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Kamil Yıldırım 
Aksaray University, Turkey

Şenyurt Yenipınar 
Aksaray University, Turkey

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Examining the Role of Contextual Conditions and Leadership Status of School Principals from Multiple Perspectives

Kamil Yıldırım, Şenyurt Yenipınar

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Abstract

Context and leadership actions are closely related, and international research still contains little knowledge about which contextual conditions lead to which type of leadership action. In this study, school administrators' leadership was evaluated through multiple perspectives. The experiences of teachers, vice principals, supervisors, and school principals were examined by means of external, internal, and self-evaluations. We collected data from 25 participants using a semi-structured interview method and examined it with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. As a result of the study, the contextual factors formed by national and local factors as obstacles and facilitators of school principals' leadership were revealed. We discussed the leadership actions regarding the theoretical, operational, and functional dimensions of school leadership.

Introduction

Because leadership is regarded as one of the most important components of fulfilling individual and organizational objectives in the field of administration, the issue of strengthening leaders and leadership is still under discussion (Bush, 2018; Harris & Lambert, 2003). School administration is a dynamic field that requires decision-making and implementation. Regulations determining school principals' duties and responsibilities cannot define all conditions in schools beforehand; therefore, school principals have to do leadership actions (Schleicher, 2018). Leadership ability in school administration is one of the main competencies that prospective and current school principals should have (Aslan & Karip, 2014; Bush & Coleman, 2008). However, the formal position of school principals does not guarantee their leadership status. Therefore, all school principals are not school leaders. A school principal's leadership (SPL) qualities, as compared to daily routine managerial activities, include setting difficult goals, leading school community towards these goals, coping with uncertainties, creating a convenient environment and school culture, and making an effort to develop the whole school community (Aslan & Karip, 2014; Bush, 2018; Cerit & Yıldırım, 2017; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Viennet & Pont, 2017; Yukl, 2010).

Leadership, as a historically evolving concept, is a complicated and multidimensional phenomenon (Bush & Coleman, 2008). In terms of historical development, leadership theories can be categorized into four sequencing perspectives: *trait theories* (personal characteristics, big five personality, emotional intelligence) (1940s),

behavioural theories (employee-oriented, task-oriented) (1960s), *contingency and interactive theories* (1990s), and *contemporary approaches* (2000s), including transformational leadership theory. More generally, trait and behavioural theories are considered classical and the others modern (Robbins & Judge, 2015). Bass and Bass (2008) stressed that leadership is a combination of different competencies.

Furthermore, in multi-factor leadership theory, they emphasized leadership that considers *transformation*, *interaction*, and *independence*. Bolman and Deal (2003) suggested a multi-leadership approach considering administrative dimensions and synthesizing different leadership approaches, namely, *structural* (organization-planning), *humanitarian* (interaction with employees), *political* (power dynamics), and *symbolic* (cultural) perspectives. According to this approach, a school principal who utilizes these four perspectives accordingly reflects effective leadership (Al-Omari, 2013). Fiedler (1967) argues that leadership cannot be explained with a single dimension and that personal characteristics, behaviours and conditions shape leadership with a complex interaction. Recent studies emphasized the contextual condition as a factor affecting leadership (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Kondakçı & Sivri, 2014; Schwarz & Brauckmann, 2015). Investigating leadership practices under different contextual conditions may contribute to the evolving process of leadership knowledge (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Da'as, 2017). In this regard, it is necessary to examine SPL considering the contextual conditions to improve school leadership.

The role of context in SPL must still be studied, as suggested by recent studies (Agasisti, Bowers, & Soncin, 2019; Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Lorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado, & Navarro-Granados, 2019). The main body of literature on SPL focuses on leadership styles such as instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership (Akar & Ustuner, 2019; Buluç, 2009). It also includes the relationships between SPL styles and demographic variables, performance and teacher motivation, etc. (Aydın & Sarier, 2014; Cemaloğlu, 2007; Cerit & Yıldırım, 2017; Korkmaz, 2007). On the other hand, some studies directly examined the effect of contextual factors. For instance, Brauckmann and Schwarz (2014) discovered the importance of contextual factors to the professional development of school principals. They emphasized that along with the new governance approach, increased autonomy demands new tasks from school principals. This is a challenging contextual issue. School principals have limited authority to determine the context which directly affects their leadership but they can manage this context. Therefore, school principals can show different leadership actions under different contextual conditions (Pashiardis, Brauckmann, & Kafa, 2018).

However, there is no prescription for controlling the effects of context. Schwarz and Brauckmann (2015), who studied the effect of contextual conditions on leadership, found that despite the high performance of school principals in disadvantaged schools, they had less leadership satisfaction. This indicates that the context and SPL interact in a complex way. When we move to a different context, we can see different results. Demirtaş and Küçük (2014) found that school principals' leadership practices did not receive equal attention despite the rhetoric about its importance. It is also understood that leadership practices in schools are quite problematic and are not demanded (Şahin & Temizel, 2007). Therefore, under these conditions, SPL would be restricted. Studies on SPL indicated that recruiting and supporting mechanisms at the national level, personal characteristics, near socio-economic environment of the school, etc. seem to affect SPL actions (Church, 2014; Demirtaş & Küçük,

2014; Gündüz & Balyer, 2012; Lorent-Bedmar et al., 2019; Sancar, 2012). However, international research still requires evidence about the interaction between contextual conditions and leadership actions (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Da'as, 2017).

