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An inquiry into leadership capacity: The case of Turkish primary schools*

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ABSTRACT

The growing research interest in educational leadership requires the investigation of new school leadership perspectives as schools become more complex structures. This article explored the perceptions of primary school teachers and administrators on leadership capacity of their schools and related factors. This study employed a mixed method in which both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used together. A total of 2370 participants including teachers, vice principals and principals from 179 primary schools were included in the quantitative part of the study while 18 participants including teachers and school administrators participated in the qualitative part of the study. The research findings suggested that participants' levels of perception on distributed leadership and shared school vision subscales were lower than their levels of perceptions on collaboration and shared responsibility and perceived student achievement. The findings also illustrated that participants from schools with high leadership capacity thought they participated in vision building and instructional decision-making processes more frequently. The paper draws implications for improving teaching and learning in the schoolhouse.

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Leadership capacity; school principals; vice principals, teachers, primary schools

Introduction

Educational leadership is one of the most important factors that have a deep impact on building high quality learning and teaching environment at the school level and improving student achievement (Blase & Blase, 1999; 2000, Dinham & Crowther, 2011, King & Bouchard, 2011). A great deal of research effort has been spent until now on investigating the relationships between educational leadership and student achievement (e.g. Alig-Mielcarek, 2003; Botello, 1997; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Hearn, 2010; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Quinn, 2002; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Valentine & Prater, 2011; Witziers, Bosger, & Krüger, 2003), student learning (e.g. Krug, 1992; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010), improving instruction (e.g. Blase & Blase, 1999; Jenkins, 1985; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008), and school improvement (e.g. Delaney, 1997; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Jackson 2000). These studies genereally focus on the direct and indirect effects of principal leadership on student achievement and on contribution of leadership processes to school improvement.

Scholars have recently discussed that school principals' workload is getting harder, and that new roles and behaviors are expected from them (Bush, 1998; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). For instance, school principals are expected to exert a great deal of effort and time to build a focused school culture as they are likely to lead a school in balkanized school cultures where teachers belong to different

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sub-groups, what teachers know, think and believe vary from one division or sub-group to another, and teachers are isolated from one another (Hargreaves, 1994). Today schools have become the structures too difficult and complex to be managed single-handedly (Harris, 2008; Lambert, 1998; 2003), which forces every single worker or each member of the school community to be skillfully involved in the work of leadership (Foster & St. Hilaire, 2004).

A line of researchers have highlighted the importance and the potential of studies on school leadership capacity in recent years (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). For instance, Spillane (2005) argues that heroic leadership, which posits all the managerial responsibility of school on the shoulders of school principal, is problematic in that schools cannot be leaded to improvement single-handedly as leadership needs the knowledge, skills and expertise of school members. Gronn (2002) suggests that heroic leadership is ineffective in schools and that dispersing leadership among school members is more likely to influence overall school capacity to improve. In the same vein, Lambert (2005) explains that understanding the leadership capacity of schools may be valuable in that it may guide further studies on improving student learning. Harris and Lambert (2003) also emphasize the uncertainty about which leadership styles may contribute well to school improvement and student achievement, and purport the need for further studies on schools' leadership capacity.

To sum up this section, this study treated and discussed leadership as a shared and collective interaction process in which each member has the right and responsibility to assume leadership. This type of leadership, as Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) argue, depends heavily on shared assumptions, values, beliefs, norms of collaboration, and collective responsibility.

Leadership Capacity

Leadership capacity, as Lambert (2003) defines, refers to "broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership" (p. 4). This definition refers that leadership potential in the organization happens through the interactions among all school members (Lambert, 2009). Spillane (2005) purports that leadership is heavily based on the interactions among faculty members. Harris and Lambert (2003) propose that the phenomenon of leadership capacity is highly associated with schools' restructuring and managing themselves effectively even when the key individuals leave. Leadership capacity of a school, as Ledbedder (2007) argues, is comprised of a composition of all school members' knowledge, expertise, and leadership skills. Fullan, Bertani and Quinn (2004) state that school leadership capacity is quite associated with a school culture where faculty members find opportunities to improve their teaching skills and help students more effectively. It is also possible to note that leadership capacity is closely related to sustainable leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003) which suggests that leadership develops effective learning for school members and spreads over other school members.

The concept of leadership capacity points to two important dimensions: (1) "broad-based"; (2) "skillful" participation in the work of leadership. Broad-based denotes that large number of students, teachers, administrators, and parents are involved in the work of leadership. However, the amount of participation itself cannot be enough for a school to have high leadership capacity. Participants of leadership work should have various abilities and make use of them effectively. In other words, members of school community are expected to use their unique skills and contribute to the school leadership processes (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Lambert, 1998; 2003).

