

# Principals' Values in School Administration\*

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## Abstract

School administration is value driven area depending on the emotions, cultures, and human values as well as technique and structure. Over the long years, educational administration throughout the world have experienced the influence of logical positivism that is based on rational techniques more than philosophical consideration, ignored values and emotions in organisations for the sake of rational problem solving, effectiveness, and strategic planning. However schools are value driven organisations that aim to train the young so as to perform social responsibility in society. Principals are not only charged with legal and professional duties but they also respond to social expectations in a manner of morality. The purpose of this study was to investigate the values that principals should have in administration. The data were obtained via focus group interviews of 19 principals under three sub-groups with qualitative research design in the town of Akçakoca, Düzce and analyzed with the inductive content analysis. The views of principals were generally shaped by Ministry of Education's exam based legislation; furthermore, the concepts of justice, confidence, diligence, career, merit were also voiced despite lack of full and common description.

## Key Words

Principal, Values, Positivism, Leadership, Exam, Career, Merit.

Values in school administration have been frequently debated among the scholars (Beaty, 2004; Benninga, Sparks, & Tracz, 2011; Berkowitz, 2011; Fullan, 2004; Starratt, 2004a). It was mostly emphasized that educational organisations had long been under the influence of positivism that prioritised the technical core of organisations and their functional effectiveness instead of cultural, emotional and value based characteristics; thus rules, procedures and outcomes had been dominated the humanistic side of organisations.

Administrators could lead organisations through the principles of what is known as good and right; and it is included in ethic leadership (Starratt, 2004b). Society also should accept what is good and right together with the administrators in order to reach consensus. School administrators, then should act to appeal societal and cultural expectations and consider the rights of the subordinate within the community they live in.

School principal as an instructional leader is responsible for both in and out of the school activities that are related with teacher, student, curriculum, teaching- learning process, environment and parents. The studies in Turkey and abroad have underlined the critical issues of instructional leadership that empower principal always almost everything about school (Akgün, 2001; Arslan, 2007, 2009; Çakıcı, 2010; Çelebi, 2009; Demiral, 2007; Gökyer, 2010; Gümüşeli, 2001; Hallinger, 2003; Işık&Aksoy, 2008; Kaşkaya, 2007; Kaya, 2008; Şişman, 2010; Tıkr, 2005; Yörük&Akdağ, 2010). Together with dissemination of enlightenment, industrialisation, and individualisation over tradi-

\* This study was presented at the Values Education Symposium, October 26–28, 2011, Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Eskisehir, Turkey.

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tional problem solving, teaching have been turned to technical process and reduced within the border of class ignoring the moral and intellectual side of teaching-learning process (Hesapçioğlu, 2009; Şişman, 2010). It was criticised that principal is the centre of the whole power and authority in schools instead of sharing authority with subordinates in the concept of leadership theories such as transformational and distributive. Although instructional leadership is much more acceptable in terms of values and cultures in school than positivistic traditions; it has also ignored the importance and characteristics of values in administration. Schools in this respect have been under the influence of societal pressure both responsible for academic and social success of students (Benninga et al., 2011; Tirri, 2011).

### Importance of Values in School Administration

Theory Movement in educational administration handle technical issues more and ignored the philosophical backgrounds of it in the midst of last century particularly in USA, Canada, Australia and England. Methods of logical positivism are not only prevalent in experimental and quantitative researches that reality is objectively measured but it was also common in social studies that are value driven and meaning based. Traditional approaches to educational administration tried to solve problems in organizations and human relation depending on rationality. Values and culture are considered important nowadays more than former positivist approaches that ignored the humanistic values in organisations in favour of techniques and rules (Beaty, 2004; Begley, 2004; Greenfield, 2004; Greenfield & Ribbins, 2004; Starratt, 2004b). Although secularization have risen in British society together with increasing expectation of families both academic success and social values, it was debated which values prioritised for schools, how the families can make choice, and among this turmoil church/faith schools have begun to be more popular both for Christian and Muslim community. It was suggested for teachers to be equipped with moral values in order to initiate change in and out of schools that are legitimized together with the degree of how they meet social expectations and cultural heritage, and teachers are expected to act as a leader, constructor of moral society and problem solving techniques instead of violence in class. Leadership with school improvement is more acceptable than success with school effectiveness, and power challenge based on authority and expertise

caused moral dilemma as a result of focusing on solely to effectiveness and efficiency (Arthur, 2011; Aslanargun, 2009; Barnett & Fallon, 2007; Davidson, Khmelkov, Baker, & Lickona, 2011; Ekşi, 2009; Fullan, 2004; Hodgkinson, 2004a; Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Castelli, 2004; Katılmış, Ekşi, & Öztürk, 2010; Tomlinson, 2004).