Contextual matters consist of national, local, and even cultural backgrounds. Education management at the national level, including autonomy and accountability mechanisms, can directly affect SPL actions (Schleicher, 2018). School principal preparation programs (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020) and recruitment and assignment mechanisms are among these factors. At the local level, the socio-economic conditions of the near environment, parental involvement, student characteristics, and interventions by the unions and political bodies all have the potential to affect SPL actions (Lorent-Bedmar et al., 2019). How these prospective factors affect SPL practices requires deep and comprehensive investigation. The Turkish context has some characteristics that are different from those of the western world. Schools have very limited autonomy in a highly centralized education system, which follows regulations formalized by the minister and his team. The ministry, regional directorates, and local directorates are hierarchically organized and school principals are seen as representatives of this structure at school. School management happens as an additional task of a teacher. Candidates complete a national-level examination and a local-level interview.

In the selection process, local political authorities and teachers unions play an active role. The selected teacher has a four-year period as school principal. If s/he performs well, a new period might start with the consent of the local authority, which is appointed by the government. On the other hand, Turkey is a member of international organizations such as OECD and EC. Therefore, global educational developments including leadership theories reflect on the Turkish educational community (EURYDICE, 2020; TEDMEM, 2020). The nature of school and the improvement of leadership theories force school principals to engage in leadership. However, limited school autonomy and a susceptible position prevent school principals from doing this. Under these contextual conditions, SPL seems to be a controversial phenomenon. The current study on SPL in this particular context may contribute to leadership studies. This study provides both SPL actions and their background related to the characteristics of a very different context based on the participants' experiences.

The other side of the matter is related to the methodology. A one-dimensional perspective such as the profession of specialty variable (e.g. teachers) is regarded as a source for bias (Akar & Ustuner, 2019; Sezer, 2018). Kaiser, Hogan, and Craig (2008) stated that evaluators' superior and inferior positions influence their evaluations. Also, there are distinct differences in the results derived from both the quantitative and qualitative research designs. According to Gronn and Ribbins (1996), the positivist approach is not adequate to obtain valid findings. Instead, they consider the contextual conditions to find more valid results. The studies that used the survey method indicate positive results (Akar & Ustuner, 2019; Buluç, 2009; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019; Sancar, 2012). On the other hand, the opposite findings are revealed in qualitative research studies (Gündüz & Balyer, 2012; Demirtaş & Küçük, 2014). The results of the studies demonstrate that discussions of SPL are still maintaining the current reality, and its contextual conditions must be comprehensively examined. The studies involving educators, who closely observe SPL and work in different positions and experience this phenomenon, can

contribute to the fields of research and application by identifying SPL acting and the factors limiting their leadership behaviors. In line with this aim, the current study sought to answer the following questions:

- i)* What are the experiences of educators (teachers, vice principals, supervisors, and school principals) with regard to SPL practices?
- ii)* What are the factors influencing SPL practices?
- iii)* How can the factors influencing SPL practices be classified?
- iv)* How can SPL behaviors be evaluated according to the leadership theories?

Method

Design

The qualitative research method was used to examine SPL in contextual conditions based on the experiences of educators (teachers, vice principals, supervisors, and school principals) and the study was conducted according to the heuristic approach in phenomenology research design (Merriam, 2015; Patton, 2015). In this study, the phenomenon of SPL was determined considering the perceptions of experiences of teachers, vice principals, supervisors, and school principals through data triangulation. The results, associated with the researcher's experiences in accordance with the phenomenological hermeneutic approach, were discussed by comparing the findings in the literature, and suggestions were put forward.

Study Groups

This study focused on SPL. However, teachers, vice principals, supervisors, and school principals participated to make sense of their experiences with regard to leadership at their schools. The participants described their experiences with a school principal they had known or observed rather than with a particular school director. The vice principals had a chance to closely and continuously observe their school principal, as well as to compare their own school principal with the others. Furthermore, since they have the opportunity to become a principal in the future, it can be thought that they internally evaluate the leadership practices of current school principals. As teachers are subjected to the leadership practices of their principals, they are in a position to evaluate their leadership actions. The supervisors have experience in supervising school administration and their contributions are considered helpful for this study. They are seen as observers outside the school and, owing to their specialty, have an opportunity to inspect, compare, and determine the effectiveness of SPL practices across provinces, regions, and the whole country.

Principals are in a position to evaluate both themselves and other school principals. In this context, the perceptions of different agents within and outside of schools were derived. The participants were selected by using purposeful sampling and maximum variation methods (Patton, 2015). The aim was to collect comprehensive data by choosing participants such as school principals, vice principals, and supervisors who had taken the leadership course. The study group consisted of 25 participants. Five of them were school principals, five were vice principals, 10 were teachers, and five were supervisors. The participants worked in different-sized schools at different levels, such as pre-school, primary school, secondary school, and high school. The

participants also worked in schools located in the villages and city center of Aksaray Province. Five supervisors worked in different regions and provinces of Turkey. This sample size for the phenomenological study was sufficient (Patton, 2015). The school principals were male. They were 36-56 years old and had 6-20 years of job seniority. The school principals worked in primary schools, social sciences high schools, and Anatolian high schools, respectively.

