

## Teachers' Views on Teacher Leadership: A Qualitative Analysis

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### Abstract

Contemporary theories emphasize the importance of teacher leaders who can impress and sincerely value the student and become a model and guide in the process of learning and production in order to be successful in the transformation and development of the educational organizations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of teacher leadership from the teachers' perspective and raise the awareness of teachers on their teacher leadership level. In that sense, the teachers were asked about the qualities a teacher leader must have, the obstacles to become a teacher leader, and the ways to improve leadership skills. The study group consists of 40 teachers who serve in primary, secondary, high school, and private schools in Trabzon province of Turkey. A semi-structured interview form was used to collect the research data, and the data were analyzed manually by using the content analysis technique. As a result of the research, key characteristics of teacher leaders were found to be being fair and reliable as a person, self-developing and a role model as a professional, and having effective communication skills as a social person. The emerging results from the views of the teachers showed that administration, colleagues and hierarchical structure of the system pose crucial obstacles for teacher leaders, and in order to nurture teacher leadership in schools teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities especially through with trainings focusing on improvement of leadership skills.

**Keywords:** Teacher Perceptions, Teacher Leader Characteristics, Teacher Leadership Obstacles, Teacher Leadership Supports

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## INTRODUCTION

For a long time, only the principals and other administrator staffs have been recognized as the “leaders” in schools, yet there has been an increased recognition, in recent years, that more attention needs to be paid to ‘teacher leadership’ (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Leadership in education plays a pivotal role in schools' progression and provide a vision, guide, and support for change for the better, and leaders who have impact on organizational change don't necessarily need to be positioned at the top of the organization. (Harris and Muijs, 2005).

Contemporary approaches describes teacher leadership as part of a broad structure that elucidate the learning stance to improve other teachers and empower their leadership capacities, values the students sincerely, and encourages them to learn and produce new roles and ideas both for the school-development process and student learning (Khan and Malik 2013; Nappi, 2014; Uribe-Florez et al. 2014).

Danielson (2006) defined teacher leadership as the abilities, responsibilities, passion, and expertise that enable the teacher to influence, persuade, and mobilize those outside of the classroom in order to increase the success of the school while continuing to teach students. Huth (2002) stated that teacher leadership is defined as a collegial, collaborative, and open process that begins with an interest in a subject and culminates in sharing the knowledge with colleagues. Murphy (2005) describes the characteristics of teacher leadership as influencing the behavior of students and adults in school, encouraging people, helping students through helping other teachers, and encouraging joint decisions for school development. According to Frost (2010) teacher as a leader means "taking the initiative to improve practice, acting strategically with colleagues to embed change, gathering and using evidence in collaborative processes, contributing to the creation and dissemination of professional knowledge" (p.210). Teacher leaders are defined as the ones who lead in and out of the classroom, continue their learning, motivate their colleagues for the realization of advanced instructional practices and take responsibility for achieving positive results. (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2013).

Teacher leaders must have some skills to exercise leadership in their schools. These skills are explained by Danielson (2006) as using evidence and data in decision making by recognizing an opportunity and taking initiative; mobilizing people and resources around a common purpose; monitoring progress and adjusting the approach as conditions change; sustaining the commitment of others and predicting negativity, and contributing to a learning organization.

Based on all these definitions, it can be stated that developing teacher leadership is fundamental to empowering teachers and improving teacher professionalism (Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann, 2009). Teachers who have remarkable skills in pedagogy and strong willingness to help other teachers are critical for school success. These teachers can offer alternative leadership forces in addition to executive leadership (Pang and Miao, 2017). However, the question of whether teacher leadership exists in a school is not the issue; rather the problem is how long it exists, how it emerges and is enacted or restricted by the dominant organizational structure and culture. (Supovitz, 2018). Given these points, it can be said that teacher leaders are resources that are often not utilized to their fullest potential (Cosenza 2015; Greenlee, 2007).

Research supports the dissemination of leadership ideas in education and encouraging teachers to take ownership of the school and contribute to the school's development by delivering quality teaching (Ankrum, 2016; (Leithwood et al., 2004). In this respect, one of the variables related to teachers' professional behavior is thought to be a school culture that supports teacher leadership. (Demir, 2014). A principal's power-sharing, vision-sharing, and having a philosophy of raising teachers' awareness of administrative ideas, decisions, and policies are also perceived as a key feature of building teacher leadership capacity (Angelle and Teague, 2014).

Teacher leadership is a leadership style that focuses on improving learning and is based on the principles of professional collaboration, development, and growth. It is not a formal role,

responsibility or set of tasks. Rather, it is more a form of an agency that teachers are empowered to lead improvement work which has direct influences on the quality of teaching and learning (Lazaro, 2011). To contribute to school development, it is imperative to understand the underlying beliefs of teachers concerning the improvement of teacher leadership. Among these perspectives, the support and facilitation provided by the principal are the key factors that directly affect teachers' professional commitment, formal and informal participation in decision-making processes, and willingness to assume leadership responsibility in schools (Hulpia & Devos, 2010).