Leadership capacity has six basic features (Lambert, 2003). *Broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership*, as mentioned briefly above, is related to the contribution of each member of school community to school leadership work. *Shared vision resulting in program coherence* means building school vision and shared purpose collaboratively and in a way appropriate to the expectations and values of school community members. *Inquiry-based use of information to inform decisions and practices* is associated especially with making use of data effectively in teaching and learning processes. *Broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions* refers to the active involvement of school community members in the instructional and administrational processes in order to increase student achievement and extend the opportunities for collaboration both in and outside of the schoolhouse. Barth (1990) suggests that school members work in flexible school structures and become willing to assume responsibility to improve student learning and engagement in schools with high leadership capacity. Fullan (2005) argues that sustainability is

more likely to be ensured and members are more motivated in collaborative school cultures. *Reflective practice that leads consistently to innovation* refers to that teachers and administrators reflect on what they do to improve teaching and student engagement, and to question the assumptions they have. According to Conzemius and O'Neill (2001), high leadership capacity schools provide their members with more opportunities to collaborate, reflect on ideas, and learn more from each other. *High or steadily improving student achievement* is defined as developing student learning not only in terms of academic learning but also building social interactions, serving the society, problem solving, and goal setting skills. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) suggest that student learning is more likely to increase in schools with high leadership capacity.

According to Fink (2011), leadership capacity denotes basically to the notion that organizations need to use their resources such as time, money, human energy and capabilities more effectively, and building capacity for leadership in an organization may be one potential way to sustain institutional improvement. Lambert (1998) clarifies the fundamental assumptions lying under leadership capacity as follows:

> "*(1) Leadership is not a trait theory, and leadership and leader are not the same. (2) Leadership is about learning that leads to constructive change. (3) Everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader. (4). Leading is a shared endeavor, the foundation for the democratization of schools. (5) Leadership requires the redistribution of power and authority. Shared learning, purpose, action, and responsibility demand the realignment of power and authority*" (pp. 8-9).

Relationship Between Leadership Capacity And Improving Instruction

Building leadership capacity in schools has a number of outcomes at the organizational level. Being a relatively new perspective for school leadership which welcomes equal rights and responsibilities for school members to assume leadership roles, leadership capacity theory denotes to create a school environment in which school principals, teachers, students, and parents exert tremendous efforts to reflect on instruction and improve student learning (Barth, 1990). In schools with high leadership capacity, all the faculty members contribute well to the efforts of building an effective school environment which supports learning of each individual at school (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001). Harris and Muijs (2003) argue that leadership capacity of a school is likely to foster change and improvement of classroom practices. They offer the idea that leadership of teachers and other parties at schools promotes collaboration and collegiality, which, in turn, influences internal capacity of schools to improve instruction.

Harris and Lambert (2003) connect instructional improvement and leadership capacity. They have described schools successful in improving instruction as those where teachers gain necessary skills and expertise to impact school norms and responsibilities, faculty members focus mainly on student learning, professional development of teachers and school principals is enhanced, and each member of the school community assumes the responsibility of the work of leadership. Hargreaves (2011) further argues that the ideas and implications of system leadership, which refers to distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities to all levels in schools, should be expanded within schoolhouse in order for teachers to take collective responsibility for both student engagement and school improvement. Harris (2000) points out that school improvement is much more achievable if school generates its own capacity for leadership. Dinham and Crowther (2011) also suggest that turning a school into a more effective one which sets and achieves higher learning standards for all students is possible by building a school environment in which teachers and principals work collaboratively and develop their leadership skills. According to Fink (2011), a school can achieve and sustain long-term improvement and excellence by building leadership capacity and making use of human and material sources effectively. Consequently, teacher participation in leadership practices at schools are necessary to improve classroom instruction (King & Bouchard, 2011), and sustainable improvement requires the capacity for leadership that enables collaboration action, collective power, and redistribution of power and authority (Harris & Lambert, 2003).

