



## THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' OPINIONS ON WORKING AS ENQUIRERS: A CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract:**

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the opinions of the school principals on their assignment as enquirers. It adopted multiple case-holistic design of the qualitative research methods. The sampling was created through criterion sampling technique of the purposive sampling methods. The study group consisted of 10 school principals working in the state schools in Kemer, Antalya. The data were collected by using the semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and analysed via the content analysis technique. The findings of the study showed that the school principals were not willing to be appointed as enquirers and considered this duty as a burden and drudgery. It was also found that they wanted to be charged since they were not paid for their services and did not regard themselves as sufficient in terms of technical and conceptual knowledge in their duty as enquirers.

**Keywords:** school principals, enquirers, inspection, investigation

### **1. Introduction**

When people act and behave against the social rules, the sanctions are imposed by the society they live. The social sanctions of individuals who do not comply with the social rules are considered as an expected situation. These sanctions are in every phase of human life but vary from one society to another. Otherwise, it can lead to social disturbances and even social tensions. The rules which regulate social life are etiquette, religious principles, morals, and legal rules. (Ertuğrul & Turpçu, 2014; Ayvaz, 2017).

The rules that should be obeyed by the staffs in Turkish Education System were laid down by the laws. Thanks to these rules, the communication is effectively maintained in the institution. It is seen that some of the officers, teachers and

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administrators who carry out public duties do not occasionally obey the rules either knowingly or unknowingly. In these cases, the officers who do not obey the authorities and rules based on the law are provided to act lawfully, and when necessary, the criminal actions are taken against them. In order to ensure that the public services are carried out properly and efficiently, it is necessary to make investigations and inquiries and take actions against whoever is responsible. (Inspection Board (MONE), 2006: 90).

The word "Enquirer" is defined as "*the person who investigates the truth*" in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (TDK, 2018). It can also be expressed as a person who carries out the enquiry process and investigates a significant problem for judicial-administrative authorities. The concept of the enquirer is characterized as the person who assumes the duty of keeping a report by examining all aspects of the disciplinary action, goes by the results of the report for the related persons and makes a criminal proposal for the ones proved guilty as charged.

The enquirers do not merely investigate the disciplinary actions that occur as a result of the staffs' disagreements within the organization; they have a wider task scope. The duties such as occupational accidents occurred as a result of any imprudence, causing financial damage in any state institutions/organizations, improper behaviours of state officials outside the state institutions and similar cases are among the tasks of the enquirers.

The implementation of the pre-inquiries processes is also called the preliminary examination, investigation or enquiry. The persons are appointed by the competent authorities to determine the degree of reality of the crimes committed or might be committed by the state officials. The preliminary examination may be referred to a particular form of research and investigation of the persons appointed by these authorities. (Kaya & Doğan, 2002; Arıca, 2006). An enquirer appointed for disciplinary proceedings deals with whether they are carried out according to the principles and procedures laid down by the laws, statutory rules and orders. (Ayvaz, 2017).

The enquirers are appointed by the Provincial / District Directorates, which are the provincial extensions of the Central Organization of the Ministry of National Education (MONE). The complaints, denunciations and disciplinary files that need to be investigated are processed by the examination-investigation unit in the provincial organization. This unit is responsible for examining the files it holds physically in the provincial organization. It creates reports on the number of the completed works and submits them to their superior managers at certain periods of time. The juridical unit of the provincial organization is thought to order the issues that need to be worked on in relation to the legal problems in its region by simple to complex. While some issues are examined by the inspectors, others are investigated by the school principals as enquirers (Ayvaz, 2017)

The enquirers begin to make inquiries with the written order such as "inquiring in terms of disciplinary" or "investigating, and inquiring when required". Upon the completion of the enquiry, the superior authority is provided with a report called a report of a disciplinary proceeding or administrative investigation report with

information and documents attached to the enquiry (MONE. Inspection Board, 2006; Başar, 1993; Pınar, 2003; Yıldırım, 2015).

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the opinions of the school principals appointed as enquirers concerning the processes and practices of enquiry and to make some suggestions based on the findings.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

Since the purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of the school principals on being appointed as enquirers and to reflect their opinions in a holistic manner, it is a case study in multiple case-holistic design of the qualitative research method. A case study is an empirical investigation carried out especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2009). In addition, the more the cases are, the more reliability and the rate of certainty in the research findings will be and vice versa (Yin, 2012) The collected data were analysed through the content analysis technique and the teachers' opinions were classified. According to the repetition of the opinions in terms of meaning, a classification was made under themes.

