Evaluation of school principals by teachers in terms of ethics compliance: Phenomenological research

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Abstract. This research study aimed to investigate whether school principals behaved ethically while fulfilling their duties. A qualitative research design was used in the study. The data of the study were collected from 12 teachers working in a primary and secondary school affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Antalya by face-to-face interviews. The findings of the study showed that teachers defined ethics as the moral rules that regulated social life and that must be followed for the existence and continuity of social life, and they mostly associated ethics with the concepts of honesty, equality, truth and justice. Teachers had a perception that school principals acted unethically from time to time. Besides, the types of unethical behaviors most frequently exhibited by school principals were to discriminate among the personnel, not to treat the personnel equally and fairly, to abuse their authority for their personal interests, not to comply with the courtesy and etiquette while addressing their surroundings and to insult them. The findings showed that unethical behaviors of school principals affected education negatively, the school climate was negatively affected due to anxiety and fear, the environment of respect and trust disappeared, the quality of education and academic success decreased. The findings also showed that the unethical behaviors of the school principals affected the teachers negatively, the work determination and motivation of the teachers and the productivity decreased, and they were restless and unhappy. Finally, the teachers suggested that school principals should be selected with a merit-based system.

Keywords: Ethics, morale, school principal, education, manager

Introduction

The relationships that people construct in society are based on ethical foundations. In addition to the importance of human relations being a part of correct and good behavior, it should be based on love, respect, honesty and trust. Ethics is of great importance both in the social field and in the field of education. Schools that build the future need to have ethical values and have managers who have ethical values in their management. It is known that educational institutions are the result of institutionalization in order for individuals to live together and serve for a common purpose. For this reason, besides deriving the principles adopted in educational institutions from basic ethical principles (freedom, equality, justice), it is important to aim for the well-being of societies (Pieper, 2012).

All people have to comply with ethical rules, and the importance of ethical rules is known especially by teachers and principals in educational institutions. This is because education is highly linked to ethics and morality. Education is recognized as such because it aims to develop people and promote positive interaction between people. It is important for teachers and principals to comply with ethical values, because complying with ethical rules positively affects the life of the person and the society. These rules guide the person on what to do and what to decide (Webster & Litchka, 2020).

The term ethical leadership has emerged due to the importance of complying with ethics in educational institutions. Since the mid-1990s, the term has been of great interest to researchers. Ethical leadership

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can be defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate behavior through interpersonal relationships and personal actions. It also includes encouraging such behavior among managed people through two-way communication, decision making, and reinforcement (Aljbour, 2020).

Ethics is a set of rules that show an individual the right and wrong at all stages of his life, enable the individual to make the right choice about what to do and what not to do, and also regulate the relations of the individual with other individuals and the society (MEB, 2006). Ethics guides individuals when choosing between right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable (Davis, 1991). Therefore, ethics is a vitally important concept for both the individual and the society.

There are rules and principles that must be followed by representatives of a particular profession, as well as ethical rules that must be followed by all individuals. These rules and principles are defined as professional ethics. Professional ethics is the fulfillment of the requirements of the profession in accordance with ethical and moral principles (Aktaş, 2012). Professional ethical rules do not change from person to person and should be known and applied by all members of the profession. In the event that the principles of professional ethics are not fulfilled, different sanctions may be applied, including disqualification from the profession (Arslan, 2012).

Professional ethics is of vital importance for institutions, organizations and businesses. It is possible with professional ethics for the members of the profession to work effectively, efficiently, in harmony and without problems. Compliance with the rules of professional ethics is also important for the success and sustainability of institutions, organizations and businesses. Professional ethics not only increases the reputation of professionals and organizations, but also causes the development of corporate culture and the quality of communication (Öktem, Leblebici, Arslan, Kılıç, & Aydın., 2003). Thanks to professional ethics, it is possible for the members of the profession to offer a standard and institutionalized quality product and service (Uzunçarşılı, Toprak & Ersun 2000).

