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Examining the Roles and Competencies of Principals of Project Schools in Terms of Accountability

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the roles and competencies of school principals working in project schools in terms of accountability, based on the views of school principals. This is a qualitative research which is based on the phenomenology design. The working group is chosen among the most well-known project schools in Istanbul using the maximum variation sampling method. Interviews were held with 12 school principals working at the Science High School, Anatolian High School, Social Sciences High School and Anatolian Religious High Schools in the 2019-2020 academic year. The data obtained from the interviews are coded using content analysis method and different 3 themes such as supervision, the functioning of education and integrity are obtained. In this context, it is indicated that project school principals felt themselves accountable most since they have a right to determine the managers and teachers they want to work with. It came to the conclusion that school principals cooperate with their internal and external stakeholders in all matters for the development of their schools.

Keywords: Accountability, Project Schools, Roles of School Principals

1. Introduction

Educational approaches are perceived differently all over the world and they affect societies both globally and culturally. Education, which is thought to play a role in shaping societies, is similarly affected by the developments in society. It is seen that conceptualization of education has changed; different types of schools are needed and different education policies have started to gain importance in the world where transformations and changes are so fast.

One of the changes in the conceptualization of education is decentralization movements. Decentralization has brought many needs for change. Perhaps the most important of these is the change in the perception of accountability. Accountability means the school staff is responsible for the actions that are taken in the context of education and can express it when necessary. Fuhrman (1999) listed the seven characteristics of the constituents of the modern accountability system: focusing on performance, schools as a development unit,

continuous improvement strategies, and supervisions, more accountability categories, general reporting and performance-based results. In these contexts, it is understood how accountability is applied in countries where neoliberal policies are followed in education. In Turkey which is also one of the developing countries, the development and change of this concept moved a different stage in project schools, too. Therefore, how school principals in project schools perceive and implement the concept of accountability is quite crucial.

For Turkish education system, 2023 Education Vision became a route map considering human being as the main subject of education to improve the education system; determining the paradigms that Turkey needs; aiming to define the direction within the framework of universal pedagogy. Accordingly, “fair, anthropocentric, teacher-based, universal in concept, local in practice; flexible, skill and manners oriented; it will be accountable and will embody a sustainable principled stance” (MoNE, 2018). It is understood from these words that 2023 Education Vision published by the National Education is based on accountability. In addition, it is believed that the project schools will continue to operate under this name even though the name of the project schools is not mentioned in the vision document (Cirit & Gunday, 2019). When the document is examined, it can be said that a project-based education is aimed even if the project schools are not mentioned in the education vision document. Project schools, which began to be implemented in Turkey in the 2014-2015 academic year, are seen as a step in the transition to school-based management. Project schools differ from other schools in many respects. Project schools, which aim to educate individuals in accordance with the requirements of the era, select their students by examination. In other words, students who come to these schools are those who get above a certain score on the exam. The administration and teacher staffs are also selected by the principal from among the individuals who are academically equipped, have developed communication skills and can adapt to the school culture. In that regard, the schools that have enabled school autonomy since 2016 are the project schools. In this study, the changing roles and competencies of the principals working in project schools are discussed and these roles are examined in terms of accountability. This system, which moves a little away from centralization and provides some opportunities to principals, also places a great burden and responsibility on the principal. The concept of accountability, which is one of the most important elements of school-based management, is also examined in detail and changing roles and competencies are determined based on the opinions of the administrators.

1.1 Purpose of the Research

The aim of this research is to examine the roles and competencies of school principals working in project schools in terms of accountability. In this context, the roles and competencies of the principals working in the project schools in Istanbul, in the 2019-2020 academic year, have been examined and their opinions on the concept of accountability have been received. The information about how the roles and competencies of the school principals are affected by accountability and in what ways they changed has been obtained by making reference to principal's own experiences. Thus, roles and competencies of school principals in project schools were examined in terms of accountability. Within the framework of this general objective, the following objectives have been identified to analyze:

- How the principals of project schools experience the concept of accountability,
- How the roles of the school principals in project schools are influenced by accountability,
- How the responsibilities of school principals in project schools are influenced by accountability,
- How the competencies of school principals in project schools are influenced by accountability.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

In this study, how the concept of accountability is interpreted, experienced and implemented by school principals are researched. Thus, phenomenology was chosen as the research design. The concept of accountability was discussed in detail and the similarities in perception of the study group was revealed. How school principals in project schools interpret the concept of accountability, what they understand from this concept and how they experience it, has been tried to be understood through open-ended questions asked to them.

