

Art. #2361, 14 pages, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v44n2a2361>

The expectations of parents of secondary school students about leadership of school principals

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Students' parents are important stakeholders of school leadership. Student mobility and some other problems in a school environment may occur when the expectations of students' parents cannot be met. Hence, I studied the expectations of the parents of secondary school students about the leadership of school principals through focus-group interviews using a phenomenology design. According to the findings, the leadership expectations of parents about school principals were categorised in 4 sub-themes: behaviour, values, skills and competencies, and characteristics. Parents of students expect school principals to prioritise student success, create unity and integrity, ensure open and sincere communication, and student safety and happiness. They also expect values that include managerial competence and problem-solving skills, showing interest and sensitivity, sensitivity to differences, respect for justice and equality, and a democratic attitude. At the same time, parents of students expect school principals to be innovative, visionary, consistent, empathetic, and disciplined – they want principals to be good role models for students.

Keywords: parents' attitudes; parents' expectations; parents of students; school leadership; school principal

Introduction

One of the important elements of a school's functioning and educational processes is parents of students (hereafter, parents). Unlike teachers, parents have a long-term influence on and commitment to children (Durišić & Bunijevac, 2017). At the same time, they play important roles in shaping their children's educational experiences (Barrera-Osorio, Gertler, Nakajima & Patrinos, 2021; Msila, 2012). At this point, parents pay attention to many factors when choosing a school for their children. For example, according to a parent and family participation survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the 2018–2019 academic year, parents pay more attention to the quality of teachers, administrators, and other personnel when choosing a school. Secondly, they attach importance to the academic programme and curriculum, and thirdly, to student safety, which includes ensuring discipline. Also, according to this survey, parents pay attention to the number of students in a class, the academic performance of the students, the student profile, extracurricular programmes, special facilities and opportunities such as the library, the suitability and quality of special education, the school location, and other factors, such as the tuition fee (Hanson, Pugliese & Grady, 2020). Studies conducted by Bakioğlu and Bahçeci (2010) and Rambiyana and Kok (2002) reveal that parents' expectations regarding the school image are concentrated on factors such as success in the standardised national exams, managerial competencies, social opportunities offered, preparing students for life, physical conditions, teacher quality, projects, foreign language education, and the school environment. The findings of the studies partially reflect the expectations that parents have of schools and school leaders. In a study conducted by Mbalo (2022), the cooperation of the school leader and the parents regarding student discipline was mentioned and it was determined that one of the roles expected from the school principal is to solve students' disciplinary problems by establishing concentrated communication with students' families.

In this context, in research conducted by Ulker and Bariş (2020), the most important factor that parents consider in selecting a school or a school-family relationship is the teacher; the second is the school principal. This shows that parents take the leadership profile of school principals into consideration. From this perspective, school leadership is becoming increasingly complex, and it requires various skills and attitudes (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2010). In this regard, revealing the school leader's profile that parents would like to see is of vital importance in terms of creating a more sustainable school operation (Barkman, 2015).

In addition, the metaphors that parents hold of school leaders or school principals are also important as they reveal the parents' perceptions and expectations. When we look at the metaphorical research on school principals from the perspective of students and teachers, concepts such as "problem solver, element of love, rule (Yalçın & Erginer, 2014:270), father, grandfather, and caring" (Akan & Yarım, 2019:229) come to the fore in student perceptions. In teacher perceptions, metaphorical meanings such as "commander, computer, pen, soldier, orchestra conductor, father (Akan, Yalçın & Yıldırım, 2014:173), guide, leader, brain, construction foundation, captain, and technical director" (Korkmaz & Çevik, 2018:978–979) come to the fore. When we look at these perceptions, we see that perceptions of a school leader who is integrative, guiding, knowledgeable, loving, and good at managing others comes to the fore. From this perspective, revealing the school principal (leader) metaphor in parents' views and perceptions will contribute greatly to the field of educational administration.

This research is based on the open system theory. In this theory, organisations and organisms are sensitive to and affected by the influences in their environment and can also affect their environment (Hall, 1977; Von

Bertalanffy, 1950). Through the application of the open system theory in education, it has been understood that the behaviour of school leaders, as well as all stakeholders of the school, are affected by the school environment, and effective leadership behaviour changes according to expectations (Güngör, 2014). As stated by Bates, Turan and Şişman (2001), social pressures force schools and their administrations to change, and pressures for effectiveness call into question the authority and leadership relationships in schools. In this context, parents' expectations of the leaders of schools as open systems have important consequences in terms of leadership and school development.

In this context, this research focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and characteristics that parents expect from school principals. Memela and Ramrathan (2022) state that the leadership roles and performance of the school principal significantly affect student achievement. Parents' expectations from school principals in Turkey may change depending on the requirements of the period and still remain current (Arslan & Aslanargun, 2024; Taşkaya, Engin & Çınar, 2024; Yücel, İlge & Aksoy, 2023). Therefore, it has become a topic worthy of research.

Conceptual Framework

Leadership is a concept with many definitions and is widely discussed. According to Perry (2022), a leader is a person who inspires his/her followers, tries to realise his/her vision, and provides the necessary support to his/her followers to achieve goals. According to Northouse (2004), leadership is defined as a process, creating influence, activating the group, and achieving unity of purpose. According to Yukl (2002), leadership involves a social influence process, and leaders influence other people to structure organisational functioning.