While complying with the rules of professional ethics has indispensable benefits, in case of non-compliance with the rules of professional ethics, dangerous consequences may arise for both the members of the profession and the organizations they work for. In case of non-compliance with the ethical rules, the productivity and performance of the employees will decrease, as well as the communication between the employees will decrease and an unfavorable working environment will emerge where there is no trust (Vega & Comer, 2005). As a result, organizations lose their reputation, prestige, and therefore their profitability.

Those who are expected to comply primarily with ethics committees in an institution are the administrators in the institution (Hughes, Ginnett & Murphy., 1999). In a sense, since managers are one of the factors that ensure compliance with ethical rules throughout the organization, failure of managers to comply with ethical rules means that ethical rules will not work throughout the organization. While the effects of the individuals in the institution not complying with the ethical rules will be limited, the effects of the managers' non-compliance with the ethical rules will be much more extensive.

In this research, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers about whether school principals acted ethically while fulfilling their duties. The problem statement and sub-problems of the research were expressed as follows:

Problem Statement

What are the teachers' views on whether school principals act ethically while fulfilling their duties?

Sub Problems:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of ethics?

2. How do teachers witness unethical behaviors of school principals?

3. What are the unethical behaviors of school principals?

4. What are the consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals?

5. What should be done to minimize the unethical behaviors of school principals?

Method and paradigm of research

The paradigm of this study is interpretive as it is based on subjective and inter-subjective views of the individuals and practical knowledge constitute interest (Gunbayi & Sorm, 2020). In this study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers about whether school principals acted ethically while fulfilling their duties. In this context, the opinions of the teachers were questioned about whether the teachers observed the unethical behaviors of the school principals they worked with, what these behaviors were, what the consequences of these unethical behaviors were and what should be done to minimize the unethical behaviors of the school principals. The design of this research is the descriptive phenomenological design, one of the conventional designs in qualitative research. Research in the phenomenology model is carried out to describe the lived experiences of the individuals in the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990, Polkinghorne, 1989)

Sampling

Participants were selected on a voluntary basis with the purposeful sampling method and criterion sampling technique (Palys, 2008).The sampling of the research consisted of 12 teachers in Ministry of National Education in Antalya. While forming the study group, care was taken to ensure that the number of female and male teachers was equal. Demographic characteristics of the sampling are shown in Table 1. Accordingly, half of the participants were female and the other half were male. The number of participants aged 35-40 was 4, the number of participants aged 41-50 6, and the number of participants aged 51 and over 2. 5 of the participants were primary school teachers, 3 English teachers, 2 Psychological Counseling and Guidance teachers, 1 was a Turkish teacher and a Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge teacher.

Table 1.

Distribution of demographic variables of the participants

Demographic variables	Sub-groups	f	%
Gender	Male	6	50,0
	Female	6	50,0
Age	35-40	4	33,3
	41-50	6	50,0
	51 and more	2	16,7
Branch	Counseling Teacher	2	16,7
	Classroom teacher	5	41,7
	English	3	25,0
	Religious culture Moral Knowledge	1	8,3
	Turkish	1	8,3

Data collection

The data of the research were collected by semi-structured interview form in September and October in 2022. There were 5 semi-structured questions in the interview form. The questions were asked as open-ended in order to obtain detailed data in accordance with the aim of the research. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the school where the participants worked to collect the data. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes. Before the interview, the participants were thanked for their participation and contribution to the research and the aim of the research and the aims for which the findings to be obtained

from the research would be used were explained to the participants. It was emphasized that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and data were collected only from voluntary participants. During the data collection process, the consent of the participants was asked for audio recording, but audio recording was not carried out because the participants did not give their consent. The interviews were recorded in hand-writing.

Ethical procedures

Ethics Committee Approval of this research was obtained from Akdeniz University Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the meeting of 17 decision numbered 353 on October 11th, 2022, and an informed consent form was obtained from the participants before the interview and participants were informed that their names would not be mentioned and be given the alphabetical codes as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12.

