THE "SAFE SCHOOL" PERCEPTION OF CLASS PRESIDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to reveal the "safe school" perceptions of secondary class presidents. The sample of the study, which is a qualitative research and figured as "phenomenology design", is constituted by eight class president students in vocational and technical secondary schools. The data were collected with a semi-structured interview form consisting of three open-ended questions to determine the opinions of the class presidents. The responses of the participants to the questions in writing were analyzed by descriptive analysis. In the study, the "school safety" perception was examined with the perspective of the class presidents in high schools. Some of the remarkable results of the research can be summarized as follows: The participants reply the question "To what extent is a safe school environment important for you?" such that they generally consider the school's physical, social and psychological environment as problematic. They indicate the importance of solving the problems of these environments in creating a safe school climate. Participants point out to the parent-school cooperation for the question regarding the duties of the school management, staff and students. Some of the participants emphasized the risks arising from the school environment.

Keywords: School safety, safe school, school climate, class presidents

1. Introduction

In recent years, the problem of school safety is not only on the agenda of Turkey, but also on that of all developed and developing countries. A systematic safety approach has been adopted in the national and international studies performed in the context of the strategic objectives of the dimensions of school safety and educational systems and different models have been introduced.

Developed countries carry out substantial researches and develop solution recommendations to the school safety problem, considering that a safe environment in schools is a prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. While the researches on school safety performed in the United States particularly focus on violence and crime prevention, the EU countries have carried out their studies about the topic with a broader perspective, including a safe learning environment and lifelong health and risk-related learning (Srichai, Yodmongkol, Sureephong, & Meksamoot, 2013). This problem is usually regarded as organizationally and executively in Turkey within the scope of physical safety and public order concept; the physical safety concept is reduced to formal characteristics with legal regulations and person protection-oriented safety concept is based on (Akyol, 2015; TEDMEM, 2016).

Evaluating schools as the concept, fact and system, they are open and social organizations such that their individual dimension is more sensitive than their institution dimension, their informal side is stronger than their formal side and their effective area is wider than their authorization area (Özmen & Küçük, 2013). When examining the structure of this organization in terms of its safety, the most remarkable dimensions in the literature are physical, social, environmental and psychological. A general definition of a safe school is a

supportive definition realized to perform school's educational mission by providing a positive environment, enabling students, teachers, and staff to interact without fear or threat and encouraging personal growth (Butcher & Manning, 2005).School safety is not only limited to the school environment but also includes all phases of the school between the time interval when the internal stakeholders of the school, especially students leave their home to reach the school and when they return back to their home (Memduhoğlu & Taşdan, 2008).

In theoretical sense, the concept of school safety can be evaluated in two categories in order to try to reduce the risk factors and contribute to the development of the school by making it an attraction center (Çetinkaya, 2009). OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries came together in an international conference on "School Safety and Security" held in Paris to discuss how best to ensure that school is a safe learning place. In this conference, the "school safety" topic was discussed under the headings, including *the focus on safety and risk assessment in schools*, *crisis planning and management*, *infrastructure approaches to school safety*, *cooperative approaches to school safety*, *school safety education*, *teaching and support approaches*. In this meeting, where rich experience and diversity was shared, the following points were pointed out in the reports of working groups (OECD, 2003): (1) Reporting of safety and safety risk assessment in schools, (2) Obtaining a student opinion on planning emergency cases, (3) Identification of infrastructure approaches for school safety and the boundaries of all schools, (4) Taking preventive measures against school safety with collaboration, establishing priorities and implementing measures to combat problems.

When the development of school safety fact in Turkey is considered, it is seen that there have been studies performed in a national and international dimension. The Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (2014) prepared the "School Safety Global Initiative Project" within the scope of the School Safety Global Initiative to share disaster risk reduction activities with the world public opinion. Turkey, which has been declared as **Leader Country at School Safety** by the United Nations, is leading five countries (Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria) within the scope of Global School Safety Initiative Project (AFAD, 2014).

When the studies on school safety are examined, it is seen that the number of researches done in recent years has increased.