2.2 Participants

In this study, study group was determined by using the maximum variation sampling which is one of the purposive sampling methods and interviews were carried out with 12 school principals in project schools. In particular, the reason behind the desire to interview with project school principals is the fact that these are schools that impose school based management partly. It is aimed to obtain different experiences by conducting interviews with school principals working in different types of project schools. In the analysis section, the demographic information of the participants was encoded. Accordingly, “P” is an abbreviation used for all managers. “P₁” is the participant's number. In parentheses, the educational background of the school principal (MD: Master's Degree, BD: Bachelor's Degree) and career phases in the headship are written, respectively. The encoding of the first participant is given as an example:

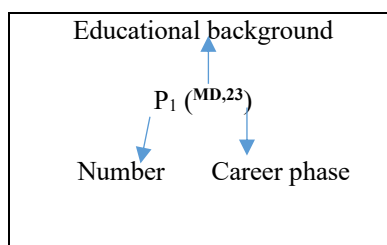


Figure 1: Sample Diagram of Coding the Participants

2.3 Data Collection Tool

In this study, a semi-structured interview form was developed as a data collection tool to conduct the interview. The researcher reviewed the literature on educational administration, accountability, school-based management, and project schools in detail. The general and sub-objectives of the study have been determined and interview questions have been prepared taking these into account. Interview questions were reviewed by the experts of educational administration, assessment and evaluation, Turkish Language literature and necessary changes were made. The validity and reliability studies of the semi-structured interview form, one of the qualitative data collection tools, were completed with the changes made.

2.4 Data Analysis

Content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was used in this study based on phenomenology, which is one of the qualitative research designs. The data collected as audio recordings were first transcribed. Then the written data were coded. Certain categories were created by analyzing similarities of the codes. Themes were created by associated categories. Saldana (2009) defined the theme as a result of coding, categorization and analytical thinking, not something coded in itself. In this study, in that sense, pre-existing themes were not examined, on the contrary, the data were first coded, categories were created combining the codes, and finally themes were created combining the categories.

3. Results

The data collected at the end of the qualitative research were analyzed by content analysis method and a total of thirty codes, ten categories and three themes were created. The main themes are as follows: 1. Supervision in Education 2. Holism 3. The Functioning of Education.

3.1. Theme 1: Supervision in Education

First theme was determined as “Supervision in Education.” Supervision in education involves the principles and assumptions of supervisory approaches (Aydin, 2016). In this study, the data collected from the participants are

explained in detail under the category of *perception of supervision* observing in what stages they are evaluating supervision in education, *principles of supervision* examining the aims of the supervision and how it should be applied, and *supervisory mechanism* interpreting the system in which supervision sources they are using in their schools. It is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Associated codes and categories of theme 1.

Theme	Category	Code	f	School Principals
Supervision in Education	Perception of Supervision	Clinical Supervision	3	P ₆ , P ₈ , P ₁
		Self-Directed Supervision	3	P ₉ , P ₁ , P ₁₁
		External Supervision	2	P ₁₀ , P ₄
	Principles of Supervision	Guidance	1	P ₁₀
		Transparency	5	P ₁ , P ₃ , P ₇ , P ₉ , P ₁₁
		Public-Individual Benefit	3	P ₁₀ , P ₁₁ , P ₅
	Supervisory Mechanism	Internal Mechanism	2	P ₂ , P ₁₀
		Belief in Teacher	3	P ₃ , P ₄ , P ₆

The category of perception of supervision is related to the way project school principals interpret and experience supervision. The first code is “clinical supervision,” which focuses on the behavior of the teacher in the classroom and expresses the relationship between the teacher and the supervisor (Aydin, 2016). As Basar (1988) also mentioned, one of the methods used in teacher evaluation is clinical supervision.

A school principal stated that he supervised the teacher by observing his/her lesson and provided feedback to the teacher as follows:

P₈ (MD,5): “Teacher supervision, I have attended many of our teachers' lessons since the second term last year. I attended their classes as a guest in order to observe their lectures and how they were with the students in the classroom. I took notes and shared them with the teachers. I congratulate and appreciate their positive sides, and we talked about them together if I have any suggestions to make them better”.

Another code under the category of perception of supervision is “self-directed supervision.” Aydin (2016) defined self-assessment as an assessment process of teachers evaluating themselves in order to foster student learning.