Validity and reliability of the research

Validity and reliability of the qualitative data were provided in terms of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985): (1) for credibility, the researcher developed the semi-structured interview form based on the relevant literature review (2) for transferability a purposive sampling method based on voluntarism was used to reach the views of participants based on their perspectives (3) for confirmability, Cohen's kappa coefficient of the themes of the transcripts created by two independent researchers was calculated as .87, a perfect level of agreement between themes d) for dependability all data collected were reserved to show on demand (Landis and Koach, 1977; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, Gunbayi, 2018).

Data analysis

Thematic and descriptive analysis were used in the analysis of the data. The data collected from each participant was transferred to NVIVO software. After ensuring data integrity, each file was identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12. Identified files were examined and common themes were determined. Later, all files were combined into a single file under these common themes. Coding was done under common themes and remarkable participant opinions about each code were also determined (Kelle, 1995; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). Each common theme and the codes of these themes are presented in tables. Remarkable participant opinions were also given below the tables.

Findings

1. *The meaning of ethics*

The findings related to participants' opinions on the meaning of ethics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

The meaning of ethics

Themes	f
Acting in accordance with the moral values of the society	2
Demonstrating individual's befitting attitudes and behaviors	1
Moral values that govern behavior	1
The set of rules necessary for the existence and continuity of social life	4
Universal rules	1
Morality	1
Honesty	3
Truth	2

Equality	3
Fairness	2
Working properly	1
Being hardworking	1
Merit	1
Work ethic	1
To work in accordance with ethical rules, principles, procedures and conditions	1
Acting lawfully	1
Not stealing	1
Non-discrimination	2
Not seeking self-interest	1
Respecting to ethical rules	1
Necessity to live in peace and security.	2

As seen in Table 2, participants' opinions on the meaning of ethics were gathered under 21 sub-themes and the sub-theme of the set of rules necessary for the existence and continuity of social life was mentioned the most . Some of participants' opinions on the meaning of ethics are given below:

It includes the concepts of morality, righteousness, equality, and merit. It occurs within the society and ensures the continuity of the society. It is necessary to live in peace and security. (P3)

Ethics is essential for a healthy social life. Community life should be built on ethical values and rules. Therefore, these ethical values should be respected in every work done. (P6)

Ethics is the set of rules formed in social life. Honesty, honesty and public peace are important. (P7)

I think the concept of ethics; Equal, lawful, non-discriminatory behavior for everyone. (P9)

There is no discrimination against anyone. Not approaching the working personnel for profit is not the behavior according to them. (P12)

When the answers given by participants were interpreted; it was understood that all of the participants expressed their opinions about what the concept of ethics meant to them. It was seen that the participants stated different definitions from each other. It was also seen that each participant referred to more than one different concept in his or her own definition. In the definitions stated by the participants, the definition of ethics as a set of rules necessary for the existence and continuity of social life (4 participants) came to the fore. In another definition, 2 participants emphasized acting in accordance with the moral values of the society. Expressions in one word to define ethics were also used: the most frequently repeated ones were honesty (3 participants), equality (3 participants), truth (2 participants) and fairness (2 participants). Similarly, it was found that ethics was defined by negative concepts such as non-discrimination (2 participants), not stealing (1 participant), and not seeking self-interest (1 participant). It was found that 2 participants directly associated ethics with work ethic. It was also found that 3 participants expressed their expectations about ethics rather than the definition of ethics and emphasized that ethics should be necessary for living in peace and security and that ethical rules should be respected.

2. *Witnessing unethical behaviors of school principals*

The findings related to participants' opinions on witnessing unethical behavior of school principals are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Witnessing unethical behaviors of school principals

Themes	f
Nepotism in class, course and assignment	6
Abusing administrative powers	3
Warn teachers and students unethically	3
Failure to make rewards fairly and on merit	1
Stealing directly or indirectly	1
Allowing negative behaviors	1
Mobbing teachers	1
Arbitrary use of school resources	1
Unethical use of school resources	1

As seen in Table 3, participants' opinions on witnessing unethical behaviors of school principals were gathered under 9 sub-themes and the sub-theme of nepotism in class, course and assignment were mentioned the most. Some of participants' opinions on witnessing unethical behavior of school principals are given below:

> *Yes it's okay. He rudely warned teachers and students. By applying mobbing to teachers who are self-sufficient in terms of knowledge and equipment, they reduced their motivation. He caused the teachers to suffer by making applications according to his own head (reducing the norm staff regardless of the number of students). (P3)*

> *Yes, it has. Stealing directly or indirectly. Teachers or parents did not intervene when they exhibited negative undesirable behaviors. (P4)*

> *Yes. For example, I have seen unethical behavior while rewarding. Rewards and advice, keeping personal relationships in the foreground. There was no objectivity, and favoritism was made entirely out of a conflict of interest. (P5)*

> *Yes, I think. School administrators adopt what is appropriate for their own feelings, thoughts and behaviors in the functioning of the school, and they have a different attitude from other stakeholders in business and operations related to people who are close to their own opinion and lifestyle, which is not suitable for work ethics. (P8)*

> *Unfortunately it does sometimes. Although they should act impartially, there may be favoritism. This behavior can create discontent among teachers. Starting from the 1st grade, it is possible to see that distinction when allocating classes or sharing tasks. (P11)*

When the answers given by participants were interpreted; it was seen that all of the participants expressed their opinions about whether they thought that school principals acted unethically from time to time. All of the participants stated that they thought that the school principals acted unethically, and they justified and exemplified these thoughts. It was seen that the participants presented different reasons and examples from each other. It was understood that the primary reason why the participants thought that the school principals behaved unethically was that the principals discriminated in matters such as class, course and task distribution, and that the principals favored those whom they saw close to them without justification (6 participants). It was found that the other two primary reasons for the participants to think that the school principals acted unethically were that the school principals were abusing their administrative powers (3 participants) and that the school principals acted unethically while warning the teachers and students (3 participants). In addition to these, school principals' failure to rewards fairly and on merit, direct and indirect stealing, arbitrary use of school resources, mobbing teachers, allowing negative behaviors and developing individual practices by going beyond the legislation were also stated as the reasons to think that school principals were out of ethical values.

3. *Unethical behaviors of school principals*

The findings related to participants' opinions on unethical behaviors of school principals are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Unethical behaviors of school principals

Themes	f
Discrimination among personnel on the grounds of being from the same union, city, or world view	7
Distinguishing between parents	1
Misuse of their office for their own personal gains	3
Insult	2
Failure to comply with courtesy and etiquette	2
Humiliating women	1
Developing arbitrary practices beyond the law	2
Unethical use of school resources	1

As seen in Table 4, participants' opinions on unethical behaviors of school principals were gathered under 8 sub-themes and the sub-theme of discrimination among personnel on the grounds of being from the same union, city, or world view was mentioned the most. Some of participants' opinions on unethical behaviors of school principals are given below:

Distinguish among staff. Distinguishing between parents (by considering their economic situation). Using your position for personal gain. To give an example, to give privileges to teachers with whom they have personal affinity while preparing teachers' lesson plans. To quickly fulfill the request of a parent who is in good economic condition. Using well-positioned parents for personal business in their daily life. (P1)

In a high school in Kayseri, a supplementary resource book worth 500 TL was purchased for senior high school students in 2016 under the name of preparing for university exams. When I asked the relevant bookstore, I learned that the books were 200 TL and 300 TL remained for the school. (P4)

Abusing the power of his own directorate seat. Giving regular speeches to teachers, addressing them with the imperative mood, behaving in ways that do not comply with the rules of etiquette. (P5)

Priority of cleaning personnel working in the school over teachers and students. Reflecting their personal relationships within the institution by making different practices among teachers. Not approaching teachers equally and fairly, treating teachers with whom he is personally sincere with privilege. Not behaving in accordance with the rules of addressing and etiquette in terms of style (exhibiting rude behavior, using imperative mood). (P7)

To assign certain tasks, for example, on October 29, April 23 to some teachers, and other tasks to some teachers. Giving the low-income or poor financial situation to a classroom teacher, the popular one to the desk classroom teacher in class distribution. (P9)

