

Full Length Research Paper

The profession of elementary teaching from the perspective of school administrators

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The purpose of this study was to identify how school administrators perceive the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers. The population of the study comprised the administrators of elementary schools located in the center of Elaziğ, Adana and Malatya. A total of 185 questionnaires were sent to the school administrators included and they were included in the sample. Of these, 153 were returned and analyzed. According to views of school administrators; young teachers implement new instructional methods and techniques better, elementary teaching requires affection. Elementary teaching is not only a woman's profession, however, it is true that female teachers adapt to the profession less easily than their male colleagues, when compared to vice principals, more principals believe that elementary teaching is a difficult branch.

Key words: Elementary teaching, profession of elementary teaching, perspective of school administrators.

INTRODUCTION

People's behaviors, actions and discourse depend on how they view the events, phenomena and people around them, regardless whether they are in a formal organization or an informal group. Thus, the behaviors of an administrator or employee in an organization can be understood by seeing the people or events in that organization through their eyes. Also referred to as empathy in social relations, this perspective helps one understand the behaviors of administrators and employees in an organization.

Leadership studies focus on situational factors that affect leader's behaviors and theories on leadership traits. However, even though it is related to the social cognition theory, very few studies have focused on the importance of leaders' abilities to examine reality and interpret its meaning (Jones, 1991; Caldwell, Bischoff and Karri, 2002).

School administrators need to fulfill their educational administrators to develop their leadership styles, their perspectives on school staff in general and the teaching leadership roles to increase the efficiency of schools. For

profession in particular have a big significance. Issues such as the nature of teaching, its personal and professional characteristics, and the qualifications of practitioners affect school administrators' views about the school and determine their future administrative behaviors.

The school is in the middle of conflicting values. It brings together individuals who hold different values to achieve a common aim, and gives every individual the opportunity and possibility to crystallize, clarify, integrate and justify their own value, judgments and beliefs (Aydin, 2000: 170). At the same time, schools have intellectual and highly educated individuals as their human resource. The decisions of school administrators are very much based on their views about this human resource.

Elementary education is a special branch of teaching that differs in many ways from others. These differences entail subject area, working style and the developmental characteristics of the individuals they educate. The aim of elementary education is to make learners acquire not only content in a predetermined order but also positive behaviors. This gives new tasks and responsibilities to elementary school administrators.

The teacher as an instructional leader who organizes the instructional setting for effective learning, acts as a guide that promotes student success, shows them how to

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learn in different ways, is aware of learners' unique characteristics, and supports them in their learning (Taşpınar, 2009: 5). These are particularly important in elementary schools. Previous studies have shown that elementary teachers have a crucial role in students' character development, future learning experiences and academic success. Thus, the multidimensional development of individuals rests on elementary teachers being successful in their profession.

The attitudes, love for the profession, expertise, general culture and abilities, and curriculum and methodology knowledge of teachers play an important role in their teaching (Ada, 2009: 172). Effective teachers are those who follow various instructional strategies depending on student needs, the topics taught, and the classroom atmosphere (Korkmaz, 2010: 447). The most important precondition to an activity-filled classroom atmosphere is having a class teacher that believes in the importance, need, and benefit of activities (Yildiz, 2006: 107).

On the other hand, elementary school administrators play the dual role of fulfilling their routine tasks as well as being the educational leader. Their leadership behaviors are shaped by their opinions about the teaching profession and the teachers in their school. It is therefore crucial to know their views about elementary teaching. This study starts from this assumption, and aims to determine school administrators' views about elementary teaching in general and elementary teachers in particular.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify how school administrators perceive the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers. Answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How do school administrators view the elementary teaching profession?
2. How do school administrators view elementary teachers?
3. Do school administrators' views about elementary teaching and elementary teachers differ with respect to their positions and professional experiences?

METHODS

This aspect gives information about the research model, population and sample, data collection and analyses.

The research model

This study examines school administrators' views about elementary teaching and elementary teachers. It uses the descriptive survey design, which aims to describe an event or situation as it is. This event, individual or object is described within its own circumstances

(Karasar, 2007). The model is used in studies that aim to identify the thoughts and behaviors of individuals, as well as different educational phenomena (Frankel and Wallen, 1993).

