

The Ethical Behaviors of Principals in Private Schools

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In light of studies on management problems in private schools (Akyol, 2008; Aslan, 2016; Cent, 2007; Saylan, 2013), having school administrators who possess professional ethics is thought able to play an important role in solving management problems. Therefore, questioning the ethical behavior of school principals is necessary for teachers and other stakeholders working in private schools. This study is thought to bring different expansions to the field in terms of protecting the ethical rights of educators working in private schools that show autonomy in human resource policies. In this regard, the aim of this study is to reveal the ethical behaviors of school principals according to the opinions of private school teachers. The following question has been addressed within the scope of the study: *“What are the personality characteristics and behavioral styles of ethical school principals, the unethical behaviors of school principals and teachers, and the characteristics of an ethical school?”* The research is important in terms of arriving at detailed data based on teachers’ semantic world instead of objective data about the ethical behaviors of school principals.

The study, designed according to the phenomenological design, has been conducted with 16 private school teachers who were determined using the snowball sampling method. By considering that the participants will have difficulty express-

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ing their opinions about the ethical behavior of school principals due to trust problems experienced while working in these schools or being unable to answer questions sincerely, this study has used the snowball sampling method in asking private school teachers their opinions on the ethical behaviors of school administrators. The study's data have been obtained using a semi-structured interview form and have been analyzed using descriptive analysis.

According to the participants' opinions, the personality characteristics of an ethical school principal have been divided into the themes of management skills, communication skills, and efficacy skills. Ethical school principals' treating teachers equally and fairly have come to the forefront among management skills. Moorhouse's (2002) study concluded that one ethical behavior school principals should have is fairness. Similar results have been reached in terms of school principals being fair and having the characteristics of equality in other studies (e.g., Börü, 2015; Turhan, 2007; Gültekin, 2008; Küçükkaraduman, 2006; Yıldırım, 2010; Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005; Aykanat & Yıldırım, 2012; Büyükgökçe, 2015; Şimşek & Altinkurt, 2009). Private school administrators should prioritize the principle of equality in their behaviors toward the teachers with whom they work. As various cases are found that have created differences in private schools such as teachers' teaching experiences and wage criteria, obstacles are considered to exist in administrators treating teachers equally and fairly (Yılmaz & Altinkurt, 2011). In this context, the results of the study emphasize the need to have work environments created for teachers working in private schools according to the principle of equality in the regulation of educational policies.

Based on the findings from the interviews, the behaviors of an ethical principal are divided into the following themes: behaviors related to the weight attached to employees, behaviors related to an ethical management approach, and behaviors related to the principle of equality; the foremost opinion is that teachers expect an ethical school principal, using behavior, to take the employees seriously. According to private school teachers' opinions, the seriousness with which school principals deal with teachers does not meet teachers' expectations. However, Erdoğan's (2007) study, conducted with teachers on the ethical behaviors of public school principals, found the importance principals attach to teachers to be high. Given the fact that the results of these two studies do not fully overlap, professional ethics studies conducted in future may clarify conflicting points about the weight principals attach to teachers in private schools. In addition, teachers stated that an ethical school principal should cooperate with teachers and have decision-making skills

and an understanding of honesty and that their behaviors towards teachers should be within the framework of these factors. Previous research (Aktay, 2010; Ertürk, 2012; İskele, 2009; Kılınç, 2010; Şimşek & Altınkurt, 2009; Yıldırım, 2009, 2010) has found that teachers expect ethical school principals to cooperatively make joint decisions at school; this supports the findings from the current study.

The teachers were also asked about the unethical behaviors of school principals and teachers working in private schools. Regarding the unethical behavior of school principals, not behaving towards teachers according to the principle of equality, which falls under the theme of fairness-related behaviors, has come to the fore. Büyükgökçe's (2015) study reached the same conclusions, as the teachers stated school principals to have unethical behaviors such as unfairness and discrimination. In addition, school principals' valuing parents over teachers was presented as an unethical behavior under the theme of value-behaviors shown to employees. It is not surprising that Parents and students being seen as more valuable than teachers is not surprising, given the understanding that private school teachers are seen like mechanical workers in factories (Alic, 1996). Ethical school managers are expected to have positive interactions with the school and society. This is more important for private school administrators. Private school principals' parent-centered approach may interfere in the education process. A striking result of the study regarding participants' responses is humiliating teachers in front of students also being among school principals' unethical behaviors.

Regarding the unethical behaviors of teachers, the study has shown participants mostly tend to uncover others' deceits and take advantage of this situation. Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2011) stated the competition between employees who blame each other, who constantly develop their own defense mechanisms, and who do not trust one another is an important obstacle to creating an effective school climate in private schools. Job satisfaction and performance decrease as employee commitment decreases. Unhappy teachers cannot raise a happy future (Büyükdere & Solmuş, 2006). In addition, teachers are understood to exhibit unethical behaviors under the theme of professional unethical behaviors in the forms of refraining to take responsibility for the work they do and not attaching enough seriousness. According to Aydın (2003), delaying or disregarding the tasks required in educational institutions means educators are neglecting their responsibilities. Employee negligence is both a legal crime and a violation of ethical principles.

According to the answers participants gave, private school principals tend to ignore teachers' unethical behaviors. School principals' ignorance of teachers' unethi-

cal behaviors may signify the principal approves the behaviors or is unwilling to deal with them. However, such cases can result in undesirable situations such as the teacher's unethical behaviors increasing. This finding overlaps with Büyükgökçe's (2015) finding that school principals often do not impose any sanctions against teachers' unethical behaviors. In addition, Büyükgökçe's (2015) study, conducted on teachers working in public schools, found principal-imposed sanctions against teachers' unethical behaviors to be in the form of warnings, whereas our study has found private school teachers to have faced sanctions for unethical behavior in the form of dismissal instead of warnings. Consideration should be given to the ethicality of being dismissed without a warning for private school teachers. For this reason, addressing and examining private school teachers' job insecurity would be useful in future studies.

The principle of equality is understood to lay under private school teachers' understanding of school ethics. Participants who think ethical school principals have a major impact on ethical school climate described ethical institutions as place where employees cooperate in line with common goals. Börü (2015) and Karaköse (2008) emphasized that establishing an ethical culture in schools is possible with the example behaviors of an ethical school principal. In this context, non-discrimination among employees and ensuring that all employees are treated equally can undoubtedly be named among the most important duties of school principals. Principals should make their employees feel valuable, that principals find employees' ideas important, and that employees do a respectable job. All school employees should benefit equally from the educational opportunities offered by the school, have equal opportunities to be successful, and be treated equally.

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