The Relationship between Primary School Principals' Leadership Styles and School Climate

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Abstract—**School climate is an organizational feature that separates a school from other schools and affects the behavior of the people within it. School climate significantly affects the achievement of the school's goals and is affected by many factors. One of these factors is the leadership styles of school administrators. In this study, the relationship between the leadership styles of primary school principals and the school climate was examined. The participants consisted of 5 primary school principals working in Adana city center. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained. As a result of the research, it was determined that school principals have an eclectic leadership style that includes both democratic and transformational leadership characteristics. In addition, it is observed that there is a positive relationship between the leadership style of principals and the school climate of the schools they manage. In parallel with the democratic and transformational leadership approaches of school principals, it has been determined that open school climate prevails in their schools.**

Keywords— Educational administration; school principals; leadership styles; school climate

I. INTRODUCTION

Schools are institutions where educational activities are carried out and play a critical role in providing qualified workforce. The fulfillment of these missions by schools is directly related to the qualifications they have. Besides the physical infrastructure of the schools, the programs they apply and similar variables, the climate they have is an important criteria in determining their qualifications.

The school climate is an important collection of internal features that have effects on the behavior of staff and students, reflect the psychological atmosphere of the school and distinguish schools from each other. School climate is defined as affective and cognitive perceptions of social interactions, relationships, values and beliefs performed by students, teachers, administrators and staff in a school (Rudasill at al., 2018). According to another definition, school climate is the emotion that an individual gets from experiences within a school system. More specifically, the school climate is the combination of norms, expectations and beliefs that characterize the school social system perceived by its members (Lindelow at al., 1989). The school climate includes the rules, beliefs and expectations of administrators, teachers, students, parents and other school personals and interpersonal relationships within the school (Haynes at al., 1997).

Research on the school climate has revealed that there are various school climates types. These are open, closed, independent, and controlled climate types. In the open school climate, individuals have deep confidence in themselves and the school; their motivation in working is high and their tendency to avoid work is quite weak. In independent school climate, leadership is mostly group-based and the administrator's control over staff is very weak (Arslan, 2019). Fulfilling the task underlies the controlled school climate. Cooperation and solidarity are not observed among the staff. Staff are constantly busy with their duties. The school administrator is in an imperative position (Kıldiş, 2019). Closed school climate is a type of school climate where school staff feel unsafe and the desire to escape from work is common. In schools where such a climate is dominant, staff and students are unhappy. Their sense of belonging to the school is very weak, and students' academic success is extremely low. School administrators use their leadership authority in an authoritative manner (Tavşanlı et al., 2016). Studies about school climate revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between school climate and students' school satisfaction (Zullig at al., 2011), self-esteem (Hoge at al., 1990), academic and social achievements (Bodovski at al., 2018; Pakarinen et al., 2017). On the other hand it was also revealed that there is a negative significant relationship between school climate and negative student behavior (Konishi at al., 2017; Petrie, 2014). The school climate has significant effects not

only on students but also on school staff. Studies show that there is a positive significant relationship between school climate and teachers' perceptions of organizational trust, loyalty and well-being (Ayık et al., 2014; Aydoğan, 2019; Korkmaz, 2011).

In addition to the significant effects of the school climate on students and teachers, it is also affected by many variables. It is possible to divide the factors affecting the school climate into two as positive and negative factors. The results of the research conducted by Tofur and Balıkçı (2018) have shown that low socioeconomic school environment, insufficient communication between school staff, unfair behavior of the administrators, staffs' avoidance from responsibility, restrictive regulations affect the school climate in a negative way. On the other hand the results have revealed that some factors such as managers' appreciation of staff, giving importance not only to teaching but also to education, healthy communication between staff, participation of employees in decision-making processes, fair behavior of administrators, and clear presentation of the school's purpose and vision affect the school climate positively. As it can be seen from the findings, there are many factors that may affect the school climate positively or negatively. However, certainly, the main factors among those are administrator and his/her leadership style. The school principal is the person who leads the determination and realization of the goals of the school through the authorities given to him/her, develops and maintains the organizational structure, ensures the motivation of the institution staff and thus plays a leading role in shaping the organizational climate (Metin, 2020).