Not everyone is treated equally. Some are tolerant, others are constantly reminded of their duties. If there is a rule in the school, all teachers should pay attention to it. For example, the same teachers always stand at the head of the class during the ceremony as the children enter. (P11)

> *Gender inequality. In one of his old schools, my principal would never communicate with me as a counselor and communicate with other male counselors. He also conveyed the parts about me through them. In general, no female teacher would contact the teacher. (P10)*

When the statements by participants were interpreted; it was found that all of the participants expressed their opinions about the unethical behaviors exhibited by the school principals, and all of the participants explained the unethical behaviors of the school principals by giving one or more different examples. It was understood that the most unethical behavior of the school principals of the participants was to discriminate among the personnel and not to treat the personnel equally and fairly (7 participants). It was understood that the participants thought that the school principals did not treat the personnel equally, discriminated among them, and that it was unfair in the allocating of classes, lessons and duties, for reasons such as being from the same union, being from the same city, having the same worldview, or having a better relationship. The misuse of their office by school principals and their use for their own personal gains were also exemplified by 3 participants as an unethical behavior. Two participants each emphasized that the school principals insulting the other person, not obeying the rules of courtesy and etiquette, and making arbitrary practices out of the legislation were unethical behaviors. One participant each cited the misuse of school resources, discrimination among parents, and humiliating treatment of women as examples of unethical behavior by school principals.

4. Consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals

The findings related to participants' opinions on consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals

Categories	Themes	f
The consequences of unethical behavior of school principals in terms of education	School climate is adversely affected due to anxiety and fear.	5
	Mutual love, respect and trust are damaged	3
	The quality of education is declining	3
	Success is declining	2
	Interpersonal communication is declining	2
	Labor peace is broken	1
	Education fails to reach its goal	1
	Individuality is increasing	1
	Harmony among employees breaks down	1
	Chaos ensues	1
The consequences of school principals' unethical behaviors for teachers	Teachers' motivation to work decreases	6
	Teachers' productivity is declining	4
	Teachers are restless	3
	Conflicts between teachers	3
	Teachers are unhappy	2
	Teachers have no respect for the principal	2
	Teachers' sense of belonging is damaged	1
	Teachers experience learned helplessness	1
The consequences of school principals' unethical behaviors for students	The student-teacher relationship negatively affects	1
	Students experience learned helplessness	1
	Students have no respect for the principal	1
	Students are unhappy	1
The consequences of school principals' unethical behavior in terms of society	Society is getting unhappy	1
	Belief in equality and justice in society is declining	1

As seen in Table 4, participants' opinions on consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals were gathered under 4 categories and 24 sub-themes and the categories of the consequences of unethical behavior of school principals in terms of education and the consequences of school principals' unethical behaviors for teachers were mentioned the most. Some of participants' opinions on consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals are given below:

> *It negatively affects the school climate. It makes the teacher environment restless. It disrupts the atmosphere of mutual respect, love and trust. It reduces the motivation of teachers to work. This situation is reflected in the classroom environment and reduces the quality of education. (P1)*

> *First of all, it disrupts the working peace, negatively affects the harmony and happiness of the personnel. It negatively affects the student-teacher relationship and education. It creates an unhappy society. (P2)*

> *It lowers motivation. It negatively affects business success. It causes conflicts between teachers at school. As it creates an atmosphere of anxiety and fear, it prevents the formation of a positive school climate. It lowers the work ethic. It creates chaos. (P3)*

> *It creates a restless environment for teachers. This reduces teacher productivity and lowers motivation. (P6)*

> *Lack of respect for teachers and students towards the principal. Don't be taken seriously. The disruption of the functioning of the institution, the increase of unhappy students, unhappy teachers. Negative corporate culture. Decreased work efficiency and learning. Doing jobs and responsibilities just for show, insincere work and reluctance. (P7)*