In a study carried out by Karakütük, Özbal and Sağlam (2017) to determine the practices of the school management performed for providing school safety in Turkey, the opinions of teachers and headmasters were received. In accordance with these opinions, among the safety systems applied in schools, "video surveillance system" and "observing the school over the Internet" were found to be the most applied safety system. It was implied that the use of cameras in teaching environments for the supervision of teachers was a topic that should be discussed by researchers. It was also pointed out that school administrators should be the pioneer such that school management and teachers should take decisions cooperatively and act together on school safety. Gülbaz (2016), who performed a similar study, evaluated the concept of school safety in the context of sub-dimensions and found the following results:

In relation to physical security, the entrance and exit doors of the school is insufficient, there are no fire exit doors, corridor and stairs are narrow, garden walls are inadequate,

In terms of violence, verbal, physical and psychological violence is applied to the students by some teachers and the most important reason for the violence committed by students against each other is family,

Regarding transportation safety, school services do not comply with the regulations, and a large majority of students, who walk to school, go to schools alone,

In terms of nutrition and food safety, canteens sell insanitary foods; parents have low awareness of nutritional health,

In relation to out of school threats, no record is kept during the entry into and exit from schools, camera systems are in blind spots, the majority of the schools do not have security guards, the number of hall monitor is not sufficient,

In the case of natural disasters and fire safety, schools are not ready for catastrophes such as natural disasters and fires and the training and exercises about this topic are insufficient.

In the research performed by Alver, Adıgüzel and Öztürk (2016), the school climate was investigated. In this study, the school climate perception of these schools selected according to the protocol signed with the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education within the scope of "Safe School Project" was analyzed according to teacher, student, region and class levels. School climate perceptions of teachers and students were determined to be positive, it was determined that there were various disagreements when the school climate perception was analyzed according to regions and class levels. As a result, it is observed that the negativities of students, teachers and school staff caused by their surroundings and experienced outside of school, do not affect their focus on education and teaching.

Akyol (2015) investigated school safety in terms of physical and psychological aspects in his research on examining the domestic and overseas studies performed on school safety. The remarkable results of the research are as follows:

- As a result of some studies carried out in Turkey, the food sold in and around the school is not fully reliable and the supervisions are insufficient,

- The security guards in the school are insufficient in providing the security and they do not fully know their duties and responsibilities,

- Schools are not ready for extraordinary situations,

- Although there are widespread physical security measures at schools, there is no significant measure taken for psychological security measures,

- Students have problems about sharing violence incidents with teachers.

The opinions of high school administrators were determined and evaluated in a study carried out by Çankaya, Yücel, Tan and Demirkol (2014) regarding the regulation of the same type of high schools located in provincial centers as educational campuses in terms of security. The views of administrators obtained by analyzing the data can be summarized as follows: Administrators cared about educational campuses in terms of space and student safety. They noted the importance of popularization of campus schools in terms of accessibility, the reduction of expenditures on public transport services and school safety. They pointed out that the quality of food and accommodation provided for teachers and students and health care services would increase with school campuses. In addition, they predicted that the quality of education, health, social and basic needs services to be provided to the internal stakeholders of high schools would increase as a result of increasing the space and student safety.

In a study conducted by Turhan and Turan (2012), the findings obtained by analyzing the data based on the opinions of teachers, students, administrators and parents are as follows:

• Food sold in school canteens and around schools is not reliable and canteen supervisions are inadequate,
• The security guards at the school are inadequate in providing security,
• Schools are not adequately prepared for any disaster case,
• Alcohol, cigarettes, etc. are sold intensively around the school regardless of age.

In addition to the studies briefly summarized above, this issue is considered as an area where it is on the agenda of Ministry of National Education, which continues its studies on this topic. In fact, evaluating the decisions on "School Safety" discussed on the agenda of 19th National Education Council (2014), in recent years, it stands out that the safe school concept in Turkey has been on the agenda of education system. *In the aforementioned council, the importance and value of continuing education of the children in the age of education in Turkey in a safe school climate has been discussed. It has been agreed that a comprehensive school safety action plan should be prepared for each school in order to solve and prevent the safety problems in schools. It was concluded that studies would be performed on providing physical and psychological security in schools.*

In this context, the main purpose of the study is to reveal safe school perceptions of the class presidents of secondary schools. In the study, for the motivation, success and contribution of the class to the school, answers were sought to the following questions by interviewing class presidents who function as a class voice and representative in the class-school management and class-teacher coordination.

1. How important is a safe school environment to you? Could you share your opinions on the subject?

2- What are the duties of the school administration and its staff to make your school safer?