However, a closer look to the literature reveals that although attempts to improve teacher leadership practices have gained momentum in recent years, there is still lot to discover about the ways for the effective preparation and supporting of teacher leaders (Berg, Carver, & Mangin, 2014). In addition, examining teachers' perspectives on teacher leadership will provide them with a window of opportunity to become aware of themselves as leaders (Angelle and Schmid, 2007). With these in mind, this study aimed to reveal the opinions of teachers, working in different school types (primary, secondary, high school, and private school) in Trabzon, about teacher leadership.

In this study, teachers were asked about the characteristics that a teacher leader must have, the barriers to become a teacher leader, and the ways to enhance their leadership skills. In this way, the concept of teacher leadership was examined through investigating the teachers' evaluations about the issue, and it was aimed to increase the awareness of teachers about their leadership levels, thus contributing to the production of more effective and efficient education policies. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics that teacher leaders should have according to teachers?
2. Are there any obstacles to become a leading teacher according to the teachers? If so, what are they?
3. What are the ways to enhance teachers' leadership skills in schools?

## **METHOD**

### **Research model**

Qualitative research is the preferred methodological paradigm in the research, as the data are to be examined in depth within their natural environment. (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). Basic qualitative research focuses on how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and make sense of their lives (Merriam, 2013, p.23).

### **Study group**

Maximum variation sampling was employed as the sampling method to reveal the common or different aspects and patterns between various situations which show alignment with the purpose of the study and research problems (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010). To represent different dimensions of the problem and clarify varying opinions, the study group includes 40 teachers from 10 primary, 10 secondary, 10 high schools, and 10 private schools, working in the central district of Trabzon. They were randomly selected from different schools among those who volunteered to participate in the study. To clearly reflect the perspectives of the participant teachers on the teacher leadership, attention was paid to the selection of 10 teachers from different schools at primary, secondary, high school, and private school levels. Primary school teachers are coded as P1, P2..., secondary school teachers are coded as S1, S2..., while high school teachers are coded as H1, H2... and private school teachers are coded as PR1, PR2... The demographic information of participants who volunteered to participate to the study is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Distribution of Participants in terms of Demographics**

School	Gender	Seniority	Degree	Discipline
<b>Primary School</b>	6F, 4M	16-20 years (2)	Bachelor (9)	Classroom (10)
		20+ years (8)	Associate (1)	
<b>Secondary School</b>	7F,3M	1-5 Years (2)	Bachelor (10)	Science (2)
		6-10 years (3)		Turkish (2)
		11-15 years (3)		English (2)
		16-20 years (1)		Vocational training (1)
		20+ years (1)		Social studies (1)
				Mentally handicapped (1)
	Music teacher (1)			
<b>Private School</b>	6 F, 4M	1-5 years (2)	Bachelor (9)	Geography teacher (1)
		5-10 years (1)	Master (1)	Turkish language teachers (2)
		6-10 years (2)		Classroom (4)
		11-15 years (3)		Math (1)
		16-20 years (1)		Social studies (1)
		20+ years (1)		Physical education teacher (1)
<b>High School</b>	6F, 4M	1-5 years (1)	Bachelor (9)	Turkish language teachers (3)
		6 -10 years (1)	Master (1)	German language (1)
		11-15 years (1)		Special education (1)
		16-20 years (5)		Math (2)
		20+ years (2)		Vocational trainer (1)
				English language (1)
			Health education teacher (1)	

6 of the teachers participated in the research in primary schools were female and 4 were male, while 2 teachers had 16-20 years seniority and 8 teachers had 20+ years. One of the teachers had an associate degree while 9 of them hold a bachelor's degree, and the whole group consisted of classroom teachers.

At the secondary school group, 7 of the teachers were female and 3 were male, 2 teachers had 1-5 years, 3 teachers had 6-10 years, 3 teachers had 11-15 years, 1 teacher had 16-20 years, and 1 had 20+ years seniority. All of the teachers hold a bachelor's degree in this group. The group was composed of 2 sciences, 2 Turkish, 2 English, 1 vocational education training, 1 social studies, 1 special education, and 1 music teacher.

In private schools group, there were 6 female and 4 male teachers. 2 of them had 1-5 years, 1 teacher had 5-10 years, 2 teachers had 6-10 years, 3 teachers had 11-15 years, 1 teacher had 16-20 years, and 1 teacher had 20+ years seniority. One of the teachers had a master's degree, and the others had an undergraduate education. Regarding the private schools group, 1 of the teachers was geography teacher, 2 of them were Turkish language teachers, 4 of them were classroom, 1 was math, 1 was social studies, and 1 was physical education teacher.

When it comes to the distribution of teachers in high schools, 6 female and 4 male teachers participated in the study. 1 of them had 1-5 years, 1 had 6 -10 years, 1 had 11-15 years, 5 had 16-20 years, and 2 had 20+ years seniority. Only 1 of the teachers had a master's degree. While 3 of the teachers were Turkish language teachers, 1 was German language, 1 was special education, 2 were math, 1 was a vocational education training teacher, 1 was English language, and 1 was a health education teacher.

### Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to obtain teachers' views on teacher leadership. While forming the interview protocol, the researchers aimed to locate intentional and necessary variety of questions considering the research questions and the purpose of the study (Meriam, 2013). Afterwards, 2 experts from the educational sciences department were consulted to review the protocol in terms of its content and appropriateness for the aim of the study and research questions. A pilot interview was conducted with 7 teachers in order to test the validity of the interview questions, and no

problem was observed. Teachers who participated in the pilot interviews were not included in the main study. In the process of collecting the data, all of the primary, secondary, private, and high schools in Trabzon were listed. Then, 5 schools were selected by simple random sampling for each application and the administrators of these schools were informed about the content of the study. Instead of 1 secondary school and 1 high school whose teaching staff did not want to participate in the study, two new schools were chosen with the help of simple random sampling.

Before the interviews, the teachers were informed about the purpose and significance of the study and provided with information about the confidentiality issues. Personal and face-to-face interviews were conducted on a designated day and time and in a place deemed appropriate by the participant teacher. Participant confirmation was sometimes used to check whether the answers of the participants were correctly understood during the interviews. The interviews with the participant teachers lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researchers. After reading the written opinions several times, they were grouped under certain codes, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis which aims to reach the concepts and relationships to explain the data in depth was used in the analysis of the research data (Silverman, 2001). During the analysis of the data the systematic procedure of content analysis was employed, which involves coding of the data, finding the categories and then the themes, organizing and defining the data according to the themes and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

In the analysis and interpretation of the data, firstly coding and elimination were conducted. In this phase, each participant was allocated a code. From the collected data, categories, such as the characteristics that teacher leaders should have, the barriers to become a teacher leader, and the ways to increase leadership skills, were reached. Then, the themes expressed by the codes were found. In the next step, the findings were described and interpreted using the data.

To ensure the internal validity, opinions were encoded, and the codes were supported by direct quotations. Significance and completeness of the findings were tested by the researcher continuously. To ensure the consistency of the findings, the consistency of the concepts constituting the themes was evaluated and tested to make a meaningful whole. To ensure the external validity, details of the research process were explained. The findings were interpreted by comparing them with the related literature and real situations in practice were tried to be reached. (Demir et al., 2015) In addition, in order to ensure reliability, a clear definition of the data source of the research were provided through presenting the demographic characteristics of the participants in a table and only those teachers who volunteered to participate in the study were selected for validity and reliability. (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016: 274-275). In addition, in order to prevent the influence of the researcher on the data while trying to reveal the participants' thoughts about teacher leadership, participant confirmation was used to check whether the answers were understood correctly; and thus, an objective attitude was adopted as much as possible to ensure external reliability.

To increase the credibility, it is one of the methods to ask experts who have general knowledge about the researched subject and specialized in qualitative research methods to examine the research in various dimensions. (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, in addition to examination of related literature, the opinions of two experts from educational science department of a university were asked to ensure that the themes were classified correctly. The results obtained from the expert opinions were compared with the codes and themes obtained by the researcher. In the comparisons, the number of consensus and disagreement was determined, and the reliability formula developed by Miles and Huberman (2015) ( $\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{consensus}}{\text{consensus} + \text{dissidence}}$ ) was used for the reliability of the data analysis. According to the coding control which gives internal consistency, the consensus among the encoders is expected to be at least 80%. Also, in the reliability study conducted specifically for this study, a consensus (reliability) of 86%, 89% and 91% was achieved, respectively. In the presentation

of the findings, direct quotations from the participants were also included to support the themes. In the last stage, the number of participants representing each category (f) and their percentage (%) was calculated. The obtained values were interpreted by presenting them in tables.

## FINDINGS

### *Teachers' views on the characteristics of teacher leaders*

When the participant teachers were asked about the characteristics of teacher leaders, 44 teacher leadership characteristics were revealed. 19 of these characteristics were related to personal characteristics of teachers, 17 of them were about professional characteristics of teachers and 8 were associated with the social characteristics of teachers. Among these, the most common teacher leadership characteristics was found to be being able to improve himself (f = 16), and having effective communication skills (f = 14). These features are followed by being a role model, an example (f = 12), fair (f = 11), reliable, trusting others (f = 10), influencing others (f = 10), solution-oriented (f = 8), vision holder (f = 8), open to innovation (f = 8), expert in his field (f = 8), loving and respecting his students (f = 8), successful in classroom management (f = 6), guiding, encouraging (f = 6), and having a strong character (f = 6). 73 of the opinions about the characteristics of teacher leaders were proposed by high school teachers, 54 of them by secondary school teachers, 49 of them by private schools, and 38 of them by primary school teachers. Table 2 illustrates the opinions of teachers about the characteristics of teacher leaders.

