

ASSESSING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY AMONG TURKISH TEACHERS

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Ethical leadership has become prominent in the leadership literature recently. The aim of the current study was to assess school principals' ethical leadership behaviours in Turkish context. School principals' ethical leadership behaviours were measured by Ethical Leadership Scale, developed by Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005), and adapted into Turkish by Tuna, Bircan and Yeşiltaş (2012). Internal consistency of the instrument was investigated by Cronbach's alpha value, and the construct validity of the scale was tested on LISREL by confirmatory factor analysis. Data was analysed by t-test and ANOVA. Findings revealed that participant teachers' opinions regarding school principals' ethical leadership behaviours did not differ in relation to gender, tenure and educational background. However, high school teachers were found to perceive that their school principals behaved more ethically than primary and secondary school principals. Results have been discussed along with the limitations of the study.

KEYWORDS: Ethical Leadership, School Principals, Teachers, Morality

INTRODUCTION

Ethical conduct of leaders has been a research topic for numerous leadership styles and theories (Bachmann, 2016; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Northouse, 2013). Kanungo and Mendoca (1996) and Sinha (2017) indicated that ethical leaders mostly engage in acts beneficial to others and avoid from harming others. Lahey, Pepe and Nelson (2017) indicated that ethical principles are foundational to organizational values. Similarly, values such as democracy,

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equity and accountability are mainly emphasized in relation to ethical leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Aronson (2001) mentioned about two main ethical theories, namely, deontology and teleology, and considered directive, transactional and transformational leadership styles related to ethical leadership and its values. As for Aronson (2001), transformational leadership style is associated with deontological ethics whereas transactional leadership is correlated with teleology, and directive leadership seems to be connected to ethical egoism.

Ethical leadership literature includes diverse study results focusing on both individual/ employee and organizational outcomes. For instance, Avey, Wernsing and Palanski's (2012) study reported that ethical leadership is associated with employee psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Accordingly, more ethical superiors were found to improve their subordinates' job performance, job involvement and affective commitment (Khuntia and Suar, 2004; Zhu, May and Avolio, 2004). Higher levels of job satisfaction and motivation is another employee outcome of ethical leadership behaviours (Brown and Trevino, 2006, Kim and Brymer, 2011; Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts and Chonko, 2009). Ethical role and moral courage of professionals were investigated and explored by personal narratives, as well (Smit, 2017).

Shin (2012) also indicated that chief executive officer's (CEO) ethical leadership behaviours mediated the relationship between ethical climate and collective organizational citizenship behaviours of employees. Ethical climate was also found to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical sales behaviours regarding buyer-seller relationships and maintaining future business (Badrinarayanan, Ramachandran & Madhavaram, 2017; Wu, 2017). Similarly, Salamon, Milfelner and Belak (2017) reported ethical culture as a predictor of late payments. Further, leader's ethical leadership behaviours were found to be associated with employee's organizational commitment and trust in leader, and psychological empowerment mediated this relationship (Zhu, May and Avolio, 2004). Toor and Ofori (2009) also drew attention to positive organizational outcomes of ethical leadership. It was pointed out that ethical leadership was related to transformational leadership, transformational culture of organization, leader effectiveness, employee willingness, and employee satisfaction with the leader. Ethical leadership was found to be related to group learning behaviour been explained partially by group ethical conduct and peer justice (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017). Besides, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) explored that ethical leadership influenced followers' voice behaviour, and followers' perceptions of psychological safety mediated this relationship. Subordinate task significance and effort were also reported to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership behaviours and

subordinate job satisfaction (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog and Folger, 2010). In another study, it was indicated that ethical leadership is related to organizational citizenship behaviours which depend on employees' perceptions of organizational politics (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris and Zivnuska, 2011). Moreover, Mahsud, Yukl and Prussia (2010) found that ethical leadership is associated with leader-member exchange.

Ethical leadership was reported to be negatively correlated with counterproductive behaviours (Brown and Trevino, 2006), deviance (Avey, Palanski and Walumbwa, 2011; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes and Salvador, 2009), being bullied (Stouten, Baillien, Den Broeck, Camps, De Witte and Euwema, 2010), and employee misconduct (Mayer, Kuenzi and Greenbaum, 2010). Wang, Chiang, Chou and Cheng (2017), though, stated that national cultural qualifications may affect behavioural manifestations of ethical leadership as it is somewhat culturally particular. As personality traits and individual characteristics, Brown and Trevino (2006) indicated that Machiavellianism and neuroticism are negatively associated with ethical leadership (EL) whereas agreeableness, conscientiousness and moral reasoning are positively correlated with EL. Accordingly, the present study aimed to elaborate on the following research questions:

- How do teachers perceive their school principals' ethical leadership behaviours?
- Do participant teachers' ethical leadership perceptions differ in relation to their gender?
- Do participant teachers' ethical leadership perceptions differ in relation to their educational background?
- Do participant teachers' ethical leadership perceptions differ in relation to the educational levels they were working at?
- Do participant teachers' ethical leadership perceptions differ in relation to their years of experience?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed in a descriptive model, and adopted quantitative research methods (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006).

SAMPLE

The participants of the study consisted of 147 teachers including 92 females (62.6 %) and 55 males (37.4 %). Of the participants, 31 (21.1 %) were working in primary schools, 69 (46.9 %) were working in secondary schools, and the rest 47 of them (32 %) were working in high schools. Majority of the participant

teachers ($n = 114$, 77.6 %) had bachelor's degrees, and 33 of them (22.4 %) were master's degree graduates. As for years of experience in teaching profession, 76 of them (51.7 %) had 1 to 10 years of experience, 27.2 % ($n = 40$) had 11 to 20 years of teaching experience, and the rest 31 of them had more than 21 years of experience in teaching profession.