Background of the Study

Much of the existing literature focuses on the quality of effective leadership practices associated with school improvement and student learning (Blase & Blase, 1999; Dinham & Crowther, 2011; Fullan, 2001). However, little is known about school leadership capacity and the specific qualities of schools with different levels of leadership capacity. In line with this argument, several authors have stressed the vital importance of studying more on leadership capacity to improve school-wide instructional policies and to ensure student learning (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Lambert, 2005; Hargreaves, 2011; Dinham & Crowther, 2011). Furthermore, Spillane, Diamond and Jita (2003) emphasize the need for further studies on various school leadership practices and perspectives to find reasonable ways for school improvement. Therefore, the present study concentrated on investigating the leadership capacity levels of primary schools and identifying unique characteristics of schools with different levels of leadership capacity. The findings of this study may contribute well to a better understanding of effective school-wide leadership, participation in decision-making processes, collaboration among school members, improving instruction, and achieving a higher level of student achievement. The research findings may also be useful for gathering more detailed data about these variables. Furthermore, the present study may have some implications for policy-makers and educators, school principals and teachers being in the first place, to build effective practices in order to improve instruction and student achievement. Thus, the current study aimed firstly at determining the perceptions of school principals, vice principals, and teachers on the dimensions of Leadership Capacity School Survey Turkish Form entitled distributive leadership, shared school vision, collaboration and shared responsibility, and perceived student achievement. Secondly, the study adopted a qualitative research strategy with in-depth case studies of three primary schools in order to identify the specific characteristics of schools with different levels of leadership capacity.

Context of the Study

Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) indicators reveal that the population of Turkey is 75,627,384, and the proportion of population living in urban areas is 77.3 percent (TURKSTAT, 2013). There are about 5,593,910 million students, 282,043 permanent teachers, and 234,920 classrooms in Turkish primary education institutions [(Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 2013]. Depending on National Education Basic Act No. 1739, the Turkish National Education System is comprised of two parts: (1) formal education; (2) informal education. According to MoNE (2013):

> "*formal education refers to the regular education conducted within a school for individuals in a certain age group and at the same level, under programs developed in accordance with a specific purpose. This type of education includes pre-primary, primary school, lower secondary school, upper secondary and higher education institutions. On the other hand, non-formal education, in accordance with the general objectives and basic principles of national education, covers citizens who have never entered the formal education system or are at any level of it or have left it at that level, and which may accompany formal education or be independent of it*" (p. XIII).

The basic purpose of primary education, which is compulsory for the age groups of 6 to 13, is to make sure that each Turkish child gains the necessary knowledge, skills, behaviors, and habits to become a good citizen and that each one of them is raised in line with the national morals. Primary education institutions include the four-year and compulsory lower secondary schools, four year and compulsory lower secondary schools which give opportunity to allow between different programmes, and lower secondary schools for imams and preachers (MoNE, 2013).

Turkey has a highly centralized national education system in that MoNE is the single institution which has the right to assume responsibility for building schools, budgeting, managing schools' financial demands, and employing teachers, principals, vice principals, and other school members (Korkmaz, 2006). In parallel with this highly centralized national education system, principals of schools are primarily responsible for managing, regulating and supervising schools in accordance with diverse laws, legislations, and regulations in Turkey (MoNE, 2012).

Methods and Procedures

Design

This study adopted a mixed method research strategy under explanatory design. According to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012), "the researcher first carries out a quantitative study method and then uses a qualitative method to follow up and refine the quantitative findings in explanatory design" (p. 559). In this regard, the current study primarily adopted a quantitative research strategy with a questionnaire to gather data about the perceptions of school principals, vice principals, and teachers on school leadership capacity. The present study also conducted a qualitative research with in-depth case studies of three primary schools with different levels of leadership capacity. The selection of cases was based on the quantitative findings. Therefore, this study examined primary school principals' and teachers' perceptions on school leadership capacity via quantitative research method, and investigated the distinctive qualities of schools with different leadership capacity levels by adopting a qualitative research method.

Sample for quantitative study

A total of 179 primary schools within nearly 30 miles radius of Ankara, one of the largest cities of Turkey, served as the population of the study. Research data were gathered from 166 (7%) school principals, 174 (7.3%) vice principals, and 2030 (85.7%) school teachers employed in participant primary schools. The unit of analysis was school, and mean scores for each school were computed from the responses of all teachers, principals, and vice principals completing *Leadership Capacity School Survey Turkish Form* (LCSS-TF). Higher school mean scores refer to higher levels of school leadership capacity.

Context of case study schools

Our purpose of conducting in-depth case studies was to gather detailed data about the distinctive features of schools with different leadership capacity levels. Therefore, it was needed to know the leadership capacity levels of all participant schools beforehand (179 primary schools). In this regard, an index was produced based on the quantitative data referring to the mean scores of leadership capacity of each participating school. This index enabled to order the participant schools according to their mean scores for leadership capacity. The selection of cases was based on whether that particular school was rated as having low, medium or high leadership capacity by the participants of the quantitative data. In this sense, three schools were chosen to conduct case studies. The first one [school with the lowest level of leadership capacity (SLLC)] was chosen among five schools with the lowest level of leadership capacity and the second [school with medium level of leadership capacity (SMLC)] was chosen among five schools with medium level of leadership capacity Finally, the third school [school with the highest level of leadership capacity (SHLC)] was chosen among five schools with the highest level of leadership capacity. The abbreviation "ST" was used for school teachers in the presentation of the qualitative findings.

