The Perceptions of Primary School Teachers on Principal Cultural Leadership Behaviors

Turgut KARAKÖSE*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of primary school teachers on principal cultural leadership behaviors, and examine the opinions of the participating teachers according to their various occupational characteristics. The study is descriptive in nature and evaluates the teachers' perceptions by using the Cultural Leadership Scale (Yıldırım, 2001). The population of the study is composed of teachers employed in the primary schools in Kahramanmaraş, a province located in the southeastern part of Turkey. The sample of the study is composed of a total of randomly selected 308 teachers. The analysis revealed that the perceptions of teachers regarding the cultural leadership behaviors of their principals vary significantly according to their gender, years of experience, and the subjects taught by the participants. On the other hand, participant teachers indicated that they were undecided about their principals' cultural leadership behaviors. In addition, as the years of experience of the teachers increased, teachers became more critical of their principals' cultural leadership behaviors. The culture of the school was not strong if the principals were not good at putting cultural leadership behaviors into practice in their schools. In order for the principals to be cultural leaders, they must take into account appropriate values and norms of the organization. It is suggested that principals be good models for staff by integrating cultural leadership behaviors into practice in their schools.

Key Words

Cultural Leadership, Principals, Behavior, Leadership, Culture, Teachers' Perceptions.

*Correspondence: Assist. Prof. Dr. Turgut KARAKÖSE, Dumlupinar University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Science, Kütahya, 43020, Turkey.

E-mail: tkarakose@yahoo.com

Leadership is at the heart of effective management regardless of one's place within the organizational hierarchy. Intentional or unintentional, the actions and attitudes of those in the positions of authority affect the actions and attitudes of their employees. The most important roles of leaders are creativity and encouragement (Block, 2003; Deal, 1995). The quality of the relationships between managers and employees affects the employee performance and leadership effectiveness (Chen, & Tjosvold, 2005). Leadership is the moving of people towards specified goals and leaders come in all shapes and sizes. The leadership dynamic of human interaction is one of the most studied and least understood phenomena (Moorhouse, 2002).

Leadership is variously treated as: a form of perceived leader behavior, the use of influence tactics, and inferred charisma from speeches and implications of different kinds of leader-member relationships (Hunt, & Peterson, 1997). Leadership, by nature, contains an element of power and the state of having influence over others. From this point of view, leadership is a kind of influence and ability. However some of the authors defined leadership as forming a new culture (Slater, Goldring, Bolman, Thurston, & Crow, 1994).

In some of the studies related to leadership, the following result has been found (e.g., Keiper, 2002; Lok, 1997; Matviuk, 2007; Wong, 2002). First of all leadership has influence on culture. Culture comprises the values and messages of organization and presents a vision and mission to members of the organization. Organizational culture includes norms, beliefs, values, traditions, and habits which have directed employee's behaviors towards organizational aims. There is a strong relationship between leadership and culture. When we looked at the issue from that perspective, we saw that principals have influence on school culture deeply (Caren, 1992; Lee, 1999; Moran, & Vokwein, 1992; Owens, & Steinhoff, 1989; Şişman, 1994). If a leader is to inspire, then she or he must embody certain values. As Hewison (2004) stated, cultural organizations are value-based enterprises, but the values are other than those of value for money.

As in the other organizations, schools have cultures that are unique to them as well. There are rules and behavior forms which guide school functioning. Teachers and students have to obey these rules and behavior forms. These values are tools in order to reach the aims of the organization, form the basic principles of school culture, and affect the emotions and thoughts of school staff.

Cultural Leadership and Principals

Cultural leadership is such a leadership that influences the ideologies-beliefs, values, and norms shared by the members of organizations and the cultural forms through which they are expressed. Cultural leadership can be seen as setting of staff into action towards aims through the agency of the norms, beliefs, values, traditions, and habits of school (Beyer, & Browning, 1999; Biggerstaff, 1992; Furtwengler, 1992; Tierney, 1992). In this respect, principals must review team work among the staff according to cultural practices (Johnson, 1996).

Cultural leadership role will require principals to use several new capacities as: *(i)* creating a shared vision of change, *(ii)* motivating students, parents, and staff, and *(iii)* organizing staff and resources. Each of these requires a much more intimate and time-consuming engagement of the principal with staff during the change process (Hallinger, 2004). By this definition, managers and others are not cultural leaders unless they influence how their followers collectively think and act (Beyer, & Browning, 1999).

Every school has a culture that is strong or weak. If the leader makes the culture of an organization an attractive and enjoyable place to work, he/she is successful leader. Teachers have to work within the school culture whether it is weak or not. Moreover, school culture has an influence on all staff and a strong culture supports the training of the school (Bakan, Büyükbeşe, & Bedestenci, 2004; Balcı, 2002; Çelik, 2003; Zhang, 1994). If there is cooperation between teachers and students in schools, then, this is evidence about a strong culture. As the cultural leaders, principals must endeavor improving organizational culture. Because of this, they must form a culture which was accepted by everybody in the school and they must gain the loyalty of their staff.