The concept of leadership style indicates the attitudes and behaviors of the leader while leading his/her subordinates. The leadership style used by an administrator significantly determines his/her leadership success. In addition to adopting an appropriate leadership style, the use of appropriate motivational methods plays a critical role in achieving both personal and organizational goals (Şafaklı, 2005). When the literature is investigated, it is seen that there are various leadership styles such as autocratic, transformational, interactionist and democratic. Autocratic leadership is considered one of the traditional leadership styles. In the autocratic leadership style, the leader uses his/her authority through his/her position, organizational decisions are taken only by the manager, and the manager manages the group members in a directive leadership style (Telli et al., 2012). Transformational leadership is defined as leadership that can provide effective change (Töreman and Yasan, 2010). The transformational leader motivates the employees of the organization with his/her suggestions, activates them mentally and gives them positive energy. It creates awareness of mission and vision among the members of the group and enables the group members to orient more towards the goal (Karip, 1998). In the interactionist leadership style, the leader expresses his expectations clearly to

those in his / her management and explains in advance what kind of reward they will receive if they perform the expected performance (Eren & Titizoğlu, 2014). An interactive leader is less interested in the innovative and creative characteristics of the people he/ leads, instead focuses mostly on quality and efficiency (Şentürk et al., 2016). Finally, in democratic leadership, the leader ensures that decisions are made as a result of group discussions, and thus tries to ensure active participation of those in the group in the decision-making process. In a democratic leadership style, perspectives on how to fulfill organizational tasks emerge during group discussions. The leader offers suggestions when necessary and organization members take these suggestions into consideration (Avcı and Yaşar, 2016).

When the studies on the effects of leadership style were investigated, it was seen that positive leadership attitudes had positive effects on the school climate, while negative leadership attitudes affected the school climate negatively (Alpay, 2019; Gültekin, 2012; Öztürk and Zembat, 2015; Varlı, 2015). On the other hand, although these studies show that there is a statistically significant relationship between school principals and school climate, they do not reveal in-depth information about the types of administrative behaviors of school principals and what kind of effects they have on the quality of the school climate. This research was carried out to obtain in-depth information on the relationship between school principals' leadership styles and school climate. In line with this main purpose of the study, the following questions were sought:

• What are the leadership styles of primary school principals?

• What is the relationship between the leadership styles of primary school principals and the school climate?

II. METHOD

A qualitative research model has been adopted in order to obtain in-depth information about the leadership styles of school principals and the climate of their schools. As a research method, semi-structured interview method was used. Participants consist of 5 school principals who work in public primary schools in the central districts of Adana, Turkey. Purposeful sampling method was used in sample selection. For this purpose, principals of primary schools in the central districts of Adana were contacted, information was given about the purpose and method of the study, and the research sample consisted of 5 school principals volunteer for participating to the study. The school principals in the study were coded as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5. The seniority years of the participants in administration range from 8 to 22 years. The administration periods in their current schools vary between 1 year and 4 years. All administrators are

graduates of education faculties. In the study personal information form and semi-structured interview form were used as data collection tools. The interview form consisted of questions about determining the leadership styles of school principals and school climate. The questions in the interview form were adopted from Üstün (2017). The interviews were conducted in the school principals' room using a semi-structured interview form. The responses of the school principals were recorded in the semi-structured interview form. Content analysis method was used for the analysis of the data.

III. FINDINGS

This research was carried out to determine the effect of the leadership styles of primary school principals on the climate of their schools. In this section, the findings obtained as a result of the research are presented in line with the research questions.

1. Findings on the Leadership Styles of Primary School Principals

In the research, several questions were asked in order to determine the leadership styles of primary school principals. The first question was "*How do you rate yourself as a manager? What are your strengths as a manager?*" P1 answered this question as "*I try to be a solution-oriented education leader. I try to solve problems by communicating effectively with my stakeholders. As my strengths, I can say that I have knowledge in the field of management and my effective communication channels*". P2 said, "*I consider myself successful with the power granted by laws and regulations. My strengths are being confident, active, and willingness to work*". P3 answered this question as "*I work process-oriented to solve the general problems of the school. I make sure that everyone is a partner in the problems and solutions of the school. I think my organizational and leadership aspects are strong*", while P4 replied this question as "*My strengths are being fair, hardworking, having time management and being consistent in my words and actions*". Finally, answer of P5 was: "*I am open to innovations and love children*".

With this question, it is aimed that the participants evaluate themselves in terms of management and reveal their strengths. While P1 and P3 emphasized the importance of "*solution-oriented*" and "*effective communication*", P2 emphasized "*law and regulation*". P4 pointed out individual characteristics such as "*justice, diligence, consistency*". P5 was the only participant who mentioned students who are one of the school stakeholders.