Like leadership, the concept of effective leadership has also been widely discussed. According to Wellin (2013), effective leadership includes planning and transferring activities to the organisation, establishing effective communication between followers and subordinates, and using creativity, emotion, and intuition well. According to Poczowski (2003), effective leadership is an influencing process that encourages the voluntary participation of individuals in achieving the goals of the organisation. According to Kostera, Kownacki and Szumski (2002), effective leaders do not attach much importance to rules and do what they want with their own vision rather than what needs to be done.

According to Barkman (2015), effective school leaders are individuals who have high interpersonal communication skills, who can act professionally, create a warm and safe climate at school, and who own reflective qualities. For example, according to Smith, Reinke, Herman and Sebastian (2021),

school principals' leadership roles can play an important part in increasing family involvement in school functioning. According to Lathan (2023), effective school leaders create an inclusive and sensitive school environment, empower teachers, follow a data-based method, have a vision and plan for the school, create a collaborative school environment, encourage risk-taking and learning, and act as a pioneer. In their research, D Adams, Cheah, Harris, Sumintono, Yusoff and Jones (2020) state that effective school leadership requires meeting expectations, establishing good relationships, empowering teachers in line with the purpose, creating a constructive school climate, open and inclusive vision, trust and respect for teachers, and developing relationships with external stakeholders. However, school principals should also be effective in developing parent-teacher relationships. Team Varthana (2023) suggests that school principals should take into account complaints from parents and teachers, solve problems, inform parents in meetings, provide feedback to teachers, and have open and useful communication with teachers and parents in order to develop this relationship. Considering all these views, it is clear that both leader characteristics and effective school leadership include various behaviours, values, attitudes, and skills.

A school leader is defined as an individual generally known as the school principal, who is responsible for the functioning and welfare of the school (Coleman & Dickerson, 2017), and who makes decisions that affect the school as a whole (Chase, 2020). According to Meador (2019b), the school principal, who is the leader of the school, has such roles as leading students, teachers, and other staff, ensuring student discipline, implementing and developing the school programme, and evaluating teachers' performance. School principals should also act as role models, prioritise the needs of the school, and establish positive relationships with parents and other members of society (Meador, 2019b). Moreover, the Wallace Foundation (2013) emphasises the need for school leaders to create a supportive and healthy school environment, Habegger (2008) to create a positive culture and school climate, and Buckner (2021) to lead student success and ensure school discipline and student safety. Additionally, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) states that good school leaders give importance to equality and fairness, and show sensitivity. Turan, Yıldırım and Aydoğdu (2012) state that having open communication and professional expertise are expectations for school leadership. However, Erdogan (2015) underlines school leaders' role in dealing with students' personal problems and protecting students against violence and discrimination by showing sincerity and compassion towards them, and Uğurlu and Demir (2016) state

that acting empathetically are the expected roles of school leaders.

Literature Review

The literature about school leadership reveals that studies are mostly conducted on teachers' (Bulach, Boothe & Pickett, 2006; Ekinçi, 2015; Heidmets & Liik, 2014, etc.) and students' (Demirbilek, 2022) expectations of school leaders. In a study conducted by Sabancı, Şahin and Kasalak (2013), teachers expected the school principal to use effective motivation strategies, establish effective communication and cooperation among all stakeholders, create a positive school climate and culture, have a clear mission and vision, have close human relationships, ensure transparency in decision-making, be sensitive and respectful to differences, focus on students and student success, exhibit democratic attitudes, and be impartial, fair, helpful, reliable, courteous, and open to new ideas. A study conducted by Demirbilek (2022), shows that students expected behaviour, values, skills, and abilities from school principals such as maintaining discipline at school, valuing student ideas, being fair, being good role models, effective communication, professional expertise, compassion, sincerity, and empathy. According to Grand Canyon University (2023), school principals are expected to be visible leaders, to communicate effectively with stakeholders, to organise and participate in activities, to be willing to make difficult decisions, to be skilled in listening to people, creative thinking and problem-solving. In addition, school principals are expected to be accessible and reliable, to implement fair and consistent discipline policies, to encourage and honour success, to motivate and guide stakeholders, to empower them within the framework of the vision, to support staff, and to keep themselves up to date on education (Grand Canyon University, 2023).

According to Whitaker (2017), parents want schools and school administrations to discover and appreciate their children's different talents and potential, develop their creativity, provide effective communication with families, create a safe school environment, and ensure that their children enjoy school. In their study, Titiz and Tokel (2015) found that parents expected school administrations to allow them to participate actively in the school administration, carry out studies to increase the quality of education, give importance to social, cultural, and sporting activities at school, prepare a weekly programme for parent meetings, attach importance to the hygiene and cleanliness of the school, support students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and create suitable areas for family-teacher cooperation. Karp (1995) found that parents' expectations of school administrations were mostly related to ensuring safety at school, encouraging the academic development of students,

improving students' social skills, providing students with opportunities to participate in various activities, and receiving information about the status and progress of their children. Şahan (2011), on the other hand, states that parents have expectations such as creating a disciplined school climate, providing a hygienic environment, being approachable, monitoring and evaluating student achievements, providing counselling for students, and being respectful and fair towards individuals. What was expected of school principals changed during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (Harris & Jones, 2020; Zhao, 2020). School principals and leaders were expected to solve technical problems affecting the teaching and learning process, maintain normal school routines, weaken the effects of the pandemic at school, and to organise and program virtual learning environments (Akbaba Altun & Bulut, 2021; Dare & Saleem, 2022).

