

Perceptions of elementary teachers on the instructional leadership role of school principals

Mustafa Yavuz¹, Gökhan Bas²

(1. Department of Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning and Economics, University of Selcuk, Konya 42090, Turkey;

2. Department of Educational Sciences, University of Selcuk, Konya 42090, Turkey)

Abstract: In this research, elementary school principals' instructional leadership behavior was evaluated based on the perceptions of elementary school teachers. The research is believed to contribute to the development of instructional leadership behavior of elementary school principals for the development of school organization. A "semi-structured interview technique", one of the qualitative research methods in the literature was used in the research. The study group was made up of elementary school teachers working in Nigde, Turkey, during the 2008-2009 academic year. For the study sample, one teacher from each school was selected at random, resulting in group of twenty elementary school teachers. Based on the content analysis, five themes of instructional leadership behavior were found. These themes are: (1) determination of the school's purpose; (2) management of instruction; (3) evaluation of students; (4) support to teachers; and (5) creation of a regular learning-teaching environment.

Key words: instructional leadership; elementary school; school principals

1. Introduction

Schools have forever been vessels for their constituents' dreams, so, parents, students, taxpayers, educational reformers and politicians want their schools to be better and different. Schools are populated with caring, committed educators, people who in most instances hold dearly their obligation to respond to the dreams and concerns of community members. Indeed, as vehicles for enlightenment and social and economic mobility, schools were invented to carry dreams for families, individuals and society (Donaldson, 2006, p. 13).

The purpose of the establishment of schools is to train qualified manpower. In order to accomplish this objective, it is required that the quality of teaching at school would be improved (Yavuz, 2006). The school principal as a leader is responsible essentially for the management of school and the school program, with the implementation of learning and overall school success. So, the success or the failure of a school is explained by the success or failure of the school principal. The legal power and authority of the school principal, as the most authoritative person in school, is not be enough in itself to both manage and make the school successful. Furthermore, it can be stated that school principals have several competency areas. So, the school principals should be good leaders as well as "instructional leaders" (Sisman, 2004).

A consequence of globalization is the emergence of generic or ubiquitous expectations of leaders. For example, there is now a cross-cultural expectation that leaders should be more proactive in leading and managing school resources to secure improved performance of staff and students (Dimmock, 2003, p. 5). The principal's role

Mustafa Yavuz, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning and Economics, Selcuk University; research field: educational administration.

Gökhan Bas, M.S., Department of Educational Sciences, Selcuk University; research field: educational administration.

as a leader, manager and change agent is far reaching. Principals are responsible for working with the entire spectrum of stakeholders: from students to school board members, parents to policymakers, teachers to local business owners, support staff to union officials. Just when the principal's pot appears to be running over, another ingredient is added to the mix—the instructional teacher leader (Mangin, 2007).

When an instructional leader listens to the teacher, clarifies what the teachers say, encourages the teacher to speak more about the concern, and reflects by verifying the teacher's perceptions, then he can understand clearly the teacher's participation in making the decisions about professional practice (Glickman, 2002, p. 42). In other words, the instructional leader is the person who is involved constantly with teaching and learning. Furthermore, they are immersed in the teaching and learning processes and always thinking about how to design a better learning environment for students and how to organize the teaching process at school (Gümüşeli, 1996). Shared instructional leadership involves the active collaboration of principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment. Within this model the principal seeks out the ideas, insights and expertise of teachers in these areas and works with teachers for school improvement (Glickman, 1989).

The instructional leader's role is that of an active proper or a sounding board for the teacher to make his or her own decisions. The teacher has high control, and the leader has low control, over the actual decisions (Glickman, 2002, p. 42).

Although the duties of school principal changes depending on their environment and on various aspects, some basic areas of instructional leadership development work have been covered in the relevant studies (Şişman, 2004). Instructional leadership behavior varies in these studies. Naturally, the intent here is to express the common or different aspects of these studies.

According to Şişman (2004), the instructional leadership roles of school principals is as follows: (1) definition of school mission; (2) management of instruction and school curriculum; (3) supervision and evaluation of instruction; (4) monitoring of student development; and (5) development of school climate.

