School Principals' Opinions about Public Relations Practices on Schools*

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Abstract

Schools are at the forefront of the institutions that need to be in close relations with the social environment. In this regard, practices of the public relations are prominent. This obligation is also responsibility of the school principals, as there are no public relations units in public schools. The purpose of this research is to reveal the opinions of school principals about public relations practices at school. Research is a case study in which qualitative data is used. Semi-structured interview form created by the researcher were used as data collection tool by reviewing the literature and taking expert opinions. This data collection tool was implemented by the researcher to 13 school principals working at different levels of education. As a result of the interviews it is revealed that school principals had enough awareness about public relations, statements of public relations were correctly understood by the school principals, but routine activities had carried out rather than planned activities. School principals are warmly committed to having a unit of planned and specialized people on public relations in their schools. In this direction, it is suggested that the schools should be supported by public relations units or public relations specialists so that they can carry out activities related to the people in a more qualified and planned way.

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Introduction

Success and effectiveness of the organizations depends on the co-operation with the environment. School is a social organization which its input and output is human. They pick up the input and return the output to the environment after a specific training period. This is why it has a close relationship with the environment. For this reason, public relations is an effective tool for schools to fulfill this function (Tutkun & Köksal, 2000). Public relations find place in schools for providing support in relation to the environment. The crucial point of public relations is to tell and explain the school to social environment and convince them. Promotion of the educational institution, adoption of the social environment and provision of the support of the community will be ensured by the establishment of the relations with the public. Since there is no planned public relations unit in the educational institutions, these activities are tried to be carried out jointly by the school administration and the school family association.

The school is considered to be one of the most important institutions that indirectly shape the family and affect the future of society. School, family and community relationships are seen as one of the school's service areas (Gül, 2013). A leading school administrator needs to know the properties and expectations of the school environment and respond to the needs of the environment (Aslan & Karip, 2014). Making the school a cultural center is more of a concern to the school principal. The teacher's work is mostly limited to classroom activities and parents of students. In this respect, making of school a cultural center is expected from the school administration (Gül & Aslan, 2016). From this point of view, the opinions of the school principals and the point of view of the situation gain importance in the practice of public relations in the school.

In modern societies, the social relationships of schools have become increasingly complex. Due to the specific statutes and functions in the society, schools create complicated social networks that are interdependent and complementary to other social organizations. As an open system, schools are in a mutual relationship with a large number of social organizations and are constantly sharing material, energy and information with their social environment within the framework of common interests. For this reason, public relations have become a general trend to strengthen the relationship, coordination and communication between schools and other social organizations. The image of the school is also being established and developed in this process, (Tianping, 2003).

Although relations with public is based on very old ideas, a new concept, public relations can be defined as the whole of the efforts that an institution spends towards the integration with the society (Sabuncuoğlu, 2001). Public relations is a process that helps to maintain and maintain mutual communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an institution and its target group (Balta Peltekoğlu, 2012). With the modern management understanding public relations have taken place as a purposeful activity to organize the relations between the institutions and the society (Karpat Aktuğlu, 2004).

The main reason why public relations is a management function in organizations is its role in mediating organizational effectiveness. Environmental support can be provided through public relations and it becomes easier to effectively achieve school's goals. In order to organizational effectiveness the recognition of the community, the anticipation of them, their indirect involvement in the administration and convincing them that the work done at school is correct is required. In order for the school to provide this needed environmental support it is inevitable that it is in an effective communication process with people living in the social environment. This communication is provided to schools by public relations activities to be carried out by school administrations or the public relations unit (Kılıç, 2006).

Public relations reflect a broad base of knowledge and practice. However, in general, it is understood as an intentional two-way communication between the school and the society that supports the academic achievements of the students and the social responsibility of the educators and parents

(Kowalski, 1996). The basic idea is that successful learning environments will focus on public relations by using planned, systematic two-way communication processes that encourage public participation in schools and thus gain public understanding and support (Kosiczky & Mullen, 2013).

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has defined public relations in schools as "a planned, systematic management function designed to help an educational institution improve its programs and services". School public relations depends on a comprehensive two-way communication process involving both internal and external public opinion to promote a better understanding of the organization's role, objectives, achievements and needs (NSPRA, 2002). The emphasis on quality public relations is vital for any school. Therefore, good communication is needed between public schools and the public sector (Ediger, 2001).