Another issue that school principals mentioned under the category of perception of supervision is “external supervision.” The code of external supervision refers to the supervision of school functioning by supervisors, that is, the supervision of the organization. The reason why this code is called is because the supervisors come from out of the school. School principals also expressed that there should be supervision and that they are pleased with it literally.

The category of “principles of supervision” has been determined as the second category of the supervision in education. In this category, how the school principals perceive supervision, which points they attach importance to are and the purposes of supervision were mentioned. The first code of this category is “guidance.” For example, one of the school principals mentioned that the purposes of both teacher and administrative supervision are guidance:

P₁₀ (MD,18): “I observe the work done by our teachers. Observing one particular lesson of a teacher does not change much. That is why the main point is not supervision but guidance which is right.

Another important concept expressed by school principals is “transparency.” As stated by Gunduz and Goker (2017), transparency is a complement factor of accountability.

Another issue examined under the category of principles of supervision is “public-individual benefit.” It implies all kinds of work done for the benefit of society and the development of the individual. Regarding that education is also a social activity, it can be mentioned that public sources are used effectively. In this context, school principals stated that they take care of the public interest, especially in financial terms, and that supervision keeps people vigorous.

“Supervisory mechanisms” is another category of the supervision in education theme. In supervisory mechanisms, it expresses how the supervision of teachers is conducted by the school principals and whose opinions are consulted in this process. The first code is determined as “internal mechanism.” The internal mechanism can also be perceived as the most important element of the school, the student. In that sense, some school principals stated that they let students conduct teacher supervision.

Apart from the internal mechanism, another issue that principals talk about is “belief in teacher.” School principals stated that they generally trust their teachers because they chose their teachers. This sense of trust represents their supervisory mechanisms.

3.2. Theme 2: Holism

Another theme is “holism.” School principals stated that the work should be carried out as whole. According to Koffka (1935), the statement that the whole is more than the sum of its parts is not quite correct, it means something other than the sum of all its parts. According to him, while addition is a meaningless procedure, part-whole relation is significant. The fact that the relationship between them forms a meaningful whole has enabled these categories to be examined under the theme of holism.

The *improvement process*, which includes the improvement of the school principals in profession, the *administrative understanding* that includes their point of view to administration, and the *work ethics* that determines the addressees in accountability are specified and shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Associated codes and categories of theme 2.

Theme	Category	Code	f	Principals
Holism	Improvement Process	In-service Training	4	P ₃ , P ₄ , P ₈ , P ₁₀
		An Active Control Mechanism	2	P ₆ , P ₉
		Professionalization	2	P ₁₀ , P ₅
	Administrative Understanding	Competence and Merit (Nepotism)	6	P ₆ , P ₉ , P ₅ , P ₇ , P ₈ , P ₉
		Empowerment of Principals	4	P ₃ , P ₂ , P ₁ , P ₇
		Perception of Duty (sense)	2	P ₃ , P ₅
	Work Ethics	Inner Peace	4	P ₂ , P ₇ , P ₉ , P ₁₁
		Social Responsibility	6	P ₅ , P ₂ , P ₁ , P ₁₁ , P ₇ , P ₆
		Employer Influence	3	P ₁ , P ₆ , P ₂

The “improvement process” includes the understandings of self-improvement of school principals in all aspects and some obstacles to this improvement. In this context, the participants mentioned “in-service training,” which they do not believe to improve themselves and that they need a more functional system.

Some of the school principals mentioned that there are some problems in accountability system.

Interpreting the control mechanism from the viewpoint of teachers, a school principal explained the negative consequences of the system not being carried out correctly as follows:

P₉ (MD.5): “Maybe we will have criticisms. It can be discussed what the concept of a good educator means or if we have really good educators. I found the criteria according to which the educators are selected, accountability criteria and application criteria problematic in our education system. Teachers are not accountable and they do not see themselves in an accountable position. In other words, as a civil servant, you can get away with positive or negative tasks you have done so far.

Another important issue mentioned by the participants was identified as “professionalization.” Since the principle of “The essential point in profession is teaching” has been adopted in Turkey, administration is not considered as a profession, it is considered as a continuation (follow up) of teaching. Project school principals also addressed this issue and made some suggestions, they mentioned that steps should be taken towards the professionalization of administration.

“Administrative Understanding” has been determined as another category examined under the theme of holism. This category represents a whole that includes how principals are selected, how they improve themselves, their perspectives on their profession, and communication skills.

Taking the codes of administrative understanding into account as a whole helps us to understand the principles that school principals pay attention to regarding administration.