Based on the above, the fact that school leaders are aware of the expectations of parents of students in the schools where they work makes important contributions to the effective functioning of the school. Adding parents' perspectives to the research studies conducted in this field, which are generally based on teacher expectations, student expectations, or expectations from schools, and learning about parents' expectations of the leadership of the school principal will enable school leaders to look at educational processes from a broader perspective.

With this study and guided by the following research questions, I aimed to reveal the expectations that the parents of secondary school students held about the leadership of school principals. The research questions were prepared with inspiration drawn from existing studies in the literature. Considering the various studies and opinions (Bakioğlu & Bahçeci, 2010; Buckner, 2021; Erdogan, 2015; Habegger, 2008; Karp, 1995; Meador, 2019b; NPBEA, 2015; Şahan, 2011; Titiz & Tokel, 2015; Uğurlu & Demir, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2013; Whitaker, 2017), I observed that the characteristics expected from school principals were generally themed and positioned in line with "behaviour", "skills", "values", and "competencies." In addition, metaphors are included to support these expectations and to reveal the school leader's profile shaped in parents' perceptions.

- 1) What behaviour, values, skills, competencies, and personal characteristics do parents expect from school principals who are the leaders of their children's school?
- 2) What metaphors about the school principals who are the leaders of their children's school are on the parents' minds?

Methodology

Research Design and Paradigm

The research was conducted within the framework of the interpretive paradigm. In this paradigm, a

researcher seeks deep meaning and it is argued that reality cannot be seen at first glance; real meaning can only be reached at the end of a deep analysis process (Neuman, 2006). The researcher is personally involved in this meaning-seeking process, and various interviews, text analyses, observations and field research can be conducted depending on the subject under consideration (Neuman, 2006). According to this paradigm, reality is not independent of thoughts and perceptions, and it requires seeing the world and society through the lenses of other people (Glesne, 2015). Within the framework of this paradigm, a qualitative research study was conducted to learn about the expectations that parents had of school leaders and their interpretations of these expectations.

In this research study, a phenomenology design was used to determine the expectations that the parents of secondary school students had of school principals' leadership and to learn about their views and perceptions. Within the framework of this design, common meanings, perceptions, and judgments in the subjective consciousness of parents about school principals were revealed and analysed (Creswell, 2014; Padgett, 2017).

In the research, focus-group interviews, which is one of the qualitative research methods, were used to learn about parents' views within the framework of the phenomenology pattern and to reveal their interpretations. Krueger and Casey (2000) consider the range of six to eight participants sufficient for each focus-group discussion. Two focus-group

interviews with six people – three from each grade (fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grades) at the secondary school level – were held with a total of 12 parents.

Participants

The maximum variation sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine which parents participated in the research. This sampling method aims to reveal the common meanings and phenomena shared among people with diverse views, and to examine different aspects of the research problem within the framework of this diversity (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2005). To this end, a total of 12 parents, whose children were studying in a state secondary school in the Sancaktepe district of Istanbul, formed the study group of the research. The school selected for the research covered different parent profiles in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. It also hosted students with different economic conditions and identities. The selected school had approximately 2,500 students at the time of the study and was, therefore, thought to represent the demographic structure of the district and province well. These differences and diversity were taken into account when selecting the participating parents. For security of information, the name of the school is not given. The required permissions to do the study were obtained from the applicable authorities.

The demographic information of the participating parents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Parents' demographic information

| Participant code* | Gender | Age | Educational status | Occupation | Child's grade |
|-------------------|--------|-----|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| P1 | Female | 35 | High school | Food technology | 5 |
| P2 | Male | 35 | High school | Automotive (Administrative staff) | 5 |
| P3 | Male | 38 | Associate degree | School bus driver | 5 |
| P4 | Female | 42 | High school | Housewife | 6 |
| P5 | Female | 43 | Secondary school | Housewife | 6 |
| P6 | Female | 48 | High school | Housewife | 6 |
| P7 | Female | 42 | Secondary school | Fashion stylist | 7 |
| P8 | Female | 39 | High school | Housewife | 7 |
| P9 | Female | 38 | Bachelor's degree | Company regional manager | 7 |
| P10 | Male | 44 | Bachelor's degree | Retired | 8 |
| P11 | Female | 45 | High school | Housewife | 8 |
| P12 | Female | 40 | High school | Housewife | 8 |

Note. *Codes (P1, P2, etc.) are used to refer to parents to ensure their anonymity.

