

THE PRINCIPAL AND HEALTHY SCHOOL CLIMATE

CELAL GÜLŞEN AND GÜLDEN BUÇKÜN GÜLENAY
Fatih University

The objective in this study was to identify the effects of the principal on the climate of the school by conducting a survey of teachers employed at the principal's school. Researchers regard the organizational effectiveness of the school to be related to the health of the school climate. In our study we used The Healthy School Scale developed by Akbaba (1997), which was adapted for use in Istanbul by these researchers in 2012. Results revealed that the principal plays a crucial role in the formation of the school climate.

Keywords: school climate, teacher, school principal, secondary education.

An organization consists of people and because this is so, organizational culture is important. Although the people in an organization come from varying cultures and each individual holds different beliefs, the organization they make up holds beliefs and values that are common within it (Eren, 2010). This culture is “the sum of the taught and shared values, beliefs, behavior characteristics and the symbols” (Koçer, 2003, p. 31).

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a concept different from social culture. Organizational culture “reflects the more directive and descriptive samples of common behaviors which characterize the types of organization” (Çelik, 2012, p. 4). If there is a strong culture in an organization, the confidence of the members increases and

Celal Gülsen, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education and Head of the Department of Educational Administration, Planning, and Economics, Fatih University; Gülden Buçkün Gülenay, Master's student of Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning and Economics, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Fatih University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Assistant Professor Dr. Celal Gülsen, Fatih University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey. Email: celalgulsen@gmail.com

they feel more powerful and energetic (Eren, 2010). The concept of culture has recently become considered as important in educational organizations, because the product of educational institutions is people. People need to be trained well and educated in a strong school culture (Çelik, 2012), where the climate “reflects the touchable and definable elements of the culture” (Balcı, 2011, p. 118).

Organizational Climate

The concept of organizational climate was initially used to explain the ongoing quality of organizational life and later it became a useful concept related to organizational behaviors (Korkmaz, 2005). Gilmer described organizational climate as “the characteristics that distinguish the organization from others and affect the behaviors of persons in that organization” (quoted in Gülşen & Gökyer, 2012, p. 351). Litwin and Stringer described organizational climate as “a measurable quality, which is identified depending upon the common perceptions of people living and working together in a specific place and affects the behaviors of individuals of the working environment.” (as quoted in Hoy & Miskel, 2010, p. 185).

School climate is a broad concept that includes the perception of the teachers regarding the working environment of the school, its formal and informal organization, and the leadership of the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). It is the common reactions or perceptions of the individuals in a situation that affect the behaviors of people in an organization. Climate is the observable form of the culture (Balcı, 2011). Climate is a psychological concept that dominates the organization and has a consistent and constant characteristic that affects the behaviors of individuals, and is felt and perceived by the individuals although it is not written (Yüceler, 2009). “Whatever personality means for the individual, the climate stands for the school in the same way” (Hoy & Miskel, 2010, p. 185).

An appropriate organizational climate helps employees become integrated with the goals of the organization and work more productively (Gedikoğlu & Tahaoğlu, 2010). In several papers researchers have shown that the policies of principals and teachers constitute the healthy school climate and influence the effectiveness of the school. The principal is the key figure whose actions have a direct effect on the school climate (Price, 2012). The school climate can be examined in two frames; open organizational climate and healthy organizational climate (Hoy & Miskel, 2010).

Open Organizational Climate

In schools with an open organizational climate there exists cooperation and respect among teachers and between the director and the teachers. The principal is supportive, listens to teachers, and shows respect for their professional competences. Moreover, he or she encourages them to perform without rigid

direction and demonstrates facilitative leadership behaviors. In addition, there are good relationships among teachers individually as well as professionally (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). In studies of effectiveness in schools, the school climate is often emphasized. According to these studies, principals willing to boost the efficacy of education become more successful when they create an open climate in their schools (Şişman, 2011b).

Healthy Organizational Climate

Like other social systems, schools “need to adapt to their environments, present their goals, take action, have an integrating atmosphere, create a separate culture, and preserve this in order to sustain their existence, to grow, and to develop” (Korkmaz, 2005), p. 531). Schools with a healthy climate can cope with their environment and utilize resources effectively in order to realize their goals. In this respect, in the current study we examined the organizational health of a secondary school in three dimensions: the institutional dimension, the administrative dimension and the technical function (Hoy & Miskel, 2010).

Institutional dimension. For schools to function well, being accepted by, and receiving support from, society are both important. The support of society helps a school adapt to its environment and achieve and maintain a valid educational program. This protects the school from inappropriate requests from the parents and society in general (Hoy & Miskel, 2010).