**Table 2. Characteristics of teacher leaders according to teachers**

Characteristics of teacher leaders	f	%	T
<b>Personal</b>			
Fair	11	28	
Reliable, trustworthy	10	25	
Strong character	6	15	
Persuasive	4	10	
Confident	3	8	
Possessing values and sharing	3	8	
Being aware of strengths and weaknesses	3	8	
Open-minded	3	8	19
Tolerant, understanding, harmonious	3	8	
Patient	3	8	
Hardworking	2	5	
Cheerful	2	5	
Effective decision-maker	2	5	
Esteemed	2	5	
Hopeful, positive thinker	2	5	
Good listener	2	5	
Good sense of humor	1	3	
Questioner	1	3	
Responsible	1	3	
<b>Professional</b>			
Self-improving	16	40	
Role model	12	30	
Solution-oriented	8	20	
Vision holder	8	20	
Innovative	8	20	
Professionalism	8	20	17
Loving and respecting students	8	20	
Effective classroom manager	6	15	
Guiding, encouraging	6	15	
Knowing students well	5	13	
Passionate about his/her job	5	13	
Using technology well	4	10	
Encourage to think differently	3	8	
Good at crisis management	3	8	
Researcher	3	8	
Inclusive	1	3	

Good time manager	1	3	
<b>Social</b>			
Effective communicator	14	35	
Affecting people's lives	10	25	
Establishing empathy	5	13	
Collaborative	5	13	8
Sharing emotions, opinions	4	10	
Using body language well	2	5	
Respectful for diversity	2	5	

As revealed in the table, regarding the characteristics of teacher leaders many teachers expressed their ideas about the personal characteristics that a teacher leader should possess, and 19 themes were obtained. To illustrate, emphasizing the importance of fairness in the classroom P1 stated that "Teacher leaders communicate well with each of their students and parents, loves them equally. They are fair, reliable and a good model". In this regard, another important emphasis on teacher leadership was being "reliable and reassuring". S1 referred to this feature by expressing that "A teacher should be reliable, coherent, empathetic, lovely for the students, and a teacher with a good relationship with students could be a leader". On the other hand, by making references to different qualities of teacher leaders PR4 maintained that:

"A teacher should love her/his job, love students as well, and be a social, modern, exemplary character, open to development, be able to use technology, be equal to everyone without discrimination, be empathetic. S/he should value education more than teaching and be a good speaker, must be patient, trustful, tolerant, and lovely. S/he should be in good relationship with parents and behave like a teacher."

In addition, teachers voiced their ideas about the professional characteristics of teacher leaders and 17 themes were obtained related to the issue. Most participants highlighted the need for teachers to build and strengthen the skills necessary for enhancing student learning. On this basis, S9 explained that "A teacher should be someone who develops himself with the knowledge and skills of the period, loves to read, likes research, listens to people's opinions and ideas, knows the technologies of the age, and has a broad perspective". PR5 expanded on what S9 voiced by stating that:

"A teacher must be visionary, problem-solver, a good leader and analyzer. S/he must foresee the future and produce new projects accordingly and be a leader for students to help them with new developments and take education beyond the classroom. The teacher with these characteristics will also be a good example for his/her students as a leading human model."

Likewise, many teachers underlined that a teacher leader must inspire and encourage students during the process of teaching and learning. In this regard, H10 declared that "A teacher should be a model for the students and society with his/her dressing and speech style, and behaviors".

Although the third dimension, social characteristics, was the one with the least code, aspects related to this theme was voiced by many teachers. The findings about this dimension imply that teachers recognize the interpersonal skills which will be used to establish connections among various stakeholders to enhance student learning, as a primary means of teacher leader effectiveness. To exemplify, S7 mentioned about this expectation by reporting that "Teachers must have self-confidence, practical intelligence and must be humorous. They must develop warm relationships with the students and guide them by being able to attract their attention." Moreover, the other common belief related to social aspects of teacher leadership was the ability to affect people. Related to the issue, H7 described his/her ideas by making references to other dimensions:

"Teachers should be open to self-development and be able to establish good relations with parents, colleagues, and students. They should be guiding and encouraging and must keep up with the new developments and adapt themselves to the requirements of the era. They should have a strong character to guide the society and be an inspiring leader."

*Teachers' opinions about the obstacles to becoming a teacher leadership*

When teachers were asked about the obstacles to become a teacher leader, 19 obstacles were mentioned. Regarding the teachers' evaluations on the barriers to be a teacher leader, 11 opinions were associated with the system, 3 with teachers themselves, 1 with the families, 1 with the faculty of education, 1 with the colleagues, and 1 with the administrators. In addition, 4 teachers (S3, S10, H9, and T7) stated that there are no obstacles to being a leader. Considering the obstacles to be a teacher leader, the biggest obstacle is seen as the system with a very high-frequency level. When the frequency distribution of teacher evaluations is examined, it is seen that the highest frequency belongs to administrators (f = 13), which is followed by colleagues (f = 12), being not free in the hierarchical structure (f=12), different groups' pressure (f=8), and teachers' disbelief on themselves (f=8).

39 of the views on barriers to teacher leadership were delivered by high school teachers, 21 by primary and secondary school teachers, and 17 by private school teachers. The barriers to become a teacher leader are presented in table 3.