School principals can manage schools effectively provided that they show instructional leadership behavior at school. Thus, it is considered important that schools principals fulfill instructional leadership roles aimed at development and training activities in schools (Akgün, 2001, p. 6). Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the instructional leadership roles of school principals from the viewpoint of elementary school teachers. In order to achieve this purpose, the authors will try to answer the following question: What are the perceptions of teachers on the instructional leadership roles of school principals?

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative case study. In this research, a “semi-structured interview technique” was used which takes place in “interview method”, one of the qualitative data collection instruments. Certain kinds of questions are prepared for use in all interviews of semi-structured interviews. The questions prepared are put to the participants in the same order, but this is an interview technique which allows the participants to state their views to a larger extent (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003).

2.1 Study group

The study sample is teachers working in Nigde, Turkey during the 2008-2009 academic year. The sample of the study consists of 20 elementary school teachers, who were selected at random from the study population, that is, one teacher from a total of 20 different elementary schools. The teachers in the sample group were interviewed directly, face-to-face. Moreover, it was stated that the data collected for the study would not be used for any other purpose except the research in order for the participants to answer all the questions, and they were also asked not to

mention their names to allow them to express their views confidently. The questions were asked in the same order to all of the participants in the study and their answers to the interview questions were not limited to enable them to express their views freely. Thus, the teachers were given the opportunity to express all the ideas and views that they considered important regarding the instructional leadership roles of school principals in the research process.

Gender, educational level, occupational seniority and occupational branches of the teachers who participated in the study are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Gender, educational levels, occupational seniority and occupational branches of the participant teachers

Code assigned to the teacher	Occupational branches of teachers	Teachers' educational levels
(1,7,M)	Elementary education	Graduate
(2,5,M)	Turkish education	Graduate
(3,11,F)	Elementary mathematics education	Graduate
(4,7,F)	Social sciences education	Graduate
(5,7,M)	Psychological consultation and Guidance education	Graduate
(6,6,F)	Elementary education	Postgraduate
(7,2,F)	Art education	Graduate
(8,10,M)	Science and technology education	Postgraduate
(9,9,F)	Elementary Turkish education	Graduate
(10,3,M)	Psychological consultation and Guidance education	Graduate
(11,5,F)	Foreign languages education	Graduate
(12,6,M)	Sports education	Graduate
(13,6,M)	Religious education	Graduate
(14,8,M)	Science and technology education	Graduate
(15,4,F)	Turkish education	Graduate
(16,3,M)	Social sciences education	Graduate
17,7,M	Elementary mathematics education	Graduate
(18,4,F)	Elementary education	Postgraduate
(19,7,M)	Elementary education	Graduate
(20,3,F)	Elementary education	Graduate

When the table above is examined, it can be seen that 11 (55%) of the participants are “male” and 9 (45%) of them are “female”. When the educational level of the participants is examined, it can be seen that 17 (85%) of them are graduates and 3 (15%) are postgraduates. It can be stated clearly that most of the teachers have a graduate level of education. When the teachers participated in the study are evaluated according to their occupational branches, it can possibly be said that 5 (25%) teachers are elementary education teachers, 2 (10%) of them are elementary mathematics teachers, 2 (10%) of them are school psychological consultants, 1 (5%) is an art teacher, 1 (5%) is a religion and moral teacher, 2 (10%) of them are elementary science and technology teachers, 3 (15%) of them are Turkish teachers, 2 (10%) of them are social sciences teachers, 1 (5%) is a foreign languages (English language) teacher and 1 (5%) is a sports teacher. It can be said that each teacher represents a different elementary school in this study.

2.2 Data collection procedure

An extensive literature review had been made on the instructional leadership roles of school principals and some of the scales and questions in these scales have been examined in a semi-structured interview form regarding the instructional leadership roles of school principals. At the end of this literature examination, the semi-structured interview form of the study was prepared by the researchers. In order to sustain the validity of the research form, experts from Department of Education Educational Sciences at Selcuk University, Ahmet Kelesoglu, were consulted for their views on the questions prepared for teachers in this regard. The reliability of the study was sustained by the

researchers themselves on creating the themes one by one and then reaching an agreement determining the subjects. At the end of the comparison of teachers' views, an agreement rate of 95% with two experts was reached regarding which subjects should be included. After the validity and reliability studies carried out in the research, the teachers, selected by random sampling method, were interviewed with the created semi-structured interview form.