Public relations in the school is a process of revealing the best aspects of the school and receiving positive messages for obtaining the support of the community. Nowadays people can get a lot of information about schools from different sources. In this context public relations in schools needs to establish and encourage various partnerships within the society rather than just transferring information. An effective school public relations program should not only provide information about the processes in the school but also add value to people by giving them the information they can use. In this process, while transferring the information, school should also be able to access the necessary information at the same time. Schools should use all media tools in this process that target various groups in society (Carlsmith & Railsback, 2001).

Schools need to be coordinated and harmonized so that they can communicate their messages and access other sources of information that may be true or false given to public. It is also necessary for schools to provide the services and information to the society that they need. In this respect, public relations are a function that schools cannot ignore (Carlsmith & Railsback, 2001). School principals must be in constant interaction with both the external target group and the internal target group (O'Reilly & Matt, 2013). The most effective way to do this is bidirectional communication. This kind of communication allows stakeholders to meet in a common understanding and to resolve conflicts in a more collaborative way. Nowadays, considering the public support, schools should find ways to connect and empower this connection with the community they are related to. The way to do this is through proactive communication (Meek, 1999). Accepting the changing dynamics of the field of public relations, schools benefit from the basics of public relations departments such as communication skills, technological developments and public administration practices including changes in the social media environment (Hutton, 1999).

The research emphasize the need to a public relations structure and a public relations expert in schools that is connected to school principals in order to clearly explain school-related policies to the public and social environment (Bagin et al., 2008). The fact that the public relations specialist is connected to the school principal will provide an in-group perspective on the attitudes and expectations of the public due to their relations and connections with the external environment. In this regard, the position of the public relations specialist has become increasingly more prominent and important in the schools' organizational chart (Lopez, 2017).

The school should demonstrate through its activities that it is a cultural center to strengthen environmental relations. Administrators and teachers have great responsibilities in doing this. It should be known that personal efforts cannot be enough to fulfill these responsibilities, team work is required. In this research, it is aimed to reveal the views of the school principals about the public relations practices which has recently become increasingly important. It is thought that the results of this study will provide a point of view about the public relations practices in education organizations and make important contributions to the study to be done on this field. The following questions were tried to be answered in the study:

What is the first expression that comes to your mind about the public relations processes in school?

What kinds of activities are being carried out in the school about public relations process?

Who should be responsible for the public relations in the school and why?

What are your proposals for the public relations processes in schools?

Method

Under this heading, the research model, study group, data collection tool and data analysis process are included.

Study Model

The study is a case study using qualitative data. Qualitative research is a process in which qualitative data gathering methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and a process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a natural, realistic and holistic manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008; Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011). The most prominent feature of the qualitative case study is the depth investigation of one or more cases (Cohen et al., 2005, Silverman, 2006, Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In qualitative research, there is often no attempt to generalize beyond a certain situation; but this is left to the reader to measure its applicability, generalization is rather limited (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013; Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011). According to Yin (2014), case study is a method used to answer how and why questions in actual situations, where researcher does not control variables. Case studies are used, especially when the boundaries between case and context are not fully understood (Yin, 2014). In a case study, researcher are to be interested in process rather than the output, context rather than the elements that affect the phenomenon and exploration rather than to confirmation (Merriam, 1998).

Study Group

The study group consists of 13 school principals working in Çanakkale province and voluntarily participating in the research.

The representation of the school level is taken into consideration while designing the study group. School principals participating in the research are composed of people who work at different levels. Three of the participants were primary school principals, five were middle school principals, and five were high school principals. Two of high school principals were vocational high school principals and three of high school principals were general high school principals. Four of the school principals were female, and nine were males. Eight of the school principals stated that they have received courses or training related to the public relations while 5 stated opposite. While the number of school principals indicating that public relations requires expertise is 11, the number of school principals indicating that this task is partially requires expertise is 2. Descriptive information regarding to study group is given in the table below.