### 2.2 Study Group

This study focuses on the opinions of the school principals, who are not considered much by the studies in the literature, on the effects of being appointed as enquirers. The criterion sampling technique (purposive sampling method) of the qualitative sampling methods was used in the study. This sampling technique involves the inclusion of individuals who meet the predetermined criteria for the purpose of a specific study. (McNeil & Chapman, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005; Büyüköztürk et al., 2010). The study group consists of 10 school principals working in the public schools in Kemer, Antalya during the 2017-2018 academic year. 10 volunteer participants who met the criteria (previously served as enquirers, had at least 10 years of experience, and participated in the seminars or conferences on the subject) were selected from 10 different schools. The demographic data of the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Principals	Gender	Experience	Age	Branch	Level of Education	School Type
P1	Female	14	36	Preschool Teaching	B.A.	Preschool
P2	Female	27	48	Turkish Teaching	M.A.	Middle School
P3	Male	19	42	Turkish Teaching	B.A.	Vocational Sch.
P4	Male	34	55	Primary School Teaching	B.A.	Primary S.
P5	Male	25	48	Primary School Teaching	B.A.	Primary S.
P6	Male	15	58	Primary School Teaching	B.A.	Primary S.
P7	Male	32	53	Primary School Teaching	B.A.	Primary S.
P8	Male	26	57	Social Studies Teaching	B.A.	Middle School
P9	Male	23	44	History Teaching	B.A.	Public Training C.
P10	Male	21	44	Accommodation and Travel T.	M.A.	Vocational Sch.

As seen in Table 1, 20 % of the participants are female school principals and 80% are male. Since the collected data will not be examined in terms of gender variable, there is no limitation in the number of the genders of the participants and it is presented only for demographic information. As illustrated in Table 1, the educational status of the participants is mainly bachelor's degree and most of them are primary school principals.

### **2.3 Data Collection Process**

In order to collect the research data, a literature review was conducted on the enquiry processes and practices, and semi-structured interview questions which would be asked to the participants were prepared in line with the research purpose after determining the conceptual framework. Accordingly, a list of potential questions was created and it was restructured to serve the purpose of the research and to include and collect factual and judgmental data. Later, it was sent for experts' opinions. The interview questions, which were restructured and checked by the experts, were converted into an interview form developed by the researchers and the data proceeded in this study were collected through this form.

During the implementation process, a convenient day and time were determined by getting in touch with the participants, an appointment was made and they were informed about the research during this appointment. In addition, a code name (any alphabet letter) was given to each participant in order to ensure that they feel secure and respond sincerely. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants and lasted for 30 minutes. The raw data obtained from the participants digitally and in written, and the notes of the researchers which were taken during the interviews, and interview texts were shown to the participants to get their final approval.

This study aims to examine the opinions of the school principals about the effects of their assignment as enquirers on them qualitatively and also to contribute to the studies in the literature. To attain this goal, the research problem was determined as "What are the opinions of the school principals about the effects of the enquirer duty on them?"

### **2.4 Regarding this problem, it seeks an answer to the following questions:**

1. Why do you think about your assignment as an enquirer? Why?
2. Do you encounter problems in the processes and practices of enquiry? How?
3. Did you receive any training in working as an enquirer? What kind of training did you take?
4. Do you find yourself sufficient / insufficient in the processes and practices of enquiry?
5. If you liken working as an enquirer, what would it be? Why?

### 3. Findings

In this section, the findings obtained through the content analysis technique are presented in accordance with the research questions of the study.

#### 3.1 Findings on the first sub research problem

Table 2 below shows the frequency and percentage values of school principals regarding their assignment as enquirers:

**Table 2:** Opinions of the school principals on their assignment as enquirers

Principals	Inadequacy	Fundamental Duty	Time	Being colleague	Drudgery
P1	√				
P2	√	√	√	√	√
P3		√	√		√
P4		√		√	
P5			√		√
P6				√	
P7	√		√	√	
P8				√	
P9		√	√		
P10	√		√		
<b>f</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>30</b>