It was alleged that the changing process of accountability and educational reforms had transformed educational and school leadership towards more knowledgeable and competent that caused administration more complex, politic and diversified, and exploit the teachers in schools by ignoring, not listening, isolating, favouring some of them, threatening and forcing to quit. Principals should adopt values in administration such as professional honour and administrative vision based on knowledge, honesty, courtesy, objective participation, and reconcile these values together with own culture harmoniously as a universal ethic standards. Society, in this respect, is the basic factor that shapes the values and culture in school in a participative community. The values that parents have common in society are tried to be transmitted best to younger generation in schools towards to expectations of families (Balci, 2011; Berkowitz, 2011; Blase & Blase, 2004; Celep, 2007; Çelik, 2007; Kılıç, 2011; Torlak, 2007). The purpose of this study was to investigate the values that principals should have in school administration and the basic criteria of principal selection process.

## Method

### Research Model

In this research, phenomenological research design, which is a one of the qualitative research methods, was employed to collect and analyse the interpretations and meanings of principals due to the interpretive, meaning-making nature of this study based on the philosophical assumption that research is socially constructed activity and the goal of research is an understanding of a particular situation or context, highlighting the concern about the situatedness of knowledge.

### Research Group

The participants of the study varied according to school types in the district of Akçakoca, Düzce one of the provinces of Turkey. The principals who are in charged at different types of schools in the district were included without any limitation. The data

were obtained via focus group method including 19 schools under the sub-groups of 6-6-7 principals interviewed in three different sessions that each lasted nearly 3 hours.

### Data Collection Instrument

Focus group interviews were conducted with the principals during the academic year of 2010–2011. The related literature was reviewed and preliminary interviews were made with 3 principals prior the actual application of the form. Consequently, 5 open ended, semi structured questions and 6 sub categories were constructed for focus group interview. An interview conversation in which the principals were free to express their subjective interpretations and meanings provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of values in administration. Depending on theoretical sampling, analysis of the data were performed hand in hand concurrently as the first data were gathered, afterwards, the form was reconstructed in the light of former analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the process of focus group interview, interviewers took the role of listener and promised the principal full anonymity and confidentiality in not sharing her account with anyone else. Participants could have chance to reorganize their ideas while sharing with others, clarify and deepen their thoughts asking and answering the questions (Ekiz, 2009; Finch & Lewis, 2003).

### Data Analysis

Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from this study. The data recorded via camera was transcribed into written form in order to analyse the data contextually. Written documents were coded and themes were appeared in the final stage of coding. Subsequently, final themes were interpreted by comparing and contrasting with de facto findings of similar studies.

### Validity and Reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research design has been criticised and found dogmatic as a result of positivist hypothetical deductive reasoning, thus credibility and transferability are more common concepts preferred by qualitative researchers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Moreover, the related literature was examined to create a contextual frame, the procedures were explained clearly in detailed, all of the data were written without any interpretation, raw data and

coded data were preserved by the researcher and other researchers were welcomed to examine.

## Results

### Values That Principals Should Have In Administration

According to the principals included in study, principals should have some common values that are *justice, confidence, school rules and sedulity*. When talking about justice, some statements of principals mostly underline the necessity of it in administration. Principals should be impartial and equal to everybody while using power and authority in schools. Although it has differed in some respects, it appeared that they were rather sensitive of being equal to all teachers. *Justice* was appeared sometimes together with motivation of teachers, sometimes compensation of former injustice and particularly respect for beliefs and ideas within the school.

Consistent behaviour to teachers and *confidentiality* in communication were underlined predominantly by principals. It was clear that respect, love, and sharing were uttered under the context of values and confidentiality.

Being *loyal to school rules*, laws and regulations of superiors was prioritised by most of the principals and they are also sensitive to rule the school in the line of the legal documents without hesitations. Following the new regulations were stressed more than other. There were some principals who underlined the importance of values in administration, but others considered it as hindering factor of change.

The sensitivity of principals towards to all participants were related with sedulity, self confidentiality and self improvement. Schools as an open system have potential to communicate with environment and families. It was advised for principals to construct school culture, give extra importance for social activity, overcome economic problems, to rule teaching-learning process. Financial problems and unsatisfying family involvement have forced principals to have multifarious ability in schools. The principals could only overcome the problems by producing unique school culture in such a highly centralised bureaucracy.