Table 1. Features of Participants

Participant	Gender	School Level	Any Public Relations Course Taken?	Public Relations Require Specialization?
P.1	Female	Primary School	Yes	Yes
P.2	Female	Primary School	Yes	Yes
P.3	Female	Primary School	Yes	Yes
P.4	Male	Secondary School	Yes	Partially
P.5	Male	Secondary School	Yes	Yes
P.6	Male	Secondary School	Yes	Yes
P.7	Male	Secondary School	No	Yes
P.8	Male	Secondary School	Yes	Yes
P.9	Male	High School (General)	No	Yes
P.10	Male	High School (General)	No	Yes
P.11	Male	High School (General)	Yes	Yes
P.12	Female	High School (Vocational)	No	Partially
P.13	Male	High School (Vocational)	No	Yes

P: School Principal

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection Process

A semi-structured interview form was prepared by reviewing relevant literature and documents for the purpose of the research in the study. After the interview form was prepared, it was presented to the expert opinion and necessary arrangements were made within the framework of the feedbacks. After the necessary regulations were made, the interview form consisting of 4 questions was applied by the researcher to the school principals voluntarily participating in the study. Some of the interviews with the directors were recorded. Some school principals have preferred to fill out the interview form in writing

Data Analysis

In the analysis of research data, a qualitative analysis method "content analysis" was used. The main goal in content analysis is to reach the concepts and associations that can explain the collected data. In the context of content analysis; encoding data into categories, finding of themes, arrangement and definition of data according to codes and themes, and the interpretations of the findings are following each other (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2008). When the research data were analyzed, the data obtained as voice recordings were written first. Later written reports were categorized by creating themes within the frame of prepared research questions. Finally, interpretations of the expressions emerging in the framework of these themes have been made.

Findings

The findings obtained in the research process are presented below in the light of research questions and research themes

Opinions about the first expression that comes to mind about the process of the public relations in the school

The opinions of the participants on the first expression that comes to mind about the process of the public relations in the school are presented in Table 2 below. When Table 2 is examined, it appears that the participants have concentrated on communication and cooperation in the first instance concerning the public relations. While 4 participants express public relations in this way, 4 participants

expressed as meeting the expectations of the school and its stakeholders. 2 of the participants expressed public relations as institution's self-introduction and self-narration while 2 of the participants expressed public relations as empathy. 2 of the participants expressed public relations as to atone.

Table 2. The First Expression that Comes to Mind in Relation to the Public Relations Process in the School

Main theme	Sub Themes	f
	Communication and cooperation	4
First surroussian that some to	Meeting the expectations of the school and its stakeholders	4
First expression that comes to	İnstitution's self-introduction and self-narration	2
mind about public relations	Empathy	2
	To atone	1

Example from the views of school principals on the first expression that comes to mind about the process of public relations in school is given below:

"To manage the process of cooperation of school and guardian well" (P1).

"The stakeholders of the school come to mind. As the first stakeholder, the greatest stakeholder, the parents of our students, our parents, our relationships with our parents. many people we can meet outside, at the point of contributing to the school, at the point of supporting the school, I think I can express these as a stakeholder in this process "(P7).

".....All our goods, fruits as human. So, human communication is extremely important, and it is extremely important that you use a language in communication and how you use a language. ... we can say that communication is our heart" (P8).

"Communication with the environment and school members, what I mean by this school environment and the members of the school, who are they; student, parent, teacher, I do not know communication with school members" (P10).

"Introduction of the school, welcoming the guests to the school, fulfilling their request, seeing them off, in the meaning of saying good bye. In this context, we can call it a profession that requires professionalism" (P13).

Opinions about the activities being carried out in the school about public relations process

The opinions of the participants on the activities being carried out in the school about public relations process are presented in Table 3 below. School principals have made a priority to use parental meetings, school web pages and social media in the context of public relations activities. In addition to this, parental visits, ceremonies, festivals and so on. Activities, information seminars, professional presentations, etc. activities were assessed within the framework of activities carried out by school principals.

Table 3. Activities Being Carried Out in the School about Public Relations Process

Main theme	Sub Themes	f
	Use of school web pages and social media (web environment)	4
	Parent meetings	4
	Unity of school-family / parent visits	4
Activities Being	Kermes, opening, festivity, ceremony, celebration, etc. activities	3
Carried Out in the	Conducting seminars by the guidance teachers	2
School about Public	Meetings with employees and students	1
Relations Process	Students, parents, teachers and staff surveys	1
	Relations with the local press	1
	Professional presentations	1
	Activities of the local family council	1

Some statements from school principals' views of public relations activities in the context of public relations are given below:

"Kermes, opening, festivals etc. activities are being carried out. At the same time, resources such as social media, school websites are used" (P2).

"Seminars are given by guide teachers in the topics of effective communication, student psychology, learning environments every year. Parent education is given to the parents" (P4).

"While we are product-oriented and result-oriented, we need to first explain our school, ourselves, in order to raise the current capacity of our school. We use social media very actively. We are doing activities that explains what we do and what we want to do through social media, through our internet sites, through school boards, through school brochure booklets. We are also doing such activities that show where we are and point out where we want to be. We have digital panels; I can say it too" (P8).