As seen in Table 1, three of the parents in the study group were male, and nine female with their ages being between 35 and 48 years at the time of the study. Two of the parents were secondary school graduates, seven were high school graduates, one held an associate degree, and two held bachelor's degrees. Most of the parents were housewives. Looking at the students' grade levels, we see that three students were in the fifth grade, three in the sixth grade, three in the seventh grade, and three in the eighth grade.

Data Collection Tools

An interview form consisting of semi-structured questions was used as a data collection tool. At the same time, unstructured questions that emerged during the interview process were also directed to the participants. While the combination of open and closed questions was used in semi-structured questions and the questions were prepared in advance (Adams, WC 2015), there was no predetermined question list of unstructured questions, and questions were asked naturally

according to the flow of the interview process (Sanchez, 2014). Some of the semi-structured questions posed to the participants were as follows:

- 1) In your opinion, who is a leader?
- 2) Answer the following questions about school principals as leaders of the school:
 - a) What behaviour should they exhibit? What kinds of skills and abilities should they have?
 - b) What values should they have?
 - c) What should their personality traits be like?
- 3) What would your ideal school principal be like?

Data Collection

The focus-group interviews with the parents were held in the school meeting room during February 2022. Before starting with the interviews, external stimuli, such as sound, heat, and light that could affect the interview were controlled by me and distractions such as mobile phones were turned off. The participants were then informed about the focus-group interview, and after obtaining their informed consent, the interview was conducted. Each of the focus-group interviews lasted an average of 55 minutes. The research was conducted in Turkish and I translated the data into English.

Data Analysis

Traditional content analysis was used to analyse the data. In this technique, the data obtained are first transcribed and then read meticulously (Tesch, 1990) after which various concepts and codes emerging from the deep meaning of the text were noted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thereafter, looking at the relationships between the obtained codes and concepts, certain categories were created (Patton, 2002). These subcategories were then combined under various themes or broader categories presented within the framework of a

scheme. Quotes of the participants' responses (revealing their opinions and as support of the findings) were included in the research report (Morse & Field, 1995).

The data obtained from the focus-group interviews were firstly transcribed and then analysed using the Maxqda programme. Views with common meanings in the data were coded using the traditional content analysis technique and brought together under various concepts, categories, and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Wilson, 2011).

Trustworthiness of the Research

Guba and Lincoln (1982) state that to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, the research should be reliable, transferable, persuasive, and confirmable, while Creswell (2014) states that one or more of these strategies are sufficient. To ensure trustworthiness of the research, detailed information about the research process was given, subjective researcher judgments were avoided, the codes obtained were checked by an expert in qualitative research analysis who held a doctorate degree in educational administration. Moreover, to prevent "stage fright" and "participant reactivity", a comfortable environment was chosen, the views of the participants and the interview process were not interrupted, and personal and emotional issues were taken into consideration.

Results/Findings

The parents' responses to the interview questions were coded and presented in four sub-themes (behaviour, characteristics, skills and competencies, and values). The codes and sub-themes are presented in Figure 1 below.