3- What are the duties of the students (yours) to make your school a safer and non-violent environment?

2. Method

This study was designed as "phenomenology design" being a qualitative research design. Phenomenology design is an approach that focuses on events we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding. In this approach, it is generally aimed to reveal and interpret individual perceptions and perspectives related to a certain phenomenon (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). The case studied with this research is "school safety". School safety was tried to be examined by the perspective of the students who are class presidents in secondary schools.

2.1. Participants

Participants of the study are limited to eight class presidents of the Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, which is a practice hotel in Kırıkkale in a boardinghouse-school status. The class presidents of the school declared their willingness to participate in the study. The research, in accordance with its purpose, was carried out with the students who could contribute to it on a volunteer basis. There are one girl and seven boys among the participants.

2.2. Collection of Data

The data of this study was obtained in November 2017 with the participation of 8 class presidents. Data used in the study were collected with a semi-structured interview form consisting of three open-ended questions to determine the opinions of class presidents. Two

expert opinions were received during the preparation phase of the interview form to assess the suitability and usability of the draft questions to the purpose. The final form of three questions to be asked to the participants was finalized in accordance with the opinions of experts.

2.3. Analysis of Data

The answers given to open-ended questions by the participants in written form were analyzed by the researcher with a descriptive analysis method. In the analysis of the data, generally such a way was followed: The class presidents participating in the study were numbered between one and nine, regardless of their names and genders. The class presidents (CP) in the working group were coded as CP1, CP2....

The disclosure of how the data in the research was obtained and recorded is considered as one of the important criteria that reveals the validity of a qualitative research. The detailed reporting of collected data and the direct transfer of the opinions of participants are also considered to be elements increasing the validity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data analysis process was explained to ensure the internal reliability and validity of the study and in the analysis of the data; the participants' comments were directly cited in the findings section without any change. In addition, no guiding example was given to the participants, a fiduciary communication was established and attention was paid to freely reflect only their own thoughts.

3. Findings

The findings obtained from the study were evaluated and presented based on the objectives. These are "the importance of a safe school environment", "school management, the duties of staff and students".

3.1. The Importance of Safe School Environment

Participants generally consider the physical, social and psychological environment of the school as problematic in replying the question that "*How important is a safe school environment to you*?" They point out the importance of solving the problems of these environments in creating a safe school climate.

> *Although the headmaster had been told for years, he did not cover around the school with wires. Some people came to our school to sell harmful substances or fight. We mostly eliminated by resorting to violence, but these are temporary solutions.* (**CP 1**)

> *School safety is very important in terms of our health; we spend a peaceful school time in a safe school environment.* (**CP 2**)

> *We are suffering a lot from harmful substances in school. Foreign students should not be allowed to enter in the school.* (**CP 4**)

> *Our school has a security guard, but he is useless; he is walking with a cigarette in his mouth and playing with his phone. There was a fight last week but the security guard did not intervene in the fight. The security guard only checks the identities at the school entrance. The door of the school is not clear, students come from the outside and the headmaster does not say anything.* (**CP 5**)

> *Drug users and alcohol drinkers come to the edge of the river 100 m away from the school. The distance between the school and police station is 1 km. We hear people drowning because the school is on the edge of the river.* (**CP 8**)

3.2. The Duties of School Management, Staff and Students

The perceptions of participants were tried to be identified with two open-ended questions about the duties of the school administration, its staff and students for the school to be safe.

The security units should be reached out regarding the events, situations and people that may pose a threat to the school environment and the environment at the entrance and exit of the school should be controlled. (CP 1)

The headmaster and teachers are not interested in us and the chiefs are insulting us in the institutions we go to practice. The headmaster does not allow social activities. (CP 2)

The duties of teachers are such that they should not overstress the student, they should leave the student alone and trust their students. I think there is no duty of the families, everything depends on the students, and parents have to raise their children sanitarily. To avoid violence, all we have to do is not to fight and avoid bad habits. (CP 3)

While coming to our school, the outside of the school is so terrible, our feet get wet and our pants become mud. The third floor WC (washbasin) is not open. There is only one washbasin used in the whole school and it is not nice at all. There are no social activities for us and they never have been. I've been in this school for three years. We should study lessons and be away from bad habits, we should do sports, we should not use slang words and there should be unity and solidarity. The duties of our families such that they should come to the school every two weeks, they should ask for how we are doing. They should attend the parent' meeting. (CP 4)

It should be ensured that we spend our time efficiently by providing adequate educational opportunities to us, the students, in the fields of arts, culture, sports, etc. The prices of the food sold in the school canteen are expensive and their price should be decreased to a level we can afford. (CP 8)

Some of the participants used the following expressions, drawing attention to the risks arising from the school environment.

