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Classifying Daily Problems of School Managers

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Abstract

Schools are open systems and this leads them to include much heavier duties for managers. It can be concluded that managers at a school, headteacher and his deputies, have to cope with many different oriented problems and even crisis. The main motivation for this study is to reveal sources and solutions of most common problems at a school in its daily routines. While revealing these experiences we tried to sort them in short, mid and long term duties. We found that student and technical problems are short term, whereas staff and parent oriented ones are mid term, and finally if the problem is caused by organizational structure or policy based then it can be said to be long term one.

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1. Introduction

In any organization it is most probably to face with multi sided problems which constitute the necessity for a governing body to produce solutions. Schools as open systems have different dynamics which will make headteachers and deputies as problem solving mechanisms (Dos and Comert, 2013). This can be clarified with the existence of many different oriented stakeholders of a school varying from local authorities to parents. Thus, it can be stated that headteachers are expected to cope with a large amount of problems during daily routines which lead them to share their responsibilities together with power as well. Either it is small or much more serious, the problems remaining unsolved may both prevent organizations enrich its effectiveness and demotivate staff (Sagir and Goksoy, 2012). In fact coping all these problems and producing creative solutions are the key elements of making a school

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effective as it is expected. School effectiveness is an indication of the extent to which school principals, teachers, parents and students can all achieve the goals which the schools have set (Lin et al, 2011).

In recent years, many occurrences such as rapid changes in education and school systems, differentiation in the expectations school environments from the school, increasing student discipline problems and many other unpredicted situations have caused educational organizations face various organizational crises (Sagır, Ercan and Sahin, 2013). In spite of all these crisis one of the major responsibilities of managing body of a school is to create a suitable environment for the teachers, students and other related staff in order to maintain the highest level of school effectiveness. This can be criticized for being visionary but organizational objectives and real life situations make it necessary and moreover compulsory. Yet, at this point we have a question; is the managing body of a school really busy with this matter? The most probable answer is no just because of the centralized structure of educational organizations. In a centralized structure in which decision-making authority is not ceded to the development teams removes many of the learning opportunities for members of the project team, especially where the possibility of learning from mistakes is deliberately removed (Lukas et al, 2002). We think that it is important to reveal the timetable of managers which means that the timing of daily routines at a school. So that we will be able to decide which matter comes first and which one latter.

It can also be said that there are various types of daily routines which should be paid enough attention. Few schools have been prepared to manage a crisis and little emphasis has been placed on prevention activities (Poland, 1994). However, whether you are ready or not such crisis can be seen at any time in any where and thus schools as open systems must be well aware of it. It is because without the recognition of a problem, efforts to prevent or respond to the problem cannot be undertaken (Cornell and Sheras, 1998). Whether it is unexpected or not such problems and crisis are mostly natural for organizations yet the point is that when a problem is not solved and let to be a part of organizational structure it may soon become entropic for the organization (Sagır and Goksoy, 2012)

When we consider that both headteacher and deputies as the brain of school then we must control all possible parameters which will affect daily routines of this system that will enable us to understand how the system works. The main motivation for this study in to reveal the most common duties, responsibilities and even crises that the managers have face in order to maintain school system running properly. So that we will try to classify these the most common duties, responsibilities and crises according to their priorities by mean of putting them short, mid and long term things to be achieved. Consequently, we will be able understand which subjects are the easiest (short term), complex and difficult (mid term) and beyond the capabilities of managers (long term).

2. Method

This study was originally designed with qualitative research model by means of using interviewing technique as data collecting tool.

2.1. Study Group

The study group of this research consists of twenty headteachers and deputies from different schools located in Kahramanmaraş province of Turkey. The study group was carefully selected to ensure that there are enough participants from different school types from nursery to high schools.

2.2. Data Collecting Tool

The data collecting tool for this research was developed by us which was first applied to two headteachers and some of the questions were removed to shape the final form of our “semi-structured interviewing form”.

2.3. Analysing and Decoding Forms

In order to analyse and decode the texts of interviews each form, we put all the answers together. In fact the participants were asked to fill in the form with their most common duties, responsibilities and possible crisis they face then we compared data collected in terms of being short, mid and long term.

3. Findings

After the participants were asked to fill in the form with their most common duties, they were sorted and put together in order to reach a full understanding of how school managers spend their time and what type of problems are there which they have to face? These short term duties are shown in table-1.

Table – 1: Short Term Duties of School Managers

| Short Term Duties | Source | Solution |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Student-Student interaction | Some students have some problems with others for example fighting or quarreling or jokes. | Have a speech with these students or call their parents or give them a second chance |
| Student-Teacher Interaction | Sometimes students and teachers may have some problems such as misunderstanding, prejudice or disobeying rules | Try to bring the sides together or persuade them to change their behaviors |
| Teacher-System Incompatibility | Teaching staff may not be satisfied with their curriculum | Lead them to widen their techniques, materials and even help them to improve their classes |
| Daily Cleaning | Both school staff and students may find the school dirty | Use the cleaners to reclean the whole school or some parts |
| Basic Physical Troubles | Sometimes there will be troubles such as broken plugs, taps, lamps and windows. | Find a technician nearby and get it repaired. |
| Simple Technological Facilities | Photocopying device may break down or projection apparatus may not work | Use other facilities such as those in neighboring schools |

As it is shown in table-1, the managing body of a school classify student oriented problems, the disagreement between students and teachers, teaching habits and related problems, cleaning, simple disorders and some technological incapacity within the daily routines of a school and accept them to be solved easily in short term. The participants were asked to sort their mid term responsibilities, problems and crisis and their answers were given in table-2.