Population and sample

The population of the study comprised the administrators of elementary schools located in the center of Elazığ, Adana and Malatya. The random sampling method was used to determine the sample of the study. The number of school administrators in the sample reflected that of the school administrators in the cities mentioned above. A total of 185 questionnaires were sent to the school administrators and they were included in the sample. Of these, 153 were returned and analyzed.

Data collection

The scale used in the study was shaped in line with the data obtained from a review of the related literature. Having a total of 28 items, this scale was implemented on the study sample, and the data obtained were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. Items with a low factor loading or overlapping ones were removed from the scale. Four items were consequently removed and the statistical analyses were performed on the remaining 24 items. The reliability coefficients of the final version of the scale were: Alpha= 0.683 and KMO 0.691.

The scale used in the study was a five-point likert type scale. The alternatives were scored as 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 from positive to negative.

Data analysis

The data obtained were entered into the SPSS for Windows package with a numbering system suited to the scale format. The analyses were also performed by the same program. The techniques used in the analyses were frequency, percentages, means, t-test and analysis of variance.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

School administrators' views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation values of the items about school administrators' views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers.

Table 1 shows that school administrators "agreed" with the statements that university educated elementary teachers are more successful and younger teachers implement new instructional methods and techniques better than older teachers. At the same time, they did not agree with the statement that older teachers are more successful than younger teachers, and only slightly agreed that new teachers had adaptation problems. It could thus be concluded that school administrators believed that experience was not an important factor for success in the elementary teaching profession. School administrators "agreed" with the statements that

Table 1. School Administrators' Views about the Elementary Teaching Profession and Elementary Teachers

No.	Item	N	X	SD
1	University educated elementary teachers are more successful.	153	3.89	1.101
2	Older teachers are more successful than younger ones.	153	2.58	0.913
3	Younger teachers implement new instructional methods and techniques better than older teachers.	153	3.81	0.941
4	New teachers experience problems in adapting to the profession.	153	3.28	1.041
5	Elementary teaching is the hardest branch of teaching.	153	3.84	1.147
6	Elementary students see their teachers as a parent.	153	4.36	0.817
7	Elementary teachers communicate one-to-one with their students.	153	4.28	0.781
8	Elementary teachers make their classes fun.	153	3.80	0.874
9	Elementary teachers do not grasp the importance of their profession.	153	2.59	0.983
10	Elementary teachers consider individual differences between students as they teach.	153	4.38	0.820
11	Elementary teachers have weak relations with school administrators.	153	2.42	0.929
12	Elementary teachers cooperate with each other.	153	3.69	0.875
13	Elementary teachers consult school administrators when there is a problem in the classroom.	153	3.46	0.819
14	Elementary teachers love their profession.	153	3.76	0.864
15	Elementary teachers have a great role in students' character development.	153	4.62	0.583
16	Teachers believe that elementary teaching requires affection.	153	4.72	0.661
17	Elementary teaching is a woman's job.	153	2.46	1.219
18	Elementary teachers should only work in grades 1, 2 and 3.	153	3.15	1.338
19	Elementary teachers have attendance problems.	153	2.62	0.827
20	Elementary teachers frequently meet parents.	153	3.85	0.838
21	Elementary teachers regularly hold parent meetings to resolve problems.	153	3.73	0.924
22	Female elementary teachers are not efficient due to childbirth, childcare and other familial reasons.	153	3.20	1.036
23	Female elementary teachers adapt to the profession more quickly than their male counterparts.	153	2.88	1.093
24	Elementary teachers avoid working in difficult conditions.	153	2.03	1.009

"elementary teaching is the hardest branch of teaching", "elementary teachers make their classes fun", "elementary teachers cooperate with each other", "elementary teachers consult school administrators when there is a problem in the classroom", "Elementary teachers love their profession", "elementary teachers frequently meet parents" and "elementary teachers regularly hold parent meetings to resolve problems". This shows that school administrators believe that elementary teaching is harder than other branches of teaching. Administrators also seemed to believe that despite the hardships of the teaching profession, elementary teachers make their classes fun, cooperate with their colleagues, consult administrators when they need, love their profession, often meet parents and try to resolve certain problems in this way so they are successful in their teaching. Merter and Camuzcu (2010: 502) state that elementary teachers in an information society should ensure the participation of parents and social institutions in the process of education. Thus, it is a positive finding that teachers meet parents frequently and look for solutions to their problems in parent-teacher meetings.