Two female and three male vice principals participated in this study. The vice principals were 41-50 years old. All of them had 1-5 years of administrative experience. They worked in primary schools, social sciences high schools, vocational and technical high schools, and Anatolian high schools. Five female and five male teachers participated in this study. They had 4-20 years of job seniority. Two of them worked in primary schools, six of them worked in secondary schools and others worked in Anatolian high schools and science and art centres, respectively.

Data Collection Process and Data Collection Tool

Data triangulation was ensured in this study. According to Patton (2015), data triangulation can be conducted in four ways: using a variety of data sources, providing a variety of researchers, consulting a variety of theories, and utilizing multiple analysis methods. Principals, vice principals, teachers, and supervisors participated in this study to ensure a variety of data resources. The fact that the study was conducted by two researchers and that any interpretation was avoided according to personality tendencies met the second condition for the variety of data sources. In the context with the variety of theories, we interpreted the data by using sequentially organized leadership theories (trait, behavioural, contingency, and contemporary, represented by transformational leadership theory) (Bush, 2018; Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012; Yukl, 2010).

It was determined that the most appropriate data collection technique for obtaining participants' experiences was the interview (Ruzgar, 2018). An interview form was designed before the interviews were conducted. In this process, the perceptions of an academician, a supervisor, and a school principal who were not participants in this study were obtained. The interview form consisted of three parts. In the "Information and Consent" part, the participants were asked to give their consent to participate in the study; they were provided with information concerning the purpose of the study, the usage of the collected data, and the confidentiality, coding, and ethics of the study. In the second part, the participants were asked to provide their demographic information. In the third part, questions were posed to the participants: "What are your experiences concerning SPL?", "According to you, what factors influence SPL?" and "What do you suggest to support SPL?" Additionally, during the interviews to reveal their experiences and elicit further information, the participants were asked questions such as "Can you give examples of the circumstances in which the principal displayed leadership practices?", "Can you give concrete factors affecting leadership?", and "Can you give information about the results of this circumstance?"

Researchers played a role in improving the validity and reliability of the study by asking clarifying questions, making interviewees' explanations clearer, transforming their genuine intentions into the right concept, and

defining and explaining the concepts for them. The participants' preferences for written or oral responses to the questions were taken into account. As they did not provide consent for sound and video recording, their experiences were transcribed. The interviews were conducted in accordance with the interview principles stated by Patton (2015). The interviews were mostly carried out at the schools and at teachers' houses on dates determined in line with the participants' preferences. During the interviews, participants had a copy of the interview form and the researcher posed the questions. The responses were transcribed by the other researcher and an independent expert. An interview lasted about 70-90 minutes. These transcriptions were compared and a common form was created. The participants were asked to check their responses. In this way, their responses were confirmed.

Data Analysis

Multiple analysis methods were implemented through direct quotations, which were used to illustrate and support the findings, and the quantification (frequency) of the codes which were repeated by the participants. The data was saved in Microsoft processing software by the researchers. Each participant was provided with a code aligning with their professions (SP₁₋₅: School Principal; VP₁₋₅: Vice Principal; T₁₋₁₀: Teacher; S₁₋₅: Supervisor). Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were conducted in the content analysis of the data. The researchers firstly worked together during the coding process and came up with a common approach by examining an interview form from each participant group. Then they carried out open coding in the contents by working separately. Words, sentences, idioms, and so forth were considered to form the codes (Patton, 2015).

The coding for an interview transcription lasted about 90 minutes. As a result of the open coding treatment, the first researcher created 44 codes, whereas the second researcher created 41 codes. A comparison of the codes resulted in the reaching of an agreement on 36 codes. Cohen's Kappa values were calculated for the inter-rater reliability between the two coders. The common codes were indicated with the same numerical values, while the different codes were displayed, with the different codes evaluating each code that was determined in the classification scale. Table 1 reveals the analysis results. The index value for Kappa inter-rater reliability (K=0.801) indicates substantial agreement among the independent coders and elimination of the chance factor (0.80-1.00) (Cohen, 1960).

Table 1. Results about Agreement of Raters

| Measure of Agreement | Valid Cases | Value | Asymp. Std. Error ^a | Approx. T ^b | Approx. Sig. |
|----------------------|-------------|-------|--------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Kappa | 41 | .801 | .063 | 36.421 | .000 |

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

The findings were derived considering the agreements occurring among the codes and contents. In this process, similar codes and contents were combined and, accordingly, Table 2 was created. Also, important and remarkable responses which were thought to represent the findings were identified, to be used in the report in direct quotations.

Abstractions with different perspectives were conducted to obtain the findings for the sub-problems. Abstraction is the categorization of the mental impressions of the realities that present extremely scattered and complicated data for subjects. In this regard, abstraction is an essential intermediary step to making an object comprehensible for a subject. It consists of three steps: *recognition*, *application*, and *constitution* (Patton, 2015). This study employed three levels of abstraction.

First, the relations among the concepts (codes) were identified through open coding. Based on these relations, the sub-themes were reached through induction at the second level. At the third level, the sub-themes were grouped through a reference to the literature and were displayed in tables. The contextual findings were obtained with the analytical coding and the scope of the findings. The results were seen to be in parallel with the perceptions of the educators. They were also confirmed by two school administrators who had worked in administration positions and by an academician who had studied leadership issues.

