Teachers' Perceptions about the School Principals' Ethical Leadership Behaviours: A Study from Turkish Vocational High Schools

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Abstract The importance of ethical dimension of leadership is a fact accepted by everyone. In spite of this, very few empirical studies have been carried out on this issue in the field of educational administration considering the significance of ethical values in leadership. This study was carried out to investigate vocational high school teachers' perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviors. The study was conducted using the survey method and perceptions' of the teachers working at vocational and technical schools located in the center of Yozgat regarding their principals' ethical leadership behaviors were tried to be determined. According to the findings of the study the teachers agreed that the school principals often performed ethical leadership behaviours.

Keywords Ethical Leadership, Principal, Teacher, Vocational School

1. Introduction

Leadership is an attractive research topic and it is one of the issues mostly talked about not only in business but also in all kinds of social organizations. Extensive research has been carried out on leadership behaviors and characteristics of the leaders should have. For instance, in 1970-1971 only 136 published articles were found in Ebsco database; then, the number increased to 258 in 1980-81. The number of the researches was seen to increase up to 10.000 in 2001-2002 [41]. Dubrin[13] stated that about 14 million entries were encountered when the articles and books on leadership were googled.

Early studies on leadership are as old as the history of civilization. The history of mankind is full of the stories of leaders. In these stories, what leaders did and why they behaved in such ways were reported. Over the years, researchers tried to formulate principles of leadership and characteristic of good leaders. In modern psychohistory, there is a search for generalizations about leadership and detailed analysis of development, motivation and competencies of leaders [4]. As a popular subject, leadership has been defined diversely by different researchers. In these definitions the keywords are interpersonal influence, directing group activities, goal attainment, taking responsibility, control, power and so forth. Northouse[35] supported this idea restating that four common themes might be encountered when related literature on leadership theory was reviewed. These themes are: (1) Leadership is a process (2) It involves influence (3) It occurs in a group (4) It involves goal attainment. Moreover, Stogdill[40] considered leadership as the act of influencing activities of a group toward goal setting and goal achievement. Similarly, Tannenbaum, et al.[42] defined leadership as interpersonal influence which is directed toward attainment of specified goals. In a similar way, Hollander[26] saw leadership as a process of influence between leader and his/her followers. In another definition by Dubrin[13], leadership is explained as an effort to control and power over other people. The ability to lead other people effectively is a distinct feature and it is needed at all kinds of organizations and levels.

Meanwhile, it is essential to stress the difference between a leader and manager. Leaders are expected to be good managers as well or be supported by good managers. What is more, leaders are inspirational figures; they deal with interpersonal aspects of managers' jobs like change, inspiration, motivation and influence [13]. In order to execute management functions effectively, leadership skills are required [36].

It is obvious that each social organization needs a leader beyond a manager to run effectively. Therefore leadership and traits that leaders should have are of the issues focused in the field of social sciences. Recent ethic scandals, especially in business management [8], caused the debates about the ethical aspects of leaders. However, the lack of ethical

understanding is not only limited to business organizations but also grows among politicians, educators and other professionals [16]. As a result of the increase in such problems, a break down in the trust of leaders and organization is experienced [48].

It is an undeniable fact that values, moral and ethics are indispensable elements of leadership and management [25]; because leadership is a moral and ethical issue due to leader's responsibilities. Ethical leadership includes demonstration of normatively appropriate actions and promotion of such actions among followers. According to the findings It is assumed that leader's effectiveness is linked by followers with his/her leader's honesty and trustworthiness [34]. It was asserted that ethical leaders would contribute organizational effectiveness through creating a sense of shared core values supporting mission, vision and strategies of organization; so leaders must develop an ethical atmosphere including mission, vision and organizational policies. Ethical framework created by the leader would help and guide staff regarding values and ethical codes of organization. Followers would learn about ethical standards observing leaders' ethical actions [19,30,33].