Another question regarding the leadership styles of the participants was "*What kind of attitudes do you take regarding human relations?*". P1 answered this question as "*Employee satisfaction, student satisfaction, parent satisfaction are at the forefront in my school. As I said at the beginning, I think that the process is completed when you handle the problems with a solution-oriented approach and when you produce solutions without delay, and when you explain the reasons to the relevant stakeholder when you cannot produce solutions*". Thus, he emphasized the importance of the satisfaction of the school stakeholders (staff, students, parents). P2 emphasized human values with the answer of "*To value and feel people because they are human*". P3 replied, "*I am doing what I have to do by acting objectively depending on the occurrence of the event and the situation*". Thus, he emphasized his neutrality. P4's response was "*I can take serious and sometimes harsh attitudes depending on the warm, sincere place*". He used positive and negative concepts (sincere / harsh) together. P5 stated "*joint decision-making efforts and attitudes towards establishing school culture*" and reflected the "*democratic leadership*" style by emphasizing collective decision-making.

Another question about leadership styles was "*Are you preparing an environment where teachers can enjoy their work? Are there any attempts / studies on this subject?*". The answers of participants were as follows;

"*As I mentioned in the previous question, teachers' satisfaction and motivation come first. However, the coexistence of the two institutions, our primary and secondary school teachers and our students using the same environments, can cause problems in some cases. When I came to this school, my first job was to change the location of the teachers 'room and to build a tea stove / kitchen next to the teachers' room so that they could be served better. Activities are held every teacher's day to increase the motivation of our teachers*" (P1).

"*I am preparing as far as possible. For example, I recently organized the teachers' room*" (P2).

"*It is more important for teachers to have suitable working environments than other professions. A sense of belonging to the school is very important for teacher success and performance. Therefore, I am working to improve the physical conditions of the school and to solve the problems of teachers*" (P3).

"*I am trying to prepare a suitable environment. I occasionally hold motivational meetings*"(P4).

"*I value teachers' work and opinions*" (P5).

In this question, P1, P2 and P3 emphasized the improvement and regulation of physical conditions (teachers' room, tea room / kitchen), while P4 and P5 are more focused on relationships.

Another question regarding leadership styles was "Do you give motivational speeches for teachers in meetings? What aspects of the teachers do you highlight in these talks?". P1 said "*I usually plan meetings briefly. I would like to thank my teachers for*

their work. It cannot be expected from every teacher to be professional. But every teacher's work, every little touches are valuable and important I try to motivate my silent teacher, who is unobtrusive, by bringing up a very small and seemingly insignificant work when necessary. Sometimes our teachers, who seem like this, are doing such great things, they solve such problems that we have always seen this with experience". The answer of P2 was "*Yes I do. I highlight corporate culture and cooperation*". P3 said "*Yes I do. I want them to act with the awareness that each of them is an educational leader, that they are role models for their students, and that the future of our country will be in the hands of the students they raise*". P4's response was *"I do it. I highlight successful and good examples and employees' products*". Lastly, P5's response was "*Yes, I have meetings. Generally I focus on positive and successful aspects*". With this question, it has been tried to reveal whether the participants show a "transformational leadership" feature. Since all the participants stated that they made motivating speeches, it can be said that they reflected transformative leadership characteristics.

"*How often do you meet and talk with teachers at school?*" was another question about the leadership styles. P1's response was, "*My door is always open to my teacher. Sometimes meetings are held in a chat environment in the teachers' room, sometimes meetings are held in my room with small meetings. I think I am very transparent and democratic in this regard. One-to-one meetings are held on the basis of confidentiality*", while P2 said "*I visit the teachers' room every day*". P3's response was, "*We are in constant communication with the teachers in the school. I meet with the departments and working groups once a week or every few weeks*". P4 said "*I can always meet with any teacher who wants*". Lastly, P5's response was: "*Once a week with each of my teacher*". As a result, while P1 and P4 stated that they interviewed teachers in line with their requests and needs; P2, P3 and P5 stated that they had interviews periodically in certain time frames.

The final question on leadership styles was "*Do you involve teachers in your decisions? How?*". The answers of the participants were as follows;

"*I definitely include teachers in decisions that will affect them and their students. I take care to make other decisions jointly. Also, I pay attention to inform the stakeholders after the decisions that need to be taken urgently*" (P1).

"*It depends on the content of the subject. I include teachers in matters concerning education and training and teachers*" (P2).

"*I think it is wrong to manage a school without including teachers in the decision. I try to involve teachers in decision-making processes through working groups, classes and teachers' council"* (P3).

"*I get the opinions of my teachers on everything that concerns them and their students. Sometimes

they can see better what we cannot see as management*" (P4).

"*Yes I do. Sometimes I do this through questionnaires, sometimes face-to-face meetings and sometimes meetings*" (P5).

As a result, it is seen that all of the participants included teachers in the decisions taken. P1, P2 and P4 involved teachers in decision-making processes, especially according to the type of subject.

