributed leadership. Correlation analyses fund that teacher trust in colleagues and principals was moderately positively related distributed leadership.

The findings of this study showed that distributed leadership in schools positively effects trust among colleagues and in principals. This urges the policy makers of education system to take action to create and cultivate distributed leadership behaviors in schools which is supposed to support collaborative school culture and school development.

References