### Values That Should Be Cared In the Process of Appointment

Superiors have executed appointment process depending on some regulations or their extensive authority in educational administration. Principals mostly value the *criteria of exam* in the process of

selection and appointment of principals that is the current appointment system has been performed since 2010. In addition, professional and personal characteristics also underlined as a complimentary competence. Moreover *leadership*, *career* and *merit* were the other subcategories emerged in the study.

For years, various instructions arranging the administrative positions in schools repeatedly reformed, but there is still ongoing debate of how to appoint administrator in schools. In spite of the fact that many instructions have been set since 2000, all of them have been invalidated, except one in force now, by administrative court because of ignoring the merit and career. The debates among MoNE, teacher unions and courts are generally focused on more the points of who has the authority to appoint rather than what standards should be set to select principals. The last regulations have been reformed to exam based towards the warning of administrative court (Aslanargun, 2011; MilliEğitimBakanlığı [MEB], 2011; ResmiGazete, 2011).

The principals were generally in favour of *exam* for the sake of objectivity, but think that there should be extra abilities also. Furthermore, performance appraisal, experience, human relations, training course, personal competencies, and post graduate degree are the additional qualifications that should be considered in the process of appointment. The principals stressed that individuals should be capable enough to solve problems in administration and be promoted according to previous performance.

Previous experiences in administration are other factors that could be considered for principal's appointment. *Career* is defined as process, success and expertise that are acquired with extra effort in a profession (TürkDilKurumu [TDK], 2011). In this respect, principals referred previous administrative experience for a person who wishes to become a principal such as deputy principal, assistant principal and teacher authorized as a principal in villages or suburbs. They underlined deputy principal ship more than the other criteria they mentioned.

*Merit* is also prioritised by principals as the ministry concurrently emphasized in all regulations as well as career. Merit is condition of individual to be suitable for certain task (TDK, 2011). Although it is vague in content, it is a critical subtitle of principals' preference. It is also ambiguous in terms of criteria and could be altered person to person.

*Leadership* as a basic and indispensable concept of administrative theories have not been ranked by principals in priority. It means that principals should have

multifarious abilities and communicative techniques in administration. Depending on the previous criteria, principals have thought that person who is knowledgeable about leadership and management could do principal ship better. They underlined that principals should be trained in universities, and person who are graduate of business management could also do principal ship at schools.

### Discussion

Leadership is a phenomenon produced by culture more than individual activity since it is shaped in life, it is part of life. Leaders unfortunately could only think of the educational issues based on technical aspects of life and characteristics of leaders in a positivist manner. But the key is how to train favourable and well-mannered principals. Great effort should be spent to train gracious principals more than effective ones (Greenfield & Ribbins, 2004). It is impossible to welcome principals that appreciate humanistic values in a system that is solely based on technical competencies and exam. This is one of the critical results of the study although not stressed potently. It is problematic to train a principal who cares subordinates and their culture with emphatic behaviour via the criteria of exam (Hodgkinson, 2004b; Starratt, 2004b).

Positivist paradigm ignores immeasurable facts such as aesthetic, justice and beauty, and considers the facts of social life in the perspective of physical realities, and this could possibly manipulate principals to standard criteria as a shelter for ambiguity or for the sake of objectivity (Beaty, 2004; Greenfield, 2004; Greenfield & Ribbins, 2004). It is important that principals value performance appraisal, experience, human relations, training course, personal competencies and post graduate degree as extra qualifications in addition to exam for being a principal.

The principals' perspectives have been particularly affected by the regulations of ministry, and neither unique nor universal ideas emerged as an outcome of the study. It is meaningful that some critical values such as justice, sedulity, career, merit have been uttered but they are far from concrete definition in the study. The principals need to perform such an enriched activity with parents, teachers and students that could unveil these kinds of value driven concepts. It is also critical that they have emphasized justice and confidentiality most in the process of adopting school culture by teachers. Similar researches underlined the significance of social res-

possibility of schools as well as academic success (Benninga et al. 2011; Tirri, 2011). However, some eloquent utterances of principals deserved attention that "it important to train principal more than select", "principals should have right to select their assistants", "if we work in a private school with this performance, will they still charge us as principal". It is A fact that principals in some respects are one step ahead of ministry that prioritise standard criteria for appointment process of principal.

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