In each case, interviews were conducted with five school teachers (each from different branches) and the principal of that school. Thus, a total of 15 teachers from various branches and 3 school principals participated in the qualitative interviewing section. It was also found that all participating school principals took part in a leadership activity while no teachers participated in any kind of leadership activity such as conference, congress or courses. It is also necessary to note that a particular attention was paid to choosing teachers from various branches in each case in order to better understand different perspectives about school leadership capacity. Therefore, interviews were conducted with five teachers from different branches (primary school teacher, science teacher, social sciences teacher, preschool teacher, and teachers of other branches) in each school.

Quantitative Instruments

Leadership Capacity School Survey Turkish Form (LCSS-TF). The scale measuring school principals' and teachers' perceptions on school leadership capacity was originally developed by Lambert (2003), and adapted into Turkish culture by Kılınç (2013). The scale is comprised of 30 items responded on a rating scale from 1 (We do not do this at our school) to 4 (We have this condition well established). Results of the factor analysis demonstrated that the scale items were distributed across four factors: Distributed leadership (7

items), shared school vision (9 items), collaboration and collective responsibility (6 items), and perceived student achievement (8 items). These leadership capacity factors accounted for approximately 68% of the total variance. Relatively high reliability coefficients for the factors ranged from .91 (distributed leadership and collaboration and collective responsibility) to .94 (shared school vision) (Kılınç, 2013). Furthermore, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the LCSS-TF's four-factor model produced through the exploratory factor analysis. Results of the CFA revealed that the goodness-of-fit statistics were reasonable, and the model fitted the data well (χ^2 = 940.25 (sd = 396, p < .001), (χ^2/sd) = 2.37, GFI = .82, RMSEA = .068, CFI = .98, AGFI = .79).

Qualitative Instruments

Qualitative interviewing was another source of data collection in the present study. Fraenkel et al. (2012) noted as follows:

> *"For example, a researcher interested in how the characteristics of teachers in urban and suburban schools differ might conduct a structured interview (i.e., asking a set of structured questions) with a group of urban high school teachers to obtain background information about them – their education, their qualifications, their previous experience, their out-of-school activities, and so on – in order to compare these data with the same data (i.e., answers to the same questions) obtained from a group of teachers who teach in the suburbs*" (p. 451).

As stated beforehand, the main purpose in the current qualitative study was to gather more detailed data about the distinct features of SLLC, SMLC, and SHLC. Therefore, a structured interview form was developed based on the leadership capacity theory and expert opinions. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), a structured interview is a formal type of interview in which the researcher asks, in order, a set of predetermined questions. The present form consisted of two different sections. The first section involved personal data regarding the demographic variables of branch and participation in any kind of activities (seminars, courses, congress, conferences etc.). The second part comprised of five questions to provide more detailed data on the leadership capacities of schools. These questions were as follows: (1) What is the leadership style of your school principal? (2) How do the decision processes on instructional issues work in your school? (3) How are the vision building processes adopted in your school? (4) What do you think about the collaboration among school members in your school? and (5) What kind of practices do the school members conduct to influence student learning in your school? Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) suggest that researchers are able to build a list of themes before conducting interviews if the theoretical framework of the research problem is well-established. In line with this argument, themes were identified based on the questions included in the structured interview form and also codes emerged from the data sets of interview transcripts. The themes identified before interviewing were as follows:

- Leadership style of school principals
- Participation in decision-making processes on instructional issues
- Building school vision
- Collaboration within school
- Practices for increasing academic achievement

Data Collection and Analyses

Questionnaires were hand-delivered to a community sample of 179 primary schools. The purpose of the researchers was to convey the questionnaires to 17 participants in each school. Two questionnaires were for the principal and the vice principal of each school, and the others were for teachers from every branch (e.g. one for mathematics teacher, one for social sciences teacher, etc.) Based on the maximum variation sampling technique, it was therefore aimed to reach the views of different people as much as possible in each school to grasp a more elaborated point of view on school leadership capacity. In the qualitative interviewing sections, the interviews for teachers and school principals of the three case study schools were conducted on an individual basis. Each school principal and each teacher were interviewed for sessions ranging from 30 to 60 minutes. Each of the interviews was fully transcribed.