1. Findings on the Impact of Primary School Principals' Leadership Styles on the School Climate

In order to determine the impact of leadership styles on the school climate, firstly the participants were asked that "*How do you usually spend your time at school?*". P1's response was "*The jobs we spend the most time as School Principal are maintenance, repair, hygiene and cleaning works and follow-up of these works; official correspondence and bureaucratic affairs; educational activities, events, social activities*", while P2's response was "*I visit the departments of the school. I take care of visitors who come. I plan the work to be done*". P3 said that "*I spend my time dealing with school affairs*". M4's answer was "*I spend time doing professional studies, leading meetings and projects, and reading books*", while M5's answer was "*I spend time with official transactions, self-control and communication with teacher candidates*".

"*What do you pay attention to while solving a problem at school?*" when asked, P1's answer is "*Solution oriented and effective communication*"; while P2's answer was "*I search for the source of the problem and listen to all parties*". P3 answered this question as follows "*First of all I try to understand the problem. I listen to the sides of the problem. By evaluating the previous experiences related to the incident, I ensure that the problem is solved in a way that the people are least harmed*". P4 said that "*First I try to understand the event and then I focus on the solution with a fair attitude.*" Finally, P5's answer was "*I focus on what the source of the problem is*".

Another question was "*How do teachers relate to each other at school?*". P1's answer was *"Egocentric teachers are tough. Those who act with the feeling of us always support the corporate culture. I and us emotions also affect their relationships with each other. Therefore, conflicts become inevitable. But the important thing is to manage teachers who are self-conscious. One of our duties is to absorb them to the maximum level of corporate culture and to reduce conflicts*". Other participants' responses were rather short. P2 said that "*teachers have harmonious and good relationships*". P3' response was "*They have very good relationships. They are very respectful to each other*". P4 said that "*Their relationship is generally warm and sincere*". Lastly, P5 response was "*Everyone respects each other*".

When asked the question "Do you think teachers like working in general?", the following answers were received;

"*I think that the most important problem of teachers is that their salaries are far behind in financial terms. They rightly expect their salary to be in a higher position in order to be more respected in society. I think this situation negatively affects their enthusiasm to work*" (P1).

"*I think the teachers at my school generally like to work*" (P2).

"*I think the teachers are aware of the teaching profession. I think that those who have chosen teaching as their profession have to be innovative and hardworking*" (P3).

"*Teachers in my school generally like to work*" (P4).

"*Most of my teachers like to work"* (P5).

The last question is "*How do you think the school climate in your institution? Do you have any work to make it better?*". The answers of the participants were as follows;

"*I think school climate is directly related to school culture. Success in school culture will directly reflect on the school climate. If you see a smiling face when you look at the faces of teachers and students, you are on the right track. Happy teachers, happy students, happy parents are formed with a solid school culture, it is difficult but when it is achieved, complaints are minimized and smiling faces are in the majority*" (P1).

"*I think the climate of my school is good. I'm trying to increase constructive communication to make it better*" (P2).

"*The school climate was very positive outside of the pandemic period. Because the success of each of our teachers, we have been together and supported as much as we could in every bitter or sweet event that happened to him. We worked collaboratively to tackle the problems encountered. I acted with the belief that the opinion of each of our teachers or staff members is extremely important. As a manager, I am aware of the positive effects of the school climate*" (P3).

"*The school climate is good. We are working on making it better*" (M4).

"The school climate is good. We are conducting communication activities and studies to develop it further" (P5).

IV. DISCUSSION

In order to determine the leadership styles of the participants in the study, firstly, how they evaluate themselves as managers was asked. When the answers given by the participants are examined, it is seen that some of them emphasize being solution-oriented and establishing effective communication. In the literature on leadership styles, it is emphasized that focusing on interpersonal relationships is a feature of democratic leadership style (Şimşek, 2017; Sevinçtekin, 2020). Similarly, when the participants were asked to compare democratic and autocratic leadership in terms of achieving successful results, all of the participants thought that democratic leadership style would bring more successful results. In this context, it can be said that the participants in question have adopted the democratic leadership style. It was seen that some of the participants answered this question using concepts such as innovation and justice. In the theoretical explanations about leadership, it is stated that the emphasis on such concepts reflects the transformational leadership style (Karip, 1998; Korkmaz, 2006; Şentürk et al., 2016). In this sense, it can be said that the participants who emphasize the concepts of innovation and justice have a transformational leadership style. When studies on the leadership styles in Turkey are examined, it is seen that school principals are mostly adopt democratic or transformational leadership styles or at least make a declaration to that effect (Buluç, 2009; Tekingündüz, 2017; Töremen & Yasan, 2010; Varlı, 2015).

