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SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: CASE STUDIES IN TURKISH AND ENGLISH OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS

Abstract:

Specifically, since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, highly significant educational changes have been instigated based on these international benchmarks which, as Inal (2005) states, have substantially shifted the philosophy of education in Turkey. In this respect, one of the main comprehensive revisions to the education system has involved primary-school curriculum reform. These curriculum changes came into effect in 2004 and have provided significant changes in teacher training, teaching methods, textbooks etc. The AKP announced that the renewed curriculum would replace the former, outmoded, behaviorist approach (accused of supporting rote learning and teacher-centred education) with a more constructivist approach (Inal et al., 2010). This approach brought a number of innovations into the educational system such as student-centered education, the multiple-intelligences approach, teacher guidance, and educational duties to enhance pedagogical performance (MoNE, 2004, p. 227-228).

In addition to these curriculum changes, broader external reforms have also taken place. Undoubtedly, the most popular of these is the most recent: a twelve-year compulsory education framework named as 4+4+4. "Primary Education Law no 6287" (MoNE, 2012a) mandates the extension of the period of continuous basic education from 8 years to 12 years (intermittent) to extend the period of compulsory education in Turkey to match EU and OECD countries averages and provide a more qualified educational environment for Turkish students (Gun and Baskan, 2014, p. 229). In particular, the Turkish Ministry of Education has adopted the Fatih Project (the Movement for Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology) to enhance technology usage in schools via incorporating interactive boards and tablets in teaching and learning processes (Akgün et al., 2011; MoNE, 2012b). By doing so, the Ministry aims to contribute to the quality of education in schools, and increase student achievement.

In addition to the reform movements mentioned above, in its mission to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Turkish schools, the Ministry of Education has also directed its attention to the role of school principals because school leadership contributes to school improvement significantly, and instructional leadership is one of the most powerful ways to support teachers' professional development and student achievement (Day et al., 2016). In this respect, the Ministry enacted a law requiring school principals to adopt instructional leadership roles by determining vision and mission of their schools, observing practices of teaching and learning in classrooms, and providing performance feedback to teachers (MoNE, 2016).

However, despite this desire to shift toward a more instructionally oriented Turkish education system, research has highlighted that rather than instructional issues, principals in Turkish school spend most of their time performing managerial and bureaucratic issues such as completing government correspondence required by the Ministry, managing budgets, overcoming discipline problems, and controlling attendance. In a comprehensive study investigating primary-school principal's instructional leadership skills from teachers' perspectives across five cities in Turkey, Gumus and Akcaoglu (2013) explain why principals are more likely to focus on managerial issues and are less inclined to enact instructional leadership behaviours by citing three main factors: (i)

principal recruitment policy, (ii) principal's job description, and (iii) the school inspection system. First, while in many developed countries principalship is seen as a profession requiring special training, in Turkey, principalship is still not perceived as a profession perse, but rather as one of a number of stages in a teacher's career. Second, public expectations and the country's centralised education policy does not hold principals to account for student success and staff development. That is, there is a stereotyped understanding between educators in Turkey that unless a school principal undermines their position by being involved in discreditable activity, they would likely continue in their job regardless of performance. Third, school inspections are carried out in a very limited time and evaluate principals' performance against a very limited set of criteria that associates principals with teaching and learning.

Keywords:

instructional leadership, leadership for learning, school principal

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