Principal Assignments in Limbo: A Qualitative Study on the Processes and Potential Outcomes of the Recent Principal Assignment Initiative in Turkey

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating school principals' and teachers' perceptions of the processes pursued in principal assignments and the potential outcomes of the recently enacted initiative concerning the assignments in Turkish public schools. The intrinsic case study was used as the research design. The data were collected through one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. It was concluded that the processes, practices, and procedures followed in the recent initiative were not considered procedurally just and ethical by principals and teachers, and that deservingness had nearly no role in the principal assignments. The participants' thoughts and perceptions overall implied that the principal assignments were entrenched in a quagmire of personal contacts and politics. More important, outcome favorability did not seem to have affected the perceptions of most of the principals. However, there were no significantly divergent views amongst the principals and teachers in terms of justifying and evaluating the initiative.

Keywords: principal assignments, principal succession, procedural justice.

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Introduction

The Turkish education system has been an arena for a massive influx of change initiatives over recent years in nearly all aspects and dynamics of the system. One of the significant change initiatives put into effect relates to the assignment of school principals in Turkish public schools. The new initiative brought about a number of novel changes ranging from holding interviews to seeking evaluations from students and teachers for the assignment of school principals. The initiative was launched in 2014, with the regulation laying the legal foundations of the initiative revised in 2015. In the related literature, principal assignments and some topics related to the initiative have been greatly investigated since the regulation's enactment in 2014. However, few studies have dealt with the processes, procedures and practices about the initiative and the potential outcomes of the initiative in public schools by utilizing a procedural justice perspective and a principal succession planning approach. The current study therefore attempts a qualitative methodology research of the topic by seeking the opinions of school principals and teachers, the two main actors witnessing the initiative in practice. The following sections focus on the literature review regarding principal succession and the recent initiative in Turkey, as well as procedural justice and its link to the initiative.

School leadership and some critical issues linked to school leaders' preparation, recruitment, competencies, roles and effects on school outcomes have been a matter of theoretical, philosophical and practical deliberations in the related literature (see Beycioglu & Wildy, 2015; Bush & Glover, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006; Heffernan, 2016; Niesche, 2011, 2013, 2015; Recepoğlu & Kılınç, 2014). Today, school leadership has become much of the focus of research and inquiry compared to the past, with new, demanding, and complicated tasks and responsibilities faced by school leaders (Cranston, 2007; Pont, 2014) such as leading instruction and reforms, managing budgets, and accounting for student performance (Athanasoula-Reppa & Lazaridou, 2008; Hallinger, 2005). Parallel to these tasks and responsibilities, significant shifts have been apparent in the understanding of professionalization of school leadership (Bush, 2008; Pont, 2014).

The developments in thinking about school leadership as a profession necessitate wider scrutiny of the position, its requirements, functions and relevant outcomes. One of the main aspects of this scrutinization needs to deal with the processes, practices, and procedures concerning "whom to select" and "how to select" in order for school leaders to understand what is expected of them in the context of the current educational system. Selecting or assigning the 'right' people through the 'proper' processes, procedures, and practices, which may be achieved via principal succession planning, may help educational systems prevent wasted time and energy due to improper actions and reforms in the recruitment of principals. This point deserves more attention both from policymakers and researchers in the field of educational administration; as changes in school leadership are linked to changes in the structure of schools. It must be remembered that a change of principal may negatively affect school improvement and school culture in the absence of a planned approach to principal assignments (Amador-Valerio, 2016).

Principal assignments appear stuck in limbo in Turkey, mostly due to an influx of policies, regulations, and change initiatives. The lack of a verified and fine-grained approach to principal assignments/appointments paves the way for starting everything anew in

schools following an appointment, sometimes disrupting well-functioning aspects, practices, and structures in the educational system. Principal succession planning can help eschew the undesired consequences stemming from the lack of such an approach. This is because the succession of school principals mainly aims at stabilizing transitory phase(s) by ensuring the uninterrupted effective performance of schools through the provision, development, and replacement of key personnel over time; and it covers the departure of administrative personnel and the arrival of their successors to vacant managerial positions through transfer and rotation procedures which regulate leadership succession (White & Cooper, 2011a).

The succession process incorporates principal recruitment, induction, interviewing and ongoing support (White & Cooper, 2011b). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that effective succession is to have a thorough plan or making plans to maintain positive and coordinated leadership throughout the years. To ensure this, closer attention must be paid to the demand, roles and responsibilities of the school leadership position (Normore, 2004). Fink and Brayman (2006, p. 65) propose that "leadership succession plans connect the identification, recruitment, preparation, placement, induction, and ongoing in-service education of leaders." Through succession management systems, organizations are able to promote and identify prospective leaders who can demonstrate the required competencies to take the lead (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011); and additionally, it can help educational systems to adopt a more proactive stance towards leadership talent identification, development, succession, and retention (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2005). Preparation for the position and leadership development programs are therefore key factors in succession planning strategies (Bush, 2011).

Bartlett (2011) explains the essence of succession planning as "to have plans in place that can address the issue of a need for leadership that continuously cultivates future leaders who are skilled in the abilities to bring about continuous improvement" (p. 52). Well-prepared succession planning helps to determine who is the best person for the position and supports candidates to work on the training they need to become a school leader (Trapiano, 2004), which seems to be lacking in Turkey. Rather than strengthening school principals' leadership (Delgado, 2015), developing countries prioritize the practices related to management and administration in schools (Oplatka, 2004). Recruiting, assigning and/or selecting the best candidates to run the schools lie at the heart of attaining desired school outcomes, amongst other things. The reason underpinning this assumption is that, as shown by previous research, school principals and their management practices affect student outcomes, school improvement and effectiveness, and school performance significantly (Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & van Reenen, 2015; Böhlmark, Grönqvist, & Vlachos, 2016; Coelli & Green, 2012; Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Di Liberto, Schivardi, & Sulis, 2015; Grissom & Loeb, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). In pursuit of the critical role of principals, succession planning and management are worthy of special attention. However, as Fink and Brayman (2006) and also Brundrett, Rhodes, and Gkolia (2006) put it, a well-established succession planning structure is lacking in most of the school systems; and thus in the public education sector, leadership succession seems to be serendipitous, as is clear in the Turkish education system.

Succession planning and management play a critical role in ensuring successful leadership in schools (Bennett, Carpenter, & Hill, 2011). However, quick-fix solutions and actions regarding principal assignments may not result in the attainment of the long-term goals of the educational systems or the selection of principals displaying the desired strong

leadership. Despite its critical value, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) lacks a formal leadership succession plan for Turkish schools (Wildy, Clarke, Styles, & Beycioglu, 2010), and there has been instability in the appointment system of school administrators and the requirements of administrators' assignment in Turkey (Yardibi & Küçük, 2015). A complexity that has been allowed to evolve over time surrounds principal appointments which have been mostly conducted through regulations (Pelit, 2015; Sezgin-Nartgün & Ekinci, 2016; Soydan, 2016). Regulations for and approaches to assigning school principals are frequently changed, which makes it impossible to implement long-term projects (Sezer, 2016). However, Turkey has recently taken an important step with legal regulation which can be regarded as a preliminary step for principal succession planning, because at least theoretically, it aims to enhance school principals' performance and target the improvement of schools (MoNE, 2014b).