An organization's leader is the creator of the organizational culture. The personal characteristics and attributes have a direct influence on the above elements of a school culture, especially on its atmosphere. In a study carried out by Nystrom (1982), the relationships between managers' personalities and their leadership perceptions were investigated and it was found that managers' personalities are significantly related with their leadership perceptions.

The principal is a representative for the school culture and cultural values improve and become rooted through the mediation of principals. Principal must constitute values, norms, and rules which connect to the social culture and are not in contradiction with the vision of the school. This is a very important strategy for improving the culture. As a cultural leader, if the principal improves and keeps cultural values alive; he/she is effective and productive in the organization (Yıldırım, 2001). In short, school culture was affected by principals' attitudes and behaviors. For this reason, principals must build a strong culture and improve it in their schools. Principals have to behave suited to school culture in accordance with cultural leadership and they must be good models to teachers in connection with adapting to cultural values as they interact with staff and direct them towards the aims of the school. Principals as cultural leaders must develop a vision which was shared by teachers and students and motivate them for the aims of the school. Leadership is an important element for the development of an effective organization (Twehous, Groves, & Lengfelder, 1991). At just this condition, a principal's cultural leadership is very important for the school organization. This study is hoped to provide empirical evidences for principals and teachers related to cultural leadership. The findings of this study may also help principals and teachers develop some strategies regarding cultural leadership. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of primary school teachers on principal cultural leadership behaviors, and examine the opinions of the participating teachers according to their various occupational characteristics such as gender, years of experience, and the subjects taught by the participants.

Method

Population

The population of the study is composed of teachers employed in the primary schools in Kahramanmaraş, a province located in the southeastern part of Turkey. The sample of the study is composed of a total of randomly selected 308 teachers.

Instrument

The study was carried out in the 2006-2007 academic year. The study is descriptive in nature and evaluates the teachers' perceptions by using the Cultural Leadership Scale (CLS; Yıldırım, 2001).The CLS has 21 items relating to the principal's cultural leadership behaviors. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point likert-type scale with the options ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree." Responses were rated as follows: totally agree = 4.21–5.00; agree = 3.41–4.20; neutral = 2.61–3.40; disagree = 1.81–2.60; totally disagree = 1.00–1.80. The following criteria were used: When the mean value was calculated equal to $p < .05$ or lower, the attitude was accepted significant; when the mean value was calculated equal to or higher than $p < .05$, the attitude was accepted having no significance. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is 0.88. According to Özdamar (1997), Cronbach's alpha ranged from a low of 0.80 to a high of 1.00. The scale was found to be reliable so, the reliability was considered to be sufficient. The analyses of the data were performed by "SPSS for Windows" package program. Statistical processes such as significance test, standard deviation, one-way variance analysis (ANOVA), Tukey HSD test, and t-test were performed. The study was carried out as descriptive survey (Karasar, 1999).

Results

The means and standard deviations of the scores of the teachers' perceptions of their principals' putting cultural leadership behaviors into practice are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Opinions

Survey Items	Means	SD
1. Principal explains us the aims, values and norms of the school sufficiently.	3.20	1.33
2. Principal helps teachers to learn the history of school.	3.55	1.27
3. Principal introduces school culture to members of the organization.	2.54	1.41
4. Principal always tries to improve school culture every time.	3.61	1.26
5. Principal keeps school culture alive as suited to social expectations.	2.51	1.39
6. Watchword of our school is to educate social, honest and honorable students who are good at using their talents and skills.	3.45	1.30
7. Principal puts cultural leadership role into practice successfully.	3.50	1.28
8. Principal uses everyday speech and the written language skillfully.	2.53	1.38
9. Principal uses his/her influence more than his/her legal power.	3.10	1.34
10. Principal believes success will come with team work.	3.51	1.27
11. Principal and teachers perceive each other as colleagues in our school.	3.59	1.27

Table 1 condt.

Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Opinions

Survey Items	Means	SD
12. Principal has an important role in the good reputation of school.	3.52	1.29
13. Principal follows modern developments and innovations.	3.40	1.30
14. Principal has an important role in bringing about vocational and social solidarity.	3.57	1.26
15. Teachers and students are seen as the most important human resource in our school.	3.49	1.28
16. Principal supports teachers' professional development.	3.54	1.30
17. Principal and teachers are in consensus in relation to mission and values of school.	2.59	1.35
18. Principal tries to keep social values alive in school.	2.61	1.33
19. Our school has a common cultural language special to it.	3.01	1.29
20. Traditional ceremonies have an important role in improving school culture.	3.12	1.31
21. The name of our school is a symbol of success and good reputation.	3.53	1.30
Total	3.21	1.29

Note n = 308

As seen in Table 1, the teachers thought their principals were not good at putting cultural leadership behaviors into practice (*M=3.21*), in general. They thought that principals were successful in trying to improve school culture (*M=3.61*), but they thought that their principals rarely kept school culture alive as suited to social expectations (*M=2.51*). In a similar research, Yıldırım (2001) found that teachers thought that their principals did not put cultural leadership behaviors into practice. However, in another study, Aksu, Şahin Fırat and Şahin (2003) found that principals put cultural leadership behaviors into practice moderately well.