School administrators "fully agreed" that "elementary teachers have a great role in students' character development", "elementary teachers consider individual

differences between students as they teach" and "teachers believe that elementary teaching requires affection". School administrators seem to believe that elementary teachers have a major role in character development. They also believe in the need for affection while teaching. The idea that "personal differences should be taken into account when teaching" is one of the principles of modern education and it is a positive finding that the administrators in this study were aware of this. School administrators did not agree with the statement that elementary teaching is a woman's profession. On the other hand, they partially agreed that female teachers were not efficient due to reasons such as childbirth and childcare, and that they adapted more quickly to the profession. Evaluated together, these items suggest that unlike the general view in the society, school administrators do not see elementary teaching as a woman's profession and slightly agreed that female teachers had low efficiency due to various reasons.

Kesercioğlu and Girgin (2008: 506-513) studied pre-service elementary teachers and found that female candidates had more positive and higher attitudes about the teaching profession than male ones. This positive attitude may help female teachers adapt more quickly to the profession during their initial years.

Table 2. Independent groups t-test and Mann Whitney U-test results of the position variable.

Item	Levene's Test		Principal		Vice principal		t	p
	F	P	X	SD	X	SD		
1	2.93	0.08	3.77	1.20	3.95	1.05	-0.946	0.346
2	12.34	0.00*	2.77	0.69	2.59	0.99	1.294	0.198
3	1.04	0.30	3.79	1.05	3.82	0.89	-0.224	0.823
4	0.02	0.86	3.22	1.05	3.30	1.03	-0.415	0.678
5	0.70	0.40	4.12	1.08	3.71	1.15	2.076	0.040*
6	0.10	0.75	4.31	0.87	4.39	0.79	-0.546	0.586
7	0.02	0.87	4.37	0.76	4.23	0.79	1.005	0.316
8	0.68	0.40	3.91	0.89	3.75	0.86	1.079	0.282
9	0.28	0.59	2.77	0.99	2.51	0.97	1.504	0.135
10	12.82	0.00*	4.62	0.56	4.27	0.89	2.911	0.004
11	2.22	0.13	2.52	1.03	2.38	0.88	0.863	0.390
12	1.05	0.30	3.58	0.98	3.74	0.82	-1.046	0.297
13	0.00	0.96	3.54	0.79	3.42	0.83	0.791	0.430
14	2.49	0.11	3.72	0.76	3.78	0.90	-0.343	0.732
15	10.66	0.00*	4.75	0.48	4.57	0.61	1.935	0.050
16	2.50	0.11	4.79	0.54	4.69	0.70	0.836	0.404
17	1.17	0.28	2.43	1.10	2.47	1.27	-0.182	0.856
18	1.11	0.29	3.18	1.40	3.14	1.31	0.191	0.849
19	0.03	0.86	2.58	0.82	2.63	0.83	-0.379	0.705
20	0.21	0.64	3.81	0.86	3.87	0.82	-0.435	0.664
21	0.33	0.56	3.75	0.91	3.72	0.93	0.162	0.872
22	0.80	0.37	3.31	1.05	3.16	1.02	0.833	0.406
23	0.00	0.93	2.97	1.08	2.83	1.10	0.739	0.461
24	0.15	0.69	2.02	0.91	2.03	1.05	-0.098	0.922

	Mann-Whitney U	p	Mean rank	
			Principal	Vice principal
2	2149.500	0.123	84.72	73.47
10	2037.000	0.033*	87.06	72.40
15	2166.000	0.088	84.38	73.63

School administrators' views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers based on their positions

Table 2 presents the t-test results conducted to explore the differences between school administrators' views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers depending on their positions.