"In this context, the guidance services usually focus on the parents, while in the occupational sense we usually work together with the guidance service and the vocational teachers. Mostly promotional activities are being held. For example; we organize 26 events in the direction of our plan within one year, in the scope of social activities. Vocational presentations are also among the activities being held; both presentations done when we go to other schools and when prospective students come to our school. Students who come to explore and understand the vocational high school are accompanied by both our guidance service and the field chefs. The workshops are being explored and introduces to the visiting prospective students, and both the school and the vocations are promoted in this way" (P13).

Opinions about the responsibilities and the reason of the public relations in schools

Table 4 shows school principals' opinion about who should be responsible for the public relations at school and their justification. A large majority of school principals (6 school principal) stated that this responsibility should be a specialist. 5 school principals stated that this responsibility should be in themselves, while 2 school principals stated that this responsibility should be in guiding service.

Table 4. Opinions About the Responsibilities of the Public Relations in the School

Main theme	Sub Themes	f
Desmansibility of mublic	Must be an expert person.	6
Responsibility of public relations	School principal	5
relations	Guidance service	2

Below are some expressions from the emerging views of school principals towards the responsibility of public relations at school:

"The person in charge of the public relations in the school should be an educated expert. Expertise is important in promoting the institution well and increasing its prestige" (P1).

"He/She must be the school principal. Because he/she is the one who welcomes the parents and visitors and who represent the school" (P2).

"There must be someone who has been trained in the field public relations" (P3).

"Guidance teachers should conduct these activities. This process should be planned together with school administrators. Because guidance teachers already have personal contact with parents for behavior development and academic development purposes" (P4).

"A guidance teacher should conduct public relations in the present conditions. Because they provide balance between parent-student-administration-teacher-staff" (P5).

"If the legal infrastructure can be prepared he/she should be someone other than teachers, administrators, and unity of school and parents, this area should be assigned to a public relations specialist who has a strong sense of education, robust infrastructure and strong resources in hand. Or it can be said that we have prepared the infrastructure and you can employ it according to your budget. This public relations specialist will be soly responsible of the public relations; that is, to take care of the outside parents, to direct, to listen. But when you have a public relations specialist he/she can plan, implement, follow-up and coordinate school activities. When needed he/she can go out and do sponsorship work, cooperate with various associations, foundations and non-governmental organizations. So I see that public relations field has a very large perspective. And I think public relations service should absolutely be in schools" (P7).

"He must be the school principal. Because he/she is the one who has the first and direct contact with parents" (P9).

"There is no unit in the school about public relations. Regarding to this, it is absolutely the school principals' responsibility who owns the unspecified tasks. Because he/she held the school's seal. So, these kind of tasks develop at the initiative of the school principal.There is no such unit in the school. But a teacher can be assigned, an administrator can be assigned, but this will always be the case. Each school has to create a unit in this purpose. I do not know how this is going to happen, but a teacher can be assigned but tasks and responsibilities should be defined first. If it is to be the administrators, tasks and responsibilities should also be defined" (P10).

Opinions on the proposal of the public relations processes in schools

The opinions of the school principals on the proposals for the public relations process in the school are presented in table 5. Forming of a public relations unit emerges when school principals' proposal are examined. In addition, the proposal of assignment of a specialist in the school and the proposal of allocating a position for public relations are another highlights. In addition to these views, other suggestions include that public relations activities should be increased, budgets should be established and in-service trainings should be provided.

Table 5. Opinions on the Proposal of the Public Relations Processes in the school

Main theme	Sub Themes	f
	Forming of a public relations unit	5
Proposals for Public	Assignment of a specialist and allocating a position for public relations	4
Relations Process	Stablishing budget for public relations work	1
	Activities related to the public should be increased	1
	In-service training should be given	1

Below are some statements from school principals' proposals for public relations in school:

"There are so many missing in the staff, especially in public schools, where public relations are discussed during priorities but the appointment of a specialist in this regard will be very much in the promotion of the school's mission and vision, in increasing its prestige and in the formation of institutional culture" (P1).

"Public relations is an important issue for all sectors. Schools should be supported public relations specialist. A budget should be set up in such studies. School-family associations are a non-governmental organizations. Adequate school budgets will make the school-family associations more functional. ...This process can best be carried out because there will be the presence of the public relations specialist and the task description "(P4).