**Table 3. The obstacles to becoming a teacher leader**

Obstacles to teacher leadership		f	%
Administrator	Administrators	17	43
Colleague	Colleagues (jealousy etc.)	16	40
System	Hierarchical structure	8	20
System	Pressure of various groups (parents, students etc.)	7	18
System	Legislation and Curriculum	5	13
System	Low status	4	10
System	Changing teacher roles	4	10
System	Politicians' point of view	4	10
System	Teacher recruitment with low score	3	8
System	Hindering critical thinking	3	8
System	Nonmerit-based appointments	3	8
System	Crowded classes	2	5
System	Unfair reward	2	5
Faculty of Education	Poor education	2	5
System	Disbelief	2	5
System	Uneducated	1	3
System	Deficiency in Idealism	1	3
Parents	Overprotective parenting	1	3

As can be seen from Table 3, the most important obstacle to teacher leadership is seen as "managers and colleagues" with the highest frequency level. Regarding the issue, H7 notes that "School administrations do not want teachers to go beyond the lines determined by the legislation and they are content with completing just the required works. A new idea that a teacher wants to do with enthusiasm is ignored by the majority of administrators". Similarly, H10 maintained that "Teachers try to hinder their prominent colleagues who are successful, remarkable, positive teacher leaders. They do not want to benefit from their experiences, they want them to be unsuccessful and try to obstruct them".

Thus, it can be seen from the interviews that more than half of the teachers recognize the administrators and their colleagues as a strong barrier against teacher leadership. Concerning the two obstacles, S8 expressed that:

"The biggest obstacle to a teacher leader is the administration, and their colleagues. What a shame. Most of our administrators do not want a teacher to come to the fore with leadership qualities and be admired by the school. Therefore, they try to prevent teacher leaders' endeavors. Another obstacle is the colleagues in the school. Teachers do not lean towards the idea of a teacher leader since a teacher leader is the pioneer in social and cultural events, curriculum implementation, sporting success, and the use of technology. To be honest, teacher leaders are being blocked by their colleagues due to jealousy. Also, as long as the bureaucrats in the MoNE (Ministry of National Education) are

not appointed consciously and properly, they also do not have the capacity to appreciate the teacher leadership".

Regarding the obstacles to teacher leadership, the most common theme was found to be the system barrier. In addition to the themes considered in the system barrier, evaluations regarding the system phenomenon were also made in general. In this respect, S2 contemplates on the problems aroused from the educational system in the country by noting that "The current system and education policy prevents teachers from leading the students and education as they wish, hinders questioning, critical thinking and seeking their rights, limits the students, and therefore does not encourage the teachers to use their imagination and creativity". On the same basis, S1 maintained that "Others are weaker, but the system is the strongest obstacle. Because the system tries to create a professional who is robotized only providing information, rather than a teacher who makes a creative difference".

Partly related to this problem, many teachers also emphasized that hierarchical structure in the system prove a handicap to develop and practice teacher leadership skills in order to establish and sustain a vision for improvement. Considering the view of "hierarchical obstacle", P2 stated that "We have to act in accordance with established rules and programs. We cannot act on our own will. Administrators, curricula, regulations... we have limits on what we want to do". Similarly, P9 added that "The existing system dulls the teachers' leadership characteristics and blocks their way. The system is managed within the order-command hierarchy which is subject to strict rules".

Additionally, teachers mentioned about the lack of supportive environment and external pressures. Concerning the pressure exerted to teachers, P7 stated that "While practicing our profession, there are some problems due to the pressure of the environment and the family. Teacher is viewed critically every time, and loses dignity in society", and P5 maintained that "There are obstacles caused by students and parents. School administrators cannot achieve the necessary balance". On the other hand, PR4 drew attention to the overprotective approaches of families by explaining that "Parents do not accept the negative behaviors of their children and see them on the top but us at the bottom. Teacher cannot be a leader; leaders are always students".

Another obstacle hindering the success for teacher leadership emerged as "poor quality education" in the faculty of education. In this context, PR2 stated that

"I think that the colleges that train teachers do not fully fulfill their responsibilities. During the teacher selection process, the teacher must be subjected to difficult exams and be selected very well. S/he should be able to get adequate education to organize the education process himself/herself accordingly by considering the factors like environment, school, etc."

Moreover, the findings show that teachers also criticized themselves as having lack of interest towards professional development and developing and sustaining teacher leadership skills. Again, H6 stated that "Leadership requires ongoing development. The teachers in the system do not follow improvements, do not read and improve themselves". At this point, S4 drew the attention to the causes of this problem by emphasizing especially the external factors and stated that "The exposure of teachers to practices that lower their dignity, both by the students and the society, has a negative impact on their leadership, and they are regarded as responsible for all failures in the system. The teacher, the architecture of the future, with these perceptions loses his/her self-belief and delays new enterprises". From a broader perspective, discussing the problems that inhibit effective practices of teacher leadership and underlining the state of teachers among these factors, H3 explained that:

"...The system, schools, individual differences, environment, circumstances, and many other obstacles can be considered. Yet, in my opinion, the most important one is the inadequate number of idealistic teachers. How far can you go with inadequate teachers both academically and pedagogically? The biggest problematic point related to the system is the admission into university with low scores. Considering the education faculties as a factory, the product will be useless unless the raw material is fruitful. How can an average teacher lead a student who is far ahead in terms of

intelligence, equipment, and technological accumulation? The quality of the teachers should be developed as soon as possible."