In the classification of the leadership theories, the literature was reviewed, then four categories titled as trait, behavioral, structural and new applications were created (Bush, 2018; Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012; Yukl, 2010). In this process, the definitions of the above-mentioned theories and the codes created beforehand were matched with each other by the researchers. These matches were confirmed by an independent reviewer who earned his doctorate in the field of educational administration; the matches are displayed in Table 3. The researchers grouped the factors restricting SPL benefitting from the data in Table 2. This tentative classification was submitted to an independent reviewer who earned his doctorate in the field of educational administration and was not involved in any process of the current study. Following his confirmation of this classification, Table 4 was created.

Reliability and Consistency

The diversity of the participants, the agreement among the interview results, the direct quotations provided in the study, and the participants' confirmation of the data support the reliability of the study. The fact that the researchers have studied in the field of educational administration and have experience working as teachers, vice principals, directors, and supervisors in educational institutions, have studied in the field of administration, supervision, and leadership, and have interacted with teachers, administrators, and supervisors meets the criterion for long-time involvement in a setting, which is one of the primary principles of reliability. Also supporting the study's validity was the fact that the study provided direct quotations, that reviewers with PhD degrees in the field of educational administration evaluated the study, and that reflective thinking strategies were used. The approval of the results of the study by two school administrators who did not participate in the study and two faculty members who had studied on leadership supports the validity as well. Together, the researchers coded an interview form belonging to each participant group to develop a shared attitude, which supported internal reliability. The sharable interview transcriptions, the explanation of the data collection and analysis processes, and the statistical explanations to prevent biases are supporting aspects for consistency (Patton, 2015).

Findings

This part contains the findings regarding the study’s sub-problems. Table 2 was used to reach the findings. The summary of the contents, the owners of the contents, and the frequency of the codes are displayed in Table 2. Also, this table indicates the themes created based on the codes.

Table 2. Descriptions about School Principals’ Leadership Actions

| Theme | Code | Participants Codes* | <i>f</i> |
|---|---|---|----------|
| Leadership of School Principals | 1. Leadership complexity | SP ₁ , SP ₂ , SP ₃ , SP ₄ , VP ₁ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , T ₁ , T ₂ , T ₅ , T ₆ , T ₈ , T ₉ , T ₁₀ , S ₁ , S ₅ . | 23 |
| | 2. Leadership habitat | SP ₂ , T ₃ , T ₈ , S ₁ , S ₃ , S ₅ . | 9 |
| | 3. Inherent | VP ₁ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , T ₈ , T ₁₀ , S ₄ . | 8 |
| | 4. Perceptual | SP ₃ , SP ₄ , VP ₂ , VP ₃ , VP ₁ , T ₆ , T ₉ . | 8 |
| | 5. Ontological | SP ₁ , SP ₂ , SP ₅ , VP ₃ , VP ₄ , S ₄ . | 8 |
| | 6. Disregard personal development | SP ₁ , T ₁ , T ₉ , S ₁ , S ₃ . | 7 |
| | 7. Disregard leadership potential | SP ₁ , VP ₁ , VP ₃ , VP ₄ , S ₁ . | 6 |
| | 8. Not to enter the realm of acceptance | SP ₂ , SP ₃ , VP ₂ , S ₁ , S ₄ . | 5 |
| | 9. Personal benefits | SP ₃ , SP ₅ , T ₉ , T ₁₀ | 4 |
| | 10. Lack of demand | S ₁ , S ₅ . | 3 |
| Problems hindering leadership of principals | 11. Systemic problems | SP ₂ , SP ₃ , SP ₄ , SP ₅ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , T ₁ , T ₂ , T ₃ , T ₄ , T ₈ , T ₁₀ , S ₁ , S ₂ , S ₃ , S ₄ . | 20 |
| | 12. Environmental/Social problems | SP ₂ , SP ₃ , SP ₅ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , T ₂ , T ₃ , T ₇ , T ₈ , S ₁ , S ₂ , S ₃ . | 15 |
| | 13. Inability | SP ₁ , SP ₂ , SP ₃ , SP ₅ , VP ₂ , VP ₃ , VP ₄ , T ₂ , T ₈ , T ₁₀ , S ₁ , S ₃ , S ₄ . | 15 |
| | 14. Take no risk | SP ₁ , VP ₃ , T ₃ , T ₁₀ , S ₁ , S ₄ . | 9 |
| | 15. Political biased | SP ₁ , SP ₃ , VP ₁ , VP ₃ , S ₁ | 7 |
| | 16. Professional problems | SP ₁ , SP ₅ , T ₆ , S ₂ , S ₃ , S ₄ . | 7 |
| | 17. Local problems | SP ₁ , VP ₁ , S ₁ , S ₄ , S ₅ . | 5 |
| | 18. School culture | SP ₃ , T ₁₀ , S ₁ , S ₄ . | 4 |
| How to improve the leadership of principal | 19. Individual development | SP ₅ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , S ₂ , S ₃ , S ₄ . | 11 |
| | 21. Legal arrangements | SP ₂ , SP ₅ , VP ₁ , VP ₃ , VP ₄ , S ₄ . | 10 |
| | 20. Assign the capable person | SP ₂ , SP ₃ , VP ₁ , VP ₂ , VP ₄ , T ₉ , S ₄ . | 9 |
| | 22. Inspection | SP ₁ , SP ₄ , VP ₁ , VP ₄ , S ₂ , S ₄ . | 7 |
| | 23. Innovative practices | VP ₁ , VP ₂ , T ₃ , S ₄ . | 6 |
| | 24. Goal orientation | SP ₄ , SP ₅ , VP ₄ , S ₄ . | 4 |

*Abbreviations: SP (School principal), VP (Vice-principal), T (Teacher), S (Supervisor)

Educators' Experiences with School Principals' Leadership Practices

The findings for the first sub-problem were presented under three themes (see Table 2). The first theme, *SPL practices*, involved 10 codes. The most frequently emphasized codes were as follows: *leadership confusion; habitat for leadership; innate leadership trait; ignoring perceptual, ontological, and personal development; ignoring potential; non-acceptance; personal interests; and no desire for leadership*.