2.3 Analysis of the data

The data gathered in qualitative research is analyzed with two ways: descriptive and content analyses. In this research, the data is analyzed with "content analysis technique". The data that is basically similar to each other, was brought together in the framework of certain concepts and themes and evaluated in an organizational format that readers could understand clearly. In the analysis of the content of the data, a four-step qualitative content analysis technique was used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003): (1) codification of the data; (2) finding out of the themes; (3) organizing and defining the data according to codes and themes; and (4) evaluation of the findings.

Footnotes have been used by the researchers in order to determine which teachers stated the interview notes in the study. The interview notes were given in quotes and then it was determined that the interview statements of the teachers were given in brackets. In the analysis and interpretation of the research, a common coding system exists in the literature was used in the study.

3. Findings and commentary

3.1 Determination of the school's purpose

School principals should explain the purposes of the school to the teachers, students, school staff and the parents of the students. The purposes of the school should be consisted with the behaviors and roles of school principals in this regard (Akgün, 2001). In this context, many teachers expressed similar views on this issue. The vast majority of teachers drew attention to the process of determination and dissemination of the school's purpose by stressing the importance of this issue. In this context, the teachers stated the following views below:

One teacher states the view that: School principals should aim for the students to be trained within the process of education and instruction at school, in order to benefit the society they live in to achieve these objectives, the principal and the teachers should work together to develop a vision of the school, share opinions and thoughts and then try to resolve the failures at school. As a result of this deal, the education and instruction process at school will be more successful. (3,11,F)

Another teacher states the followings: School principals, while determining the purposes of the school, should consider the ideas of all the staff at school, assess these ideas and then determine the most appropriate objective. He should be far away from the idea of "me always" and he should also take into consideration the views of the teachers in order to create shared purposes at school. (5,7,M)

While the vast majority of the teachers advocate the same views, another teacher emphasizes that:

School principals should determine purposes for the school by providing effective communication among teachers, students and parents. (8,10,M).

Some teachers drew attention to the process of "team work" that should be constructed amongst teachers and to the "school's vision and mission". (10,3,M and 1,7,M)

Most of the teachers stated the same views as those presented above regarding the determination and sharing of the school's purpose that school principals, as instructional leaders, should demonstrate at school.

The teachers in the study are in agreement that schools should have a shared vision among members of the school. But many of the teachers did not reveal a particular opinion on "how a vision should be". Some of the teachers used a vision expression that would serve the purposes of society. Consequently, the teachers can be said to have the opinion that school principals should serve the purposes of the school and then the purposes of the

society they live in. On the other hand, while the teachers stated that all of the stakeholders at a school should participate in the process of vision development, they emphasized that there needed to be effective communication between the school principal and the teachers in a school.

3.2 Management of instruction

A school principal is expected to create opportunities for the successful implementation and practice of the school curriculum, which is one of the main inputs of the school, and to lead the teachers effectively in the application of the curriculum process. Most of the teachers stated remarkable views on this issue.

Some of the views stated by the teachers are presented below: A school principal should know the education-instruction techniques well. Furthermore, a school principal should know how to communicate with the students, while working in close collaboration with the teachers, whose views he should always consider. He should also give all kinds of support for every positive event in the education process and provide support for every negative aspect at school to the teachers in need. If necessary, the school principals, by participating in teaching activities, should play an active role and be a model in the process of effective instruction at school. (1,7,M)

Another teacher states the followings: It is very important that a school principal, as an instructional leader, should follow the innovative activities in education, renew and develop himself, and share these innovations with his teacher colleagues at school. It will enhance the success at school in the process of the management of instruction if a school principal provides course equipment and works to improve the physical conditions of the school. (18,4,F)

Some of the teachers in the study stated the same views on the management of the curriculum and the process of instruction at school. In addition to the views expressed above, some teachers stated some supportive and similar views such as:

In the process of instruction, school principals should be as close to the teachers as a friend and they should develop the instruction process together. (7,2,F)

The school principal should have high expectations of both teachers and students at school. (11,5,F)

Training and guidance education programs should be regulated by the school principal, for the teachers in the education-instruction process. (13,6,M)