Administrative dimension. Administrative process is the responsibility of the principal. This includes motivating teachers in order to coordinate the work as well as to boost teachers’ trust and commitment. The administrative dimension has four characteristics: a) impact of principal, b) caring, c) initiator effect, and d) support for resources. Impact is the ability of the principal to influence his subordinates. When needed, a principal would work with his subordinates effectively for the sake of his superordinates. Caring is the behavior of a friendly, supportive, and open principal. For the initiator effect, a principal presents his expectations clearly and identifies the standards. Support for resources implies that the principal should supply the required materials and atmosphere for educational activities (Hoy & Miskel, 2010).

Technical function. The technical function is composed of the education process for which the teachers are responsible. The first dimension of the technical function is that of moral importance, representing the feelings of trust and friendship among teachers. The second dimension is academic emphasis, representing the pressure that the school applies to the students for their success. The school holds high expectations of academic success (Hoy & Miskel, 2010).

An institution in which institutional, administrative, and technical dimensions work in harmony is referred to as a healthy organization. Healthy organizations meet their own needs and deal with outside problems successfully. In some

studies researchers have shown that a healthy school climate has positive effects on learning and has boosted the efficacy of teachers.

The principal and the school climate. Numerous studies have been conducted regarding increasing the efficacy of schools and many factors have been put forward as affecting the success of schools. In the current study school success is mentioned often. School climate, including healthy school climate, is one of the factors that indirectly affects the success of the school (Şişman, 2011a). For a school to be effective, an appropriate atmosphere for education is essential (Bush, Bell, Bolam, Glatter, & Ribbins, 1999). The leadership of the principal is the key factor in the formation of school climate. A positive correlation has been found between educational leadership and school climate, resulting in greater school efficacy (Şişman, 2011b).

Our aim in this study was to present the status of organizational health in a school.

Method

Research Model

We used a descriptive model in this study. This research was conducted to examine an existing situation. The second author adapted the Healthy School Scale (Akbaba, 1997) for use in the study.

Participants and Research Site

The research site was Cumhuriyet High School and the participants were the teachers employed at this school. The school used to be the type called a common high school in Turkey (no entrance examination required), but it became a vocational school for girls in August 2012. Therefore the students in grade 9 were studying as students of a vocational school, whereas grades 10, 11, and 12 were students of a common high school. There were 68 teachers on the staff of the school. This school was chosen because the person holding the position of principal had changed six times over the previous five years. The survey forms were given to 63 teachers, with the 55 who returned their forms comprising the participants in this study.

Table 1. *Percentage and Frequency of Participants' Response to the Survey*

Participants	The survey				Total	
	replied		did not reply		f	%
	f	%	f	%		
Teachers of Cumhuriyet High School	55	87.30	8	12.70	63	100

Data Collection and Analysis

Literature was reviewed in order to develop the instrument with which to collect the data wherein it was noted that a healthy organizational climate was described as having seven characteristics (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). These seven characteristics are: a) institutional unity, b) the impact of the director, c) caring, d) initiator effect, e) support for resources, f) moral importance, and g) academic importance. These features are represented in three dimensions. The second author developed an adaptation of the Healthy School Scale (Akbaba, 1997), which consists of 14 items representing these seven characteristics in three dimensions (Hoy & Miskel, 2010); institutional (4 items), administrative (5 items), and technical function (5 items). The items were arranged in a Likert-type scale and were graded under 5 alternative responses, as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Percentages (%), arithmetic averages (\bar{X}), and frequencies (f) were calculated. When evaluating the data, intervals in the scale were set equally. The options, limits, and grades of the scale were identified as in Table 2 (Karasar, 2012).

Table 2. *The Grades Defined for the Items in the Survey and their Limits*

Grade	Option	Limits
1	I don't agree at all	1.00–1.79
2	I barely agree	1.80–2.59
3	I agree reasonably	2.60–3.39
4	I agree mostly	3.40–4.19
5	I agree totally	4.20–5.00

According to our statistical analysis, those features for which the arithmetic averages were in the middle level and below the middle level formed the features that did not meet the criteria of a healthy school.

Results and Discussion

The responses given by the participants to the Healthy School Scale are interpreted in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Table 3. *Teachers' Views on the Administrative Dimension*

Question	f	\bar{X}
1 This school works in accord with its environment	55	3.16
2 This school is supported by its environment	55	2.69
3 This school is accepted by its environment	55	3.18
4 This school can stand out against inappropriate demands of parents and society.	55	3.22
GENERAL AVERAGE	55	3.06

Note. I don't agree at all (1) 0.00-1.24; I barely agree (2) 1.25-2.24; I agree reasonably (3) 2.25-3.24; I agree mostly (4) 3.25-4.24; I agree totally (5) 4.25-5.00.