1.1. School Principals as Ethical Leaders

The studies concerning leadership and its reflections on educational organizations are relatively new when compared to the earlier studies in the field of business and economics. Educational leadership is a concept emerged in the late 20th century. After the world wars, providing economic and social development was one of the primary goals. Technological advances would contribute to attaining the goal, but education is an essential step to realize social development and the best vehicle for personal and social change [7].

Schools are institutions designed to promote social change and establish social norms. Although these institutions are dedicated to the well-being of children, students generally are not the ones controlling what happens there. For this reason, we need a leader to guarantee moral aspects of educational activities [31]. As leaders of schools principals' ethical responsibilities are crucial for the organization of their school [29]. For a principal making a true decision is bound to his/her true understanding [37]. If relations at schools are based on morality, the quality of education would be promoted [14].

Ethical leadership is generally associated with dimensions of the values, vision and virtue. Apart from those, ethical leadership has some variables like creating ethical awareness, granting responsibility to the people, adopting participatory and democratic administration, creating a positive organizational climate suitable for the organizational requirements, being honest and reliable, behaving equitable in every attitude and behaviors [45]. Gallagher[17] also states that ethical leaders require particular knowledge to support professional competence; particular skills to encourage organizational change and development; moral virtues to act ethically.

Leader's characteristics have considerable effect on the enhancement of overall ethics in the school. Different leadership skills might intensify the strength of the leader in creating an ethical atmosphere in school. Some of these skills are interrelated. See Figure 1 explaining how leadership skills can enhance both individual and organizational ethical standards [23].

Likely, there are defined behaviours that principals are anticipated to take into consideration to create an ethical atmosphere at schools. AASA (The American Association of School Administrators) established a list these behaviours. The samples for virtuous behaviors expected from educational administrators are as follows [39]:

- Making the well-being of students the fundamental value of all actions.
- Fulfilling professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity.
- Supporting the principle of due process and protects the rights of all individuals.
- Obeying laws and not deliberately joining or supporting organization that advocates directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government.
- Implementing administrative policies, rules and regulations.
- Pursuing appropriate measures to correct problematical laws, policies, and regulations which are not consistent with sound educational goals.
- Avoiding using positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic, or other influence.
- Accepting academic degrees or professional certification only from suitably accredited institutions.
- Seeking to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development.
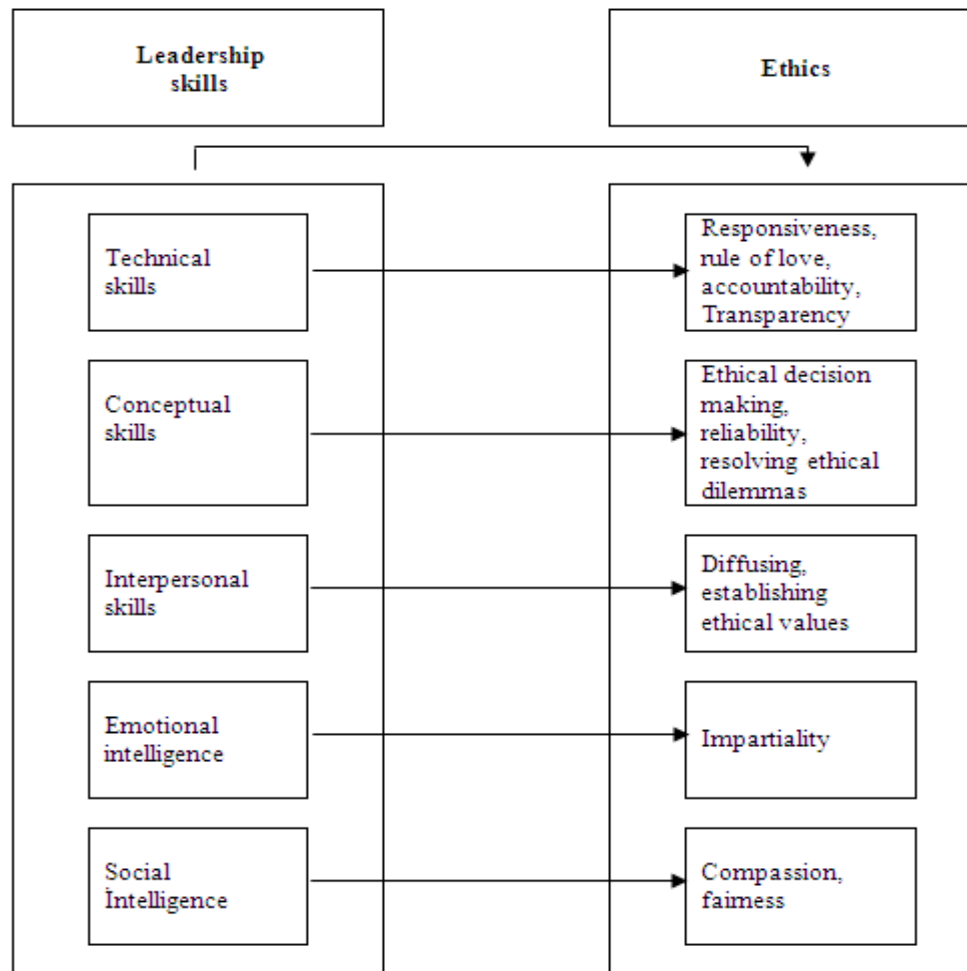
Figure 1. The relationship between leadership skills and ethical standards