At the data analysis stage, mean scores for school leadership capacity dimensions were calculated by dividing the sums into the number of items in each scale. Mean scores for distributed leadership, shared school vision, collaboration and collective responsibility, and perceived student achievement were computed in the same way. The researchers also conducted content analysis in order to analyze the qualitative data derived from interviews. Fraenkel et al. (2012) argue that qualitative researchers are able to use several techniques to ensure that they are not being misinformed and that they are seeing or hearing what they think they are. Thus, several procedures were employed to check and enhance validity and reliability. Firstly, necessary permissions were obtained from participants to record the interviews, and audio recordings were used during all interviews. Prolonged engagement is another technique to enhance the validity of qualitative studies. Therefore, relatively longer interviews were conducted with each participant (ranging from 30 to 60 minutes) to obtain more data. The last technique employed to increase the validity of the study was member checking in which all the participants of the current study were asked to review the accuracy of the research report. The present study also employed external audit referring to inviting an individual outside of the study to check and evaluate the research findings. Consequently, researchers exerted considerable effort and time by resorting to various techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

Findings

The perceptions of school principals and teachers on school leadership capacity were analyzed by means of quantitative techniques, and findings were presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. The means and standard deviations of leadership capacity subscales (n = 2370)

Subscales	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	$\overline{X}$	*S*
Distributed leadership	1.00	4.00	2.72	.69
Shared school vision	1.00	4.00	2.79	.65
Collaboration and collective responsibility	1.00	4.00	2.93	.68
Perceived student achievement	1.00	4.00	3.01	.64

As can be seen in the Table 1, participants' perceptions on collaboration and collective responsibility ($\overline{X}$ = 2.93) and perceived student achievement ($\overline{X}$ = 3.01) were higher than those on other subscales. Standard deviations demonstrated that the most homogeneous range occurred on perceived student achievement (*S* = .64), while the heterogeneous one was for distributed leadership (*S* = .69).

Qualitative Findings

This section presents findings obtained from qualitative study in regard to the significant characteristics of SLLC, SMLC, and SHLC. Thus, the qualitative findings were provided in a systematical order.

The findings obtained from SLLC showed that most of the participants (*n* = 5) thought the principal of their school had autocratic leadership style. Only one participant stated that his/her school principal tended to have distributed leadership style. Half of the participants (*n* = 3) expressed that school principal made decisions related to instructional issues by consulting several teachers. Moreover, two participants thought school principal made instructional decisions together with all teachers. It was only one teacher's opinion that school principal made instructional decisions only together with other administrators at school. Two participants' opinions were as follows:

> "*For example, school principal made decisions together with several teachers even on simple activities. If you consider the opinions of other teachers, the quality of decisions may be higher*" (ST3).

> "*Teachers' opinions are considered only in exceptional cases. Something happens, and all we do is to keep up with it*" (ST4).

In terms of the vision building processes in SLLC, it was clear that over half of the participants (*n* = 4) stated that school vision was built beforehand. In other words, those participants had no idea on and contribution to building the visions of their own schools. There were also two participants having slightly different perceptions on this issue. One purported that school vision was built by the administrators and the

other one thought school vision was built by school principal in cooperation with just a couple of teachers. Therefore, it is possible to say that participants had a tendency not to be actively involved in building school vision processes. The following excerpt indicates the overall picture of vision building processes:

> "*The vision of our school has already been defined. It is written on all doors and walls. Nobody asks teachers about changing or improving the school vision*" (ST3).

In SLLC, the views of participants about collaboration within school differed in three ways. Three participants thought that school members tended to teach individually. Two participants referred to balkanization while only one talked about collectivism. In other words, some of the participants believed that they acted together in designing, building, and implementing instructional processes while the others did not speak of such a collective understanding. Some excerpts are given below to reflect these different perspectives:

> "*There are two different types of workers at this school. The first is the one in which members wish to interact and cooperate with each other. Members of this group also follow the innovations and help each other on any issue. Second group members say 'no' to everything. They just enter into classrooms and leave the school on time*" (ST1).
>
> *Everyone does their best. They even help each other. Whenever I have difficulty in any matter including classes and students, there is always somebody around to help me*" (ST5).

Individual consideration of students (n = 5) and additional courses (n = 3) were the activities that participants more often preferred to increase student achievement in SLLC. Furthermore, providing parental support (n = 1), instructional material support (n = 1), and home visits (n = 1) were other activities that participants used for the same purpose.