In the former system, school principals could remain in their post as principal until retirement or chose willingly to leave the position. However, according to the recent initiative (Law no: 6528), principals who complete their incumbency of four years are now supposed to vacate the position. New principals are to be assigned to the principalship positions for four years after an interview with a jury consisting of authorized officials from the Provincial Directorate of National Education. In addition to the interview, applicant performance is evaluated by various stakeholders, including the students and teachers of the appointed school (MoNE, 2014a, 2014b).

After the multi-step evaluation, applicants who gain at least 75 points in total can be assigned to the principalship with the proposal of the Provincial Director of National Education and subsequent approval of the Provincial Governor (MoNE, 2014a). According to the MoNE statistics, there are up to 17,216 principals and 42,793 vice-principals facing the possibility of dismissal from their administrative posts in Turkey (TEDMEM [Turkish Education Association], 2014) due to implementation of this new initiative.

The recent initiative concerning principal assignments needs to be investigated through a procedural justice perspective. As procedural justice corresponds to the fairness of the policies and procedures used in decision-making (Michel, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2010; Özyurt, 2010; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003; Yılmaz & Taşdan, 2009), such a perspective could shed light on the reasons behind perceived fairness and/or unfairness perceptions of stakeholders in education. It is noted from the literature that justice-related issues need to be examined in times of change as the sensitivity to justice increases in such times of uncertain circumstance (Lind & van den Bos, 2002; Marzucco, Marique, Stinglhamber, de Roeck, & Hansez, 2014). A new path for principal assignments is being pursued in Turkey, and this novelty in assignments can be accepted as a change as it has brought about alterations to the practices and policies of the MoNE regarding principal assignments. Thus, to better grasp the dynamics of the change, a justice perspective the required next step (Novelli, Kirkman, & Shapiro, 1995).

Research shows that feelings of trust or mistrust are closely related to the processes of change and justice (Hoy & Tarter, 2004; Pitts, 2006; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003), and justice perceptions positively affect organizational members' support and motivation for change (Karriker, 2007). Research on the principal assignment initiative has shown that the regulation was negatively perceived by principals and teachers due to varying reasons (Arabacı, Şanlı, & Altun, 2015; Bozkurt & Bellibaş, 2016; Yolcu & Bayram, 2015); however, the views of the principals and teachers were not discussed from a procedural justice

perspective. This current study was therefore framed so as to look at the initiative from a different standpoint in order to unearth new evidence with regards to the topic.

The current study attempts to explore the perceptions of school principals and teachers with regard to the assignment and replacement of school principals in the case of Turkish public K-12 education. The study hopes to contribute to the existing knowledgebase through revealing how perceived justice and/or injustice shapes the opinions of those who are differently affected by the change, largely because of the lack of standardization of processes, procedures, and practices in the assignment of school principals. The study aims at investigating school principals' and teachers' perceptions of the processes and potential outcomes of the system-wide principal assignment initiative launched for public schools throughout Turkey from a qualitative perspective. In line with the purpose of the study, the research questions which guided the study were;

- "How do school principals and teachers perceive the processes, procedures, and practices implemented during the recent principal assignment initiative?"

- "What are the potential outcomes of the initiative in terms of schools and the principalship position?"

Methodology

The researchers employed the intrinsic case study design in the study. Case studies include "analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods" (Thomas, 2011, p. 513). A set of qualitative procedures were used in this study to reveal comprehensive information and evidence about the recent principal assignment initiative, as suggested in the literature on qualitative case study research (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006; Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2011; VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

A total of 11 school principals (four females, seven males) and 11 teachers (five females, six males) formed the study group (n=22) of the research. From the 11 principals, two had worked previously as principals in primary and middle schools and were now reappointed as teachers, while the rest were serving principals, vice-principals or former teachers now assigned as school principals to kindergartens, primary, middle, or high schools. However, none of the 11 teachers had previously held a principalship position. The researchers selected 11 principals and five teachers via a maximum variation sampling technique to assure participant variation in order to present information dialectically from different positions at all levels of education; those still holding the position, those being newly assigned and those returned to the classroom as teachers. However, the interviewees participating in the focus group discussions were recruited through convenience sampling technique.

The data were gathered via a semi-structured interview protocol covering seven open-ended questions. The questions in the protocol were structured through a reflective and dialogic process (Agee, 2009), based on the relevant literature (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The data were collected using audio recorders, and some notes were also taken during the interviews. The interviews lasted a duration of between 20 and 45 minutes and proceeded until no new theme emerged. The records were then transcribed verbatim. The focus group interview lasted 101 minutes in total. The inductive content analysis technique (Krippendorff, 2013) was applied in order to unearth the patterns of meaningful units,

including larger and smaller ones. Inductive content analysis is a kind of inductive reasoning in which categories gather around a general theme. It is used to identify central themes by reducing raw data to a set of categories. The following open-ended questions included in the interview protocol were posed to the participants:

- What do you think of the recent initiative put into effect by Law no: 6528 regarding the assignment of school principals?

- What do you think of the way and process of implementation of this law/regulation?

- Given the new processes, procedures, and practices about the assignment of principals, do you think the law/regulation complies with the principles of justice?

- What do you think of the assessment criteria used to assign school principals?

- What consequences would this law/regulation bring about in practice when compared to the former approach in terms of school principal assignments?

- How would this law/regulation affect the principalship and public schools?

- What do you think of the rationale underlying this new law/regulation?

Findings

This section is divided into two part: the findings obtained from school principals are presented in the first part, and the second part provides the findings gathered from teachers. While presenting authentic quotations, 'I' was used to denote principals, and 'T' was used for teachers.

Findings related to school principals' perceptions

Seven main themes, related sub-themes and codes emerged in the qualitative analysis of the data based on school principals' perceptions. Authentic quotations concerning striking themes and/or sub-themes are also presented in relevant contexts. The first theme was constructed based on school principals' general perceptions about the initiative. Table 1 demonstrates the main theme, sub-themes, and related codes/concepts.

Table 1. Principals' general perceptions about the change

Main theme	General perceptions about the change			
Sub-themes	Positive perceptions	f	Negative perceptions	f
Codes	A necessary change	4	Political interference	5
	Refreshment in management	4	Ignoring qualifications	4
	Discharging principals with poor performance	2	Setting up a «cadre» in public schools	4
	Discharging older principals	1	Chaos and complexity in schools	3
	Professional development	1	Unfairness	3
			Deposing experienced school principals	2
			Disruption of education	2

Main theme	General perceptions about the change			
Sub-themes	Positive perceptions	f	Negative perceptions	f
			Assignment of inexperienced principals	1
			A negative change	1
			Unethical	1
			An attempt to vanish organizational memory	1

School principals' views on the initiative about the principal assignments differed as can be seen in Table 1. The first sub-theme related to the positive perceptions of the initiative which was seen as a necessary step to refresh managerial positions. By this initiative, as some school principals believed that those who did not perform well or were much older could be dismissed from the managerial positions. They believed that the change initiative was necessary since it might compel the candidates to the principalship to develop themselves professionally. The positive perceptions may be interpreted as an outcry of a need felt for change in principal assignments by those waiting to hold school principalship positions. On the other hand, the recent change was mostly perceived negatively due to the procedures and processes pursued during the change, the effects of the change on education and schools, the perceived indifference to managerial experience and qualifications, political orientation and vanishing organizational memory.