In the existing study, ethical leadership behaviours of school principals were mentioned under seven dimensions as; being loyal to ethical principles, solving ethical dilemmas and making ethical decisions, creating an ethical school culture and ethical atmosphere, social responsibility, task oriented leadership, leadership based on trust and leadership based on principles. In the review of the related literature, it could be noticed that Brown et al.[8] considered ethical leadership unidimensional and contained the interconnected aspects such as; communicating, caring, role modeling, treating employees fairly, honesty and listening to employees, there are other studies stating that the concept has some other dimensions and it is multi dimensional. For instance, De Hoogh&Den Hartog[11] pointed out fairness, power sharing, and role clarification as the outstanding aspects of ethical leadership. Besides, Hargreaves&Fink[24] added sustainability as an essential element of ethical leadership. Considering the previous studies, Kalshoven et al.[28] defined seven dimensions of ethical leadership behaviour as; fairness, power sharing (listening to followers ideas and concerns), role clarification (clarifying responsibilities), people orientation (caring, respecting and supporting), integrity (consistency of words and acts), ethical guidance (explaining and promoting

ethical rules), sustainability (caring about environment and promoting recycling). In some of the studies from Turkey, the dimensions of ethical leadership were defined as communicative ethics, climatic ethics (creating an ethical school climate), behavioral ethics and ethical decision making [2,5,10,20,29,38,39,49]. In some other studies it might be noticed that these dimensions were increased in number and specified as following ethical principles, ethical decision making, creating ethical school culture and climate, behaving socially responsible, being service oriented, being trust based oriented and principles oriented [3,44].

1.2. A Brief Review of the Related Studies

Over the last twenty years, researchers have been interested in the factors connected with leadership. Leaders' values and ethics are two essential aspects which draw attentions of the researchers [39]. Calabrese & Roberts [9] stated that leaders' values and ethical behaviors are directly related to leadership in organizations. Trevino et al.[43] claimed that employees take leader's behaviors as model in organizations. Leithwood&Jantzi[32] emphasized the importance of values as a part of individual traits which are regarded as the factors stimulating successful school leadership.

The effect of shared values on organizational achievement is not a new concept for schools. Moral or ethical leadership is a concept that has been discussed by a number of researchers. For example, in their theoretical study Getzels et al.[18] pointed out that different cultural values could impact school leaders' behaviours at school. Besides, Hallinger&Leithwood[22] observed in their study that in western management tradition social values were often treated as implicit variable. School leaders are expected to make use of the social values as stimulating factors to increase educational success in their organizations. In order to achieve predefined educational goals, spiritual capital is one of the basic resources needed by all the school leaders. For a school, spiritual capital refers to ethics and values shared by school members and to the degree of coherence among these values [12]. The studies carried out in the field of education regarding ethical leadership generally focus on the spiritual capital which influences the school atmosphere in a positive or negative way.