3.3 Evaluation of students

The dimension of the school principal's evaluation of the instruction process and the students is consistent with certain behavior, such as supervision of the instruction, evaluation of school curriculum, monitoring the development and evaluation of students (Şişman, 1997, 2004). In this regard, the teachers in the study have some views on the evaluation of the instruction process and the students of school principals, such as:

As the school principal has a stimulating and controlling role for students, he should be active in the education-instruction mechanism. He should also have a driving force for the development of the education-instruction and school-family collaboration processes, as well as of the students, by being in close contact with the students. (8,10,M)

On the other hand, another teacher states the following: The school principal should, firstly, be informed about the evaluation process of the students. The school principal should perform an introductory and encouraging attitude to the teachers in order to evaluate students in the contemporary sense. (14,8,M)

Large number of teachers (Teachers; 1, 5, 6, 13, 16), broadly support the views above, stating the views that:

Students should be evaluated objectively at school. (5,7,M)

Successful students should be rewarded in order to be motivated for success. (3,11,F)

School equipment should be in good condition in order to make an objective evaluation at school. (10,3,M)

Another teacher states the following by pointing out the other types of the academic evaluation, such as: In the process of student evaluation, students should not only be evaluated academically, but their different performance (i.e., social, athletic and artistic) should be reinforced and taken into consideration in the evaluation process. (12,6,M)

3.4 Support to teachers

It is not sufficient for school principals as an instructional leader to only develop the instruction process at school and provide some of the resources to teachers and students. In addition, school principals should pay attention to the professional development of teachers and should also understand that the professional development of teachers means the development of students in this regard. The vast majority of teachers who adopt these views stated that school principals should contribute to the professional development of teachers at school. Some of the views expressed in the interviews are as follows:

The school principal should pay attention to the in-service training courses and seminars for the professional development of teachers and should also make the teachers come together to reinforce teacher cooperation and make them share their views and practices with each other. (4,7,F)

Another teacher states the following in this regard: The school principal, by listening to teachers' views and problems using some questionnaires or interviews, should take notice of these views and support the teachers participating in activities such as seminars, etc. Besides, he should also support teachers through different activities such as social, artistic and sports activities for psychological relaxation. (12,6,M)

Most of the teachers, by stating similar views as the teachers above, believe that school principals should improve their professional development:

School principals should create opportunities both for the development of innovative ideas at school and teachers' professional understanding. On the other hand, school principals should pay attention to ways of rewarding and motivating teachers. (13,6,M)

School principals should behave the teachers equally and he should not also make discrimination towards teachers. (14,8,M)

School principals should be able to appreciate teachers for their positive behavior at school. (17,7,M)

School principals should proclaim successful teachers to society by different means of communication. (18,4,F)

School principals should prepare activities for resolving teachers' inadequacies at school. School principals should establish healthy and effective communication channels with teachers and they should value them, because the more the school principals value the teachers at school, the more motivated the teachers will be. (7,2,F)

These were some of the views that the teachers in the study stated regarding the "support of teachers and their development" role of school principals as an instructional leader.

3.5 Creation of a regular learning-teaching environment

A school's atmosphere is very important and has a valuable impact on students' effective learning. A school creating a positive school climate should be relatively orderly, safe, clean, convenient and supportive (Gökyer, 2004). On the other hand, it is understood that the school environment primarily means the working conditions and the impact of these conditions on people at the school. The positive environment at a school has a multi-faceted impact on the school's integration, motivation, morale and performance of the people at school. The school principal should develop a school environment before anything else where friendship and mutual trust occur and everyone is happy at work (Şişman, 2004, p. 101). In this regard, a vast majority of the teachers participating in the study expressed their views on the school principals' creation of a regular learning-teaching environment. Some of these views are as follows below:

In order to be an instructional leader and establish an interpersonal dialogue at school, it is crucial to creating a regular learning-teaching environment. Problems can be solved and a positive climate can be established within this dialogue and the process continues in a good way. As a result of this, there is nothing which cannot be achieved if a school's physical structure is organized and the necessary materials and infrastructure are provided. (2,5,M)

Another teacher says the following on this issue: Environmental regulations can be made by taking into account

student characteristics and obtaining the necessary course materials to be used in class. The school principal can provide the necessary technological tools and supplies to benefit the teachers at school. (1,7,M)