Believing that the change would eliminate ineffective principals, a newly appointed principal opined that:

> Some school principals were ineffective and had lost their sensitivity to school-related issues as they had been living in the same organizational culture for a long time. There was a kind of managerial blindness. Therefore, the former system had to be revised. (I4)

I10, who was re-assigned after not completing his four years of incumbency at the time of the change initiative, stated that the new system helped to dismiss the entrenched cadre of ineffective principals, but regarded the change as an attempt to vanish organizational memory. He argued:

> The change has some positive aspects like dismissing the ineffective ones, but we have witnessed that it has become a change through which many good principals have lost their positions too. In fact, these are the things which are done with political purpose. (I10)

Consistent with I10's views, a female principal expressed her feelings as follows:

> I think the authorities can dismiss ineligible principals in a proper way...but there is no point in disrupting the modus operandi of the schools. Always the same people stay in management positions: those who work hard and who do not. There is no way for new-comers to hold the position. It is significant to discharge those who do not work, but not to dismiss those whose schools are well run. I have not felt a progress in this sense. (I8)

I8 clearly asserted that the authorities must dismiss unsuccessful school principals, not those who are running schools properly. As can be understood from her feelings, she *partly*

supported the new initiative as it offers a new way for the entry of new blood and the departure of principals with poor performance.

The second theme covered themes incorporating the way the recent change was put into practice and its effects on education and schools. Table 2 shows the themes; "implementation process and its effects", "evaluation criteria and process", "the future of the principalship position", and "outcomes of the new initiative" and the related sub-themes and codes.

Table 2. Implementation process and effects, evaluation criteria and process, future of principalship position, outcomes of new initiative

Main theme	Implementation process/ effect	f
	Lack of a formal informing process	11
	Discontentment with the process	8
	Ignoring the equity principle	5
	Disregarding data about actual performance	5
	Non-participation in decision making	5
Sub-themes	Politically oriented planning	3
	Unfair assignments	3
	Acting based on manipulated lists	3
	Problems with timing	2
	Unprepared and abrupt	2
Main theme	Evaluation criteria and process	f
	Evaluators' incompetency	9
	Effects of unions	7
	Unrealistic/symbolic scoring	6
	Biased	5
	Non-transparent	5
Sub-themes	Ignoring managerial experience and performance	4
	Effects of political stance	4
	Inappropriate criteria	3
	Illegitimate	3
	Unscientific	1
Main theme	Future of principalship position	f
	Devaluation of the managerial position	4
	Feeling uncommitted	3
	School principals showing off (advertising)	3
Sub-themes	Assigning obedient people	3
	Principals masquerading real problems (mushroom management)	1
Main theme	Outcomes of new initiative	f
	Exacerbating the current/chronic problems	5
	Increasing polarization/balkanization	2
	An atmosphere of conflict and discomfort	2
Sub-themes	Lack of tolerance for diversity	2
	A state of flux in principal assignments	1
	Losing the potential human capital	1

The participants' views on the implementation process of the recent initiative included the problems in ensuring change-related information, equity, using performance data, top-down decision making, timing, processes, planning, and assignments. The most accentuated issues in the change process were the lack of a formal informing process, the uncanny disregard of the principle of equity (outcome-related) and discontentment with the process and procedures followed in the change process (process-related). Most of the former, re-assigned, and newly assigned principals were in agreement about the problems linked with the informing process, equity, using performance data, timing, processes, and planning. A former principal's and a newly appointed principal's thoughts depict the implementation process in detail. A former principal noted: "No one asked for our opinions about this implementation that can affect the MoNE deeply, and that really saddened us" (I2).

I11 also mentioned nearly the same issues:

> In the preparation phase of a former regulation, the MoNE asked our views. I personally raised many concerns about some aspects of it. After it was enacted, I saw that my views were considered and some items were rearranged. It made me happy, but for the present one, I cannot say the same thing. No one asked us anything. (I11)

I2 and I11 underscored the importance of listening to the voice of significant stakeholders in the education system, the change recipients. As principals were directly affected by the change, letting them voice their thoughts could be critical for a smooth transition from the former to the new approach. A new principal and a re-assigned principal commented:

> We learned everything about this law from social media, blogs, and the unions. No one informed us about the law formally beforehand. We had a meeting with the Provincial Director of National Education, but there were no clear explanations about the incoming change and assignments. (I5)

> No one gave us any information about the regulation…They followed an 'I-did-and-it-happened' format. The policymakers arranged everything according to what they thought in one month, and we received a formal announcement on the implementation of the regulation afterwards. (I9)

I10 and I11, two male school principals, agreed with I9 and stated almost the same concerns. As implied by I5, I9, I10, and I11, there was no mechanism which informed the implementers of change and enabled them to make suggestions about its novelties.

Evaluation criteria and process was another theme. This theme covered issues about the selection and assignment criteria and in what ways these were thought unfair. Most of the participants complained about the evaluation criteria, the evaluators, and the evaluation process. Most of them (n=8) noted that those who rated/evaluated school principals and made decisions about the selection and assignments were not qualified to take place in the interview panel/commission. Another issue was related to the transparency of the process. They argued that no one knew what happened during the interviews. The interviews and the questions asked were not considered to be objective and appropriate for selecting new school principals, as put forward by some principals' views. Some principals thought that some specific unions were effective in new assignments and that the political stance of the

candidates was one of the main parameters of getting the principalship chair. One former school principal commented:

> I want to say something assertive. I knew who would be assigned to some schools before they were appointed with high scores. In other words, even without oral examination/interviews, the assignment of these names was certain. Equity was not taken into consideration. (I1)

I1 believed that all the process was symbolic as everything had been put on the stage beforehand. One female principal stated:

"Principals who were affiliated with one particular union were mostly assigned again. I think the system selects its own advocates. This is my belief" (I9).

Although I9 was still holding the (re-assigned) position, in other words, the outcome was favorable for her; she stated similar thoughts with I1 who had been dismissed. Another female principal still holding the position commented:

> In that process, I got upset for some of my friends. I was not happy that I had been found successful in the exam. Because people, as I assume, thought this question, "Who did you support and therefore were selected for the principalship?" I wanted everyone to know that I had been selected having been successful in the exam and deserved the position. A kind of stigmatization happened. (I8)

I8 mentioned her sadness due to people's thoughts of newly appointed principals and of their way of being assigned.

The future of principalship position emerged as another main theme which included the effects of the recent initiative on the principalship position in public schools. This theme consisted of school principals' views about how the recent change would affect the principalship position in the future. One of the effects of the new initiative on the principalship position was related with candidates' unwillingness to seek a managerial position. The new selection and assignment process, which means a reappraisal process for candidates, was considered daunting; and the existing processes and practices in principal assignments were thought to discourage young prospective principals in the future. Furthermore, the former and some of the re-assigned principals lost their trust in the system due to the subjectivity of the system and possibility of being dismissed anytime. Furthermore, former principals opined that most of the new principals would be mushroom managers as they believed that they would show off for fear of losing their positions. They would masquerade real problems faced in their schools and deal with petty details such as replacing a broken window. Newly appointed school principals, however, believed that time would show how this change would affect school principalship. A newly appointed male principal commented: "After this law, the school principalship position may lose its attractiveness as principals will change every four years. They will feel under pressure when they do anything in their schools" (I7).