The most frequently cited code in the context of the study and sub-problem was *leadership confusion*. Although less than half of the teachers stated that the principal displays leadership, half of the supervisors and all the participants indicated that *principals cannot display leadership practices*. Direct quotations supporting this finding are as follows:

Unfortunately, the majority of the administrators appointed through the exams or different methods do not have leadership qualifications (VP₁). He/she does not give confidence to his/her employees, shuffling off all his/her responsibilities [and] making them sign the papers. To illustrate, when [it is desired that] a student ... be sent to the disciplinary board on account of cheating on an exam or guilt, the director says, "My teacher, we are in trouble, if you take the responsibility, write the petition and send the student to the disciplinary board and I do not interfere in this matter" (T₁₀).

The second most frequently emphasized code was *habitat for leadership*. Principals, teachers, and supervisors indicated their perceptions concerning this issue. They pointed out that the qualities of school stakeholders and the socio-economic and educational features of schools should be taken into account for principals to display leadership practices.

It was stressed that principals should have the necessary qualities in the school environments where they will work. It was also stated that principals who get low marks on evaluations for administrators' assignments and who are appointed to schools located in relatively low socio-economic and cultural environments cause problems. Some of the direct quotations that represent this finding are as follows:

As long as teachers, students, parents, and other employees do not want change at school, leadership cannot be conducted (SP₂). When there is not harmony between employees and administrators, principals cannot lead, though they want to do it (T₈). It is seen that incompetent administrators have difficulty in displaying leadership practices in environments where there are educated students' parents. On the other hand, those who have leadership characteristics fulfil their leadership in accordance with the objectives of their schools and education to the fullest extent (S₁). It is not taken into account whether the person who will be appointed to the director position will have the necessary qualifications (S₅).

The findings in the context of the first theme point out that the principal cannot effectively carry out leadership practices. Some participants stated that leadership is an innate trait and that it can be improved through education and personal development efforts. In this context, the following direct quotations were given:

Human nature includes leadership (VP₁). There are leaders [who are] born leaders. In this regard, they are extremely qualified. They do not need training. ...those leaders have most of these qualities. Thereafter, I believe that a good director, leaders could be thanks to training and personal development (V₂). They do not have to be gifted for their professions (SP₄).

Factors Influencing School Principals' Leadership Behaviors

The findings for the second sub-problem constituted the second theme. The key reasons not to lead leadership were *administration selection* and *training system*. It was found that those who have the potential for leadership cannot be selected and that the competencies of the administrators who work in their positions cannot be developed.

In this context, the codes created, from the most significant ones to the least significant ones, were: *systemic problems, environmental/social problems, incompetence, not taking risk, political favoritism, professional and duty problems, local problems, and school culture*. All the participant groups pointed out that the most important reason to limit leading leadership is *systemic problems*. The following direct quotations derived from the participants support this finding:

The reasons why the principal cannot lead leadership are, firstly, concerned with the system (VP₂). The most important factor to limit the principal's conduct [of] leadership is regulation because the most important element in leadership is to be able to create solutions for needs. The person who creates the best solution becomes a leader in his/her group. Unfortunately, such a process does not happen at schools. When you take initiatives which are not stated in the regulations, you are exposed to investigations. When we try to create solutions for the problems, our chiefs tell us "to obey the regulations or else you [will] undergo investigation." In that case, we deal with the chores we do not want to do (SP₂). There is a significant deficiency to prepare educational institutions and teachers for the future. I do not think that this stems from the principal. It is not possible to promote the quality of education for the future on account of the systemic structure and authorities (T₃). The principal cannot take the initiative to run their school owing to systemic problems and limitations. On account of the routine chores, the need to lead leadership decreases to a large extent. Instead of creating solutions for the problems, they are referred to the chief in authority (S₁).

All of the participant groups emphasized that *environmental/social problems* prevent the principal from leading leadership. The key direct quotations concerning this code are as follows:

The principal cannot solve even small incidents taking place at their schools on account of the environmental pressures (T₂). The reactions coming from the employees for whom the director is responsible sometimes affect his/her leadership. Leadership cannot be led owing to the top authorities or social pressures (T₈). Stakeholders not being able to unite in the school's goals; failure to evaluate the

feedbacks regarding the goals prevents being a strategic leader (SP₃). The director can quit leading leadership on account of having problems with the public or being the subject of gossip if we do something not convenient for the features of the working environment where we work (T₈).

The *incompetence* code predominantly involved the criticism that the candidates who have a potential for leadership are not appointed as principal. Among these criticisms, it is remarkable that *those who have a potential for leadership* are not intentionally selected. It was emphasized that the applications for administrator selection bring about this undesirable case.