Table 2 shows that principals and vice principals had similar views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers. The t-test and Mann-Whitney U test results revealed that a significant difference existed only in items 5 and 10.

While principles "fully agreed" with item 5 (Elementary teaching is the hardest branch of teaching), vice principals only "agreed" with it. Even though both principals and vice principals "fully agreed" with item 10 (Elementary teachers consider individual differences

between students as they teach), principals were found to agree at a higher rate.

At schools, vice principals usually fulfill the routine administrative tasks, while principals act as instructional leaders and strive to increase the success of the school. To fulfill this aim, they are more concerned with the success of elementary teachers and classes. As they more closely observe the efforts that teachers make to increase class success, they may agree more that elementary teaching is a difficult branch and that teachers consider individual differences between students as they teach.

Özden and Özdemir (2007: 368) found in their study that elementary teachers took crowded classes as a great obstacle to personalizing education and recommended that class sizes should be decreased. School administrators observe and analyze teachers' problems better.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA results about the professional experience variable.

Item	1-10 years(a)		11-20 years (b)		21-30 years (c)		30 years and more (d)		Homogeneity test		ANOVA		Groups with differences
	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	Levene	P	F	p	
1	4.62	0.50	3.83	1.21	3.87	1.05	3.67	1.13	2.60	0.054	2.990	0.033*	a-d
2	2.37	1.14	2.65	0.92	2.52	0.90	2.94	0.74	2.70	0.047*	2.173	0.094	
3	3.93	0.99	3.74	0.95	3.96	0.84	3.62	1.03	1.77	0.155	1.176	0.321	
4	3.75	1.12	3.06	1.09	3.31	0.98	3.27	0.99	0.51	0.675	1.717	0.166	
5	4.12	1.20	3.81	1.13	3.73	1.11	3.91	1.21	0.19	0.903	0.543	0.654	
6	4.56	0.62	4.09	1.08	4.42	0.68	4.51	0.65	2.32	0.077	2.465	0.065	
7	4.18	0.75	4.11	1.00	4.40	0.65	4.32	0.66	2.16	0.094	1.222	0.304	
8	3.68	1.07	3.69	0.86	3.84	0.81	3.91	0.89	1.00	0.392	0.551	0.648	
9	2.37	1.31	2.76	1.13	2.47	0.84	2.67	0.81	4.94	0.003*	1.082	0.358	
10	4.68	0.60	4.48	0.82	4.36	0.83	4.16	0.83	1.26	0.289	1.905	0.131	
11	2.12	0.61	2.39	0.90	2.47	0.92	2.51	1.07	2.22	0.088	0.730	0.536	
12	3.68	1.01	3.55	0.66	3.75	0.95	3.75	0.92	1.54	0.205	0.494	0.687	
13	3.68	0.94	3.39	0.79	3.40	0.79	3.54	0.83	.79	0.502	0.704	0.551	
14	3.75	1.23	3.60	0.82	3.87	0.82	3.78	0.78	3.59	0.015*	0.818	0.486	
15	4.43	0.72	4.62	0.53	4.66	0.57	4.64	0.58	1.26	0.288	0.663	0.576	
16	4.68	1.01	4.65	0.78	4.80	0.54	4.70	0.46	1.97	0.120	0.497	0.685	
17	2.43	1.45	2.67	1.20	2.31	1.19	2.45	1.16	0.49	0.686	0.706	0.550	
18	3.62	1.58	2.83	1.34	3.42	1.25	2.91	1.25	1.34	0.263	2.687	0.049	a-b. b-c
19	3.18	1.04	2.46	0.79	2.49	0.65	2.75	0.89	1.11	0.043*	4.038	0.009	
20	3.87	1.02	3.74	0.78	3.85	0.85	3.97	0.79	0.64	0.587	0.493	0.688	
21	3.68	1.13	3.58	0.93	3.78	0.92	3.83	0.83	1.60	0.190	0.623	0.601	
22	2.75	1.23	3.34	1.11	3.22	0.92	3.21	1.03	1.40	0.042*	1.322	0.269	
23	3.18	1.42	2.90	1.01	2.63	1.01	3.10	1.10	1.92	0.128	1.984	0.119	
24	2.06	1.48	2.09	0.92	1.98	0.83	2.02	1.14	4.56	0.004*	0.101	0.959	

School administrators' views about the elementary teaching profession and elementary teachers based on their professional experience

Table 3 presents the results of the one-way ANOVA conducted to reveal the differences between school administrators' views about elementary teaching and teachers based on their professional experience.