A former school principal stated that:

> I personally do not believe that this new change will solve any chronic problems that our schools are facing. It has been about five months since the new regulation was put into practice; however, I did not see new school principals dealing with the daunting challenges lying ahead of their schools.

> You can also see this on their schools' Facebook accounts. They share ordinary things, like painting a wall in the school, as masterpieces, thereby try to give an exaggerated impression about themselves. (I2)

Disconfirming I2's perceptions, I11 believed that the newly assigned principals were doing great things at schools: *"*I went to the schools of the new principals and saw the great things that they are doing at their schools" (I11).

As for the outcomes of the recent initiative presented in Table 2, many of the principals were not hopeful about the consequences which this new initiative would bring about. Two principals were pessimistic about the contributions of this system for the solution of the problems faced: "These new regulations cannot solve chronic problems of national education" (I7); "This change was not a priority for us. We have some other chronic problems to be handled first" (I8).

Another point specified by a former school principal focused on polarization/ balkanization in schools. As a politically-oriented change initiative, he believed, the change would lead to a chaotic atmosphere sharpened by political stances. Other principals emphasized two other negative aspects of the change: conflict and discomfort, and the lack of tolerance for diversity. These perceptions were clearly delineated in principals' views: "We have dynamited the system with this new regulation. Social polarization has deepened in schools. Tolerance for diversity has been removed" (I2); "There will be a culture of conflict and discomfort in schools" (I1).

One female principal felt hopeless about the principalship position at schools due to the political interference. She continued:

> We do not have to look at the future. Even though those who are affiliated with different unions do really good job in schools, they are not recognized by the authorities. The reason, as we think, is that we are not their advocates. (I9)

I10's views were consistent with I9. However, another female principal (I8) did not agree with I2, I9, and I10. She (I8) asserted that politics had always been a part of principal assignment and selection. She commented: "In the past, when other governments were in power, there was more political interference with the principal selection. I think the degree of political orientation or interference is softer now. In the past, it was more intense" (I8). Tables 3a and 3b demonstrate the two themes, *the effects of the new initiative on school principals* (Table 3a) and *suggestions for a fair and well-operating system* (Table 3b), together with related sub-themes and codes.

Table 3a. Effects of new initiative on new, re-assigned, former principals

Main theme	*Effects on school principals*			
	Newly assigned & re-assigned principals	*f*	*Former & re-assigned principals*	*f*
Sub-themes	Prejudice	4	Decrease in commitment	4
	Less commitment to schools	3	Sense of injustice	4
	Teacher resistance	1	Loss of energy	3
			Feeling of worthlessness	3
			Stigmatized as failed	2

Main theme	Effects on school principals			
	Newly assigned & *re-assigned principals*	*f*	*Former & re-assigned* *principals*	*f*
			Hopelessness	2
			Burnout	2
			Distrust	2

Table 3b. Suggestions from new, re-assigned, former principals

Main theme	Suggestions	*f*
	Written exam + interview	5
	Leadership competencies/capabilities	3
	Candidacy process	2
	Internship	2
	Independent/qualified jury	2
Sub-themes	Gradual career phases	2
	Leadership training	1
	A collaborative process	1
	A central assignment system	1
	Appropriate timing	1

As Tables 3a and 3b demonstrate, the new change initiative had negative effects on former, re-assigned, and new school principals. However, the reasons for these negative effects differed. For former school principals, a kind of psychological exhaustion seemed to have existed, asserting a loss of trust in the fairness of the educational system. The sense of distrust was followed by a sense of burnout and loss of energy. Some principals also mentioned a different aspect of the new change, which was a feeling of being stigmatized as a failure. They believed that many people would think they were not successful in managerial positions. Especially, two of the participants, who returned to the classroom as teachers, noted that they were drained of all their energy, and therefore, they were looking for a way to get out of the system:

"I wish they had directly said that we didn't have the same political view with them. I don't accept failure. We are stigmatized as failures" (I1). "I will try to leave this system; I am looking for a way to do this. I don't see myself as a part of this system" (I2).

On the other hand, the new principals and the ones who were re-assigned complained about teachers' and other people's perceptions of their taking the position. Most of the newly appointed principals were dissatisfied with teachers' perceptions. Teachers working at their schools held prejudice against them, believing that the new principals were appointed just because they had some political connections with the authorities from the MoNE. Teachers' thoughts affected their attitudes toward their school principals. Some of them tended to resist what the school principal initiated or took to the school agenda: "People hold prejudice against us. They think that we have supporters to get the post and we know some people holding the authority to do this" (I5).

Another problem was the school principals' own experiences in their new schools. One female principal opined that she felt less committed to her school because she changed three schools in one academic year due to the new initiative:

I have changed schools three times since the inception of this new initiative. I cannot develop a sense of commitment to my new school as I think my school may change yet again. It is hard to get accustomed to the organizational culture of the schools in such a short period of time. (I7)

As indicated in Table 3b, school principals proposed some suggestions for a better selection and appointment system. Almost all of them were uncomfortable with merely holding interviews. Therefore, the newly proposed model should include both written exam and interviews held by an independent jury of experts. Two other suggestions were about the preparation of prospective school principals prior to taking the principalship chair. Visiting schools and making observations over a certain period of time (internship) and working as assistant principals for a while (candidacy) were considered much better than direct assignments. Two female principals and one male principal, however, stressed the importance of leadership competencies. Participants' views were as follows:

"I think there should be gradual career phases for principals. The system should be like this: working as a teacher, then as a vice-principal and finally being appointed as a principal" (I3). "I think a written examination should be held before the oral examination. I support that one should be trained to be a principal after being successful in the written exam" (I5). "There should be an independent jury of evaluators. They must be experts in the field of school management" (I6).

As opposed to other participants, I8, I9, and I10 implied another vital issue in principal succession. They mentioned the significance of leadership competencies and capabilities, which needs to be one of the main determinants in principal succession. The male principal asserted that leadership capabilities can be seen best by observing school principals in the actual field, *viz.* in schools:

Appointing principals through holding exams is not the solution. Why? Think of a principal who memorized everything related to the content of the exam and knows every regulation about school management, but he/she has zero skills in human relations. To me, the principalship is mainly significant for social relations at school. In other words, principals must be the ones who fulfill their duties, have strong communication skills, can take risks when necessary and are courageous. Do you believe it is worthwhile to memorize all of the regulations, but not be able to do all these things? Taking the post through exams is not correct. (I8)

"I think a system which encompasses many aspects ranging from entrepreneurship to speaking style to the way of using Turkish and to even the mimics need to be developed" (I9).

These principals stressed the professional dimension of school principalship and the competencies and capabilities it requires.

Findings related to teachers' perceptions

The inductive content analysis of the data revealed seven main themes, with their respective sub-themes and codes based on teachers' perceptions. The main themes were *general perceptions, the implementation process, perceived effects on teachers, evaluation criteria, effects on the schools, effects on the principalship position*, and *suggestions for a*

well-operating and fair system. The findings are supported with the descriptions of the sub-themes and/or codes and authentic quotations.

The researchers attempted to learn the first impressions that the recent initiative left on teachers. The lead-in interview question thus inquired on their general perceptions of the initiative. This question helped see teachers' general tendencies in their evaluations and justifications concerning the recent initiative. The sub-themes under the general perceptions theme were seen to be mostly negative, which implied that teachers did not support the initiative in many aspects. Teachers' negative perceptions manifested themselves in other themes as well. Table 4 indicates the general perceptions and related sub-themes.