The findings obtained from SMLC through qualitative interviewing demonstrated that most of the participants (n = 4) thought the principal of their school had autocratic leadership style. Only one participant stated that their school principal tended to have laissez-faire style. Autocratic leadership and laissez-faire might be considered to be two distinct leadership styles. Some quotations are given below to reflect these different perspectives:

> "*... for example, last year a summer activity was organized at school whose purpose was to fund school. However, we did not know anything about how and where the earnings from the activity were spent. In other words, our ideas were asked, we responded, but school principal did what he knew right*" (ST3).
>
> "*Let me tell you something. This year I have not participated in any of the activities or studies. This is because nobody has considered my ideas and wanted me to do something for the school*" (ST1).

In SMLC, participants had different views on participation in decision-making processes on instructional issues. Some participants (n = 3) reported that school principal made decisions on instructional issues by himself. While one participant stated that school principal consulted others, but made the final decisions by himself, one expressed that school principal made instructional decisions by consulting all the teachers. Results signed that most of the participants in SMLC thought school principal did not give them enough opportunities to be involved in decision making processes.

In SMLC, participants' views on vision building processes might be divided into two groups. Participants in the first group (n = 3) stated that the vision of their school was built beforehand while the other group (n = 3) thought that the vision of their school was built by school administrators and some teachers. In this regard, it is likely that a holistic and collective approach could not be followed in building school vision in SMLC and that participation of school members in school vision building process was quite limited. One of the participants reported:

> "*I have never attended in a vision building process at my school. Our vision and mission were announced in a meeting on "Total Quality Management", and we just listened to them*" (ST1).

Another result of the content analysis for SMLC was that a significant part of the participants stated that collaboration was limited among certain groups in the school community, as in balkanized school cultures. Only one participant tended to believe that individualism was the most common characteristics at his/her school. According to the results of the content analysis, it seems difficult to say that collaboration has been one of the basic characteristics in SMLC. One participant stated his/her thoughts by saying:

> "*... if you find somebody to collaborate, it is OK. As I said before, I have only one colleague to collaborate at this school*" (ST5).

According to the views of participants from SMLC, individual consideration of students (n = 5), providing parental support (n = 3), additional reading hours (n = 2), additional courses (n = 1), and instructional material support (n = 1) were among activities designed for supporting and increasing student achievement. This finding brings to mind that individual consideration of students and providing parental support are at the forefront of activities that participant choose to increase student achievement.

According to the findings derived from SHLC, four participants pointed out that school principal had distributed leadership style. One participant described his/her school administrator as autocratic, and the other as transformational leadership style. It seems clear from findings that the views of participants on school principal's leadership style center on distributed leadership. One participant said:

> "*I have learnt to manage with teachers when managing the school. I have become a successful school principal by distributed leadership. Leadership alone means nothing*" (SP).

The principal of SHLC generally made decisions on instructional issues in a consortium involving all teachers at the school. Only one participant stated that the school principal consulted others before making instructional decisions, but made the final decisions by himself. It is possible to say, therefore, that participants are allowed at least to be involved in instructional decision making processes in SHLC. The following expressions of one of the participants support this argument:

> "*Each school member conveys his or her own ideas in school committees, but a consensus is often reached. School members tend to be open to different ideas and thoughts, and we do our best to improve*" (T3).

In SHLC, participants' views in building school vision focus on a single idea. They expressed that the vision of SHLC was built by the contribution of school community members. In other words, participants felt that they were active in building the vision of their school. One participant spoke as follows:

> "*We have built our own school vision. All school members have contributed to the process. Every individual at school including teachers and students is aware of the way our school vision leads*" (ST4).

The results of the quantitative study signified that most of the participants (n = 5) in SHLC thought that they worked collaboratively at school to increase student learning and achievement. There was only one participant in SHLC noting that collaboration occurred in just certain groups. The findings suggest that participants have a tendency to work collaboratively in SHLC. The following interview excerpt is an example of the notion that school members collaborate effectively in SHLC.

> "*Collaboration works in this school. School members collaborate well on academic issues. We share everything to influence and improve student learning. Everybody takes the responsibility for student learning*" (ST5).

According to the views from SHLC, participants often made use of activities such as additional courses (n = 3) and instructional material support (n = 2) to increase the academic successes of students. It was also understood from the findings that additional reading hours (n = 1), rewarding student achievement (n = 1), and guidance and counseling services (n = 1) were other activities aimed at supporting student achievement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research results indicated that participants' perceptions on collaboration and collective responsibility and perceived student achievement were higher than those on distributed leadership and

shared school vision. This is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Gambini (2011). On the other hand, this finding can be interpreted from different perspectives. It has already been known that there are some formal groups within Turkish primary school schools such as teacher boards, discipline committees or other teacher communities in which teachers can work collaboratively. Therefore, it is not surprising that working with colleagues collaboratively is perceived as part of their profession by teachers. Besides, the reason for why school administrators and teachers have more positive perceptions on perceived student achievement subscale might stem from the fact that they consider contributing to student learning and achievement among their primary purposes.