TOOL USED

School principals' ethical leadership behaviours were measured by Ethical Leadership Scale-ELS, developed by Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005), and adapted into Turkish by Tuna, Bircan and Yeşiltaş (2012). ELS consists of 10 items in 1-5 point Likert format from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Sample items are 'Makes fair and balanced decisions' and 'Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics' in terms of how well the school principals represented ethical leadership. Internal consistency of the instrument was investigated by Cronbach's alpha value. The estimated internal consistency value for the current study was calculated to be 0.943. Construct validity of the scale was tested on LISREL software by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA, Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). The CFA yielded following fit indices: [$\chi^2 = 43.87$, $df = 33$, $\chi^2/df = 1.32$, RMSEA = 0.047, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, sRMR = 0.049, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91, PGFI = 0.57]. The fit indices indicated that the single factor model fit the study data well as the chi-square and the degree of freedom ratio was under 3.00 as Kline (2005) stated.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey forms were administered by the researcher. Contribution to the study was voluntary. The return rate of the survey forms was 89.91 %. The assumption of the normality was investigated by skewness and kurtosis values of the data set. Kurtosis value was calculated to be -0.564, and skewness value of the data was 0.039. As the data distributed normally, parametric analyses were conducted throughout the study. To investigate whether school principals' ethical leadership behaviours varied in relation to participant teachers' gender and educational background, t-test was conducted. To examine whether teachers' perceptions varied in relation to educational levels they were working, and years of experience, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and LSD test of post hoc tests were conducted. Internal consistency of the instrument was investigated by Cronbach's alpha value, and the construct validity of the scale was tested on LISREL by confirmatory factor analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In line with the research questions of the current study, participants' overall ethical leadership behaviour perceptions toward their school principals were examined first. Mean and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Mean and Descriptive Statistics of Participants.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Ethical Leadership Behaviour Perceptions	147	3.144	0.8517

As seen in Table 1, mean score for participants' overall ethical leadership behaviour perceptions was found to be 3.144. This finding makes it apparent that participant teachers had a moderate level of ethical leadership perception towards their school principals. Besides, participants agreed on the 'conducts his/her personal life in an ethical standards' item with the highest mean ($X=3.28/ 5.00$), whereas the lowest mean among the scale items belongs to 'makes fair and balanced decisions' item ($X=3.02/5.00$).

To explore whether participant teachers' perceptions toward their school principals' ethical leadership behaviours varied in relation to their gender (male/female) and educational background (bachelor's/ master's degree), t-test was conducted. Results of the analysis are presented below.

Table 2
t-test Results in Relation to Gender and Educational Background of Participants.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Gender	Female	92	3.133	0.798	145	0.206	0.837
	Male	55	3.163	0.941			
Educational background	Bachelor's Degree	33	3.281	0.881	145	1.049	0.296
	Master's Degree	114	3.105	0.842			

Note. $p > .05$

As presented in Table 2 above, participant teachers perceptions toward school principals' ethical leadership behaviours did not differ in relation to their gender ($t = 0.206, p > 0.05$). This result points out that both female and male participants had similar levels of ethical leadership perceptions toward their school principals. Furthermore, as seen in Table 2, having a bachelor's or master's degree did not lead any difference in participants' ethical leadership

perceptions either ($t = 1.049, p > 0.05$). Teachers with different educational backgrounds had similar perceptions regarding their current school principals.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine whether participants' ethical leadership perceptions varied in relation to their years of experience, and educational levels they were working at. To find out among which groups there were differences in values, a LSD test of post hoc tests was conducted sequentially. Results of the ANOVA and LSD test are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3
ANOVA Results in Relation to Experience and Educational Levels of Participants.

Variable	Groups	Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	p*	Difference
<i>Years of Experience</i>	1-10 years	Btw groups	1.081	2	0.541	0.743	0.478	-
	11-20 years	Within groups	104.842	144	0.728			
	21+ years	Total	105.924	146				
<i>Educational Levels</i>	Primary School/PS	Btw groups	7.258		3.629	5.296	0.006*	PS-HS
	Secondary school/SS	Within groups	98.666		0.685			SS-HS
	High School/HS	Total	105.924					

As can be followed in Table 3 above, teachers' ethical leadership perceptions on their school principals did not vary in relation to their years of experience ($F(2-146) = 0.743, p > 0.05$). This finding indicates that participant teachers' years of experience did not have any statistically significant difference on their ethical leadership perceptions.

However, participant teachers' perceptions toward their school principals' ethical leadership behaviours differed in relation to educational levels they were working ($F(2-146) = 5.296, p < .05$). The LSD test results showed that teachers working in high schools had lower levels of ethical leadership perceptions than those working in primary or secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

The present study focused on ethical leadership behaviours of school principals based on teachers' perceptions. Teachers' perceptions were also examined in relation to their gender, educational background, educational levels they were working and years of experience. The results showed that school principals'

ethical leadership behaviours did not differ depending on participant teachers' gender, educational background and years of experience. However, ANOVA results indicated that high school teachers perceived their school principals less ethical than teachers working in primary and secondary schools. High school principals may need to pay attention on morality in their acts within and outside schools, and emphasize ethical conduct. Overall, ethical leadership is still a research material as not much known and revealed of every possible aspect of its theory and application strategies in educational environments.

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