*Teachers' views on the ways to increase teachers' leadership skills.*

When teachers were asked about the ways to improve their leadership skills, 23 suggestions were elicited. While 18 of the teachers made suggestions about the amendments on the education system. 1 suggestion was linked with improvements in administrators, 1 was about education faculties, and 3 of them were related to changes teachers can make on themselves. When the frequency distribution of teachers' evaluations is examined, the following sequential order is observed in terms of the codes: development environments should be presented to the teachers (f=17), teacher leadership education should be given to the teachers in cooperation with the university (f=16), free spaces should be left for the teacher (f=8) and teacher status should be increased.

40 of the opinions about the ways to increase teachers' leadership skills were presented by high school, 23 by secondary school teachers, 20 by primary and 17 by private school teachers. Table 4 presents the ways to increase leadership skills of teachers according to opinions of teachers.

**Table 4. The ways to increase leadership skills in teachers**

What can be done?		f	%
System	Development environments should be offered to teachers	17	43
System	Training / leadership training should be provided	16	40
System	Free areas should be left to the teacher	8	20
System	Teacher status should be increased	7	18
System	Selection of faculties of education should be multifaceted	5	13
System	Personal rights of teachers should be improved	4	10
System	Idealist people should be selected for the profession	4	10
System	Teachers leaders should be selected	4	10
System	Teachers should be encouraged for innovations	3	8
System	Teacher leadership should be supported	3	8
System	Application training should be focused on	3	8
System	Teachers' opinions should be considered	2	5
System	Successful examples should be shared	2	5
System	Exam-oriented system should be avoided	2	5
System	There should be equity in appointments	2	5
System	Drama education must be compulsory	1	3
System	Teacher academies should be established	1	3
System	Teachers must have a foreign language requirement	1	3
Administrators	Teacher leadership should be supported	7	18
Faculty of education	Quality education should be provided	5	13
Teachers	Communication skills should be increased	3	8
Teachers	Teachers need to improve	2	5
Teachers	Should participate in congresses and symposiums	1	3

Findings obtained from the data showed that teachers see the development opportunities provided to them as the most effective mean to pave the way for improving teacher leadership skills. Additionally, participants underlined the importance of trainings, in this sense, focusing on the preparation of teacher leaders. In this context, S5 expressed that:

"Teacher leadership qualities are an integral part of the character. In order to remove the barriers in front of teacher leadership and to benefit from these qualities of the teacher in a positive way during the process of education and training, it is possible to increase the opportunities provided to the teacher leaders in terms of project development, to create resources for independent and original work, to be the supporter of the teacher. MoNE should be organized as a system that does not limit the teacher, rather frees it"

Similarly, H6 expressed that "Teachers' academies should be established, compulsory in-service activities should be brought, the harmonization of curricula and MoNE should be ensured and

teachers should be provided with training opportunities in the areas they feel assistance, more importance should be given to language education, and leadership training should be provided". In the same vein, P7 suggested that "various seminars can be organized for the teachers. To raise the status of teachers in the community, the ministry must support to the teachers and restore the prestige of the profession."

The view that administrators should support teacher leadership is emphasized as an important point to increase leadership skills in teachers, as well. To develop teacher leadership, H7 argued that "School administrations need to play an active role in providing teachers with free spaces in which they can apply their ideas and thoughts in their own classroom". Regarding the issue, H2 added that "School administration should be with the teachers, not against them. When observed problems are reported to the administration, they should be able to act without delay. An apathetic administration wipes out everything that is done and wants to be done".

The teachers underlined the responsibility of the education faculties in instilling the inspiration to develop leadership skills into the teachers and emphasized the importance of "quality education" offered to pre-service teachers. PR10, in this sense, explained that "All steps, from student selection to the education faculties, training of them to practices done in practicum schools should be carefully arranged and monitored, and finally injustices in appointments should be eliminated". In this regard, S4 said that "It is necessary to increase the admission scores for the faculties of education and to accept qualified students. In order to educate these young people as teacher leaders, it is necessary to introduce them to practices that will make them recognize the holiness of this task from the very first moment".

Last but by no means the least, had the teachers also drawn attention to what they can do themselves to increase teacher leadership skills. Within this context, increasing communication skills, self-development and participating in academic studies were expressed by the teachers to strengthen leadership skills. Contemplating on the issue, H1 expressed that:

"Teaching is not a profession but a way of life. Those who have this understanding should be teachers. A man who does not believe in himself does not believe what he does. People with high exam scores should be encouraged to teach. In addition, the destroyed reputation of the teacher should be restored, and personal rights of teachers should be regulated. Self-educated, socially talented, willing people should be teachers... In a system that does not ignore teachers, the teacher can educate him/herself and will be eager to bring out his/her existing leadership skills".