The first code of the category of administrative understanding has been determined as “competence-merit.” Project school principals stated that they have right to select their teachers and they care about the merit while choosing the teachers.

The other sub-theme of the administrative understanding category is determined as empowerment of principals. Col (2004) stated that delegation of authority is a part of empowerment and that the main purpose of empowerment is a broader concept that includes holding the person who works for it responsible. Thus, the autonomy of selecting the administrative and teacher staff given to the project school principals should be considered not only as a delegation of authority, but as a broader empowerment.

Another code of the administrative understanding category is “perception of duty.” Project school principals stated that they felt more responsible and worked harder than the other principals. They also said that they sacrificed their own lives in order to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. One participant explained his perception of duty as follows:

P₅ (MD.10): “When I leave at 5 or 6 pm, I worry if I betrayed. I work here until eight or nine pm, I brought it here to the lodgings so I can see my wife and children.

“Work Ethics” is another category of the holism theme. Ilhan (2005) emphasized that the business lives of individuals should be based on certain moral criteria. Kocabas and Karakose (2009) argued that the ethical behavior of a school principal is an important factor in creating a safe school environment for the education process of school staff and students. In this sense, school principals also feel responsible for certain audiences. The first code, “inner peace,” is the best phrase that expresses the source of school principals' responsibilities. While putting their priorities in order, school principals emphasized that they should first be accountable for their conscience.

Another issue mentioned by school principals under the category of work ethics is “social responsibility.” Social responsibility describes the liability that individuals feel towards society. The last code of work ethics is “employer influence.” School principals working as government officials mentioned their legal responsibilities, and the Ministry of Education, provincial and district directorates for national education.

3.3. Theme 3: The Functioning of Education

The last theme was defined as “the functioning of education.” This theme, which discusses how educational activities are carried out at schools and what kind of variables affect this, has been examined under four categories. These categories are ‘school finance,’ ‘mission of education,’ ‘improving the quality of education’ and ‘instructional leadership.’ Associated categories and codes are shown in table 3:

Table 3: Associated codes and categories of theme 3.

Theme	Category	Code	f	Principals
The Functioning of Education	School Finance	Local Facilities	4	P ₂ , P ₆ , P ₉ , P ₁₀
		Personal Efforts	3	P ₁₁ , P ₁₀ , P ₅
		Financial Dilemma	3	P ₂ , P ₃ , P ₄
		Government Support	3	P ₇ , P ₈ , P ₁₂
	Mission of Education	Academic Success	3	P ₄ , P ₇ , P ₈
		Socio-Cultural Development	4	P ₂ , P ₇ , P ₅ , P ₆
		Moral Development	4	P ₁ , P ₈ , P ₉ , P ₆
	Improving the Quality of Education	The Role of Common Ground	3	P ₁₂ , P ₈ , P ₁
		Unique Practices	3	P ₂ , P ₄ , P ₆
	Instructional Leadership	Teachers’ Needs	5	P ₈ , P ₂ , P ₃ , P ₁ , P ₁₀
		Students’ Demand	3	P ₂ , P ₈ , P ₃
		Communication Skills	3	P ₂ , P ₃ , P ₅
Self-Update		3	P ₁₂ , P ₅ , P ₆	

In the “School Finance” category, the project school principals mentioned the sources that provide financial support to the school. School principals are responsible for education and training as well as for the income and expenses of the school. In this sense, the first code determined is “local facilities.”

Another code under the school finance category is determined as “personal efforts.” One of the participants emphasized that maintaining the balance of income and expenses is the same in each school, that the school principal is responsible for that and that the importance of individual success in financial matters as follows:

P₁₀^(MD, 18): “If I make excuses, then there is no difference between me and the principal at another school. We do not have an economic autonomy. So, success or failure is up to the school principal himself.”

Another code under the school finance category is determined as “financial dilemma.” Project school principals also stated that they felt difficult in this sense. According to them, the income provided by the government to schools is not sufficient and school principals feel themselves financially stuck.

The last code of the school finance category is “government support.” Accordingly, as explained by the project school principals, the government provides the same support to all schools. In other words, the funding provided by the Ministry of National Education to all schools is the same.

The category of “Mission of Education” is concerned with the achievement of the educational objectives expected from schools. Participants emphasized that they attach particular importance to these three points in order to improve their schools in general. The first code is determined as “academic success

One of the aims of education is to develop the individual socioculturally. In this sense, especially the project schools aim to train their students as individuals who are well-equipped in every aspect. These views of the project school principals have also been examined under the code of “socio-cultural development.”