Table 4. Teachers' general perceptions about the change

General Perceptions	Description	f
Prioritization of personal contacts	*Negative* (elites and those close to political power were supported and assigned)	8
Not objective	*Negative* (interviews and evaluations were not considered to be held impartially)	4
Not a necessary change	*Negative* (initiative seemed not to have stemmed from need)	4
Limited period of incumbency	*Negative* (1) (four-year assignment is inadequate to understand school climate and culture) *Positive* (2) (four-year assignment is enough if the principal is competent)	4
A highly centralized initiative	*Negative* (initiative was launched in a top-down fashion)	3
Not discussed adequately	*Negative* (no prior investigation conducted)	3
The possibility of returning to the classroom	*Positive* (educators must see both teaching and principalship, not only one of them)	3
Not scientific	*Negative* (academic and scientific evidence or research was not taken into consideration)	2
Ignoring stakeholders' views	*Negative* (no-one asked the views of change recipients)	2
Not a bad step	*Positive* (initiative was a result of teachers' inability to unite and initiate needs for change)	2
Not a settled change	*Negative* (regulation has changed three times since 2014)	2
A superficial change	*Negative* (initiative was not well-planned)	1
Refreshment in administrative positions	*Positive* (young candidates could find a chance to get the principalship)	1
Lack of an evaluative mechanism	*Negative* (no mechanism to evaluate all the processes and practices)	1
A ineffective model	*Negative* (does not seem a promising model for assignment of principals)	1
Not fair	*Negative* (principles of justice were violated)	1
Discordance between the regulation and reality	*Negative* (regulation did not fit realities of the principalship position)	1

General Perceptions	Description	f
Problematic nature of the system	*Negative* (system, rather than regulations, is not good)	1

The most emphasized aspects of the initiative that caused teachers to hold negative perceptions were about the prioritization of personal contacts, the pursuit of a non-objective process, the change's being perceived as unnecessary and the way the initiative was launched. The other negatively perceived aspects were that the initiative was launched without discussing it thoroughly in light of current evidence regarding the schools and challenges. Stakeholders' views were stated not to have been appealed in the planning phase. The role favoritism played seemed to have bothered teachers and led them to think only elites and/or those with close relationships were assigned as principals, which negatively affected their motivation for seeking the principalship position in the future. However, for some teachers, the initiative was not totally negative or useless. One aspect that teachers appreciated was about the four-year incumbency which was considered as an appropriate action. Some believed that it was not a bad step as the former system had also led to some problems. Teacher views about the initiative were as follows:

> I evaluated this initiative both from qualitative and quantitative standpoints. From the quantitative perspective, four years of incumbency is really good, in that in the former system, the administrators were able to stay at the principalship position for 25-30 years, and they tended to accept the schools as their farms… To put it from the qualitative perspective, however, none of the items covered in the regulation were implemented, namely qualifications were not considered at all. Rather, a competition on how to get the principalship chair started in the form of favoritism and finding someone important. (T3)

T3 asserted that it would be much better if the regulation was followed to the letter, but it was not the case for the recent assignments. T5 had similar views with T3, but stated her views in a different way:

> Our laws and regulations are appropriate for ideal principals: which principals are ideal?... The system lets some people who are close to the politics and deprived of administrative competencies use the schools as means for some material concerns. We want people who have administrative competencies, expertise and can meet the needs of the position to take the lead. (T5)

Another teacher, T7, stressed the significance of informing teachers regarding the initiative: "I learned the change from social media. We should have been informed beforehand; we did not deserve this. The starting point for change is with the teachers; they are the dominoes. One has to inform them" (T7)

The second main theme emerging from teachers' views was related to the implementation process and practices in this process. Teachers' perceptions of the process are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Implementation process

Process	Description	f
No informing about the initiative	*Negative* (teachers learned about the initiative from social media, not through formal information and communication channels)	5
No teacher voice in the change	*Negative* (teachers are the locomotives of the change process)	4
An abrupt change	*Negative* (no pilot implementation conducted)	4
Unknown justification	*Negative* (reasons why such an initiative was needed were unknown)	3
Not transparent	*Negative* (those affected by the initiative were not informed, and not all processes were visible to the parties)	2
Top-down assignment of principals	*Negative* (no-one cared about change readiness and did not ask for people's view)	2
Mismatch between regulations and practices	*Negative* (regulation was good, but not implemented properly)	1
Lack of systems-thinking	*Negative* (not all aspects of the change were well thought through)	1
No situation analysis	*Negative* (current needs and challenges were not investigated)	1

The sub-themes which were grouped under this main theme consisted of only negative perceptions, which hinted that teachers voiced discontent with the process in general. The most emphasized aspect of the implementation process was the provision of change-related information. Teachers strongly underscored the problem of not receiving information about the initiative. Another negatively conceived aspect was the lack of a role that teachers had in the change process. They believed that teachers had no voice concerning the initiative, that is, the initiative was planned and put in place by MoNE's upper management. Two teachers commented:

> We, the teachers, come to know changes made in national education only at the very end. That means implementers are informed about the decisions at the very last moment. We had no opinion about the process in which our principal was selected. (T1)

"Anyway, everything is over and performed centrally. We are only informed about the results: 'We changed your principal, and this is your new principal'. That's it" (T2). They found the initiative as an abrupt change, pointing out that change readiness and prior investigations need to be ensured: "The change was launched unexpectedly. I think there must be readiness for change: Will people accept this or not?" (T6).

The main aspects observed in the initiative such as providing information about changes, involving teachers in the change process, making all the processes transparent, and conducting prior investigations regarding the dynamics of the system, were different from what teachers expected from a change initiative and its implementation. These issues might have affected their views on the initiative and their intent to apply for the principalship position.

The third main theme that emerged was *the perceived effects on teachers*. This theme indicated how the new initiative affected teachers, either directly or indirectly. Table 6 shows the findings concerning the effects of the initiative on teachers.

Table 6. Perceived effects on teachers

Perceived effect	Description	f
A sense of injustice	*Negative* (justice not served in this initiative)	5
A sense of disregarding deservingness	*Negative* (deservingness/qualifications were not considered in assignments)	3
A strongly felt political orientation	*Negative* (political stance of people played a very critical role)	2
Prioritizing personal relationships	*Negative* (principals may pay more attention to having good relations with people in power to get another four years of incumbency)	2
Decrease in teacher motivation	*Negative* (former principals' good relationships with the teachers may cause such a result)	1
No strong reaction from teachers	*Negative* (teachers tended to accept whatever came from above)	1
Teachers' prejudice towards the principal	*Negative* (teachers may think that every principal coming to the position symbolizes unfair selection processes)	1

As can be seen in Table 6, the most significant perceived effect of the initiative was the sense of injustice evoked in teachers. They asserted that not all the applicants were treated fairly during the evaluations and final assignments. The reason why they adopted such a sense was their belief that deservingness and/or the applicants' qualifications were not considered in the process. Political stances or orientations of the applicants played a determinant role in getting the principalship chair, as suggested by teachers. The assignments were regarded as entrenched in a quagmire of personal contacts and politics, which they believed to be incorrect. Some teachers stated:

"Definitely, there is injustice. Generally, the candidates of a certain political view were assigned to the position" (T9). "Probably, this change has a political orientation. I am one hundred percent sure that it is about the politics" (T10). "The references were paid more attention than experience. Knowledge, expertise and approaches to human relations, I think, were all disregarded" (T2).