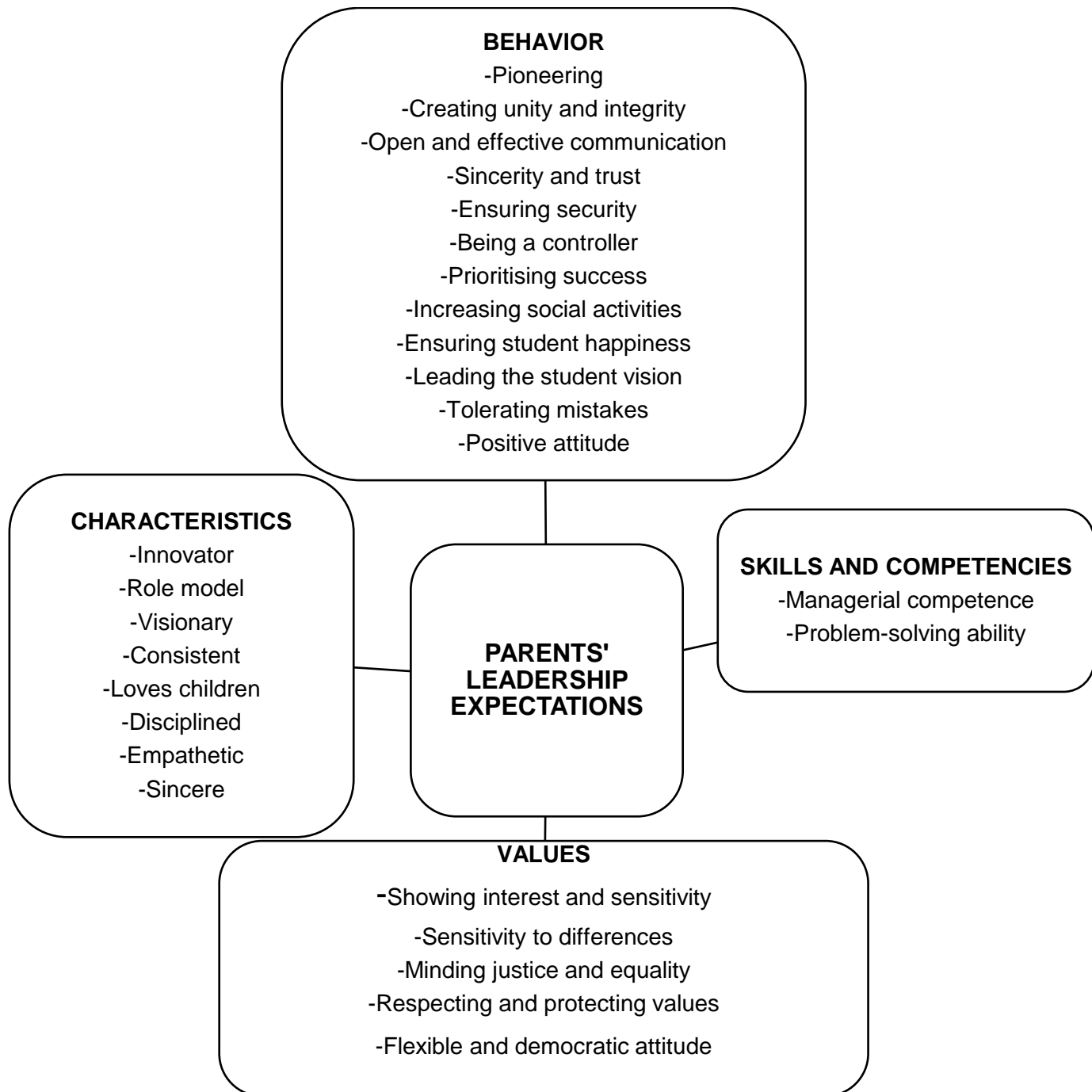


Figure 1 Codes and themes established on the parents' expectations about school principals' leadership

Behaviour

From the data it became clear that parents expected certain behaviour from school principals as leaders. According to the parents, school principals should guide, pioneer, and lead students towards success. They should exhibit a unifying attitude towards all stakeholders and ensure unity and integrity by planning activities. According to parents, school principals should also establish open and effective communication with stakeholders, increase sincerity, implement an open-door policy, value others' opinions, establish a moderate dialogue with

parents, and display a friendly attitude. Some of the parents' opinions were as follows:

The school principal should be qualified enough to shed light on their students on the road to success. They should be a guide (P10/pioneering).

... therefore, the school principal should play a leading role in activities that will contribute to the progress of children (P1/pioneering).

When I think of a school principal, I think of a father figure. Just as a father holds the family together, the school principal is a person who can sustain and gather the whole school in positive or negative situations. He is the backbone of the

School. (P7/creating unity and integrity)

I think the principal of the school should be unifying, reassuring, and fair (P6/creating unity and integrity).

The school principal should be active in the organisation to ensure unity and solidarity (P9/creating unity and integrity).

The principal should have open communication with parents and students. For example, our school principal greets us when he sees us, which we value greatly. Most principals do not do this, and they keep their distance from the parents. We return this sincerity by showing him respect. (P1/open and effective communication)

When my child meets the school principal on the stairs, he greets them, and the students like it very much (P11/open and effective communication).

They should have a moderate dialogue with parents and students. They should hear parents' opinions and respect different opinions (P12/open and effective communication).

They should be social and caring. They should also be active. For example, they should be able to leave their office and go to any classroom and take the children to events. In this way, they can better understand the problems. They should be open to communication. They should be accessible. If students think their principal is approachable, they can be more courageous to convey their problems. (P7/open and effective communication)

According to the parents, school principals should create a sincere and trusting environment for students and parents in which they can express themselves comfortably, reflect this to stakeholders, and make themselves accessible. Moreover, they should take measures to ensure school and student safety and act in a disciplined manner. According to parents, school principals should also be managers and investigate complaints.

They should make the school environment warmer and reflect this warmth to students and parents. Since our school principal was appointed, there has been a warm atmosphere in the school. Students also feel that warmth (P5/sincerity and trust).

They should be sincere and accessible. Their door should be open to everyone, regardless of one's social class. The student should not feel that distance (P12/sincerity and trust).

They should prioritise safety and security. In the past, dangerous things like drugs were observed around our school. This is no longer the case and I have witnessed that parents from surrounding schools want to send their children to this school now. (P9/ensuring security)

School principals should be managers. Teachers should be supervised. When they receive a complaint about teachers, they should pursue that complaint, and things should be corrected (P1/being a controller).

Parents were also of the opinion that school principals should develop projects to pave the way for and ensure students' success. They should plan and present social and cultural activities at school to enhance student motivation and happiness. The parents also said that school principals should lead

and direct a vision that will broaden students' horizons. Besides, they should be tolerant of students' mistakes and exhibit a positive attitude not based on pressure.

In my opinion, the school principal should have projects for success. They should pave the way for success, and while doing this, they should prioritise education, not money (P10/prioritising success).

They should be able to arrange social and cultural activities like trips and activities for both parents and students with the help of municipalities (P3/increasing social activities).