## **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

A teacher's personal perspective or vision about teacher leadership affects self-leadership perceptions and contributes to the ongoing process of identity formation (Angelle and Schmid, 2007). For this reason, the research was conducted to understand the perspectives of teachers working in different school type and branches about the characteristics that teacher leader should have, the barriers to become a teacher leader, and the ways to increase leadership skills in teachers.

According to the results of the study, the characteristics that the teacher leaders should have were evaluated under three categories which are personal, professional, and social characteristics. Opinions about teacher leaders' personal characteristics were found to be being fair, reliable, strong, convincing, confident, valuing and sharing, aware of the good and bad sides, open-minded, and so on. While the opinions about the professional characteristics were revealed as being self-improving, role models, solution-oriented, visionary, and open to innovations, competent in their field, loving and caring about their students, and successful in classroom management. The social traits that teacher leaders should have, on the other hand, were being able to carry out effective communication, being influential, empathetic, and able to form a "we" mindset, sharing his/her feelings and ideas, using the body language effectively, respectful to differences and being open to criticism.

It is possible to say that the essential teacher leadership qualities found in this study are significantly similar to those effective teacher leader characteristics proposed by Nudrat and Akhtar (2014) such as, having leader ethics, emotional strength, interpersonal communication skills, teaching competence, learning power, collaboration, entrepreneurship. In this regard, Wenner and Campbell (2017) defined teacher leaders as people being located beyond the classroom walls, supporting professional learning in their schools, involved in any stage of policy or decision making, and focused on learning, achievement and development of their students. Similarly, definition of teacher leaders made by Hanuscin et.al. (2012) focused on their being cooperative, devoted, reliable and reflective, having a clear vision, positive attitude, and high intrinsic motivation. Parallel to the results of this research, Arslan and Özdemir (2015) underlined that teacher should have qualities like being responsible, valuing different ideas, being a team player, a role model, having an appetite for learning something new, be able to take a risk, self-reliant, good at communication, and an expert on his field. Again similar to the results of the research, Dağ and Göktürk (2014) stated that teacher leaders are the ones who can share the vision of teaching with the students, trust the students, play a guiding role in the classroom, analyze the characteristics of the group well and exhibit appropriate leadership characteristics.

Additionally, it is revealed that the obstacles to become a teacher leader are the hierarchical structure of the system, various pressure groups (parents, students, etc.), colleagues and administrators, legislation and curriculum, low status of teachers, changing teacher roles, politicians' perspective, recruitment of teachers with low scores, the lack of quality teachers in the faculties of education, the lack of self-belief, idealism, and the protective approaches of parents towards the children.

In this study, the number of teachers who consider school administrators as an obstacle to teacher leadership is quite high. This finding is in agreement with the results of Arslan and Özdemir (2015) which show that executive attitudes and behaviors, peer approach, student achievement, physical elements, bureaucratic organization, personal problems, and leadership skills deficiencies are obstacles in the way to be teacher leader. Likewise, Işık and Bahat (2018) state that school principals are decisive in terms of paving the way for teacher leaders or putting obstacles. In their research, although the administrators stated that their expectations for teacher leadership were high, they admitted that some administrators are worried about the power and influence of teacher leaders in the school environment. Similar to the study, Özdemir and Devocioğlu (2014) stated that problems such as bureaucratic structure of schools and legislation-based decision-making prevented school stakeholders from developing leadership characteristics. In the same parallel, Cemaloğlu and Savaş (2018) argued that the hierarchical structure in the education system is expected to systematize the behaviors expected from teachers and teachers are seen as an employee who is expected to teach only within a set of rules, procedures and principles. Clark (1988) states that teachers in schools where the bureaucratic system is predominant are away from creativity, waiting for everything from others, not taking responsibility, and preferring to be controlled and directed. Again Kurt (2016) states that due to the centralized structure of the education system in Turkey, the authority of school administrators in schools is very limited and the responsibilities are transformed into strict legislation pursuits which prevents school administrators and teachers from taking initiatives, producing creative solutions and assuming new roles beyond their job descriptions.

Again, Can (2006), similar to the findings of this study, states that the factors affecting teacher leadership at school are inadequacy in professional training, ineffective management support, time limit, formal burden of teachers, lack of support provided by colleagues, lack of training and development environment, lack of additional effort and insufficiency of democratic trust and participation environment. Likewise, Johnson and Donaldson (2007) argue that although teachers have leadership skills, they are reluctant to identify themselves as leaders due to the school culture that does not give teachers the opportunity to show leadership behavior, the teachers who think that they do not have the skills to lead other adults, and the egalitarian approaches that see everyone equal in the school decrease the motivation of teachers who want to improve their leadership skills. On the other hand, Balyer (2016), which is largely similar to the results of the research, states that teacher leaders are not

provided with freedom, although the profession seems to be a free field; teachers are not free enough and do not have the time or competence to lead.