In the current selection system for educational administrators, principals are not appointed on the basis of merit and competency and, therefore, internal and external stakeholders do not accept the appointed administrators as leaders. The principals' poor governance and communication skills and their inadequate training in these areas make them detract from leader positions to administrative positions (SP₃).

There is no criterion of "having leadership quality" in the conditions of assigning school principal. Therefore, the system is too late to understand whether the assigned principal has leadership quality (VP₄).

Owing to the mistakes made in the principal selection, those people with a leadership character cannot be selected. In my opinion, they are not selected on purpose. The right people with regard to personal characteristics are expected to be selected in interviews. However, we see that assigned people have weak characteristics. So that they fulfill everything by consulting the chief-administrators and they accept or refuse their teachers' petitions by approving of the chief-administrators. Actually, it is seen that there is no desire to appoint people with a leadership quality, a sense of self-confidence, and responsibility as administrators. Those administrators who use their authorities to the fullest extent and behave independently are not preferred much (S₁).

Classification of the Factors Influencing Leadership Behaviors

The sources of the problems that the principals encounter in leading leadership were classified under two themes, namely, systemic and human cases. In the context of the systemic cases, conceptual and systemic sub-themes were created. In terms of the second theme, social and personal sub-themes were formed. As seen in Table 3, the reasons preventing SPL stem mostly from systemic reasons.

The participant coded as SP₄ indicated this case as follows: *"Principals are not left [with] an area for their movements. An important decision is made for my school. However, in this process, my perception is not regarded and I am not informed about this decision, either."* Some of the systemic problems originate from the leadership concepts. The reasons concerned with human cases are less emphasized. In the context of the social and human sub-themes, both of these sub-themes are equally stressed. It can be deduced from the data that the systemic and human cases which prevent SPL happen at a close level to each other.

Table 3. Contextual Analysis of Leadership Hindrances

| Theme | Sub-theme | Code | <i>f</i> | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Systemic situations | Conceptual | 1. Ontological | 8 | |
| | | 2. Inheritance | 8 | |
| | | 3. Perceptual | 8 | |
| | Systemic | Systemic | 1. Systemic problems | 2 |
| | | | 2. Assign capable ones | 0 |
| | | | 3. Work conditions | 9 |
| | | | 4. Negligence individual development | 1 |
| | | | 5. Political biased | 0 |
| | | | 6. Inspection | 7 |
| 7. Professional conditions | | | 7 | |
| 8. Disregarding leadership potential | | | 7 | |
| 9. Refusing leadership | | | 6 | |
| Humanistic situations | Social | 1. Environmental/social problems | 3 | |
| | | 2. Leadership habitat | 5 | |
| | | 3. Realm of acceptance | 9 | |
| | | 4. Localisation | 5 | |
| | | 5. School culture | 5 | |
| | | 6. Goal orientation | 4 | |
| | Personal | Personal | 1. Practicing leadership | 2 |
| | | | 2. Incapability | 3 |
| | | | 3. Individual development | 1 |
| | | | 4. Refrain from risky | 7 |
| | | | 5. Innovativeness | 1 |
| | | | 6. Personal benefits | 1 |

Classification of the School Principals' Leadership Behaviors Based on the Leadership Theories

The classification in Table 4 was created as a result of matching the theories in the literature and the codes and contents which were formed in the current study. According to Table 4, most of the codes belong to the scope of contingency which is regarded among the contemporary theories. Two codes were indicated for new approaches under the same theme. There are four codes in the traits theory and three codes in the behaviourist theory. Based

on the data, it can be stated that the SPL types are densely grouped among the contemporary theories. The level of awareness concerning new approaches is low.

Table 4. Theoretical Analysis of Contextual Explanations of SPL

| Theme | Sub-theme | Code | <i>f</i> | |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Classic Theories | Leadership characteristics | 1. Inheritance | 8 | |
| | | 2. Incapability | 17 | |
| | | 3. Individual development | 11 | |
| | | 4. Refrain from risk | 9 | |
| | Leadership Behaviors | 5. Ontological | 8 | |
| | | 6. Personal benefits | 4 | |
| | | 7. Leadership practices | 23 | |
| Modern Theories | Contingency | 8. Disregard leadership potential | 6 | |
| | | 9. Perceptual | 8 | |
| | | 10. Acceptance realm | 5 | |
| | | 11. Individual development | 7 | |
| | | 12. Leadership habitat | 9 | |
| | | 13. Refuse leadership | 3 | |
| | | 14. Local issues | 5 | |
| | | 15. Political biased | 7 | |
| | | 16. Systemic problems | 20 | |
| | | 17. Professional problems | 7 | |
| | | 18. Environmental/social problems | 15 | |
| | | 19. Designing job conditions | 10 | |
| | | 20. Inspection | 7 | |
| | | 21. Assign capable candidates | 9 | |
| | | 22. Goal orientations | 4 | |
| | | Modern approaches | 23. School culture (transformational leadership) | 4 |
| | | | 24. Innovativeness (transformational leadership) | 6 |