They should make sure that the children come to school happily. Just like a cheesemaker is proud of his cheese saying: 'I milked this cow, and made this cheese with this milk', etc., a teacher or principal should be proud of their students. They should make that school and classes so welcoming that the children attend them happily. (P8/ensuring student happiness)

They should not establish ties with the students only based on their grades. Apart from the children's grades, they should be interested in their views on life. They should discover their students' outlook on life and be able to guide them. They should be able to prepare students for life. (P2/leading the student vision)

They must be tolerant of mistakes. Fear does not lead to the true path; rather, it leads to mistakes. When a child makes a mistake at school, they should feel sadness and regret, not fear (P12/tolerating mistakes).

They should be positive and have high levels of energy. They should display an attitude that does not give up on discipline but also does not put pressure on students (P4/positive attitude).

Skills and Competencies

Parents expected various skills and competencies from school principals as leaders. According to parents, school principals should have the necessary knowledge and experience to be competent as a manager or leader and should be worthy of it. They should also be able to analyse and solve problems at school. Some of the parents' opinions are presented below.

School principalship is a job that requires a lot of effort. Not everyone has the necessary qualifications. If the principal does not manage the school well, the students cannot be successful either, but when it is managed well, the principal will be remembered by the parents and students with respect. (P1/managerial competence)

They have to know. They should have merit. They should be aware of things going on at their school and be equipped to support students. They must be experienced (P10/managerial competence).

They should have problem-solving abilities. For example, sometimes when there is a problem with the teachers, the principal needs to take this into account. He needs to look into the issue. The only authorised manager that the parent can meet here is the principal. Therefore, we expect that person to be a problem solver. (P7/problem-solving ability)

Characteristics

Parents expect various characteristics from school principals as leaders. According to the parents, school principals should be open to new ideas and innovations and set good examples for both students and parents with their behaviour, competencies, and practices. Also, according to the parents, the school principal should have the vision to plan the future with a foresighted approach by setting goals in terms of school success, and s/he should display the consistency necessary to achieve these goals. Some of the parents' opinions were as follows:

... they should be innovative. They should be open to new ideas; I think this is what being a school principal is all about (P8/innovator).

A person who can do their job well in the institution, set a good example for parents and students with their behaviour, and knows how to manage others is a school leader (P6/role model).

They should set an example in an environment where children keep everything in sight. For example, if the school principal tells the children not to smoke but smokes himself/herself, it will not matter what s/he says (P7/role model).

They should be active in sports and activities. We would like them to play basketball, tennis, and the like. Thus, they set an example for both teachers and students (P4/role model).

They should have a vision; they should be farsighted. They should be education-oriented. They should be able to set goals for the success of the school and carry the school to the future (P10/visionary).

They should be consistent; they should fulfil their promises. For example, I come to you as a parent and discuss a matter with you and make a decision together. If I heard from someone else that you told a different story the next day, I'd lose trust in you. (P1/consistent)

Similarly, parents expect of school principals to be loving and caring towards students and should create an environment in which rules are set and discipline is maintained. Also, they should have empathy so that they can put themselves in their stakeholders' shoes and possess sincerity that will enable them to establish a bond with students.

... most importantly, they should love their students. A person who does not love students or children, in general, does not have the luxury of being in school (P2/loves children).

The leader is the principal at the school. [Principals] Must be understanding towards parents. They should be disciplined and prescriptive (P11/disciplined).

They should be able to empathise with parents (P2/empathetic).

They should be sincere, and their door should be open to everyone, regardless of one's social class. The student should not feel distance (P12/sincere).

In my opinion, leaders and administrators should establish bonds and deal with their students sincerely (P5/sincere).

Values

Parents also expect various values from school principals as leaders. They should pay attention to their stakeholders and take their problems seriously. Moreover, they should act with sensitivity towards different ideas and individuals with different backgrounds or views and show flexibility. Some of the parents' opinions were as follows:

... to start with an example, back then, while kids were watching a film being shown at school, a student's nose bled and our school principal took care of him personally and did not leave him alone. I had not seen this in most principals. He ran for help, took care of the student, and I really liked it. We were surprised as these are things we don't normally see. (P5/showing interest and sensitivity)

They should care about the student and the parent. They should be sensitive to problems and take them seriously (P7/showing interest and sensitivity).

They should be flexible over different ideas and lives. For example, there are children with autism and dyslexia at school, and they should be sensitive to them ... therefore, they must be flexible and respectful of differences (P11/sensitivity to differences).

The parents expected of school principals to protect justice and equality by avoiding nepotism, ensuring equality among students, addressing all parties equally, and being honest and conscientious. Moreover, school principals should protect the sensitivities and values of their students and parents, be respectful, and ensure that cultural, national, moral, and family values are conveyed to the students. According to parents, school principals should avoid oppressive attitudes, be flexible, value the opinions of stakeholders, and have democratic values.

They should be fair; they should ensure equality among students. Students should be treated equally (P5/minding justice and equality).

They should be fair; they should be able to appeal to all groups. They should represent truth and honesty by working as selflessly as possible. Leadership is a very broad concept. Whether this is a school principal or a headman, they should be on the side of justice and equality. They must be conscientious. (P4/minding justice and equality)

They should respect the values and sensitivities of students and parents. We send our children to school not only for the content of the school subjects. We also expect that they learn what is right and wrong. Children will follow what they see from you and the teacher. Values should be protected. (P1/respecting and protecting values)

They should protect the family values and culture, and reflect them to the students by protecting national and moral values. They should convey this to the student by protecting its essence (P7/respecting and protecting values).