Teachers criticize us, the students, by saying that "Do not you learn decency from your family?" They say that your behaviors are the reflection of your family. Their attitudes lead us to dislike and hate the lessons. School family cooperation is weak; invitations are not delivered to parents for parents' meetings. The duty of our family is not only important for school safety but also for us. Our parents should notify the school about their requests for school safety. We should be sensitive to our friends and show love, respect. Our headmaster and teachers should organize more social activities to improve our social relations with our friends. (CP 6)

The environment in which our school is located poses a risk to school safety. The number of people using and selling harmful substances around the environment is very high. Thus, the entry to and exit from the school garden should be controlled ideally. Security guards and hall monitors should effectively perform their guard duty. School administrators should take precautions for the safety of the school road. The risky places that remained from the old factory buildings around the school should be organized. (CP 7)

4. Discussions and Conclusions

In this section, the results and interpretations based on the findings of the research are given.

Examining the perception of class presidents about the "*the importance of the safe school*", it is generally evaluated such that school safety is not based on social realities and not a common point of view. On the basis of the fact that the majority of the participants regard the safe school as significant, it originates from aiming to ensure the individual safety of people. All participants are in negative perception about evaluating the school safety in terms of social reality. School safety, on the other hand, is not only an isolated dimension of school life in a physical sense. It is a concept expressing a safe learning environment based on the common perceptions of stakeholders such that the internal stakeholders (managers, staff and students) feel the sense of trust in terms of physical, psychological and social aspects. School safety comes first in the social realities of education that is a social phenomenon. School safety concerns every process and function at school. The structure of the school, its rules, attitudes and relationships, the educational process, the structural design of the school building are the basic elements of building a safe school environment (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016).

Evaluating the findings obtained in the scope of "*the duties of school management, staff and students*", all participants are in negative perception. The reason for the fact that participants pay attention to the attitudes and behaviors of the school administrators and consider this as a source of problems may be as the fact that the risky environment in which the students are and the management does not have a desire to create a positive "school climate". The reason for this can be as follows: having risks of the school environment that threaten the safety of students, the inadequacy of entrance and exit doors, the lack of garden walls, the insufficiency of security guards at the school in providing safety and not fully knowing their duties and responsibilities, intensively sold of harmful substances around the school, not identifying people coming from outside by the management. The findings of this study and its results are similar with the results of some researches performed in recent years (Akyol, 2015; Gülbaz, 2016; Turhan & Turan, 2012). The fact that the majority of participants indicate that there is not a family-school cooperation and the relationship of parents with the school is inadequate is effective in not ensuring school safety.

The majority of participants' desire to establish safe school climate is an indicator that their expectations from particularly the school management are high. It cannot be said clearly in ensuring school safety that stakeholder relations (teacher, student, administrator and parent) are aware of the fact that they are effective in providing a safe school environment. This will ensure that the safe school is perceived in a positive environment as an exercise of management processes to ensure that students, teachers, staff and visitors are able to interact without fear or threat and provide a safe learning environment (Butcher & Manning, 2005).

Based on the results of the research, the following strategies can be proposed for providing school safety and forming a safe school climate:

It is possible to take effective precautions against the factors that affect the development and success of students and constitute a risk for the school safety. Interaction with the school's physical and social environment is of great importance in ensuring school safety and forming a safe school climate.

The attempts to improve the quality of education and provide the integration of educational environments with the social and physical environment are important in terms of preventing negative groups and persons from organizing around the school environment. The safety of the school and its environment cannot be ensured only by measures taken in educational environments. Conducting planned studies that will enable the school to cooperate with the family will also help to transform information into behavior in terms of individuals.

While physical security measures are taken on schools, the psychological aspects of students and school staff should be taken into consideration. In order to ensure the emotional and spiritual safety of school stakeholders, it is necessary to conduct research on physical security measures. School safety action plans should be made at schools and all managers, staff and teachers should be included in this security team. They should have knowledge of school safety action plans and comprehend the importance of school safety precautions.

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