The table shows that administrators with different years of experience have similar views on the majority of the items. One-way ANOVA results showed a meaningful difference only in items 1 and 18. Additionally, the Kruskal Wallis H-test was conducted on items 2, 9, 14, 19, 22 and 24, where a homogeneous distribution was not found. The results of the Kruskal Wallis H-test are given in Table 4.

In item 1, administrators with 1 to 10 years of professional experience "agreed fully" that "University educated elementary teachers are more successful" ($X=4.62$). However, administrators with 30 or more years of professional experience "agreed" with the same item, with a mean value that almost denotes undecidedness. Almost all of the administrators with 1 to 10 years of professional experience are university graduates.

Therefore, it may be natural that they think university graduates are more successful than 2 year college graduates. In item 18, administrators with 1 to 10 and 21 to 30 years of professional experience "agreed" with the statement that "elementary teachers should only work in grades 1, 2 and 3", while those with 11 to 20 years of professional experience only "partially agreed" with it. In educational research, opinions are expected to become more similar as professional experience increases. It is thus an interesting finding that administrators with 11 to 20 years of professional experience thought differently on this item than those with less and more experience than themselves.

The Kruskal Wallis H-test, which was performed on items with non-homogeneous distribution, showed a meaningful difference between the groups in items 2 and 19. In order to find the source of the difference, the Mann Whitney U-test was conducted. While less experienced administrators did not agree with item 2 that "older teachers are more successful than younger ones", more experienced ones partially agreed with it. This is an expected result, as less experienced administrators are usually younger than others. In item 19, while administrators with 1 to 10 years of professional

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis and MW U-test results of items with non-homogeneous distribution in the professional experience variable.

Item	Kruskal Wallis H- test		Mann-Whitney U-test		Groups with differences
	Chi-square	p	MWU	p	
2	9.47	0.02*	273.50 (a-b)	0.20	a-d c-d
			398.50 (a-c)	0.39	
			182.50 (a-d)	0.02*	
			1079.00 (b-c)	0.27	
			654.50 (b-d)	0.14	
			713.50 (c-d)	0.00*	
9	2.81	0.42	-	-	-
14	2.56	0.46	-	-	-
19	9.60	0.02*	205.00 (a-b)	0.01*	a-b a-c
			259.50 (a-c)	0.00*	
			222.00 (a-d)	0.12	
			1212.00 (b-c)	0.91	
			667.50 (b-d)	0.18	
			869.00 (c-d)	0.11	
22	3.79	0.28	-	-	-
24	1.27	0.73	-	-	-

experience partially agreed that “elementary teachers have attendance problems”, those with 11 to 20 and 21 to 30 years of professional experience did not agree with it. It may thus be concluded that less experienced administrators have problems ensuring that elementary teachers attend their classes regularly.

Conclusion

In light of the results obtained in this study, the views of school administrators about the elementary teaching profession are given as:

- (i) In elementary teaching, young teachers implement new instructional methods and techniques better. However, experience is not an important factor in professional success.
- (ii) New teachers experience a certain level of adaptation problems.
- (iii) Elementary teaching is a difficult branch. However, elementary teachers make their classes fun and they collaborate with other school personnel to overcome the difficulty.
- (iv) Elementary students see their teachers as their parents. Thus, having affection is an important factor in elementary teaching. Elementary teachers have a crucial role in students' character development.
- (v) Elementary teaching requires affection.
- (vi) Elementary teaching is not only a woman's profes-

sion. However, it is true that female teachers adapt to the profession less easily than their male colleagues. On the other hand, female teachers' efficiency falls relatively in future years due to reasons such as childbirth and childcare.

(vii) When compared to vice principals, more principals believe that elementary teaching is a difficult branch.

(viii) Less experienced school administrators believe that university educated elementary teachers are more successful.

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