... I think they should stay away from despotic attitudes, should have democratic values and personalities that reflects this (P10/flexible and

democratic attitude).

They should exchange ideas, be able to find common ground with teachers, students, parents, a parent-teacher associations without adopting the attitude of 'only I make the decisions here', and not be selfish (P6/flexible and democratic attitude).

Parents' Metaphors about School Principals

The findings obtained in the study to reveal the parents' metaphorical perceptions of the profile of the school principal, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Parents' metaphorical perceptions and expectations about school principals

| Metaphor | The reason explained |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Umbrella | <i>"I would liken the principal to a huge umbrella. They gather children under it and become inclusive. They provide security and protection" (P6).</i> |
| Eagle | <i>"I would liken the principal to an eagle. They can fly very high; they can renew themselves. When they get old, they remove their nails and sharpen their beaks by hitting the stone. They make innovations" (P11).</i> |
| Car tire | <i>"I would liken the principal to a car tire. If the tire is not straight, the vehicle will not go smoothly. It is the tire that makes the vehicle go on the road. No matter how strong the engine is, if the tires are not smooth, the vehicle will not move. If the administrative structure is faulty in the school, students cannot be educated properly. No matter how qualified the teachers are – if the administrative structure is faulty, efficiency cannot be achieved." (P10)</i> |
| The sea | <i>"I would liken the principal to the sea. They should be able to carry all kinds of weights and overcome problems. They should be capable of nurturing whatever they take in. They should carry all the burdens and solve all the problems successfully." (P7)</i> |
| Insurance | <i>"I would liken the principal to insurance. Just as the fuse blows in the event of a current fault, the principal should feel the existence of a problem at school and act accordingly" (P1).</i> |
| Roof | <i>"I would liken the principal to the roof of a house. Without the roof of the house, the house will not be warm and liveable. Problems cannot be solved without a school principal" (P8).</i> |
| Remote-control device | <i>"I would liken the principal to a roof; the principal is inclusive and protective" (P9).</i> |
| Book | <i>"I would liken the principal to a remote-control device. They should be guiding students to ensure order and remind them of their duties" (P5).</i> |
| Father | <i>"I would liken the principal to a book. They should contain knowledge, teach life, and act as a guide" (P12).</i> |
| Rainbow | <i>"I would liken the principal to a father. Just as a father takes his children under his wing, the principal should approach students with love and compassion" (P3).</i> |
| | <i>"I would liken the principal to a rainbow. They should reflect the colours one by one and give happiness" (P4).</i> |

Considering the metaphorical perceptions in Table 2, the parents' expectations about school principals focus on the following: being inclusive and protective, ensuring safety, self-renewal, innovation, coordinating the functioning of the school correctly and systematically, maintaining order, being skilled at foreseeing disorder and problems at school and solving them, being a guide in maintaining order, being competent in their profession, and guiding students in their preparation for life, approaching students with love and compassion, recognising their potential abilities and different qualities, and prioritising student happiness.

Discussion

Considering the results obtained in this research, parents expect school principals to lead student success and create unity and integrity. In addition, they expect school principals to communicate openly and effectively, to act sincerely and trustingly, and to ensure the safety of students and the school. In addition, principals should be supervisory, should prioritise success, increase social activities, ensure student happiness, lead the student vision, tolerate mistakes, and show a positive attitude.

Parents regard student safety as paramount; research conducted by NCES reveals that student safety is among the top three in order of importance, and that fact was reflected in parent expectations in this research (Hanson et al., 2020). At the same time, Buckner (2021), Karp (1995), and Şahan (2011) state that leading student achievement and ensuring school discipline and student safety are the most important duties expected from school leaders. Also, as reflected in the findings, an important point that parents pay attention to is ensuring student success and increasing the social activities offered. Thus, research conducted by Bakioğlu and Bahçeci (2010), Titiz and Tokel (2015) reveals that parents take into account school success, the improvement of the quality of education, and the social and cultural opportunities and activities of the school. A school leader's ability to communicate effectively is also an important leadership indicator according to parents. As Meador (2019b) states, school leaders should be able to communicate effectively and positively with parents. Sabanci et al. (2013), Turan et al. (2012), and Whitaker (2017) state that school leaders should establish open and effective communication with all stakeholders. Whitaker (2017) also states that one of the most important expectations of parents is to ensure that their

children enjoy school as the parents care about students' happiness. All these results reaffirm the need for principals to build relationships, create a shared vision, prioritise success by encouraging collaboration, act within the framework of inclusive and fair values, and engage in activities that ensure student happiness (Pruitt, 2023).

Regarding the sub-theme of skills and competencies, parents expected managerial competence and problem-solving skills from school leaders. In this context, managerial competencies and merit represent a critical situation in terms of school leadership. Bakioğlu and Bahçeci (2010), Demirbilek (2022), Sabanci et al. (2013), and Turan et al. (2012) state that parents expect school leaders to have sufficient expertise and experience in the administrative field, as parents are aware of the necessity of professional competence in terms of good school leadership.

