

Just Before Sitting on the Chair: Reasons, Expectations and Goals of School Principals in Turkey

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Abstract

Schools exist to prepare students for life and to ensure students' success. School principals are the most important people in terms of achieving schools' goals. Principals are expected to have goals and work in line with the main aims and principles of National Education. The aim of this study is to determine newly appointed school principals' reasons for becoming principals and to explore the expectations and goals of their schools. The research data were collected using semi-structured interview forms that were applied during the pre-service training of 40 school principals who were assigned as school principals for the first time in a province in the Black Sea region of Turkey at the beginning of the academic year. A qualitative research method and a content analysis technique were used for data analysis. The results show that most participants became school principals because they wanted to realize their educational ideals and goals. Participants' most important goal for their schools was to improve student qualification. Most of the participants' expectations about their schools' recognition in their school districts were about their schools' success.

Keywords: Reasons to become a principal; school principals; school principals' goals.

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INTRODUCTION

Education can be defined as an initiative that shapes, regulates, supervises and controls the future of people and social life in the society through the conscious transfer of individual or social experiences. The education system is a top system that includes schools. The formal organization of education, a social institution, is a school (Aydın, 2014; Başaran, 2000; Bursalıoğlu, 2010; Eren, 2018; Taymaz, 2007). In all societies, schools are the most important organizations in the community where educational activities are organized systematically and regularly. Schools help individuals adapt to their own society and understand other societies (Mulford, 2003). Education transfers tradition, culture and values to students (Dewey, 1996). Also, by promoting lifelong learning, school education helps people understand the changes that occur. The creation of knowledge in the school, the acquisition of information, communication and the use of information are particularly important. In short, the importance of educating people has increased, becoming society's most important investment (Mulford, 2003). Dewey (1996) stated the social purpose of education is to provide a profession and economic support for an individual and to grow good citizens. Education also creates a culture of useful values for society.

In determining the objectives of a country's education system, it is important to train the type of person who will ensure social continuity. The determinant of a country's general goals in education is the dominant political power or state authority in society. The boundaries of the distant and general objectives are drawn in the constitution of that country. These power and authority resources in democratic administrations are the organs of the legislative and executive (political) power that the constitution authorizes – the organizations that determine the society's development plans and objectives (Çelik, 2006). Countries form their aims for their educational systems based on their own social realities, historical backgrounds and educational philosophies (Akın, 2018). The Turkish educational system has democratic, modern, secular and coeducation characteristics. The aims of the system are to increase the prosperity and welfare of Turkish citizens and society, to support and accelerate economic, social and cultural development in accordance with national unity and integrity, and to make the Turkish Nation a constructive, creative and distinguished partner of contemporary civilisation (MoNE, 2001). The aims and principles of Turkish National Education, defined by the Basic Law of National Education number 1739, are as follows (OECD, 2005);

“To raise individuals who are committed to Atatürk's reforms and principles, his concept of nationalism as defined in the Constitution; who adopt, protect and improve the national, moral, human, spiritual and cultural values of the Turkish nation; who love and always elevate their families, homeland and nation; who are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the Turkish Republic- which is a democratic, secular and social state ruled by law based on human rights and the basic principles defined in the beginning of the Constitution- and behave accordingly; to bring up individuals who physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and emotionally have a moderate and healthy personality and mentality, independent and scientific thinking power, a wide world view; who respect human rights, appreciate enterprise and individuality; who feel responsibility towards the society; and who are constructive, creative and productive; and to prepare individuals for life by ensuring that they have professions which will make them happy and contribute to the welfare of the society through equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and habit of working cooperatively in line with their own interests, talents and abilities. Thus, the aim is to promote the welfare and happiness of the citizens and Turkish society, to support and accelerate economic, cultural and social development in national unity and cohesion, and finally to make the Turkish Nation a constructive, creative and distinguished partner of contemporary civilization.”

As we know, the smallest unit of the educational organization is the school. The head of this unit is the school principal. The school principal is the leader of the interior elements that will keep the school's goals alive (Bursalıoğlu, 1984). The school principal should know the contribution made by the school that he/she manages to the education system as well as realize the goals of the education

system and school with faith (Teyfur, 1995). School principals are expected to have goals and work in line with the main aims and principles of Turkish National Education.