The arithmetic average of teachers' answers about the administrative dimension in Table 3 shows that they agreed with these items reasonably ($\bar{X} = 3.06$).

Table 4. *Teachers' Views on the Institutional Dimension*

Question	<i>f</i>	\bar{X}
1 The principal has an impact on decisions of subordinates	55	3.23
2 The principal is friendly	55	3.49
3 The principal expresses his expectations frankly	55	3.52
4 The principal states his performance standards frankly	55	3.24
5 The principal provides the needs of teachers about the school	55	3.45
GENERAL AVERAGE	55	3.38

Note. I don't agree at all (1) 0.00-1.24; I barely agree (2) 1.25-2.24; I agree reasonably (3) 2.25-3.24; I agree mostly (4) 3.25-4.24; I agree totally (5) 4.25-5.00.

The average score of the teachers' answers about the institutional dimension of the school in Table 4 shows that they agreed with these items reasonably ($\bar{X} = 3.38$). This average is higher than the average in the administrative dimension.

Table 5. *Teachers' Views on the Technical Function*

Question	<i>f</i>	\bar{X}
1 In this school teachers love and show respect for each other	55	3.93
2 In this school teacher morale is high	55	3.36
3 In this school teachers think that all of the students will be successful	55	2.49
4 This school has high goals about success of the students	55	2.87
5 In this school success is rewarded	55	2.65
GENERAL AVERAGE	55	3.06

Note. I don't agree at all (1) 0.00-1.24; I barely agree (2) 1.25-2.24; I agree reasonably (3) 2.25-3.24; I agree mostly (4) 3.25-4.24; I agree totally (5) 4.25-5.00

The average score of the teachers' answers on the technical function as presented in Table 5 reveals that they agreed with these items reasonably ($\bar{X} = 3.06$).

The average scores of the teachers' answers in the three dimensions revealed that they agreed with the items reasonably. The average score for the institutional dimension was relatively higher than the scores for the other dimensions.

Table 6. *The Views of Teachers on Healthy School Climate in Descending Order According to Arithmetic Average*

Question	<i>f</i>	\bar{X}
1 In this school teachers love and show respect for each other	55	3.92
2 The principal expresses his expectations frankly	55	3.52

Table 6 continued

Question	<i>f</i>	\bar{X}
3 The principal is friendly	55	3.49
4 The principal provides for the needs of teachers about the school	55	3.45
5 In this school teacher morale is high	55	3.36
6 The principal states his performance standards frankly	55	3.24
7 The principal has an impact on decisions of immediate managers	55	3.23
8 This school can stand out against inappropriate demands of parents and society	55	3.22
9 This school is accepted by its environment	55	3.18
10 This school works in accord with its environment	55	3.16
11 This school has high goals about success of the students	55	2.87
12 This school is supported by its environment	55	2.69
13 In this school success is rewarded.	55	2.65
14 In this school teachers think that all of the students will be successful	55	2.49
GENERAL AVERAGE	55	3.18

Note. I don't agree at all (1) 0.00-1.24; I barely agree (2) 1.25-2.24; I agree reasonably (3) 2.25-3.24; I agree mostly (4) 3.25-4.24; I agree totally (5) 4.25-5.00

The data in Table 6 show that the teachers agreed mostly with the items “In this school teachers love and show respect for each other” and “The principal expresses his expectations frankly”, and they agreed reasonably with the other statements. The statement “In this school teachers think that all of the students will be successful” had the lowest average score.

Conclusion

In today’s world, schools are expected to teach effectively. The principal plays a crucial role in the formation of the school climate, which, in turn, has a positive effect on the school’s efficacy.

Teachers were in reasonable agreement with the items in the Healthy School Scale, which showed that the health of the school was not at their desired level.

Because the expectations related to the success of the students were low, success was not rewarded in the school. The results we obtained showed that the technical dimension, which includes the education process, was not of an adequate standard and the school staff members were not eager enough for the success of the students.

The teachers agreed reasonably with the items in the institutional dimension, which is about the integration of the school with the environment. The statement in this dimension “This school is supported by its environment” had the third lowest score of all the items in the scale, and this reveals that the school had some inadequacies in terms of support and acceptance by its environment.

Suggestions

From our findings in this study, we suggest that a consistent administration is required for the formation of a healthy school climate. We also suggest that teachers at in-service training sessions should learn that school efficacy will be boosted by high expectations regarding academic success. Teachers and principals should be supplied with performance assessments and feedback in real terms and reward systems should be applied properly in order to promote success of students and teachers. In regard to improving the institutional dimension in a school, campaigns and activities to reinforce the relationship of the school with its environment should be organized.

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