The study also shows that teachers criticize their colleagues for not following professional development opportunities and improve themselves to enhance student learning. In this regard, parallel to this finding Margolis and Deuel (2009) defined teacher leadership as a function that supports teacher development, and stated that one of the most positive results of teacher leadership is that teachers continue to develop and sustain their personal goals, professional aspirations and moral imperatives, while influencing others and transforming themselves. Again, Frost and Durrant (2003) explained the basics of teacher leader behaviors as their development skills, awareness of participation and change, visionary thinking, program analysis, providing community and family support, and resistance to obstacles. Similarly, Bozkuş et al. (2015) argue that teachers do not take part in professional work groups and thus neglect their professional development.

The study also showed that in order to increase the leadership skills of the teachers, quality pre-service education should be provided in the faculties of education, and school administrations should provide a leadership supportive environment. Teachers' communication skills, self-development and participation in congresses and symposiums were suggested by teachers as ways to strengthen the leadership skills of teachers. In this regard, teachers also expressed that they should be provided with systematic development environments and leadership trainings conducted in cooperation with the university, they should be given freedom, their status should be increased, and multi-functional student selection system should be established to education faculties. This finding is supported by previous research (Can, 2010; Işık & Bahat, 2018) which show that school administrators need to create an infrastructure that supports teacher leadership and allow teachers to lead and they need to create professional learning communities. Again, similar to this finding, Cemaloğlu and Savaş (2018) found that administrative support is an important element in showing leadership behaviors of teachers and contributing to individual-professional and institutional development processes. Likewise, Öztürk (2015) and Ngang et al. (2010) stated that creating a supportive culture by school administrators in their schools provided the opportunity for teacher leadership to emerge and played an important role in the development of teachers. Similarly, Gabriel (2005) stated that managers play an important role in creating the conditions and support needed to develop teacher leaders and that providing support to leadership roles has a significant impact on educational change.

According to the research findings, one of the issues pointed by the teachers were the necessity for the amendments to be made to the curriculum of the education faculties to encourage the development of teacher leadership skills of pre-service teachers. This finding is supported by Balyer (2016) and Işık and Bahat (2018) which showed that in the process of teacher training, it is necessary to include training and programs in which prospective teachers can develop their leadership skills. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2013) similarly suggested that the curricula of the faculties in which pre-service teachers were trained should be reconsidered for teachers to demonstrate leadership roles beyond classes. In parallel to this view, Ngang et al. (2010) argue that teacher leadership training should be a capacity building strategy to enable teacher candidates to better manage their habits, attitudes and practices in order to improve their achievement levels. Teachers should be provided with professional development programs to understand their roles, leadership practices, and also, they should be supported with new approaches to improve the quality of teaching. Can (2009) argued that teacher training programs needs to train teachers that loves their profession, tries to improve themselves in every way, can be a role model to their environment, have effective communicational skills and high level of interest and curiosity. On the other hand, similar to the finding of the study that teacher should be provided with free spaces to act on; Emira (2010) stated that the basic principles for developing teacher leadership are to convey clear ideas and strategic aspirations, to include other people in ideas and to create individual space for teachers to innovate.

In this research, teachers evaluate their participation in decision-making process as important for the development of teacher leadership. This finding is in line with the previous research (Beycioğlu

& Aslan, 2012; Spillane & Healey, 2010) which propose that in order to develop teacher leadership, more shared leadership approaches are expected to be adopted by all school stakeholders. Similarly, Frost (2012) argues that teacher leadership is considered as a strategy used for school development by mobilizing teachers' innovative leadership potential. However, in order to use this strategy, the system should leave free spaces for educators, and be the driving force for teacher leadership. In this respect, it can be suggested that the system and school administrators should take steps to support teacher leadership. In the study, it was seen that teachers had difficulty in defining teacher leadership. Similarly, Balyer (2016) found that most of the teachers were alien to the word “teacher leadership” although they managed some initiatives and developments.

Even though teacher leadership has an important place in foreign literature, it can be said that there are shortcomings in Turkey in this regard. It may be suggested to conduct new researches, projects and providing new trainings in order to introduce, develop and implement teacher leadership. Yiğit, Doğan, and Uğurlu (2013) and Balyer (2016) talked about the need to define teacher leader's roles in the system more clearly in order to dismiss the unplanned, unscheduled efforts of teachers regarding teacher leadership.

As Helterbran (2010) states, teacher leadership needs to be cared and developed to overcome the “I am just a teacher” syndrome that causes teachers to underestimate their profession and themselves. In this sense, it can be suggested that the characteristics of the teacher leaders should be determined and defined by research. It should be included in the managerial texts, and the teachers who have leadership characteristics should be selected and developed in a systematic way. In order to eliminate the obstacles stemming from the teachers themselves and the social structure, the teacher leadership phenomenon should be integrated in the curriculum of education faculties and teacher leadership can be processed and applied by methods such as case studies, life stories and modeling.

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