Educational objectives are defined as desirable features that we find appropriate in the person we grow; they can be gained through education (Ertürk, 1972). The student is the reason for the school's existence. The school aims to educate students as good citizens and members of society. Effective schools focus on all students gaining a set of basic skills (Şişman ve Turan, 2005). Between a national department of education and its smallest unit of operation (the classroom) are many layers and actors. Schooling systems have a number of different, interacting fields of interest. These cut across each other in ways that are not always co-ordinated or predictable (Eryaman, 2007; Christie, Sullivan, Duku & Gallie, 2010). The policies, decisions, leadership capacity and practices of the Ministry of National Education, the decisions and practices of provincial national education directorates and district education directorates, the socio-economic characteristics of families, the decisions and actions of teachers' professional organizations, the physical conditions of the school, the learning climate and culture in the school, the individual teachers and factors such as their capacities and professional qualifications, curricula, in-class teaching practices, and the quality of measurement and evaluation exams have the potential to affect learning outcomes in schools. However, the school principal has a decisive role in organizing the interaction of all these factors and creating a better learning environment for students (Karip, 2018).

Schools are complex organizations. School principals have a wide variety of roles within this organizational structure. School principals are expected to shape the school's relationships with teachers, parents, students and many other elements, provide all the necessary resources and environments for offering educational services at the school, and produce different solutions to the problems they face. In fact, all attitudes of the school principals can be identified with the school. For this reason, school management is an indispensable and highly serious subject in education services (Bingül & Hacifazlıoğlu, 2011). School principals' roles are also identified by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), as school principals exhibit leadership in the education and training of teachers, students, parents and the environment, develop productivity, build team spirit, integrate the school with the environment, develop the corporate culture, and make the school ready for service. Scientific and technological developments constantly improve the school in line with the principles of efficiency and transparency, and use the time and all facilities to accomplish the school's goals (MoNE, 2013). According to NASSP (2007), a school principal is expected to be a visionary, a teaching leader, an expert in evaluation, a disciplinarian and a public relations expert, as well as to perform many roles, such as analyzing budgets, managing events and special programs, and forming relationships with the community. Many researchers list the different roles that school principals play. Başaran (2000) pointed out that the school principal carries out the following tasks in the educational organization. He/she: 1. manages the functions of educational administration, educational programs, student affairs, budgetary affairs and general services to realize the school's organizational and educational objectives; and 2. plans management work and operations for effective training management; organizes and coordinates all the resources and powers of the school; engages in effective communication with the employees of the school; controls actions, work and operations to ensure that they do not distort the school's objectives; and ensure the school's effective operation. On the other hand, Taymaz (2007) stated that school principals manage staff, student affairs, instructional facilities, school finance and educational activities. Murphy (1990) classified their roles into four broad types of activity: mission and goals, processes of learning and teaching, climate for learning and supportive environment.

In Turkey, school principals are appointed according to the MoNE Administrative Appointment Regulation. According to the appointment regulations, those who have served at least two years as a teacher can be appointed assistant principal. Candidates who want to be appointed principal should meet at least one of the following conditions: a) have served as a principal, b) have worked for at least one year as a founder principal, deputy principal or assistant principal or c) have served as a branch manager or in a higher position in the Ministry. Candidates are appointed principals

based on a ratio of 60% of their written exam scores and 40% of their oral exam scores on examinations administrated by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2018).

Various factors affecting their choice of profession. Generally, if the individual thinks that the work will meet his/her individual needs, he/she is willing to do it. One of the most important prerequisites for the promotion of school management is that the teacher wants to be an administrator and finds himself/herself suitable for the profession (Çalık & Tüzel, 2014; Tüzel, 2014). To be functional, to achieve the objectives and to ensure quality in education, it is important that the "directorate" be a desired and expected task in schools (Altınışik, 1995). In other words, the principal's desires and the reasons for climbing the administrative ladder are important in terms of achieving the goals of education and of the school. According to Kaya (1986), as the head of a school, the school principal is responsible for the school's success in line with the expectations regarding general education policies, development plans and modern education. Thus, the most important person in terms of success and achieving the goals of the school is the school principal. The primary task of school principals is to achieve the goals of the schools which they attended. Each school principal must determine the school's specific codes of practice, which are believed to be important for the school, and the school culture is shaped according to their leadership (Çelikten, 2006).

In addition, the school principals' personal characteristics are important factors in creating a healthy school environment and ensuring school success. Success is inevitable if managers are sensitive to people, are able to influence their colleagues and students, are able to encourage the opinions of different groups in decision-making and use the information they learn (Korkmaz, 2005). In this context, it can be said that the reasons why school principals want to become principals, their goals for their schools and how they want to promote their schools in the community are very important in shaping their schools' character and affecting their schools' success.

Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to determine newly appointed school principals' reasons for becoming principals and the goals and expectations with respect to their schools. To achieve this aim, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are newly appointed school principals' reasons for becoming principals?
2. What are the most important goals of newly appointed school principals with respect to their schools?
3. How do newly appointed school principals expect their schools to be recognized in the community?

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach. "Qualitative research is designed to explore a problem and develop a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. It states the purpose and research questions in a general and broad way so as the participants' experiences and analyses the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings" (Creswell, 2012: 16).

Participants

The study group consists of 40 newly appointed school principals in a province in the Black Sea Region in Turkey. The demographic characteristics of the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographics		N
Gender	Female	2
	Male	38
Age (years old)	30 - 35	7
	36 - 40	11
	41 - 45	8
	46 - 50	11
	51 - 55	2
	56 - 60	1
Marital status	Married	40
	Bachelor	-
	Widowed/divorced	-
School grade (for which they were newly appointed as principal)	Preschool	1
	Primary school	9
	Secondary school	17 (General school: 14; Religious school: 2; Boarding school: 1)
	High school	13 (General high school: 7; Science high school: 1; Anatolian high school: 1; Multi-program high school: 1; Vocational high school: 2; Religious high school: 1)
Teaching branch	Primary school teaching	8
	Turkish/Turkish language and literature	8
	Religion and ethics	6
	Mathematics	3
	Social studies	3
	History	3
	Electrical/electronic	2
	Other	7 (Science: 1; Preschool: 1; Physics: 1; Technology design: 1; English: 1; Physical education: 1; Chemistry: 1)
Professional experience (years)	Less than 10	5
	11 - 15	14
	16 - 20	4
	21 - 25	12
	26 - 30	2
	Over 31	3
Graduated faculty type	Institute of education	2
	Higher teacher education school	3
	Faculty of education	17
	Faculty of art and science	11
	Other	7 (Faculty of divinity: 6; Open education faculty: 1)

As seen in Table 1, while two of the principals are female, 38 of them are male. Their ages range between 30 and 60. All of them are married. Seventeen were appointed as principal of a secondary school, 13 as principal of a high school, nine as principal of a primary school and one as principal of a preschool. Eight of them are in the branch of primary school teaching, eight are in the branch of Turkish/Turkish literature, six are in the branch of religion and ethics, three are in the branch of mathematics, three are in the branch of history, two are in the branch of electrical/electronics and seven are in other branches. Fourteen of them have 11-15 years of professional experience, 12 have between 21-25 years, five have less than 10 years and three have over 31 years. Seventeen of them graduated from a faculty of education, 11 graduated from a faculty of art and science, three graduated from a higher teacher education school, two graduated from an institute of education and seven graduated from a faculty other than faculties or schools of education.

Data Collection Tools

The research data were collected through semi-structured interview forms that were applied at the beginning of the academic year during the pre-service training of 40 school principals assigned as managers for the first time in a province in the Black Sea region in Turkey in 2015-2016 educational year.

During data collection, participants were asked to complete the tool, which had two parts. The first part sought information about the participants' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, school grade, teaching branch, professional experience and graduated faculty type. In the second part of the tool, the participants were asked to fill in the blanks of three questions: "1. I wanted to be a school principal because...", 2. "I expect that the school to which I was appointed will be recognized as ... in the school district." and 3. "My most important goal/goals for the school to which I was appointed is/are...".

After the questions were established in the data collection tool, two educational management field experts, two school principals and one assessment field expert were presented to the opinion and the questions were finalized the questions. All experts in the opinion stated that the questions asked were adequate and understandable.

Data Analysis

A qualitative research method and content analysis technique were used for data analysis. First, all the data collected from the school principals were evaluated and codes were formed by bringing together similar expressions. The codes were put together and themes were determined.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the identified codes and themes were submitted to two educational management field experts with the request that these experts examine the codes and themes for conformity and expression. In line with the opinions of field experts, the codes and themes are given as final versions.

Results

Participants' Reasons for Becoming School Principals

The first question in the study sought to determine the reasons why first-time principals sought to become principals. To that end, school principals were asked to fill in the blank in the sentence, "I wanted to be a school principal because..." The findings with respect to the participants' answers to this question are given below.