One teacher stated her views on the effects of the initiative on teachers as follows: "If the principal were active and devoted, and if he/she were dismissed for a reason we didn't know about, then as teachers, this situation would decrease our motivation" (T11).

Teachers' perceptions on the evaluation and its criteria were another main theme emerging from the teachers' views. This theme consisted of the sub-themes related to the scoring, the criteria, the content of the interviews and the evaluator quality. Table 7 indicates the main theme and sub-themes.

Table 7. Evaluation criteria

Criteria	Description	f
Evaluator quality	*Negative* (interviewers were not competent and objective to hold the interviews)	5
School council members' evaluations	*Negative* (members and council head may have good or bad relationships with the principal, which may lead to unrealistic scores)	4
	Positive (it is good to take their views as they are among the main stakeholders)	
Students' evaluations	*Negative* (students may not have the awareness to give realistic scores. Some students may not know the principal personally)	4
The MoNE's high ratio in scoring and evaluations	*Negative* (MoNE has a ratio of 65%, which means that it has a central role in the selection)	4
Content of the interviews	*Negative* (interviews are not effective to learn applicants' managerial competencies. Questions asked to applicants are not related to education)	4
Non-objective criteria	*Negative* (criteria seem non-objective, implying that some other things such as political stance are prioritized)	3
Ineffective evaluation criteria	*Negative* (criteria does not measure desired characteristics)	3
Teachers' evaluations	*Negative* (novice teachers receive performance evaluations in their first years of teaching from the principal, but may not be objectively scored)	2
Overwhelming effect of the unions	*Negative* (unions dominant in the selections)	1
No process and outcome evaluations	*Negative* (no-one conducted evaluations of the pre- and post-selection processes)	1

As can be seen in Table 7, teachers' perceptions of the evaluation and its criteria were mostly negative. The most emphasized issues were related to the evaluator's quality, school council members' evaluations, students' evaluations, the MoNE's high ratio in scoring and evaluations, and the content of the interviews. One of the most striking issues was about the evaluators and the quality of the interview panel. Teachers believed that the evaluators taking place in the interviews were not competent to choose the right people for managerial positions. More important, teachers opined that the evaluators did not know anything about the applicants or their performance in the school, and this may have resulted in not choosing really good performing principals who deserved the position and could make significant contributions to the school. One teacher stated his views on the vice-administrators who took place in the interviews: "A vice-administrator doesn't know anything about a candidate principal. So how could she/he evaluate that candidate?" (T5).

To what degree are the evaluators competent to hold the interviews? This should be inquired. The evaluators must have mastery in the planning of teaching and learning. They must have extensive knowledge on teachers' content knowledge and the school level they work at. (T8)

Two teachers stressed the significance of involving school council members in the selection process, but delineated their concerns towards the members' attitudes:

"It is important that school council members have a say on the selections. Because it is better to include their opinions about the person who will make decisions about their children in the school" (T4).

The current principals may select whomever they want as the head of the school council in the fourth year of their tenure. They would select the one who supports them. Thereby they may get better scores from the heads of the councils. (T3)

As can be understood from teachers' views, some specific aspects of the initiative made teachers worried. These aspects were seen to be closely linked to the processes, practices and procedures followed in the selection of the principals. Although some practices such as involving school councils' evaluations in the evaluation process were positively perceived, teachers did not believe that these evaluations would reflect the real performance of school principals. Some opined that the ratio of scores obtained from parents, students and teachers was lower than that of the MoNE, which meant that the MoNE still had the power to select whomever it wanted. Teacher views implied the renewal and/or revision of some aspects in the evaluation process.

The effects of the initiative on schools were another main theme of the research. Teachers had various standpoints on the recent initiative, which led to the emergence of different aspects and effects of the initiative, one of which covered the effects on schools. Table 8 shows the findings related to the effects on schools.

Table 8. Effects on schools

Effect	Explanations	f
Principals' limited contribution to the school	*Negative* (principals may be unwilling to take initiatives and be cautious to take action not to receive negative upper management reaction)	4
A politically-oriented assignment tradition	*Negative* (feeling that every principal may come to the school through such an orientation may become dominant)	4
A sense of temporariness	*Negative* (four years may not be adequate to develop a sense of belonging at a school)	4
Not caring for the future of the school	*Negative* (principals may pay attention to personal success in order to garner another four years incumbency)	3
Effects on the relations within the school	*Negative* (principals may not establish positive relations with school staff who do not have a critical role in the assignments)	2
Change in school atmosphere	*Negative* (principal change may negatively affect a previously built positive atmosphere)	1

Effect	Explanations	f
An improper school climate	*Negative* (conflicts may arise between principals and teachers)	1
No radical effects	*Negative* (initiative does not seem to have radical effects on the schools)	1
Teachers' non-involvement in decision making	*Negative* (principals may believe that teachers have no role in his/her assignment, and thus act freely)	1
No diversity in terms of political stances	*Negative* (specific interest groups may hold most of the positions)	1
Forced political orientation among educators	*Negative* (educators may feel obliged to orient politically to obtain benefits)	1
Effect on the modus operandi of the school	*Negative* (good functioning schools may lose their tempo with the change of good performing school principals)	1
Effect on team spirit	*Negative* (team spirit may disappear with the departure of good principals)	1
Vanishing school's organizational memory	*Negative* (schools' organizational memory may vanish with the departure of experienced and effective principals)	1

The perceptions of teachers on the effects of the initiative on schools were mostly negative. Teachers believed that the initiative would lead to the emergence of a politically-oriented assignment tradition in the selection of principals. They thought that principals would not be able to develop a strong sense of school belongingness due to the prescribed four-year assignments. One teacher stated his views: "In the end, principals may think that they are not permanent in the position, and they will need to work hard" (T10).

The strongly felt political interference in the selections was thought to lead the principals to make limited contributions to the schools, implying that they would avoid taking initiatives that might not comply with what the political power would warrant. Some teachers argued that the new principals would focus on their own future gains, that is, getting appointed for another four years, and thus would not care for the future of the school. Personal interests may come to the fore due to the initiative rather than that of the school or the quality of education provided at the school in the future, as some teachers suggested.

Another point stressed by teachers was the negative effects on the relations within the school. Some believed that as teachers had a limited role in the selection of the principals, the newly selected ones would not make efforts to establish good relations with the school staff. A female teacher asserted that: "We will have trouble communicating with the principals. As they are assigned to the position with the help of some people; when we have a problem, the principals will linger over our wishes" (T4).

The lack of a commitment to maintaining good relations with the staff might result in problems in school climate and atmosphere according to some teachers.

Table 9 demonstrates the effects of the initiative on the principalship position. This main theme also mostly included negative perceptions regarding the position.