For instance, Hulpia et al.[27] examined the relationship between school leadership and teachers' organizational commitment. As a result of the study it was seen that organizational commitment consisted of three characteristics; such as, identification and acceptance of organizational goals and values; willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; loyalty to maintain membership to the organization. Similarly, Uğurlu&Üstüner[46] and Sağnak[39] found out that ethical leadership behaviours created a positive atmosphere for organizational commitment of teachers and they influenced organizational justice nature of the schools. What is more, Cemaloğlu&Kılınç[10] determined in their study that ethical leadership behaviors had positive and significant effects on organizational trust.

In some other studies, school principals were asked about the moral values and ethical behaviors that they should have. For example, Feng [36] tried to explore the ethical orientations of Taiwan's school principals. The results demonstrated that the most frequent ethical orientation of Taiwan's school leaders was justice. In another study done by Aslanargun[2], the participant principals were asked about the common values that principals should have. According to the principals participated to the study emphasized that the values that principals should have were justice, confidence, being loyal to school rules and sedulity.

2. Methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate vocational high school teachers' perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviors. The study was conducted using the survey method and it was limited with the teachers who worked at vocational and technical schools located in the center of Yozgat. This city was selected as research site because of its accessibility to the researchers. In order to investigate teachers' perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviors, a Likert type questionnaire was used. The Ethical Leadership Scale used in the study consisted of 7 subscales with 46 items. Since all the teachers defined in the target population were included in the study, data collected with the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean, standard deviation.

2.1. Target Population

Target population of the study comprised of the teachers working at public vocational high schools in Yozgat during 2013-2014 academic year. In the study, perceptions related with the principals' ethical leadership behaviours of the teachers who were teaching vocational subjects and other subjects; like Turkish, Math, Foreign Language and so forth were taken into consideration. It was aimed to reach all the teachers in the target population no sample was taken. See Table 1 for the detailed information concerning the numbers of vocational schools and teachers working there.

Based on the aim of the study, 250 teachers working at vocational high schools in Yozgat were reached and they were distributed the surveys. Of the 250 surveys 225 surveys returned and 207 of the surveys which were appropriately responded were analyzed. The return rate of the surveys was high (82.8%). See Table 2 for the details regarding the participants in the survey.

Table 1. Vocational schools located in the city center of Yozgat and the number of teachers working at these schools

School	Number of teachers	%
Mimar Sinan Vocational High School	70	28
Atatürk Vocational High School	30	12
Halide Edip Vocational High School for Girls	62	24.8
Zübeyde Hanım Vocational High School for Girls	22	8.8
Vocational Trade High School	30	12
Tourism and Hotel Management Voc. High Sch.	15	6
Medical Vocational High School	21	8.4
Total	250	100

Table 2.   Personal details of the participant teachers

Variable	Level	N	%
Gender	Male	89	43.0
	Female	118	57.0
	Total	207	100.0
Age	21-30	51	25.1
	31-40	86	41.1
	41-50	70	33.8
	Total		100.0
Faculty that the teachers graduated	Faculty of education	64	31.0
	Vocational/technical edu. fac.	92	44.4
	Other	51	24.6
	Total	207	100.0
Subject	Vocational subjects	97	46.9
	Other	110	53.
	Total	207	100.0
Service period at school	1-5years	121	58.5
	6-10 years	28	13.5
	11-15 years	24	11.6
	16-20 years	21	10.1
	2 or above	13	06.3
	Total	207	100.0
Professional seniority	1-5 years	51	24.6
	6-10 years	28	13.5
	11-15 years	50	24.2
	16-20 years	29	14.0
	21 years or above	49	23.7
	Total	207	100.0
School	1 Vocational High School for Girls	78	37.7
	2 Vocational High School	74	35.7
	3 Medical Vocational High School	20	09.7
	4 Vocational Trade High School	25	12.1
	5 Tour. and Hot. Man.Voc. H. S.	10	04.8
	Total	207	100.0