Table 2 Themes and Codes for Participants' Reasons for Becoming School Principals (n=40)

Themes	Codes	f
Educational ideals and goals (n=16)	To realize my goals and ideals about education	6
	To create a reputable/successful school	2
	To serve society	2
	To apply my projects	2
	To grow the next generation	1
	To make a cultural contribution to children	1
	To add a different vision to education	1
	To give opportunity to teachers	1
Self-competence and skill perception (n=13)	I like to manage and lead	3
	I wanted to apply my experience	3
	I think I will be useful	2
	The children/school need me	2

	I like organization	1
	I think I will be efficient	1
	Being a principal is more suitable for me than teaching	1
Personal and professional development (n=6)	For my personal development and career	2
	To realize myself	1
	I have enough knowledge and skills	1
	I felt ready	1
	I have spent enough time as an assistant principal	1
Criticism and negative experiences (n=5)	I'm sick of the negative behavior of previous school principals	2
	To protest the poor practices of school management	1
	I saw that problems were not being solved in schools	1
	I'm sick of routine/classic school principals	1
Total		40

As seen from Table 2, the participants expressed 40 different reasons for becoming school principals, grouped under four different themes. Most of the reasons are about educational ideals and goals (n=16); next is self-competence and skill perception (n=13), personal and professional development (n=6) and criticism and negative experiences (n=5). According to these results, the most important factor affecting participants' desire to become school principals is the educational goals they want to achieve. On the other hand, it can be seen that self-confidence and competence perceptions have a significant impact on choice of profession. Also, the negative experiences that newly appointed principals experienced in managerial issues in the past had a significant effect on their choice to become school principals.

Participants' Most Important Goals for Their Schools

The second question of the research sought to determine the most important goals of newly appointed school principals with respect to their schools. To that end, school principals were asked to fill in the blank in the sentence, "My most important goal/goals for the school to which I was appointed is/are...". The findings with respect to the participants' answers to this question are given below.

Table 3 Themes and Codes for Participants' Most Important Goals for Their Schools (n=40)

Themes	Codes	f
To improve student qualification (n=23)	Growing students who adopt national values	4
	Growing moral and virtuous students	4
	Preparing students well for life	3
	Growing happy students	2
	Helping students discover their abilities	2
	Growing people who love their country	2
	Growing productive students/individuals	1
	Growing confident students/individuals	1
	Growing reputable students	1
	Growing well-cultured students	1
	Giving students different perspectives	1
	Growing self-sufficient students/individuals	1
To improve student success (n=22)	Improving academic achievement and growing successful students	20
	Giving a good professional orientation to students	2
Relations with stakeholders (n=14)	Improving school-parent-student relations	6
	Creating a school with happy stakeholders	5
	Breaking negative judgments of the school district towards school	1
	Enabling stakeholders to express themselves	1
	Encouraging participation of stakeholders in management	1

School qualification/climate (n=13)	Creating a school rich in social activities	5
	Creating a safe/peaceful school environment	2
	Creating a clean/hygienic school	1
	Creating an effective school culture	1
	Making students see school as their home	1
	Solving school problems	1
	Creating an environment of love/respect in school	1
	Establishing a good communication environment in school	1
Social benefit (n=7)	Creating a school which is useful to society	3
	Increasing the schooling rate	1
	Making the school a social center	1
	Reducing absenteeism in school	1
	Creating a good model for other schools	1
Prestige (n=4)	Being the preferred school in the school district	2
	Being a school that makes a difference	2
Total		83

As seen from Table 3, the participants had 83 different goals for their schools, grouped under six different themes. Most of their goals for their schools are about student qualification (n=23); next is success (n=22), relations with stakeholders (n=14), school qualification/climate (n=13), social benefit (n=7) and prestige (n=4). It can be said that the most important goal of newly appointed school principals is to increase student success and grow them as good citizens. As seen from the results, the most important goals of newly appointed school principals are to improve student achievement and qualification. Therefore, it can be said that the goals of the school principals and the main objectives of education overlap with each other.

Participants' Expectations About Their Schools' Recognition in the School District

The third question of the research sought to determine, "How do newly appointed school principals expect their schools to be recognized in the community?" To that end, school principals were asked to fill in the blank in the sentence, "I expect that the school to which I was appointed will be recognized as ... in the school district." The findings with respect to the participants' answers to this question are given below.