Table 9. Effects on the principalship position

Effect	Explanation	f
Lack of motivation for the principalship position	*Negative* (existing circumstances faced in principal selections may discourage teachers from applying for principalship positions)	6
Elimination of potentially successful candidates	*Negative* (political stance is regarded by teachers as a main criterion for appointment)	1
Disadvantages in sustainability and productivity	*Negative* (frequent principal changes may lead to daunting challenges in sustainability and productivity)	1
Devaluation of the principalship position	*Negative* (four-year assignments require changes in private life domains, which may cause the position to lose its attractiveness)	1
No career phases	*Negative* (position changes may not help principals to see all career phases)	1
Good performers' chance to stay at the same position	*Positive* (high-performing principals may keep their positions in the new system for a further four years)	1

Teachers believed that the candidates to the principalship were discouraged because of the processes, practices and procedures followed in the recent initiative. One of the reasons why teachers believed this seemed to be associated with their assumption that political stance was the major determinant of being appointed as a principal in lieu of expertise, knowledge and competencies. Some examples encountered during the principal assignments became effective on their beliefs regarding applying for the principalship position. One teacher commented: "Personally, if I have such an idea (of applying for the principalship), I will never attempt to apply. In this way, competent people who have the potential to be successful will be eliminated directly" (T1).

Another teacher (T11) who had similar views with T1 noted that one would need to be brave to apply for the position: "It may be an act of heroism to apply for the principalship under the existing circumstances".

Confirming both T11's and T1's concerns, T9 asserted:

> I do not want to be a principal under these circumstances. However, if I can have the freedom for decision-making, without authorities implying that 'you do not need to think, we can do it instead of you'…why not, there must be an ideal atmosphere for this. (T9)

The other mostly accentuated issues were about the disadvantages in sustainability and productivity in schools due to the four-year assignment. Some teachers emphasized that it was not enough to get sustainable and productive results in schools in just four years. According to these teachers, some well planned projects at the school level could not be sustained by the newcomers as it would take time for the new principals to get to know their schools. One teacher commented: "I do not believe four years of incumbency is enough as it is difficult to understand the school climate and to try to enhance it" (T1).

The last main theme compiled from teacher views was about their suggestions for a well-operating and fair system, as presented in Table 10. Under this theme, teachers' views about a well-functioning and fair system of principal assignments are provided. This theme is

presented with the related aspects of the initiative to unearth what teachers expected from a well-operating and fair system in principal assignments.

Table 10. Suggestions for a well-operating and fair system

Suggestion	Explanation	f
Prioritizing qualifications/deservingness	Process-related	4
Written exam	Process-related	3
Choosing the right people	Competence-related	2
Measuring personal success/competencies	Competence-related	2
Supervision after assignments	Outcome-related	2
Establishment of interview/exam centers	Process-related	2
A school for school managers	Professionalization-related	1
Extra points for postgraduate studies	Professionalization-related	1
Setting up an environment of trust	Process-related	1
Change in scoring and related ratios	Process-related	1
An objective interview	Process-related	1
A diversely established jury	Process-related	1
A system re-structuring	Whole-system-related	1
Written exam + interview	Process-related	1

The most recurring sub-themes were seen to be related to process and procedure. As indicated in Table 10, the most critical suggestion was to focus attention on the applicants' qualifications, or more simply the issue of deservingness. They argued that deservingness needed to be the main determinant of getting the position. One teachers said: "I would like to see young people who have developed themselves and are more idealist to come to the principalship positions. But this must only be done based on deservingness " (T6).

They believed that a written exam could be one way to assure that no one was favored just because of their personal contacts or other issues that signaled favoritism. They emphasized the significance of choosing the right people to take the lead, which could be possible by measuring personal success and competencies objectively based on teacher views. Another issue appeared to be linked with supervising those selected in the field after assignment. Supervision was accepted as a practice for ensuring whether or not the right people were chosen and what kind of problems emerged by pursuing such a way of assigning candidates as principals: "After the principals are assigned, schools must be supervised for three or four months in order to see whether or not there has been any difference noted since the assignments" (T3).

Other suggestions, such as setting up a school for the training of school principals and giving extra points to those holding postgraduate degrees, focused on the professionalization of principalship. The others were suggestions to make the recent initiative, its processes, procedures and practices more standard-based.

Teachers' suggestions demonstrated that the problems which seemed to be process- and procedure-related caused teachers to have negative perceptions about the initiative. It can be suggested based on teachers' views that if the process- and procedure-related issues were handled in a more objective, fair and transparent way which also prioritized the qualifications of the candidates not the political stances and/or politics, teachers would be more able to positively evaluate the initiative. One participant commented: "I neither

support the new system nor the former one. Both systems need to be harmonized into a new, completely objective and trustworthy system" (T4).

Lastly, teachers emphasized that an atmosphere of trust needed to be set up, and that scoring and ratios in the evaluations required revisions. The objectivity of the interviews, the composition of the selection jury and a system-wide restructuring were among other significant suggestions made.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, the researchers attempted to explore the processes pursued in principal assignments and the potential outcomes of the recent principal assignment initiative, a system-wide change initiative launched in Turkey, from the standpoints of school principals and teachers. A procedural justice perspective and a principal succession planning approach were adopted in the current research. Such a justice-related perspective may be significant to better grasp the reasons behind the contentment and discontentment with change initiatives because it is believed that any change lends itself to the assessment of perceptions regarding fairness (Bernerth, Armenakis, Field, & Walker, 2007). More importantly, the perceived legitimacy of change is closely linked with procedural justice (Korsgaard, Sapienza, & Schweiger, 2002). As procedural justice is strongly related to job satisfaction, trust in management, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Kernan & Hanges, 2002), attaining procedural justice in organizational contexts such as this Turkish case seems vital. In addition, a principal succession planning approach was highlighted as a planned approach ensuring the standardization of the processes, procedures and practices to be observed in assignments appears to be lacking in Turkey. This research implies that most of the problems emerging in the current initiative might stem from the lack of such a planned approach.

The results demonstrated that most of the former, re-assigned and newly appointed school principals and teachers thought that the processes, procedures and practices followed during the last change were not ethical and totally fair. Some of them, however, did not state that the change process was unfair directly, but implied that some processes, procedures, and practices did not work as they were supposed to. The main philosophy behind the initiative was considered to be political interference and setting up a "cadre" comprising of people from some specific teacher unions by some principals and teachers. Specifically, the former and some of the re-assigned principals and teachers mainly focused on the negative aspects of change such as the dismissal of successful school principals. However, the principals stating this were young, with 2-8 years of experience as principals. One female principal, who had 19 years of experience, asserted that political interference had always been a part of principal recruitment and selection. Furthermore, she found the existing interference softer than in the past. This issue is also mentioned in the professional autobiography of a well-known researcher, Aytaç Açıkalın, in the field of educational administration in Turkey. Açıkalın confessed in his autobiography that political favoritism is not a new issue and will be a problem in principal selections, giving an example from his own experiences during his incumbency as a principal in 1975 (Akbayır, 2016). Similar issues can also be seen in different countries. In Hong Kong, for example, relational associations, loyalty, and acquaintance were detected to be influential on the final decisions regarding principal appointments (Walker & Kwan, 2012).