Another finding of the research on leadership styles should show that all participants give motivational speeches to their teachers. With their answers in this direction, the participants showed that they have transformational leadership characteristics. In addition, considering the answers given by the participants to the question of what kind of attitudes they display in human relations, some of them showed transformational leadership characteristics because they emphasized satisfaction; some showed the characteristics of democratic leadership, as they emphasized neutrality and collective decision-making. In the leadership styles literature, managers' attitudes towards employee satisfaction are considered as a feature of transformational leadership (Başaran, 2006; Gençay, 2014); their neutrality and active participation in decision-making processes are accepted as an indicator of their democratic leadership styles (Gündüz, 2019; Özdemir, 2019).

Another question to determine the leadership styles of the participants is whether they prepare an environment where teachers can enjoy their work. All of the participants gave a positive answer to this question. This shows that the participants adopt the transformational leadership style. In the relevant literature, it is stated that managers' preparation of a suitable environment for their employees reflects their transformational leadership characteristics (Çelik, 2013; Zeren, 2007).

In conclusion, considering all the responses of the participants to leadership styles, it is seen that they exhibit both democratic and transformational leadership characteristics. In this context, it can be said that participant school principals adopt an eclectic leadership style that includes both democratic and transformational leadership characteristics.

In order to determine how leadership styles affect the school climate of the schools where they work, the participants were first asked what the school climate in their institutions was and what they did to improve it. All of the participants stated that the current school climate was positive; they emphasized the satisfaction of teachers, students and parents and the importance of communication. In line with these findings, it can be said that the open climate prevails in the schools of the participants. As a result of the study conducted by Varlı (2015), it was determined that school principals' adoption of democratic leadership style caused the open school climate to prevail. Similarly, Bozdoğan and Sağnak (2011) found a significant relationship between democratic leadership style and open climate dimensions such as freedom, harmony, and cooperation.

Considering the responses given by the participants to the question of what they pay attention to when solving a problem in their schools, it was seen that all of them emphasized effective communication and solution-oriented, and this shows that there is a healthy communication with teachers and other stakeholders in their schools, and therefore their schools have an open climate. In parallel with these findings, as a result of the research conducted by Gültekin (2012), it was found that school principals generally exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, act as solution centers in the face of problems and support healthy communication; As a result, it has been determined that the open climate is common in the schools of principals who exhibit this kind of leadership behavior. Similarly, Avcı (2015) stated that principals with transformational leadership style tend to strive for an open and tolerant climate.

Finally, when the participants were asked about the relationships between the teachers at their schools, all except P1 stated that the relations were in harmony, respect and love. This finding supports that the institutions of the participants have an open school climate. P1, on the other hand, can be said to have an open school climate, as he emphasizes the managerial qualification by stating that there are two types of teachers acting with the feeling of "I" and "we" in his institution and that the real challenge is to manage the teacher who acts with the feeling of "I". As a result of the study conducted by Demir (2019), it was observed that school principals displaying transformational leadership behaviors supported positive relations among teachers and contributed to the prevalence of an open school climate. Similarly, in the study conducted by Bilgi (2020), it was found that there is a significant relationship between school principals' leadership styles and school climate; It was determined that there is a significant relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and the open school climate.

In line with all these findings, in line with the statements of the participants, it can be said that the school principals in the study showed both democratic and transformational leadership characteristics, and parallel to this, open school climate characteristics are common in their schools.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the study show that the Participants have an eclectic leadership style that includes both democratic and transformational leadership characteristics. In line with their leadership style, they attach importance to effective communication. It adopts a solution-oriented approach; emphasizes the concepts of innovation and justice; strives to motivate teachers; trying to be impartial; they care about joint participation and strive to create an environment that will enable teachers to work efficiently. Finally, there is a close relationship between the leadership styles of principals and the school climate of the schools they manage. In line with the statements of the participants, it has been determined that in parallel with their leadership styles, open climate characteristics are dominant in their schools.

Considering the results obtained in the research, some suggestions for the application and research field are presented. First of all, principals should adopt a democratic and transformational leadership style in order to create a positive school climate. In order for school administrators to adopt a leadership style in this direction, it will be beneficial to train them about the effects of leadership styles and leadership styles on the organization in both undergraduate and in-service training. When choosing school principals, their leadership styles should be investigated and candidates with democratic and transformational leadership styles should be preferred. Finally, in this study, the relationship between leadership styles and school climate was examined from the perspective of school principals. In future studies, the relationship between school principals' leadership styles and school climate can be addressed from the perspective of teachers, students, parents and other staff.

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