As seen in Table 2, when the opinions of the school principals are examined; "time" theme ranks number one with the ratio of 60 %. The school principals do not want to be appointed as enquirers due to the fact that it takes a lot of time. Some of the participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"As an institution principal, we have an institution to deal with. Working as an enquirer is a separate task in itself. The works of our own institution are hindered or working as an enquirer takes a long time." (9P1, 2, 3).*

*"It's not our primary duty, it is a drudgery. We are asked to decide on a legal issue with a 5-day training on this issue. We spend our time on it rather than performing our primary duty. "As expressed in the saying "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing", having little knowledge about the enquiry can cause legal problems. We know the people that we will make investigations. Therefore, it can cause to end our fellowship and friendship. Or, there may be human weaknesses while delivering a judgment...." (2P1, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).*

The school principals do not want to be appointed as enquirers with the ratio of 50 % due to "Being Colleague" with the people they make investigations. Some of the participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"As well as requiring technical knowledge and capability, it takes a lot of time. The reason why we do not want to work as an enquirer is to be a colleague with the people who are examined or investigated, and to meet them every day." (7P1, 1, 3, 4).*

*"We encounter our own teachers and administrators and it is not ethical. We can emote unavoidably and can be unkind. It hurts our friendship and sincerity. It must be performed by the specialists on this subject or the inspectors." (8P1, 4).*

With the ratio of 40 %, the school principals stated that they did not have sufficient technical and theoretical knowledge about working as an enquirer and did not want to be appointed as enquirers because they thought this service hindered their primary duties. Some of the participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I have not received an adequate training, especially in practice... Since I do not have full knowledge about the subject, the process takes longer time..." (10P1, 1, 4).*

*"I think that I may not perform it in a fair way. I do not want to be appointed as an enquirer because of the lack of legal knowledge and the decisions that I will make will inevitably affect the life of the person. Those who have legal knowledge, the inspectors, same as before, or those who have knowledge about this subject can perform these works." (1P1, 1).*

*"My reasons why I do not want to be appointed as an enquirer are multidimensional. In the period we take these duties, both our work in our own schools are halted and there is no feedback to our works." (4P1, 2, 4).*

With the ratio of % 50, the school principals remarked that they did not want to be appointed as enquirers since they consider it as drudgery due to the fact that they are not paid for their services. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are given below:

*"I want to serve as an enquirer. My reasons why I do not want to be appointed as an enquirer: it is considered as drudgery, not paid for the service, our own works are hindered. This duty should be performed for a fee by the private experts." (3P1, 2, 3, 5).*

*"This work requires intensive work, in return we do not receive any additional payment." (5P1, 3, 5).*

### **3.2 Findings on the second sub research problem**

Table 3 below shows the frequency and percentage of school principals' opinions on the problems they encounter in the processes and practices of the enquiry:

**Table 3:** Opinions of the school principals on the problems they encounter in the processes and practices of the enquiry

Principals	Statement taking	Fundamental Duty	Transportation	Speciality
P1	√	√		
P2	√			√
P3		√	√	
P4				√
P5	√	√		
P6	√			√
P7	√		√	
P8				√
P9		√		√
P10				√
f	5	4	2	6
%	50	40	20	60

As seen in Table 3, when the opinions of the school principals are examined: The "Speciality" theme ranks number one with the ratio of 60%. The school principals stated that they did not have sufficient knowledge about the issues they investigated. They also pointed out that there was no expert to consult during their investigation when they did not know something or could not produce a solution, or they could not reach the knowledgeable expert.

Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"This duty should be given to those who studied law and feel ready themselves for this task." (6P2, 1, 4).*

*"In addition, this duty is too difficult and painstaking to carry out with a background consisting of one or several weeks of course. Being an enquirer is a business and process which can be formed with the experiences that require education and speciality on this field." (4P2, 4).*

With the ratio of 50 %, the "Statement taking" theme ranks number two. The school principals highlighted the deficiencies of the process as follows: when they were appointed as enquirers, the complainants, witnesses or defendants did not come to give a statement. Also, since the complainants were uncertain, the statements could not be taken and there were many people whose statements should be taken. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"There are difficulties in taking statements. The person does not want to give a statement, behaves reluctantly, and does not want to come. We have to run after him/her..." (2P2, 1).*

*"I do not know how to take statements. I can't prepare reports in legal parlance. I am insufficient in criminal proceedings since I did not have any training." (6P2, 1, 4).*