Discussion

The primary finding of this study was that the SPL actions were not welcomed, so they were the causes of a very restricted context. This finding was emphasized through such dimensions as being incapable of determining schools' visions and aims, of making and applying decisions, and of creating change, as well as not having the right personality and effective communication skills. Although there are similar results in parallel with this finding in the literature (Cerit & Yıldırım, 2017; Demirtaş & Küçük, 2014; Gündüz & Balyer, 2012; Şahin & Temizel, 2007), on the contrary, studies are available to indicate that school principals have leadership features (Akar & Ustuner, 2019; Lorent-Bedmar et al., 2019; Sancar, 2012). To illustrate, the principals in some

studies perceive their competencies with regard to several leadership styles as being high, whereas the teachers' perceptions of their SPL competencies were low (Akar & Ustuner, 2019; Sezer, 2018). Another reason for the differences in these studies could be confusion between leadership and management position. As stressed by Bush (2018), leadership does not have a settled definition, which could lead people to confuse "management" and leadership concepts. Some participants in the current study used "management" and "leadership" concepts interchangeably. Aslan and Karip (2014) indicated that there is a conceptual uncertainty stemming from stakeholders' various expectations concerning principals' leadership. Also, it was frequently stated that the factors limiting leadership were *administrator selections, duties, and authorities*. This shows that the principals' leadership is directly associated with their administrative duties and that leadership is perceived as a dimension of governance duty. In fact, principals' positions in the hierarchical structure can be a significant opportunity, though this is not enough to be a leader (Akin, 2019; Bush, 2018). This result can be interpreted regarding contextual conditions as indicating that Turkish educators have not internalized the developmental stage of school leadership. Based on the definition of Schwarz and Brauckmann (2015), at the macro level, leadership has no legislative arrangement and there is not yet an established systemic infrastructure.

The transition from school management to school leadership is concerned with meeting schools' changing needs in addition to the practices for accountability and autonomy (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). As school administrations in Turkey are far removed from this situation (Kondakçı & Sivri, 2014; Yıldırım & Yenipinar, 2019), it can be argued that principals' inability to implement leadership actions is more associated with the contextual conditions rather than their personal qualities. It should be emphasized that any reference to leadership to support this assertion has not been made in the legal regulations related to educational administration (TEDMEM, 2020). School principalship is defined as 'the second duty' in the administrative regulations, which can frequently change according to political understanding and cannot be stated as being stable. Also, leadership potency and qualities are not sought in "the selection and evaluation for school principal" practices. Under such contextual conditions, the position of school principal is intended to be indicative of being the first among equal ones rather than a leader. Thus, the perception of the principal participants that "leadership is not desired" is in line with this assertion. School leadership practices are limited because the school administrators' practices are subject to the definitions and directions of their higher authorities in countries where management is based on a central and hierarchal structure. According to the new school governance approach, the principal should be able to make and implement autonomous decisions (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008; Schwarz & Brauckmann, 2015). The lack of legal power supporting principals' leadership leads to leadership practices that are perceived as personal and risky behaviour. For this reason, school principals might refrain from engaging in leadership. In addition, those teachers who have leadership qualities do not want to be administrators (Konan, Çetin, & Yılmaz, 2017). This contradicts the approach which indicates that the core quality influencing educational outputs is leadership (Bush, 2018). Therefore, there may be similar negative consequences such as deprivation of individual and social development that can be achieved through school (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Different leadership perceptions are evident between the participants who are educated and experienced in management and leadership and those who do not have these qualifications. While the supervisors and vice

principals stated that the principal cannot display leadership, the school principal participants granted the former perception. Some of the teacher participants who did not have experience and training in administration and leadership explained their experiences in the opposite manner. A similar result was found by Lorent-Bedmar et al. (2019) among Spanish teachers. There is a need for convincing studies, carried out using different methodologies, on teachers' perceptions of SPL. The common conceptual deficiency in SPL can be regarded as another conceptual matter because it can affect SPL. Therefore, educators should be informed about leadership and leaders' functions.

It is seen that developmental tendencies in leadership theories evolve from the traits approach to modern theories (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012; Yukl, 2010). This study found that the SPL cases are far from the contemporary level. The fact that some participants indicated that leadership is an innate quality supports this result. Also, the participants' perceptions are predominantly concentrated on the contingency approach. According to this approach, because contextual conditions have an impact on leadership performance (Bass & Bass, 2008; Fiedler, 1967; Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008), some regulations should be implemented to strengthen SPL in Turkey. In this respect, the most frequently mentioned issues can be cited as *administrator selection, training and evaluation practices, administrators' uncertain duties and roles, diversity in stakeholders' demands, political interferences, and inability to create a working team*. These issues are indicated in the other studies (Kayıkçı, Özdemir, & Özyıldırım, 2018; TEDMEM, 2020). These mentioned contextual factors are subject to the regulation of the ministry team. Thus, the implementations of the ministry team in relating to SPL can directly affect the improvement of SPL in Turkey. In this regard, the function of context in Turkey differs from the cases explained by recent studies (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Lorent-Bedmar et al., 2019).

The expression "as long as teachers, students, parents, and other employees do not want change, just administration, not leadership, can be conducted at that school" can be emphasized in the context of the habitat for leadership (Harris & Lambert, 2003). This study also supports the main hypothesis of Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory (1988). The term "performance readiness" in this theory refers to the audience's ability and willingness to carry out a particular task. In this regard, it can be deduced that the limiting impact of social and institutional culture can prevent the principals from commonly implementing modern leadership theories, as habits and culture are the most important guides for human life (Schein, 2010). This study determined that the most important issue shaping the habitat of leadership is the administrator selection and assignment system because the participants mostly stressed that administrators are not selected objectively and, therefore, are not supported by their school communities.