A teacher added the following: The school principal should help teachers in matters such as finding supplies, materials and equipment. (5,7,M)

Another teacher says: Mistakes should be corrected and met with tolerance in a positive learning environment and students should be educated so that they develop social relationships with their friends and have self-confidence. Moreover, the school principal should approach teachers with tolerance and support and motivate them in a positive learning-teaching environment at school. On the other hand, the school principal should work to build team spirit and a positive and safe climate at school. (11,5,F)

In this regard, another teacher adds the following views by saying: The school principal should support teachers at every opportunity. He should also develop cooperation in school, approach both teachers and students with tolerance and try to understand them. The school principal must believe in team spirit and support this. Moreover, the school principal should be proactive in providing the necessary equipment for a positive learning-teaching process. (19,7,M)

Other views the teachers expressed in the interviews for school principals creating a positive school environment are given below:

School principals should not exaggerate and should think beyond bureaucracy, thus being more flexible and more tolerant in order to develop a more positive school climate. Besides, he should also help teachers and students get together by holding different events (artistic, athletic, academic, etc.) at school. (18,4,F)

Another teacher states the following: "School principal should be objective towards everyone at school. He should also adopt understanding towards teachers and students by communicating effectively with them. He should never use an authoritarian manner at school and should work to develop a more tolerant and trusting school climate. (10,3,M)

4. Discussion and interpretation

At the end of the research, the elementary school teachers participating in the study put forward some views on the instructional leadership roles of school principals, such school principals should: (1) adopt supportive and encouraging roles for both teachers and students; (2) communicate effectively with students; (3) contribute directly to the development of the students by participating actively in the instruction process; and (4) reward successful students in different ways. The school principal as an instructional leader should also sustain the examinations carried out at school which are based on objective criteria and lead the teachers in evaluating of students, not only in an academic sense, but also in social, sporting and artistic aspects.

School principals should reflect all aspects of the teaching process in addition to the creating the school vision together with all members of the school, as well as developing of the school curriculum. In addition, school principals should pay attention to the evaluation of students in order to determine the impact of this on students at school. The school vision should be prepared and shared with all members of the school, since the curriculum and the teaching process are all for the development of students at school. Consequently, school principals that have effective instructional leadership should evaluate students in such a way that the effects of all the above can be observed. School principals should not only monitor, evaluate and improve student development according to the results of standardized tests, but should also interview teachers on the evaluation and development of students at the school. So, an effective school principal as an instructional leader should not only protect the present results/status, but should also try hard to develop these current results or school status to a greater extent. Effective instructional leaders are never satisfied with current success, they always have higher expectations of students at the school (Andrews & Soder, 1987). But, it is not enough that school principals work to improve only the teaching process and have high expectations for students and teachers. School principals need to implement powerful supervision and evaluation at school in order to create an effective educational environment. In studies carried out by Daresh

and Ching-Jen (1985), Krug (1992), it was revealed that school principals as effective instructional leaders pay great attention to supervision and evaluation at school. Of course, the rewarding of outstanding students at the school will motivate them even more. It will increase the success of school so that students who are in need of extra education/instruction are recognized and the education process is developed for them. In this regard, it is not sufficient for school principals as instructional leaders to set a vision and objectives for the school and to develop the school curriculum. It is important to move this process to the education process and then to develop the teaching process in line with some feedback by taking some precautions (Glickman, 2002), with regard to the evaluation of the instruction process and the students. Therefore, it is crucial that school principals know multiple evaluation methods well in the student evaluation process and can share them with teachers to implement these at the school.

At the end of the study, the teachers who work in elementary schools stated that school principals should take an active role in providing resources to teachers and improving the instructional environment for the development of teachers from both professional and psychological aspects. Moreover, they should also attempt to create vocational discussion environments relating to the organization of some seminars and/or in-service training activities at school. Besides these, it was concluded at the end of the study that school principals should treat the staff equally, value everyone, reward them whenever possible, motivate them, give guidance activities to teachers in order to resolve their deficiencies, make an effort to announce successful teachers to the public.