Regarding the sub-theme of values, parents expect of school leaders to show interest and sensitivity towards their stakeholders, sensitivity to differences, consideration of justice and equality, respect and protection of values, and a flexible and democratic attitude. In this context, Blake and Mestry (2020) and Erdogan (2015) state that showing interest in students, dealing with their personal problems, and displaying a sincere and affectionate attitude towards students provide satisfaction for both students and parents. NPBEA (2015) states that a school leader that ensures equality and justice and shows sensitivity to problems and stakeholders creates advantageous, effective leadership. Aslanargun (2012) states that school principals feel responsible for maintaining values of justice, trust, discipline, and hard work; Sabanci et al. (2013) state that being sensitive and respectful to differences and displaying democratic attitudes and behaviour are expected from school leaders, and these findings are the same as those in my research.

In the characteristics sub-theme, parents expect school principals to be innovative, visionary, consistent, disciplined, empathetic, and sincere leaders; they also want them to love children and be good role models. The empathic leader profile is a characteristic expected by parents and students, and it is a trait that school leaders should adhere to (Uğurlu & Demir, 2016). Thus, the solution and approach of a school principal who understands students and interprets their feelings can become more efficient. Suryadi, Nurhattati, Sawan, Fadhillah and Kemal (2020) state that one of the most important characteristics of school leaders is being good role models. According to Suryadi et al. (2020), school principals' model characteristics constitute one of the key aspects of leadership success; and therefore, they state that school principals should display behaviour and characteristics that will set a good example for all

stakeholders. Another basic building block of effective school leadership skills is school principals acting in line with a vision, as seen in parent expectations. However, the study conducted by Mombourquette (2017) shows that the majority of school principals did not have a personal vision or did not lead the school for the development of a vision. It is observed that contrary to parents' expectations, school leaders lack this trait. Again, according to Dogaru and Neacsu (2014), an effective school has an effective principal; therefore, they state that a school principal who exhibits leadership characteristics that please the stakeholders should act innovatively and put new ideas into practice. They emphasise that one of the main characteristics expected from school leadership is to adopt an innovative approach. Yet, parents also highlighted the consistent behaviour of school leaders. According to Meador (2019a), students notice inconsistencies displayed by school leaders in the school environment and they may be prejudiced against him/her because of his/her inappropriate and inconsistent behaviour. As stated in this study, the expectation of the school principal to be consistent was reflected not only in the expectations of students but also in those of parents.

When parents' metaphors about school leaders were examined, it was clear that parents expected school leaders to be inclusive and protective, ensure security, be self-renewal and innovative, and coordinate the functioning of the school correctly and systematically. Parents expect school leaders to demonstrate their ability to keep the school functioning, to act in accordance with the purpose of the school's existence, to be competent in solving problems, and to be a guide in maintaining order. In addition, parents expect school leaders to be competent in their profession, to guide students in preparing them for life, to approach students with love and compassion, and to ensure student happiness.

In this context, Krasnoff (2015) states that an effective school principal has qualifications such as having a clear vision, creating a safe environment suitable for education, setting goals for academic success, improving teaching, and managing people and processes to ensure the development of the school. It also includes effective skills such as orientation, goal setting, encouraging co-operation, monitoring and tracking development, and encouraging high performance (Tedla & Kilango, 2022).

According to Balyer (2014), school leaders should have command of the school management system. They should manage the school properly, plan the future of the school, ensure the professional development of their stakeholders, focus on people, and manage relationships well. Fook and Sidhu (2009), on the other hand, emphasise the leading role of the principal in promoting innovation and

productivity at school, stating that school principals' leadership is critical in terms of creating a sustainable school climate and ensuring the productivity of students and teachers.

Moreover, Khaleel, Alhosani and Duyar (2021) state that the awareness of the school principal for inclusion is a vital factor in creating an inclusive school environment and catering for students with special needs or differences. In this context, it has been observed that the metaphors and expectations of parents about school principals are in line with the professional standards and competencies of school leaders. Thus, according to Töremen and Kolay (2003) and Williams (2011), school principals should display conceptual competencies that require expertise in methods, processes, procedures, and operations related to the task, and human competencies that require expertise in relationships, such as empathising with individuals. According to Töremen and Kolay (2003) and Williams (2011), school principals should have the ability to empathise, consider individual differences, manage relationships, and cater for individual needs. Moreover, they should be caring, trustworthy, good at discovering potential, and have competencies that require theoretical and conceptual perfection in the field of education, and follow innovations in that field.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important that school leaders take the perceptions of stakeholders of their schools about themselves into consideration and learn from these. If school principals take the results of this research on parent expectations (which is in line with Demirbilek's (2022) research) into account, they will not only benefit in terms of professional satisfaction but will also improve communication and cooperation between schools and parents.

Limitations

A qualitative research approach was used in this study to obtain in-depth opinions about parents' expectations of school leadership by conducting focus-group interviews with 12 parents. Although this number is sufficient in terms of focus-group interviews, it is a partial limitation in terms of the generalisability of the research.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank all the parents who participated in the study for their valuable comments.

Notes

- i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- ii. DATES: Received: 12 April 2022; Revised: 11 April 2024; Accepted: 31 May 2024; Published: 31 May 2024.

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