Ogawa and Bossert (2000) argue that an understanding of hierarchical management still prevails at schools. From this point of view, one might say that it is because of the dominant traditional and autocratic school management mentality still prevailing in Turkish primary schools that participants' perceptions on distributed leadership are less positive. In a number of recent studies on leadership (Akbaba & Altun, 2003; Bozman, 2011; Buluç, 2009; Cemaloğlu, 2007; Eldred, 2010; Harms & Credé, 2010; Myers, 1987; Pichon, 2010; Yılmaz & Ceylan, 2011), it has clearly been seen that leadership and leader are treated as the same what leadership capacity theory denies. These studies generally concentrate on determining the relationships between principal leadership and various variables. In other words, a great amount of research on leadership still focuses on school principals' behaviors or their leadership styles. Although school leadership is one of the most important determinants in the school capacity literature (Borko, Wolf, Simone, & Uchiyama, 2003; Dinham & Crowther, 2011; King & Bouchard, 2011; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001), as emphasized by Hallinger and Heck (2010) and Lambert (2003), leadership work in school capacity literature comprises not only the principal leadership but also an understanding and practice of leadership that allows broad-based and skillful participation of school community members. In line with this, findings of the study conducted by D'Ambrosio (2004) indicated that distributed leadership was not accepted widely in schools and that some important steps were needed to build school leadership capacity in which every member had right and responsibility to assume leadership. The findings of the present study therefore suggest that hierarchical management style is still prevalent in Turkish primary schools.

The research results demonstrated that participants' perceptions on shared school vision were less positive than on other subscales, respectively. In other words, shared school vision was not achieved adequately according to the opinions of participants. This finding might refer that participants do not participate in the school vision building processes regularly. Furthermore, the fact that school members' efforts are inadequate to build a shared school vision and that participants do not perceive contributing to building school vision within their job description are among other potential reasons for this finding. Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) describe shared school vision as a guide which leads school members to the point where they want to be and what they want to achieve. Lashway (1997) remarks that it is important for a school vision to be built with the active participation of all school members and to be developed with dialogues among teachers, administrators, and students in order to serve the school purposes. Therefore, the fact that participants' perceptions are not very positive towards shared school vision might be undesirable, which may prevent school from achieving its purposes.

The qualitative findings of the study suggest that school principals tend to demonstrate autocratic leadership behaviors in SLLC and SLMC while distributed leadership is more widely accepted in SHLC. This finding denotes that in schools with high leadership capacity school principals prefer a more distributed and humanistic leadership styles. Fullan (2001) believes that good leaders are those who encourage others in the organizations to become leaders. Arguing that autocratic leadership style is not consistent with the leadership capacity theory, Harris and Lambert (2003) state that in schools with high leadership capacity, school principals support teacher leadership and try to facilitate organizational change and development processes and build a trustworthy and warm school environment in which both collegial and congenial relationships blossom among school members. As stated by Conzemius and O'Neill (2001), encouraging individuals from different roles in organization may well contribute to the individual and organizational capacity. In this regard, this finding of the study can be said to be congruent with the leadership capacity literature.

The research results also indicated that participants from SHLC were more often involved actively in decision-making processes on instructional issues. Participants from SLLC and SMLC thought that decisions

about instruction were more often led by school administrators and by limited number of teachers or certain teacher groups. In this sense, it might be inferred from this finding that in SHLC instructional decisions are more likely to be made by school community members together. In a study focusing on the effects of teachers' leadership behaviors on classroom activities, it was found out that teachers were mostly incapable and unwilling to define school purposes, to attend in vision and trust building processes, to design projects, and to conduct studies about community services (Can, 2009). It was also discovered in the same study that a lack of encouraging school culture, teachers' lack of opportunities to become leaders, limited number of professional development activities for teachers, and inadequacy of collaborative and trustworthy school environment were among the reasons for which teachers did not actively participate in school leadership processes. Considering that in schools with low leadership capacity school leadership is limited only to the leadership of school principal or limited number of school members, innovations about teaching and learning are resisted, a culture of obedience and blame prevails, and shared responsibility for school purposes is lacking (Lambert, 1998). Can's (2009) research findings seem parallel to the present study findings. Harris and Lambert (2003) also suggest that teachers and administrators work collaboratively to make important decisions especially about instructional issues and implement them carefully in high leadership capacity schools. In addition to this, the participation of school community members in the processes of defining school policies and making decisions is seen as a prerequisite to developing school capacity for sustainable school improvement (Harris & Jackson, 1997).