An interesting finding was noted about the principals' behaviors regarding improving the school culture. Trying to improve the school culture is a very important attitude that a leader should endorse. On the other hand, teachers thought that their principals were doing too little on the item "principals keep school culture alive as suited to social expectations." This can be seen as an important deficiency for the relationship between school and society.

Table 2

Summary of the One-Way ANOVAs for the Variable Years of Experience As This Relates to Teachers' Opinions

Years of experience	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p
1-10 years	83	3.85	.767	7.210	.000*
11-20 years	116	3.58	.990		
21 years or more	109	3.24	.843		

p<.05

Teachers' perceptions regarding principals' cultural leadership behaviors was tested by one-way ANOVAs and significant differences were found according to the years of experience [$F_{(2,305)}$= 7.210; p < .05]. The Tukey HSD test results showed that there were significant differences between the teachers who had taught for 1-10 years and those who had 21 years or more; the teachers who had worked for a short time (M = 3.85) thought more affirmative than the teachers who had worked for a long time (M = 3.24) as an educator in relation to their principals' cultural leadership. In the light of these findings we can easily say that, as the years of experience of the teachers increased, they were more critical of their principals' cultural leadership. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 3

Summary of t-Test for the Variable Gender as This Relates to Teachers' Opinions

Gender	N	$\overline{x}$	SD	t	p
Male	216	3.07	1.42	2.656	.004*
Female	92	3.81	1.15		

*p<.05

Teachers' perceptions regarding principals' cultural leadership behaviors was tested by t-test and significant differences were found according to the variable gender [$t_{(306)}$ = 2.66; p<.05]. As seen in Table 3, male teachers reported that they were neutral (M = 3.07) and female teachers thought that principals put cultural leadership behaviors into practice successfully (M = 3.81).

Table 4

Summary of t- Test for the Variable Subjects Taught As This Relates to Teachers' Opinions

Subjects Taught	N	$\overline{x}$	SD	t	p
Social Sciences	211	3.64	1.27	2.492	.000*
Sciences	92	3.26	1.33		

*p<.05)

Table 4 presents the summary of the t test for teachers' opinions. Teachers' perceptions regarding principals' cultural leadership behaviors was tested by t test and significant differences were found according to the variable subjects taught [$t_{(301)}$ = 2.492; p < .05]. Ba-

sed on this finding, the teachers of social sciences have perceived the cultural leadership behaviors of their principals significantly higher in comparison with the perceptions of the teachers of sciences. In a similar research by Leman (2001) on special-education teachers and regular-education teachers, it was found that special-education teachers thought more affirmative than regular-education teachers about their principals' cultural leadership behaviors.

Discussion

This study investigated the perceptions of primary school teachers on principal cultural leadership behaviors, and examined the opinions of the participating teachers according to their various occupational characteristics. The results of the study show that there was a statistically significant difference in the teachers' perceptions of principals' cultural leadership behaviors according to the subjects they taught, years of experience, and gender.

The findings of this research also indicated that teachers found their principals rarely put cultural leadership behaviors into practice. In the light of this finding, it can be said that principals are inadequate to put cultural leadership behaviors into practice in educational organizations. Very few empirical studies analyzing school principals' cultural leadership were found in a review of the available literature. Nevertheless, in another study by İbicioğlu (1999), it was found that the teachers of private schools have perceived the cultural leadership behaviors of their principals significantly higher in comparison with the perceptions of the teachers of state schools. In this study, as the years of experience of the teachers increased, they were more critical of their principals' cultural leadership. In a related study, Hartman (1997) was found that principal's cultural leadership affects trust among teachers, but principals were not able to give teachers the feeling that they were trustworthy. In the study by Çelik (1997), it was found that principals couldn't put cultural leadership behaviors into practice according to teachers' views.

Bass and Avolio (1993) stated that there was a close interaction between organizational culture and leadership. Therefore, principals have to behave suited to school culture in accordance with cultural leadership and they must be good models to teachers in connection

with adapting to cultural values as they interact with staff and directs them towards the aims of school. Besides, principals as cultural leaders must develop a vision which was shared by teachers and students and they must motivate them for the aims of the school.

In conclusion, principals should try to adapt the values of the society to suit the requirements of school and they must present the cultural values of school to the teachers and students. If they learned values of society, they could build up a good relationship with people in society. Since they are responsible for building and improving the school culture, principals should develop cultural values and keep them alive in schools. Also, principals should be trained to manage cultural values as an important element in the development of educational organizations. For a strong school culture, principals must be equitable, tolerant, honest, and respectful towards their staff. However, principals must create a new vision; they must motivate students and staff in accordance with the cultural values of the school. Finally, it is suggested that future studies examine the relationship between principals' cultural leadership and the job satisfaction of the members of their staff and organizational effectiveness.

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