The "Fundamental duty" theme ranks number three with the ratio of 40%. The school principals marked that the responsible people (after them) hindered the works in their schools during their assignment. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I'm the school principal. The enquiry process can take a lot of time, especially if the number of people we need to take statements is high. The things are hindered at school." (1P2, 1, 2).*

*"As an institution manager, we have an institution to deal with. Working as an enquirer is a separate duty in itself. The works of our own institution are hindered or the enquiry takes a long time. Therefore, this duty becomes tiring and troublesome for us. It would be more appropriate for the education inspectors to perform this service." (9P2, 2, 4).*

The "Transportation" is the last theme with the ratio of 20%. According to the school principals, they had problems in reaching the schools they will carry out an investigation during their assignment. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"While performing this duty, at first, there are problems with the transportation. Also, there are problems and deficiencies related to the lack and uncertainty of the complainants." (7P2, 1, 3).*

*"...having difficulty in doing our routine work, transportation problems" (3P2, 2, 3).*

### 3.3 Findings on the third sub research problem

Table 4 below shows the frequency and percentage values of the school principals' opinions on the training they had about their duty:

**Table 4:** Training of the school principals on their duty

Principles	Course	Seminar
P1	√	
P2	√	
P3	√	√
P4	√	
P5	√	√
P6	√	
P7	√	
P8	√	√
P9	√	
P10	√	
f	10	3
%	100	30

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that all the school principals had training on working as enquirers in a course level. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I've recently taken the course of investigation techniques." (9P3, 1).*

*"Within the framework of Local In-Service Training courses, I attended the course of being an enquirer for a week twice." (2P3, 1).*

It is also observed that 30 % of the participants attended seminars on the duty of enquiry. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I attended seminars and courses organized by Provincial Directorate of National Education" (5P3, 1, 2).*

*"I've attended courses and seminars: however, the training was not sufficient." (8P3, 1, 2).*

### 3.4 Findings on the fourth sub research problem

In Table 5 below, the frequency and percentage values of the school principals' opinions on the subjects they considered themselves sufficient or insufficient while preparing their files as enquirers:

**Table 5:** Opinions of the school principals on the subjects they considered themselves sufficient or insufficient while preparing their files as enquirers

Principals	Technical Issues	Statement taking	Regulation	Reporting
P1				√
P2	√			
P3	√		√	√
P4		√		√
P5		√	√	
P6		√		
P7			√	
P8		√	√	√
P9	√			
P10	√	√	√	√
<b>f</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

As seen in Table 5, the school principals considered themselves as insufficient in the themes "Statement taking", "Regulation", and "Reporting" during the processes and practices of the enquiry with the ratios of 50 %. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I'm having trouble taking statements. My role as an educator does not match the role I had while taking statements. I'm emotionally traumatized. The statement taking is a completely legal process, so the person should be a lawyer. I am emotionally in two minds. Writing a report requires information on regulation and it is based on legal knowledge. I see myself inadequate on this issue."* (8P4, 2, 3, 4).

*"I'm having trouble taking statements; I think that I am not fully equipped for the investigation matters as the regulation. Since I do not constantly do these tasks like the inspectors who carry out investigations, I do not have experience as much as them."* (8P4, 3, 4).

With the ratio of 40 %, the theme "technical issues" ranks number two. It addresses the participants' opinions on considering themselves insufficient in the process and practices of the enquiry. Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"I consider myself sufficient to take statements, but I have problems in preparing reports. My file has rejected because of the shape. In addition, we are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the laws because we are not lawyers."* (3P4, 1, 3, 4).

*"I'm good enough to comprehend, evaluate, and investigate the subject. But, I don't know much about the technical issues regarding making an investigation."* (2P4, 1,).

### 3.5 Findings on the fifth sub research problem

**Table 6:** Metaphors of school principals on working as enquirers

Principals	Chameleon	Rainbow	Mercury	Litmus
P1				√
P2	√			
P3	√			
P4		√		
P5		√		
P6		√		
P7			√	
P8			√	
P9	√			
P10	√			
f	4	3	2	1
%	40	30	20	10

As seen in Table 6, the metaphor perceptions of the school principals for working as enquirers are Chameleon, Rainbow, Mercury and Litmus. Most of the principals likened their duty to "**Chameleon**". Some of the school principals' opinions on this issue are as follows:

*"...during the process, we go all shades of red. Some say one way, others say another. I lose my bearings. Therefore, it is right to say I'm a chameleon." (2P5, 1).*