The last code of the mission of education is determined as “moral development.” In addition to the academic success, growing students up as individuals who are compatible with the society and have internalized universal moral laws is another issue emphasized by the project school principals.

“Improving the Quality of Education” has been determined as the third category of the theme of the functioning of education, which explains how education is pursuing in project schools. The activities carried out in the project schools in order to increase both academic and sociocultural activities and therefore to support education in all aspects are divided into two codes under this category. The first one, the role of common ground, involves project schools cooperating with similar educational institutions to improve their educational activities.

The second issue, which includes the activities carried out by principals in their own schools in order to improve the quality of education in project schools, is examined under the code of “unique practices.”

“Instructional Leadership” has been determined as the category that explains the leadership understanding of school principals. The first code examined under instructional leadership is “teachers’ needs,” which is about providing the environment that teachers, one of the most important stakeholders of the school, need while performing their educational activities.

The views of a participant who stated that school principals are primarily responsible for the psychological readiness of the teacher are as follows:

P₂^(BD, 4): “Initially, the teacher should be happy, if the teacher is happy, the happiness of the teacher will make students happy, too. If he is happy, we believe that success will be obtained faster.”

Project school students' enrolling these schools with a certain exam score causes their requests and demands to differ from other schools. In that sense, another important issue that school principals attach importance to as instructional leaders is examined under the code of “students’ demand.”

Another feature of the instructional leader is that he has effective communication skills. This feature has been examined under the code of “communication skill.”

The last code studied under instructional leadership is “self-updating.” Project school principals stated that the characteristics of their students force them to improve themselves compulsorily.

4. Discussion

In this part, the roles and competencies of project school principals have been analyzed based on the project school principals' opinions within the framework of accountability. Findings were discussed in the context of the purpose and sub-objectives of the research. Similar and different studies in the literature were compared with this research.

First of all, it was determined that principals explained the concept of accountability in relation to the concept of supervision in education. The school principals interviewed interpreted the supervisions in three different aspects in terms of accountability. They mentioned firstly classroom supervisions by school principals, secondly, institutional supervisions (external supervisions) carried out by inspectors, and lastly about self-directed supervision of themselves and teachers. Project school principals supervise the educational activities by observing the teachers' lessons. The results of the studies conducted by Kayikci, Canturk and Yilmaz (2014) and Karakose and Kocabas (2006) reveal that school principals adopted the clinical supervision. In these studies, it can be concluded that clinical supervision has turned into a routine for school principals, but the project school principals also stated that they do not need this supervision much, especially in their own schools.

In terms of external supervision, school principals stated that they did not experience any problems with the inspectors by mentioning school supervisions. Ladd (2012) stated that the only way to inspect schools is to visit

schools and that this inspection is necessary regardless of the cost. It can be said that the project school principals also support this point of view. In addition, it was observed that school principals talked about self-directed supervision of both themselves and their teachers'. It was emphasized that individuals with self-directed supervision do not need any external control.

Project school principals have the right to build their administrative and teacher team that they will work with. In addition, the students enroll to these schools by getting exam scores. It can be said that the effect of all these variables creates an accountability pressure on school principals. As a matter of fact, during the interviews, school principals also stated that they regarded it as natural to be held accountable while having such rights.

As a result of their research, Summak and Karadag (2009) emphasized that school principals should be financiers who can optimize resources. This research also supports the results and mentions that school principals should be good at creating resources. Some of the project school principals stated that they regard the ability to use local resources and to receive support from their personal contacts as part of the budget management. This makes it necessary for school principals to be chosen among individuals who are sociable with high persuasiveness and advanced communication skills. According to the research results of Yolcu (2007), school principals face difficulties in finding off-budget resources and these difficulties differ depending on the socio-economic level of the school environment.

In this context, it can be said that school principals do not have a common view on the financing of the school and that they either expect the support of the government or using their own means to eliminate socio-economic inequalities. Emphasizing the importance of the moral development of the students, their integration into society, and their education as individuals who know what is right and what is wrong, the project school principals drew attention to the importance of this issue. They concluded that academic development alone would not be sufficient, emphasizing that education, whose results are not seen at once, may have unfavorable consequences in the future. Francom (2016), and Karakose, Kocabas and Yesilyurt (2014) argued in their researches that one of the roles of school principals is being cultural engineer and this is possible by integrating character education in every field of the school. In this sense, it can be said that the project school principals adopted the role of being "cultural engineers" and aimed at raising individuals in every aspect.

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