2.2. Instruments and Procedures

Based on the aims of the study, "Ethical Leadership Scale" which was developed by Turhan[44] was used to investigate teachers' perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviors. The previously validated scale included 46 statements with 5-point Likert-scale responses such as; (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Partly agree; (4) Agree (5) Completely agree.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) revealed that the scale had seven subscales (see Table 3): being loyal to ethical principles; solving ethical dilemmas and making ethical decisions; creating an ethical school culture and ethical atmosphere; social responsibility; task oriented leadership; leadership based on trust; leadership based on principles (oblique rotation methods were used assuming that the factors in the scale were correlated. Besides, parallel analysis was used to determine the number of factors). Based on the result of the EFA (Principal Component Analysis), no statements were excluded from the scale due to high reliability coefficients. Thus, Ethical Leadership Scale explained 68.28% of the total variance. Factor loading ranges varied between 0.53 and 0.82. Therefore, the construct validity and reliability coefficient of the scale was quite high. Thus, it might be stated that the "Ethical Leadership Scale" was found to be consistently reliable.

Table 3. Statistics related with the subscales of Ethical Leadership Behaviours Scale

Subscales	Number of items	Explained variance %	Reliability coefficient	Communalities range
1. Being loyal to ethical principles	13	29.213	.957	.818-.560
2. Solving ethical dilemmas and making ethical decisions	5	15.952	.954	.723-.655
3. Creating an ethical school culture and ethical atmosphere	6	9.906	.959	.735-.625
4. Social responsibility	5	4.438	.953	.727-.590
5. Task oriented leadership	5	3.269	.961	.747-.530
6. Leadership based on trust	5	3.187	.958	.762-.619
7. Leadership based on principles	7	2.670	.955	.812-.536
Total Variance Explained: 68.633		KMO: 964	Reliability coefficient for the scale:.945	

Table 4. Descriptive statistics showing the teachers' responses to in the subscales

	Subscales	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd
1	Being loyal to ethical principles	207	3.88	.645
2	Solving ethical dilemmas and making ethical decisions	207	3.94	.804
3	Creating an ethical school culture and ethical atmosphere	207	3.62	.697
4	Social responsibility	207	3.91	.742
5	Task oriented leadership	207	3.97	.741
6	Leadership based on trust	207	3.64	.764
7	Leadership based on principles	207	3.95	.692
	Composite scale	207	3.85	.654

2.3. Data Analysis

The data gathered with the Ethical Leadership Scale was analyzed with SPSS (Version 20). Percentages and frequencies were used to analyze demographic variables. To describe school principals' ethical leadership behaviours, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) were used.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics depicting the participating teachers' perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviors showed that teachers agreed that the school principals often performed ethical leadership behaviours and the teachers' perceptions on this issue could be regarded as positive (see Table 4). Considering the average scores; out of seven subscales, the most negative responses were in the subscale titled "creating an ethical school culture and ethical atmosphere" ($\bar{X} = 3.62$) while the most favourable responses were in the subscale titled "task oriented leadership" ($\bar{X} = 3.97$). When all of the statements existed in the scale were analyzed in details; the statement that the teachers agreed most was "The school principal does not give consent to illegal entertainments at school" ($\bar{X} = 4.41$). The statement which the participants least agreed upon was "The school principal uses formal power on his/her subordinates to get information about the other employees." ($\bar{X} = 2.55$).