Table – 2: Mid Term Duties of School Managers

| Mid Term Duties | Source | Solution |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Students' Health Problems | Some students have physical or mental problems | Call for professional medical help |
| Teacher-Teacher Interaction | Teachers may have some type of disagreement among them. | Try to bring the sides together or persuade them to change their behaviors |
| Organizational Issues | Members of school organization may not play their role | Improve organizational culture, climate etc. |
| Habits | Some of the teachers may tend to continue their past habits such as using their old techniques. | Try to change and harmonize these old habits to new circumstances |
| Parents Oriented Problems | Parents as one of the chief stakeholders of school organization may either not get on | Create enough opportunities to interact parents and teachers. Hold regular meetings |

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| | well with staff or disagree with eachother | with parents and teachers. Bring harmony and empathy. |
| Staff Disobedience | Teaching or other staff may not obey the rules put by managing body | Help them to understand the real meaning of these rules of apply sanctions. |

As it is shown in table-2, the managing body of a school classify students' health problems, teachers' interaction with eachother, organizational issues, habits, parents and staff disobedience within their duties and accept them as mid term problems. The participants were asked to sort their long term responsibilities, problems and crisis and their answers were given in table-3.

Table – 3: Long Term Duties of School Managers

| Long Term Duties | Source | Solution |
|---|---|--|
| Students' Cognitive Readiness | Some students are not ready enough to learn school subjects | Prepare them as much as possible |
| Teachers Qualifications | Teachers may have necessary qualifications | Organize in-service training activities |
| Organizational Structure | Schools' pre-determined organizational structure may be inappropriate | Try to change organizational structure |
| Parents and Students' socio-economic background | In some cases, parents and so students' socio-economic background may have much effect on school system | Try to improve their current situations |
| Education Policies | Government's national policies for education may be irrelevant or impossible to achieve | Apply new policies or improve the current ones by motivating the staff, students and all relevant stakeholders |

As it is shown in table-3, the managing body of a school classify students' cognitive readiness, teachers' qualifications, organizational structure, socio and economical situations, education policies within their duties and accept them as long term problems.

4. Results and Discussion

Managers in any organization carry the chief responsibilities to achieve organizational goals and they are forced to face with different oriented problems and prevent some types of crisis. Many studies on leadership deal with such topics in which researchers try to reveal sources and possible solutions for organizations. Schools, within the scope of organizational affairs, are also scenes for problems and their solutions. Throughout this study, we tried to understand real situations valid for any school and to classify these daily duties accepted as problems to be solved by sorting them as short, mid and long term issues.

When the participants were asked to classify their daily routines in short, mid and long term duties, they almost gave similar answers. Most of the short term problems at a school consists of students behaviors, teachers' attitudes and technical problems. These problems are everyday situations at a school and can easily be overcome with simple solutions or precautions. One of these everyday situations is violence between students in terms of student-student interaction. Students are mostly in the heart of school violence therefore, they are both bullies and victims (Cubukcu and Donmez, 2014). The communication among peers is considered as the primary problem (the most important problem) and following the in-class rules is considered as the secondary problem (the second most important

problem) by all participating students of the study (Kalaycı, 2005). Another one is technical problems that a school has to face with. It is a common problem among state schools which do not have economic freedom and can not effort some technical issues on their own. State schools are paid cash or sent some technical equipment. This problem can be solved before turning into a crisis with school-based economic management and schools should be given their own financial sources.

When we look at mid term problems, one of the pioneering subjects is staff based disorders which may cause big troubles unless necessary precautions are taken. Sarpkaya (2006) also reported that if teacher's basic needs such as housing, safety and higher ones such as relationships with friends, recognition etc. were not met, there would be problems and headteachers were responsible of them. As a result, it can be said organizational commitment, organization culture and climate together with leadership styles and all other related subjects are much more important than they used to be, because human needs has evolved and can not be answered easily with mere financial sources. Another point is parents' attitudes and their contradictions with the staff. This is so common nowadays just because some worldwide policies such as neoliberalism has reshaped education as a struggle against international powers. It is known that parents generally do not accept the real conditions of their children which means that with a simple human instinct, parents are tend to protect their children against foreigners. When we take it at school such a contradiction and disagreement between the two sides may cause burnout among teachers. A burned out teaching staff may be incapable of making the necessary extra efforts to empower students in a student-centred democratic school (Dworkin et al, 2003).

When we analyze long term duties or these are in fact roles and expectations, we see much more complex issues such as organizational structure, education policies, society's economic situation etc. However, the school managers, themselves, are well aware that they are not able to solve such questions on their own, in fact this the main reason for them to put these item in long term period. Changing a country's national education policies is not a daily habit as you can not see its results in short. School managers know the fact but can't do anything to improve the situation instead they just accept and try to live with these big policies whether they are right or not.

Consequently, there many different things that the school managers have to cope with but in spite of all these duties and responsibilities they try to do their best in fulfilling their official responsibilities. When we think about these problems which are sorted as short term, especially the basic and daily parameters such as students' attitudes to eachother and teachers, physical conditions of school building; they all seem to be solved without any help or just a little technical support. On the other hand, when we think about the problems which are sorted as mid term, especially teacher and parent oriented; they seem to be related to adult stakeholders of a school and these are all about contradictions and different expectations. Finally when we think about the problems which are specially sorted under long term, they are all beyond the school managers capability, responsibility and power. While principals were facing problems with stakeholders and financial issues, they indicated that they are uncertain about the future of task or profession of principalship (Turan, Yildirim and Aydogdu, 2012). On the other hand, headteachers and deputies must have communication skills to fulfill their duties (Karadag, 2011). Schools, as socially open systems, must establish their problem solving bodied together with as many stakeholders as possible (Ritchie, 2004).

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