"As improving expectations and the number of questions to be answered vary, it will be good to be led by an expert in this field" (P5).

"... I think that a department like the public relations specialist should be appointed and the position should be allocated. our perception operations are to be done by public relations specialist and I should not spend energy on them. There should absolutely be a unit in legal regulations regarding to public relations and foreseeing that the material in hand is human I can say that it would be appropriate to give norm related to the subject" (A8).

"Public relations unit should be established and in-service training should be provided" (P9).

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

It is only possible for the schools to win the support of the society by the collaboration process with the social environment. The school is located in the most appropriate and most critical area of society in terms of public relations. In public relations it is of great importance to tell and explain the school and convince people about work done. Today, the public expects certain tasks from the school and wants to learn the reasons for these tasks. For this reason, in recent years, public relations in the school have an important role to play in providing support for the interaction of schools with the environment. The image acquired as a result of effective public relations practices will provide opportunities for the success and popularity of the school.

According to the results of this research, it was revealed that what school principals have the most to say about public relations is term of communication. In addition, school principals are emphasizing expressions such as school-parent interaction, school self-expression. From this point of view, it can be said that the connotation of the concept of public relations in the school principals is in accordance with the literature to a great extent. The definitions of public relations also emphasize mutual communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation. When it is considered that the crucial point of public relations is to explain the school and to explain and convince people about the

work done, it can be said that the school principals' awareness of the public relations process is in the positive direction. In the master thesis named "Public Relations in Private Education Institutions" by Çamlıgüney (1998) it was emphasized that public relations activities are showcases of the institution and promotional activities for parents and cooperation with other institutions came to the forefront as the most important public relations activities. For this reason, the presence of the public relations unit in the schools will contribute to the promotion of school to target groups.

According to an another result of the research, the school principals stated that various applications were made in the schools for the public relations processes in the school and that the better ones could be done. The use of the school web pages and the making of parent meetings are the most popular activities stated by school principals. In addition, visits to parents, kermes, opening, exhibition etc. activities were also expressed by school principals. Considering these activities, it is noteworthy that the conducted practices are mostly routine and practices and the ones which are obligatory according to regulation. In this context, it can be said that school principals do not carry out planned and programmed public relation activities. A result reached by research conducted by Kılıç (2012) on non-governmental organizations operating in the field of education, is that non-governmental organizations except for the old, well-established ones and that achieved sustainability are not practicing planed and programmed public relations activities. In the study conducted by Yılgın (2016) on public relations practices carried out in Doğa Schools and Private Seymen Educational Institutions, it was emphasized that various activities were carried out by the existing public relations units in the institution.

According to the results of the research, the school principals emphasized that the responsibility of the public relations in the school are in the school principals and the guidance teachers with the current management structure. However, they pointed out that the public relations is an area requiring expertise and a unit should be established within the school regarding the public relations. Responsibility of public relations needs to be shared by all. In the research conducted by Calvin (2001), it was emphasized that teachers should also receive education in the field of public relations. However, this should not mean that public relations do not require expertise. In the research conducted by Kılıç (2006) regarding to public relations practices, the need for establishing two-way relationship, studying patiently, planned process for public relations practices and application by field experts was also emphasized.

Lastly, the school principals were asked about the proposal for the public relations process. In this context, school principals proposed that public relations practices are important for all sectors, schools should establish public relations unit with specialists in the framework of increased expectations and schools should be supported by public relations specialists. School principals also stated that presence of public relations specialist in the school will increase the effectiveness of functions of school-family association. In addition, school principals stated that appointment of specialists for increasing the prestige of the school and for the presentation of the vision and mission of the school will be a positive reflection of the institutional culture.

When the results of the research findings are assessed, it is seen that the level of awareness of the school principals related to the public relations is adequate and in the positive direction, however activities carried out are routine activities rather than planned and programmed activities. School principals are warmly welcoming to have a unit of planned and specialized people on public relations in their schools. Within the framework of these conclusions, the following suggestions can be made:

First, considering that schools are at the forefront of areas where public relations are most intense and the responsibility of public relations is in all stakeholders, trainings and seminars can be given to both school administrators and teachers.

In order to help schools conducting public relations activities, relevant units can be established in provincial or/and district national education directorates.

Schools can be divided into various education regions and a separate public relations specialist can be assigned to each educational zone and job descriptions can be provided to support schools.

One of the school principal's assistants may also be assigned as responsible for public relations activities by making a job description.

In the long run, employment of public relations specialists can be done in schools.

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