3.1. Comparing Attitudes towards Addicts According to the Participants' Demographic Characteristics

When demographic characteristics of the participant teachers were analyzed to find out if their perceptions were affected by demographic variables or not, it was seen that the teachers' perceptions were affected by these variables. To illustrate, there were meaningful differences between the teachers' perceptions about the principals ethical leadership behaviours based on the participants' gender, subject they thought, teachers' being graduated from faculty of education, faculty of vocational and technical education or another faculty, teachers' professional seniority, teachers' period of service at the school that they worked (during the time when the study was carried out) and the school types of the teachers. Thus, it might be stated that personal variables could be considered as of the factors affecting the teachers' perceptions (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics showing the differences between teachers' perceptions based on teachers' demographics

Variable	Groups	N	%	$\bar{X}$	Sd
Gender	Female	118	57.00	3.84	.673
	Male	89	43.00	3.87	.630
Subject	Vocational	110	53.14	3.88	.637
	Other	97	46.86	3.82	.674
Graduated Faculty	Faculty of Education	64	30.92	3.86	.693
	Faculty of Vocational and Technical Edu.	92	44.44	3.84	.665
	Other	51	24.64	3.86	.590
Professional Seniority	1-5 years	51	24.64	3.78	.737
	6-10 years	28	13.53	3.93	.511
	11-15 years	50	24.15	3.96	.605
	16-20 years	29	14.00	3.77	.555
	21 years or above	49	23.68	3.82	.735
Institutional Service Period	1-5 years	121	58.46	3.90	.653
	6-10 years	28	13.53	3.84	.627
	11-15 years	24	11.59	3.84	.602
	16-20 years	21	10.14	3.81	.657
	21 years or above	13	06.28	3.57	.815
School type	Vocational High School for Girls	78	37.68	3.96	.059
	Vocational High School for boys	74	35.75	3.93	.077
	Medical Vocational High School	20	09.66	4.20	.096
	Vocational Trade High School	25	12.08	3.02	.113
	Tour. and Hot. Man. Voc. H. S.	10	04.83	3.80	.149

4. Discussion

The study examined the perceptions of the teachers working at vocational schools regarding the school principals' ethical leadership behaviours. The findings from the study might be regarded as useful for leadership studies since they provide clues about the teachers' considerations about ethics and ethical leadership. The aims of the study were (1) to find out the teachers' perceptions about the school principals' ethical leadership behaviours (2) to analyze if their perceptions were affected by their demographic characteristics. As a result of the study, it was seen that vocational school teachers agreed that their school principals displayed ethical leadership behaviours and the teachers assessed their principal ethical leadership behaviours favourably. Similarly, Gülcan et al.[20], Aydın[3] and Baştuğ[5] reported that teachers approved that school principals showed ethical leadership behaviours. What is more, in these studies it was restated that teachers' perceived their principals ethical leadership behaviours positively.

Moreover, it was seen that the demographical characteristics of the teachers such as, gender, subjects they thought, faculties that they graduated from, total professional seniority, institutional service period and school type had

significant effect on the teachers' perceptions regarding school principals' ethical leadership behaviours. In similar studies, there were results showing teachers' gender [21,29,47] faculty that they graduated [20,29,47], professional seniority [20,47] as the factors affecting their perceptions. Dissimilarly, there were also findings indicating gender as a variable which did not significantly affect teachers perceptions but the place where they worked as a significant one [20,49].

Eventually, it might be claimed based on the results of the present study there was a strong relation between school type and the teachers' perceptions on the principals' ethical leadership qualities. The result supported the previous findings claiming that organization type or leaders' personal characteristics as a determinant of ethical climate [6,38].

4.1. Implications and Conclusions

School leadership is a kind of ability for the school principals to inspire the employees of the school to achieve common organizational goals. Various factors could be assumed to influence employees' perceptions about what is successful leadership. In this study it was found out that the teachers' gender, subjects, faculty that they graduated,

seniority did not impact their perceptions about their principals' ethical leadership behaviours. According to the results of the statistical analysis, the only variable which influenced the teachers' perceptions seemed to be the school type. This finding suggested that among other variables school principals' individual leadership traits were the most effective factors which had a significant impact on the teachers' perceptions. As a result of the study it might be recommended that further studies on a larger scale might be done to have better understanding about the factors influencing teachers' perceptions on this issue. Besides, designing a qualitative study would be informative about this issue.

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