The results also mirrored that participants' views on vision building processes differed in low, medium, and high level leadership capacity schools. Participants from SLLC and SMLC stated that they did not participate in school vision building processes. However, participants from SHLC thought that school vision was built with the collaboration of all school members. Lambert (2003) argues that all school members contribute to building and developing school vision in high leadership capacity schools. Defining school vision as an inspiring picture towards desired purposes, Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) claim that vision building is a collective endeavor and shared undertaking. In parallel with Senge's (2007) statement implying that building school vision is not only the responsibility of school principal but also the responsibility of the whole school members, the findings indicating that shared vision is built collaboratively by school members in the high leadership school characterized by broad-based and skillful participation in the work of leadership (Lambert, 1998; 2003), are consistent with the expectations.

The qualitative results of the study showed that a more collaborative working environment to increase student learning existed in SHLC while individualism and balkanization in teaching were more dominant characteristics of SLLC and SMLC. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) point out that teacher leadership, collaboration among teachers, and professional learning community have not been supported enough and developed at many schools yet. In this regard, it is not surprising that a collective understanding towards teaching and learning has not been flourished in schools with low leadership capacity in which leadership has been regarded as only principal leadership. Hargreaves (1994) emphasizes that balkanized school cultures are those in which sub-teacher groups are isolated from each other, a limited number of teachers move between groups, and cross-membership of groups is rare. Therefore, it seems acceptable that a more individualized and balkanized school culture exists in SLLC and SMLC rather than SHLC.

As stated by Harris and Lambert (2003), one of the crucial points distinguishing schools in which student achievement is steadily improving or failing is collaboration among school members in regard to student learning. According to Harris (2000), school improvement is much more achievable if school generates its own capacity for leadership. In this sense, there is little doubt to say that teachers, administrators, and members of the whole school community collaborate with each other and accept shared responsibility for school change and development in high leadership capacity schools. In other respects, Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) lay emphasize on collaboration among members who are capable of solving problems effectively, communicating well, making decisions, managing group processes, and sharing practices with each other in order for school leadership to become successful. That is to say, the finding showing that a collective undertaking towards improving teaching is more dominant in SHLC is congruent with the leadership capacity literature.

The research results indicated that "individual consideration of students" was the common activity used in each school from different levels of leadership capacity in order to increase students' academic

achievement. Furthermore, participants from SHLC also reported that they rewarded student achievement and activated guidance and counseling services. One of the potential reasons for why individual consideration is a widespread activity among participants for increasing student achievement is that teachers and school administrators accept considering students individually among their primary duties. It has already been known that there are a number of activities conducted to raise student achievement levels in high leadership capacity schools (Lambert, 2003). In this regard, the findings showing that there are more various activities like rewarding student achievement and guidance and counseling services in SHLC seem congruent with the expectations. This finding also brings to mind that different student needs are more likely to appear in high leadership capacity schools where student achievement might be expected to improve steadily, which forces school community members to increase and diversify the activities to improve student learning. Moreover, student achievement is rewarded in SHLC, which implies that teachers or administrators in SHLC are possibly aware of and informed about basic incentives and motivation techniques. It is important to note that activities focusing on improving student achievement are associated with school culture. Harris and Lambert (2003) conclude that school improvement means changing school culture and that school community members reflect on and improve the activities they have conducted to develop student learning. In this sense, teachers' and other school members' commitment to improving teaching might be accepted as the essential part of developing student learning.

Policy makers can deal with leadership challenges and improve schools in the long term by building leadership capacity and using human resources effectively (Fink, 2011). This study produced empirical data about primary schools' leadership capacity levels and distinctive features of schools with different levels of leadership capacity. Therefore, such data are likely to help school community members and policy makers to build leadership capacity within schools to influence student learning and school improvement. Educational programs designed for training school teachers and administrators and for developing their knowledge and skills may also focus more on factors such as participation in decision making, collaboration, shared responsibility, building shared school vision, and activities for improving student achievement.

Limitations

This study was conducted in order to examine the perceptions of primary school teachers and administrators on the leadership capacity of their schools and related factors. Therefore, only primary school teachers and administrators responded to the items of the questionnaire and questions in the interview form. It is suggested that further research examining the responses of teachers and administrators, and even students and parents from high schools to the issues of leadership capacity should be conducted. In consideration of the fact that it takes too much time for a school to build and develop its capacity for leadership, a longitudinal examination of schools may be more practical to gather more detailed data. Future studies should also investigate the relationships between leadership capacity and school culture, school improvement and other possible variables. Furthermore, factors affecting building leadership capacity of schools should also be examined in detail.

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