One of the important issues that must be focused on in the process of developing and improving a school is the improvement of human resources towards the implementation of the management activities of school principals at school (Şişman, 2004). School principals should support the teachers from psychological and social viewpoints, because teachers need this support. Teachers generally feel safe on the condition that school principals are on their side. On the other hand, according to Şişman (1997), one of the basic responsibilities of school principals is to contribute to the development of teachers' professional skills, as well as to create opportunities for teachers to practice their new-found knowledge and skills at school. Otherwise, the things made for the development of teachers will not be more than a vain. In this regard, another role of the school principal is to ensure the reward and recognition of teachers as a result of their success. The statements expressed here are consistent with teachers' perceptions of the "support and development of teachers" aspect of the current study.

In the studies carried out by Gümüşeli (1996), Şişman (1997) and Sözüeroğlu (2006), it was found that school principals support the professional development of teachers "occasionally". This result indicates that school principals should support the professional development of teachers more often. Arın (2006), in his study, found out that high school principals exhibit a more positive attitude towards the role of "supporting and developing teachers", attending 4 or 5 seminars or courses in the field of educational administration. Through in-service training, administrators transfer a lot of knowledge required for management to their organizations, such as information technologies, human relations, group leadership, organizational learning, motivation, group communication processes, etc., and they also exhibit a more positive attitude towards communication and the professional development of teachers, who are the most important building blocks of schools. Arın (2006) found out that the more the school principals participated in seminars/courses in the field of educational administration, the more they made positive effects on the creation of a regular teaching and learning environment at school. So, it is crucial that school principals should direct teachers to in-service training courses and give full support to their postgraduate education in the field of education as a contribution to their professional development. In addition, the organization of a school-based professional development team for teachers means developing teachers. In this study, the teachers expect that school principals should support them in this respect.

However, in the study carried out by Akgün (2001), it was revealed that school principals did not take part in

such activities and did not inform the teachers about in-service training activities. In this regard, it can be said that school principals can encourage teachers' development and help them with their problems, as well as contribute to their professional development of them by organizing some professional meetings, at least at the school. According to Ejimofor (2007), the leadership role that school principals will play at this point will not only provide teachers to be appreciated by some award structure, but this will also help teachers get more satisfaction from their work. But, school principals in the Turkish Educational System do not have enough say in the rewarding of teachers. However, school principals can motivate teachers by presenting them with fair awards such as a monthly award, registering their improvement, giving them a certificate of thanks, and announcing their names to their colleagues, etc.

According to the results obtained in the study, the teachers stated that, firstly, school principals need to improve school's technological infrastructure and physical environment in order to have a positive learning-teaching environment. Moreover, the teachers participating in the study also stated that school principals should establish an effective communication process amongst the teachers, and support and motivate them, take initiatives in order to make the teachers act like a team, as well as create a sense of trust and tolerance by developing cooperation at school, organizing different activities for the integration of teachers and students, and take an active role in creating a flexible school environment. The school principals of the future will need to create a positive open learning environment in order to assure integration amongst students and staff, as well as to ensure the continuity of this process (Duke, 1987, p. 19). First and foremost, the school principals should create an attractive school culture for everyone to feel happy to work in. This atmosphere will encourage the school staff to work, be successful and motivated in this context (Şişman, 2004). With regard to "creating of a regular learning-teaching environment and climate", school principals will need to willingly provide students and teachers with a positive teaching-learning environment. Hence, school principals should be able to recognize the trends within the various sub-cultures of the school, as well as organize them and take action. They should also be the pioneer of the creation and sharing of new opinions for education and instruction at school (Şişman, 1997; Şahin, 2008).

School principals can enable the school to work in a harmonious way with a learning environment in which teachers, students and parents are integrated. Moreover, school principals can increase the cooperation and capacity of teachers for working together, as well as developing better understanding amongst them by establishing and strengthening teams amongst teachers and students. On the other hand, school principals can draw both the parents and the external environment to the school and help them make a contribution to the school environment and positive learning at the school. According to Şişman (2004), schools cannot see themselves as external to environmental changes, expectations and trends. In the contemporary discussions dealing with the school itself, more support and involvement from the environment on the school processes are on the agenda and it is also believed that the environment should contribute to the school more from a material and spiritual aspect. School principals should search for cooperation opportunities between the education and the non-school environment, and try to create an image whereby the school is integrated with its environment. Although Akgün (2001) found out that school principals do not always fulfill this role. Arın (2006) and Kaya (2008) found positive results related to the conditions of school principals' creation of a positive learning environment. Consequently, school principals should create, as well as continue, a positive teaching-learning environment for students and teachers to study and work. Thus, school principals should be able to recognize the trends within the various sub-cultures of the school, as well as organize them and take action (Arın, 2006, p. 24).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

It is not enough for the school principals to possess the main knowledge and skills of management science. School principals should have basic responsibility for improving education programs and planning, evaluating knowledge and behavior that are required at school, and propounding the aims of the school. It means that the school principals have to be an effective “instructional leader” (Erdoğan, 2000).