Table 4 Themes and Codes for Participants' Expectations About Their Schools' Recognition in the School District (n=40)

Themes	Codes	f
Successful (n=15)	Successful	12
Competitive (n=8)	Preferred	3
	Model school	2
	Leading school	1
	Number one	1
	Unique	1
Quality (n=6)	Quality	3
	Reputable	3
People-oriented (n=6)	Respectful to stakeholders	3
	Beloved by students	1
	Full of love for students	1
	Happy	1
Open to development (n=5)	Visionary	3
	Innovative	2
Beneficial (n=4)	Producer	2
	Beneficial to society	1
	Enlightening society	1

Social focus (n=3)	Attraction point Social center	2 1
Safe (n=3)	Safe	3
Well-managed (n=1)	Well-organized	1
Total		48

As seen from Table 4, the participants have 48 different expectations about their schools' recognition, grouped under nine different themes. Most of their expectations about their schools' recognition in the school district are as successful (n=12); next is competitive (n=8), quality (n=6), people-oriented (n=6), open to development (n=5), beneficial (n=4), social focus (n=3), safe (n=3) and well-managed (n=1). According to these results, it can be said that newly appointed school principals mostly want their schools to be seen as making a difference due to success and quality as compared to other schools in the school district.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results, the participants' primary reason for becoming school principals is to achieve their educational ideals and goals. They also sought to become principals because of their beliefs regarding self-competence and skill perception, to ensure personal and professional development and because of their previous negative experiences at school. It is possible to say that the various situations that school principals encountered during the period when they worked as teachers or/and assistant principals played a decisive and shaping role in determining the reasons why they wanted to become school principals. Similar results are observed in different research. According to Günay and Özbilen's (2018) research, school managers stated that they wanted to be school managers because they had experience with management, considered their communication skills to be strong, had taken career steps in management and believed the position of school manager would satisfy them professionally. Erginer ve Köse (2011) found that school principals' reasons for becoming principals could be broken down into two different themes: social factors (being a social/popular person, not being able to deny the requests of top managers, being useful to people, engaging in teamwork) and personal factors (being at the top of the career ladder, doing more important work, transferring their experiences, applying modern management concepts and implementing their own truth). Tüzel (2014) determined that the factors affecting willingness to become a school manager were working conditions, the position's effects on personal/life balance, self-competence and belief in success, and the status and gains provided to managers. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) determined four major themes influencing practitioners' growth towards becoming principals: role conceptualization of principalship, initial socialization into a new community of practice, role-identity transformation and purposeful engagement based on career aspirations. Also, Hancock, Black and Bird (2006) determined that personal/professional benefit/gain and leadership motivate teachers to transition into administration. In their research, Pounder and Merrill (2001) found that reasons for becoming a school principal were as follows: subjective factor, which is about achieving and improving education; work factor, which is about the additional time demands of the job; and objective factor, which is about the salary and benefits.

Karip (2018) pointed out that the development of students' well-being and learning should be the focus of all arrangements, administrative work and educational work carried out in a school. The results of this research show that the most important goal of newly appointed school principals is to improve student achievement and qualification. Also, Erginer and Köse (2012) focused attention on different research showing that achieving and improving education, taking on leadership roles, making an effective and exemplary school, making a difference to students and making school attractive are other reasons for becoming a school principal. According to Bamberg and Andrews's (1991) research on 10 high-achieving and 10 low-achieving schools, no clear differences are evident in terms of the official goals selected by schools, though differences do appear when the operative goals are analyzed.

Specifically, the evidence suggests that high-achieving schools emphasize goals stressing academic excellence to a greater degree than do low-achieving schools. Therefore, an overlap can be observed in terms of principals' individual goals and the official goals of school/education that are important for achieving school success.

The critical role of school principals is important for improving the effectiveness of a school and the quality of teaching (Balyer, 2013). The results of Babaođlan, Nalbant and elik's (2017) research show that, according to teachers, school principals' leadership and the organization of the school's work are among the most important factors affecting the success of that school. Motivating teachers and students, preparing the physical environment of the school and principals' positive communication with others are other factors that positively affect the success of schools. In this research, newly appointed school principals' most important goals for their schools include establishing good relations with stakeholders, improving their schools' qualification and establishing a good school climate. As Bilge (2013) pointed out, the purpose of a school is to prepare students for life and to help them achieve success. The success of a school and its principal can be measured only by student success. If the students succeed, the school and the school principal succeed. If the students fail, the school and the school principal are considered unsuccessful. The results of this research show that participants want their schools to be recognized as successful, competitive and high-quality in their school districts. The participants also expect their schools to be known as people-oriented. Therefore, it is possible to say that, in achieving school success, school principals care about relationships with stakeholders and students within the school.

It is possible to say that determining the goal is the first step to achievement. However, it is also important to determine whether the goals have been achieved. This research investigated newly appointed school principals' reasons for becoming principals, as well as their goals and their expectations of their schools, before they started working as school principals. Researchers who investigate the same subject may be advised to determine whether school principals have achieved their goals and expectations.

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