Yukl (2010) divided leadership qualities into three categories: technical, interpersonal, and conceptual. In this study, the participants put forward the interpersonal quality with regard to SPL. This was followed by the technical and conceptual dimensions. According to this finding, the first quality is the interpersonal quality, when leadership came to the participants' minds. While Schein (2010) stressed the importance of intimacy in the human dimension, Bolman and Deal (2003) indicated that one-dimensional leadership is not effective.

Kaiser, Hogan and Craig (2008) stated that the people-oriented approach is used when leaders have weak control over situations. On the other hand, those leaders who control situations put forward the technical and conceptual dimensions. In the current study, it is understood that those principals who have a limited impact on their employees in terms of the conceptual and technical aspects try to influence them through interpersonal aspects. Another reason for this issue can be a limitation of authority. The authority of administrators in low-level positions is very limited as compared to the authority of chief-administrators (Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Those principals with limited authority may have to use their interpersonal relations to ensure change and fulfill the objectives of their institutions. On the other hand, feelings, cognitive aspects, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship were not mentioned as affecting the others. It can be stated that instructional leadership in the conceptual dimension is ignored. The fact that principals cannot display leadership in the development of instruction can reveal that their interest or devoted time is very scarce. Attaching importance to the interpersonal dimension was indicated when the systemic obstacles were encountered. It can be stated that the interpersonal dimension was more frequently expressed than the systemic dimension. *Incompetency, not ensuring personal development, and environmental social problems* were the most frequently mentioned problems, and these problems negatively affect leadership. In the context of the systemic dimensions, the most commonly stated obstacles included *administrator selection and training system not being objective and valid, the chief-administrators' negative approach to leadership, bureaucratic centralization, political favoritism, the dysfunction of the control system with regard to determining and meeting performances, and principals' uncertain duties and authorities*. These results align with those in the literature (Kayıkçı, Özdemir, & Özyıldırım, 2018; TEDMEM, 2020). To illustrate, Aslan and Karip (2014) demonstrated that there are systemic limitations to school administrators' leadership in Turkey.

Suggestions

In the habitat of SPL, the goals oriented with human and social development are fulfilled. The goals apart from the aforementioned ones naturally limit SPL. Current and prospective school principals should gain relevant competencies to work in challenging contextual conditions. In this regard, an administrator selection, training, and development system should be arranged accordingly (Bush, 2018; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). The potency of leadership should be taken into account in the administrator selection and career system. Autonomy and accountability should be recognized on particular issues, and those administrators who display effective leadership under such contextual conditions should be supported (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Kondakçı & Sivri, 2014). Those teachers who are successful in strengthening instructional leadership could be encouraged to pursue school administration roles. In assigning the principal, harmony among candidate principals' qualities and the conditions of the schools and environments where they will work should be considered (habitat). It should be compulsory for candidate administrators to receive training on administration and leadership. The lack of such an infrastructure in the Turkish context is one of the main reasons for restricted SPL. Also, school administration should be arranged as a legal duty requiring specialization.

Contemporary leadership theories should be introduced to prospective administrators, teachers, and pre-service teachers. The exemplar school administrators could be assigned to places where they can display leadership

through best practices. The setting and networks should be created to enable principals and teachers to share their experiences concerning their professions.

Conclusions

This study displayed the fact that there are restricted contextual factors unlike those indicated by previous studies (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Ärlestig, 2020; Lorent-Bedmar, 2019; Schwarz & Brauckmann, 2015). The remarkable result in the *systemic dimension* is that the approaches and practices are concerned with the fact that principals are *not desired to display leadership*. This result can be interpreted as indicating that the social, cultural, and economic dynamics governing and directing the educational system are out of date. This case functions as a glass ceiling for SPL. While the contextual conditions prevent leadership invisibly in the background, the school community indicates that the main reason to not display leadership stems from personal and human factors. Actually, an evolution towards director leadership is observed in the contemporary world (Bush, 2018; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). It can be stated that the current principals do not have the qualities to conduct leadership, as the contextual factors limit personal development. This case is a vicious cycle for SPL. As a result of the complicated interaction of these two negative factors, school leadership implementations are limited (Middlewood & Lumby, 2007).

Limitations

The method is a matter that can affect the results of the studies on leadership. This study was carried out by qualitative method that can limit the results. Mixed method studies on leadership can provide more valid results. Furthermore, the participants' characteristics are the hidden factor that may affect the studies' results. For instance, this study indicated that the duty variable has a significant effect on perceived leadership. It is suggested that in future studies, researchers should study the participants' duty variable considering their pre-education, training, or participation in professional development programs. Additionally, they could compare the school administrators' legal status, selection, training, appointment, and personal development in developed countries and compare the school principals' cases in different contexts. The current study did not focus on a particular leadership style. Rather, it dealt with leadership holistically. The fact that focusing on a particular leadership style can influence the results. The effects of this approach on the results should be taken into account. Since this study profoundly revealed the principals' cases through multiple perspectives, it makes a significant contribution to leadership studies.

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Author Information

Kamil Yıldırım


 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5212-3905>

Aksaray University

Turkey

Contact e-mail: kamilyildirim1@gmail.com

Şenyurt Yenipınar

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0568-876X>

Aksaray University

Turkey