*"Due to the guidance of my superior managers, acquaintances and friends, I feel like a chameleon which changes colour according to the environment. Therefore, I resemble working as an enquirer to a chameleon." (3P5, 1).*

*"I do not know what colour I will use during the process. Should I choose justice, follow the instructions of my supervisors or listen to the voice of conscience since the person that we investigate is our colleague? I think we need to be colourful as a rainbow in the process. I liken it to the rainbow." (5P5, 2).*

*"Let's take the form of the container we each poured like the mercury and behave so. I think working as an enquirer is completely like being a mercury." (8P5, 3).*

*"Thanks to the limited training in the courses, we are asked to give a fair decision. In order to do it, we should be like litmus in chemic. For this reason, working as an enquirer is like being a litmus for me." (1P5, 4).*

#### **4. Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations**

This study examining the opinions of the school principals on their assignment as enquirers revealed that the school principals were affected by the "time" during the enquiry process. It was concluded that contrary to their fundamental duties, the enquiry process took a lot of time, so they did not want to be appointed for this service. This finding might be because they had insufficient technical and theoretical skills on the enquiry and did not have full knowledge of rules, procedures and regulations of the enquiry process. Another remarkable finding is that the participants did not want to be appointed as enquirers since they were "colleague" with the people investigated. Such a finding can be interpreted that the school principals who make investigations on their colleagues can have difficulty in communication in daily live and have some problems in their relationships or even tensions with their colleagues.

Similarly, although it appears to be a different dimensional finding, the research conducted by Altındağ (2007) on "The Opinions of Teachers and Supervisors in relation to Supervisors' Guidance, Evaluation and Investigation Roles" showed that the sense of tension occurred when the supervisors came to the school for investigation. This result supports the finding of our study. It is an important process for questioning and improving the sense of justice when it is considered that the superior managers appoint them for this duty as a symbol of trust by raising their awareness rather than considering it as drudgery. However, as mentioned above, both moral and material difficulties encountered in the process harm the proper management of this process.

It was found that the school principals did not want to be appointed as enquirers since they felt insufficient in technical and theoretical issues on the enquiry, complained

about having no payment for their service, and thought that their fundamental duties were hindered while working as enquirers. This finding might be because of the insufficiency in the technical and theoretical knowledge of the school principals who will be appointed as enquirers. In addition, some issues such as paying expenses for transportation, food etc. and having no payment for their service can cause motivational decreases in performing their responsibilities as enquirers. Since they both do not receive payment and have lower time in performing their fundamental duties, their unwillingness to perform the enquiry issues increases.

The school principals also highlighted that they had problems during the inquiries due to the lack of "speciality" on the problems they encountered. They prioritised some problems such as lack of speciality on the subject they investigated, having difficulty in finding a solution to the problems they encountered, not having a consultant expert during the enquiry or having difficulty in getting in touch with a knowledgeable expert on the subject. This finding shows similarity with the results of the research conducted by Ayvaz (2017) who found that the school principals were uncertain about which criminal actions should be taken for the experienced principals investigated and they were in need of an expert opinion on how to solve the problem in the file.

The participants also stated that they" encountered problems in "statement taking" and "transportation" during the enquiry process. The reasons behind the problem related to statement taking are as follows: the complainants, witnesses or suspects did not come for giving a statement; the complainants were uncertain and so the principals could not take a statement, and there were many people to give statements. It was also found that they faced with some problems in transportation when they would go to the schools they would make an investigation.

It was observed that all the school principals had training on their service in the course level. However, it can be said that they did not attend the seminars much. Regarding the first sub research problem, the school principals declared that they did not want to be appointed as enquirers since they considered themselves as insufficient in technical and theoretical knowledge on their duty. Therefore, it leads us to think that the training provided for the school principals is not sufficient.

In addition, this study unearthed that the school principals regarded themselves as insufficient in terms of "statement taking", "regulation" and "reporting" in the processes and practices of the enquiry.

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions can be put forth:

- The school principals who have more experienced in technical knowledge, regulation and practices should be appointed as enquirers,
- Only the voluntary school principals should be appointed for this service,
- Each complaint should be carefully examined as a significant element in terms of time and the enquirers should be appointed if required,
- The school principals should receive payment for their service as enquirers,
- If required, a commission consisting of the specialists should be established for the enquiry issues and the number of the training facilities such as course and

seminar which are organized for the school principals and teachers in the commission should be increased.

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