At the end of the research, the teachers pointed out that school principals should determine the vision and goals of the school and share them with all the members of the school, such as students, teachers and so on. Additionally, in that process, they emphasized that school principals should communicate effectively with both students and teachers. Besides this, school principals should also consider team spirit between the teachers.

According to elementary school teachers, school principals should know the learning and teaching methods well, as they could play an active role in curriculum development, cooperate strongly with other teachers, give guidance to the teachers, work to improve the physical environment of the school, and learn new techniques and methods in the field of education and share them with the teachers. It is also pointed out that school principals should have high expectations both for students and teachers and should also motivate them in the teaching process at school.

One basic input of the school is “the curriculum”. Necessary conditions and maximum learning opportunities should be prepared for the practice of the curriculum at school. In successful schools, school principals play an important role in the preparation, practice and coordination of the curriculum sections (Şişman, 1997). In the traditional sense, their role means choosing and providing all kinds of materials. In other senses, instructional leadership means that school principals should give guidance on the school curriculum and the learning and teaching processes, as well as lead them (Şişman, 2004). However, the curriculum is sent to the schools by the Ministry of National Education, known as MEB in Turkey. This means neither teachers nor school principals have a role in the preparation process of the curriculum. As the curriculum is prepared centrally, school principals cannot be involved in curriculum development. On the other hand, teachers and school principals can play an active role in the development and practice of the curriculum, and can also contribute to the improvement of the classroom instruction process. However, in Turkey, school principals have some problems on that matter.

The results obtained in this study have the limitations of the teachers’ perceptions for the instructional leadership of school principals, as well as the limitations of the interview technique and the teachers’ perceptions. However, the results obtained in the study present some clues regarding the instructional leadership role of school principals working in elementary schools. The results obtained in the study can be summarized briefly below:

The school principal should take the initiative for the creation of goals and a vision for the school and then share these with all the stakeholders at the school. The school principals should know the learning-teaching principles and methods well and also cooperate with the teachers at school in this regard. They should encourage the teachers and the students, communicate effectively with the students, as well as be an active member of the instructional process at school. Moreover, according to the perceptions of the teachers who participated in the study, school principals should be able to enrich the instructional environment and provide the necessary resources for the professional and psychological development of the teachers. The teachers also shared the perception that school principals should be able to create a positive school environment at the same time.

5.2 Suggestions

The following suggestions can be developed based on the findings obtained in the study: (1) Schools should be organized in a way that school principals can show effective instructional leadership behavior, and should be given more authority in this regard. So, conditions should be ensured for school principals to demonstrate effective instructional leadership skills at school; (2) In-service training seminars should be organized so that school principals can learn instructional leadership behavior from both practical and theoretical dimensions, and

they should also be supported in postgraduate studies on this subject; (3) “Instructional leadership” courses should be set as part of the curriculum for teacher training programs at universities; (4) Selection and appointment of school principals, and the laws, legislation and regulations related to the school, should be revised and reorganized so that school principals can demonstrate effective instructional leadership behavior at school; (5) Annual workshops should be organized by the Ministry of National Education (MEB), or the regional Directorates of National Education, for the improvement of the instructional leadership role of school principals.

According to the results of the research, it is thought necessary and useful for the researchers to carry out studies on the issues listed below, in order to put forward all aspects of instructional leadership: (1) The instructional leadership role of school principals who work in different elementary schools and cities; (2) The relationship between the success of elementary schools and the instructional leadership roles of school principals; (3) The instructional leadership role of school principals who work in elementary schools within different socio-economic environments; and (4) The relationship between the instructional leadership role of school principals and some demographics with other factors such as burnout, self-success, locus of control, etc.

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