Lack of an information process, top-down imposition of change, inappropriate evaluation criteria, and questionable evaluator quality were among the aspects former principals and some teachers mostly complained about. Evaluator quality was one of the strongly accentuated aspects of the change, which is consistent with Kapusuzoğlu and Öztürk's (2016) study. These seemed to be the issues that would challenge both teachers' and school principals' trust in the fairness of the education system. This finding is significant as organizational justice plays a key role in the operationalization of trust in change processes (Novelli et al., 1995). Involving employees in the change process through increasing the fairness and transparency of decision-making processes, providing useful, timely and accurate information on change and making explanations for the decisions can help organizational managers to temper resistance to change (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015). Most of the participants believed that the regulation was constructed without appealing to the stakeholders' views, and that there was no transparency to the system making it possible to observe all the processes, procedures and practices in detail.

Some principals, the former principals in particular, argued that they felt burnout, distrust, and loss of energy due to the change. The former principals were dismissed, returned to the classroom as teachers, and therefore, these negative outcomes were mostly accentuated by them. Furthermore, some of the re-assigned female and male principals stated that they felt a sense of injustice, hopelessness, and worthlessness. Consistent with the principals, teachers also held a sense of unfairness. In Riolli and Savicki's (2006) study, it was found that lower procedural justice was a predictor of higher burnout, strain, and turnover. If the perceived level of procedural justice is low, then negative organizational outcomes such as burnout, strain, and turnover will tend to increase. Folger and Cropanzano (1998) argue that upon feeling a lack of fairness, employees will feel a decline in their morale, intent to quit their jobs and attempt to damage the organization. Perceived unfairness can cause counter-productive work behaviors in organizations (Beauregard, 2014). As Singer (1992) found, candidates' perceptions of fairness regarding the procedures can affect their later job-related attitudes such as organizational commitment, work satisfaction, and perceived organizational effectiveness. Therefore, during change initiatives, procedural justice may inspire employees to feel that their work and knowledge is honored and that they are respected in their organizations (Michel et al., 2010), which may positively influence their attitudes towards change.

From the newly assigned and some of re-assigned principals' perceptions, however, the portrait was somehow different. Even though they were assigned as principals under the new system, nearly all of them, both female and male principals, considered that the process, procedures and practices followed were not ethical. This can be explained using Schminke, Ambrose, and Noel's (1997) ethical frameworks. According to Schminke et al. (1997), all individuals have ethical frameworks which guide them to perceive and react to organizational events. They call those who approach ethical situations through *process lens* as ethical formalists and those who perceive these situations through *outcome lens* as ethical utilitarians. In this case, new school principals can be considered as ethical formalists as they focused on the procedures and processes rather than the outcomes in the context of the principal assignments. In contrast to the former principals' views, the new principals viewed the change as a necessary step to combat managerial blindness and underperformance. They thought the change was necessary, but felt discomfort due to the

processes, procedures and practices during the change. The results of this current research are consistent with Memişoğlu's (2015) and Sezer's (2016) studies which unearthed similar reasons behind principals' positive and negative perceptions regarding the recent initiative. Similar to the principals, teachers found the initiative procedurally unfair, but some of them noted that the initiative was useful in itself and that the problems raised were from not implementing the regulation to the letter.

One of the main themes of the study was about the impact of the recent change on the future of the principalship position and newly assigned principals. It was seen that only former and some of the re-assigned principals had negative perceptions about the effects of the new change. The former principals believed that those who were strongly committed to those in political power would be assigned in the future and that most of the new ones would do their best to satisfy the government in order to be appointed for another four years of incumbency. However, the newly assigned and some of the re-assigned principals were concerned about the commitment problem. They asserted that principals would be less committed to their schools as they would stay there for four years, which would also cause them not to take initiatives for their schools. This was a recurring theme that emerged in the teachers' views.

Four principals also mentioned the devaluation of the principalship position due to the reason just stated. Some principals believed that the change would deepen the chronic problems of the educational system, and it would also form a kind of balkanization among the school staff. However, teachers commented on the effect of the initiative on their lack of motivation to get such a position at schools due to processes and procedures pursued during the initiative. These findings are consistent with the literature. Brundrett et al. (2006) argue that principal appointments to leadership positions have significant implications for the principals themselves, as well as for their colleagues and the school.

The last theme revealed the participants' views about a well-operating system in principal assignments. It was observed that the female principals in particular, stressed the significance of considering leadership competencies and capabilities in principal assignments. Another important issue was related to the career paths of the principals. Most of the participants suggested a written exam and an interview. Assignments based only upon interviews were not found proper due to favoritism, the quality of the interview panel, and the lack of objectivity. Teachers also mentioned similar suggestions. What they argued was mostly related to the issue of deservingness. They asserted that the impact of politics and political orientations needed to be eliminated, which they believed to be possible through the standardization of the processes, procedures and practices. These findings are consistent with the studies of Kayıkçı, Özyıldırım, and Özdemir (2016), Singer (1992), and Walker and Kwan (2012), and University-MoNE collaboration, a central assignment system, leadership training, candidacy process, objective interviews, a competent and impartial jury, a system-wide re-structuring and internship were among the suggestions for a better and fair principal assignment system.

The findings of this current study altogether demonstrated that outcome favorability may not have affected newly assigned or some of the re-assigned principals' views about the fairness of the system. However, the new principals and some of the re-assigned principals did not directly delineate that the change was totally unfair. According to some of them, the change paved the way for new people to hold the principalship position despite some problems in the implementation process of the initiative. Both female and male principals

were of the same opinion about the problems related to the processes, procedures, and practices during the initiative. Teachers also criticized the initiative due to similar reasons. It was understood from teacher views that process- and procedure-related issues overshadowed the potential merits of the initiative. In this respect, Argon (2010) argues that if all the procedures and policies are settled in accordance with the principles of justice, those who are negatively affected by the change would tend to accept the outcomes. Consistently, Brotheridge (2003) focuses on the importance of a fair change implementation in addressing the concerns of those negatively affected by organizational change. Attaining justice in the organization will help to cultivate pro-change behaviors in organizational members (Fuchs, 2011; Fuchs & Edwards, 2012) even when the outcomes are not favorable for everyone. This is because people tend to make procedural justice judgments based on the fairness of the decision procedures regardless of the outcome favorability (Daly, 1995). The change which is seen procedurally fair leads to positive appraisals of the effects of the change initiative (Benson, 2002; Paterson & Cary, 2002). Justice judgments and orientation toward acceptance and support for change in the organization are significantly related (Sousa & Vala, 2002).

If properly implemented, leadership succession planning could be an important step for Turkey as it requires careful recruitment, the support and retention of people who are well prepared and qualified for the challenges they will face as administrators and the sustainability of such people in the long-term (Read, 2012; Renihan, 2012). In this recent initiative, it can be suggested that one of the main criteria used to assign school principals was 'fit'. According to Palmer, Kelly, and Mullooly (2016), if fit will be used in the selection of principals, it must not supersede some other significant characteristics, such as the candidates' ability to affect student achievement, which can be determined objectively. Furthermore, It should be remembered that justice can help construct a buffer zone which may mediate a smooth transition of a change process, and it may contribute to the success of organizational change (Ford, 2012), increase commitment to change (Foster, 2008), and influence openness toward future change (Imberman, 2009). However, the process, practices and procedures which were perceived unfair seemed to overshadow the potential benefits that this change could bring about. The same problem can be seen in the research conducted on other reform initiatives. The practices and processes in the change might underscore the contributions that change could make as happened in the 4+4+4 educational reform (Summak, 2016), which portraits a reality about Turkey's way of initiating changes: "too many times burnt, but never shy…".

Notes

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