> *The unethical behavior of the managers disturbs the peace in the institution. Behaving according to the person reduces the motivation of the employees, the sense of belonging, and the desire to be more productive. While administrators who make unethical assignments bring people to higher positions, their work efficiency and quality decrease. The aims to be achieved in education cannot be achieved. The sense of equality and justice and trust in people decreases. (P8)*

> *Such unethical behaviors also cause communication problems within the organization, feeling of not belonging to that organization, and communication breakdowns. (P10)*

When the answers given by participants were interpreted; it was seen that all of the participants expressed their opinions about the consequences of unethical behaviors of school principals and each participant drew attention to more than one type of result. However, while all of the participants mentioned the consequences of the unethical behaviors of the school principals in terms of education and teachers, only 4 participants mentioned the results in terms of students and only 2 participants in terms of society. All of the participants thought that unethical behaviors of school principals led to negative consequences in terms of education. It was understood that the most common negativity that the participants emphasized was the formation of an atmosphere of fear and anxiety in the school due to the unethical behaviors of the school principals, and therefore the deterioration of the school climate (5 participants). Similarly, 3 participants stated that the atmosphere of love, respect and trust in the school was damaged due to the unethical behavior of the school principals. 3 participants emphasized that the quality of education decreased due to the unethical behavior of school principals. 2 participants pointed out that success decreased, 2 participants pointed out that interpersonal communication deteriorated. One participant each evaluated that because of the unethical behaviors of the school principals, the peace of work was disturbed, the education could not reach its purpose, the individuality increased, the harmony among the employees deteriorated and a chaos environment occurred. All of the participants thought that unethical behaviors of school principals caused negative consequences

for teachers as well. It was understood that the most common negativity of the participants was the decrease in the motivation and determination of the teachers to work due to the unethical behaviors of the school principals (6 participants). 4 participants stated that the productivity of the teachers decreased due to the unethical behaviors exhibited by the school principals, 3 participants stated that the teachers were restless, and 3 participants stated that there were conflicts between the teachers. Two participants each stated that the teachers were unhappy because of the unethical behaviors of the school principals and that the teachers lost their respect for the school principal. One participant each stated that teachers lost their sense of belonging to the school and teachers experienced learned helplessness. Emphasizing that unethical behaviors of school principals had negative consequences on students, 4 participants listed these negative effects as follows: negative effect to student-teacher relations, students being unhappy, students' lack of respect for the principal, and students experiencing a sense of learned helplessness. 2 participants thought that the unethical behaviors of the school principals also caused negative consequences for the society. According to these participants, when school principals exhibited unethical behaviors, the society became unhappy and the belief in equality and justice decreased in the society.

5. What to be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals

The findings related to participants' opinions on what to be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

What to be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals

Themes	f
The selection of school principals should be based on merit.	4
School principals should be supervised frequently	4
Showing favor should not be allowed in the selection of school principals	3
Parents and teachers should have an authority in the selection of school principals.	3
The tenure of school principals should be kept short.	3
School principals should have a good command of behavioral sciences	3
Ethics training should be given to school principals	2
School principals must have taught before	2
School principals should be educators with high humane feelings.	2
Must have pedagogical formation	1
Must have knowledge of information technology	1
School principals should be given a job guarantee in their practices.	1
There should not be politicians or bureaucrats that the school principal is afraid of outside the law.	1
MoNE(Ministry of National Education) should provide adequate budget to schools	1
School principals should treat everyone fairly, impartially, fairly and equally.	1
School principals should have the characteristics of a good leader	1
School principals should take Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, as an example	1
School principals need communication skills, problem solving, etc. must constantly improve themselves	1
School principals should be evaluated by students, teachers and parents.	1
A report showing the performance of school principals should be published at the end of their term of office.	1
School principals should be subject to a proficiency exam every year.	1
School principals should be subjected to a psychological test every year	1
School principals should be selected by examination.	1

As seen in Table 6, participants' opinions on what to be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals were gathered under 23 sub-themes and the sub-themes of "The selection of school principals should be based on merit" and "School principals should be supervised frequently" were mentioned the most. Some of participants' opinions on what should be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals are given below:

It must be thoroughly tested for its human values. He must have taught before. He must have received pedagogical formation. Parents and teachers should have a say in the selection of the principal. It must be inspected by qualified persons. Term of office should be kept short. Must be proficient in informatics. (P3)

School principals should be given a guarantee of duty in their practices, as in the case of judges and prosecutors. The school principal should not be afraid because a teacher or parent has an acquaintance in the Provincial National Education or district. The Ministry should send funds to the Parent-Teacher Association. The principal should not be involved in fundraising. (P4)

In the election of the principal, an administrator from within the institution should be determined by the teachers by secret ballot. Providing them with serious training in communication skills, conflict resolution and community awareness during the summer period, and as a result, controlling whether they apply them in their institutions. (P5)

Examining the managers every year, passing psychological tests. Equipped managers, who know the job very well, should be brought to the institutions with merit, by paying attention to the social rules, character traits and temperament. It is important to make a written evaluation with students and teachers at the school where they work, provided that it is confidential. There should not be a right to reach working hours from 4 to 8 years. As a result of 4 years of work, a report should be kept and displayed on the school board about the actions that he did or could not do. (P7)

Ethics training should be given to administrators in order to reduce unethical behaviors. The authorities, which also supervise the administrators, should be strengthened. Assignments should be made by examination, based on concrete results. Appointments should be based on merit. (P8)

Principals can be trained on subjects such as professional ethics, communication skills, problem solving skills, etc. to minimize unethical behaviors. (P10)

In order to minimize it, everyone should be treated equally, regardless of what is right or wrong. When it is done in an impartial and fair way, the teacher also trusts the administration in the place where he works. This contributes positively to his work. This does not happen in every school. There are managers who do their job really well. They must also be given their due. (P11)

When the answers given by participants were interpreted; it was understood that all of the participants expressed their views on what should be done to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals. It was seen that the participants made more than one suggestion at the same time. It was found that the total number of suggestions of the participants was 23. It was seen that the most frequently stated (4 participants) among these suggestions were the selection of school principals in accordance with their merits, making the principals the ones who really deserved it, and the frequent and qualified supervision of school principals. Other suggestions that were frequently stated were not showing favor in the selection of school principals (3 participants), teachers, students and parents should have an authority in the selection of school principals (3 participants), keeping the duty periods of school principals short (3 participants), and school principals having a good command of behavioral sciences. It was found that 2 participants each suggested that ethics training should be given to school principals, school principals must have taught before and school principals should be educators with high humane feelings. Finally, as shown in Table 6 above, 1 participant each made 14 different suggestions for minimizing unethical behaviors exhibited by school principals.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, it was aimed to understand whether school principals behaved ethically while fulfilling their duties. In accordance with this purpose, based on the opinions of the teachers, it was examined whether the teachers observed the unethical behaviors of the school principals they worked with, what these behaviors were, what these unethical behaviors caused, and what should be done to minimize the unethical behaviors of the school principals. A qualitative research design was used in the study. The data of the study were collected by face-to-face interviews with 12 teachers working in a primary and secondary school affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. The data of the research were analyzed qualitatively by in-depth content analysis method.

Teachers defined ethics as moral rules that regulated social life and must be followed for the existence and continuity of social life. Teachers mostly associated ethics with the concepts of honesty, equality, truth and justice. Teachers had a perception that school principals sometimes behaved unethically. In a study conducted, while school principals always evaluated the compliance of the school principals' behaviors with ethical rules as appropriate, they often evaluated the compliance of teachers' school principals' behaviors with ethical rules as appropriate (Sunar, 2011). Similarly, another study found that school principals had a high level of compliance with ethical rules, but it was found that there was a significant difference between school principals' evaluations of school principals in terms of compliance with ethical principles and teachers' evaluations against teachers (Erdoğan, 2012).

According to their teachers, the most common type of unethical behavior by school principals was to discriminate among staff and not to treat staff equally and fairly. In this regard, teachers thought that school principals did not treat the staff equally, discriminate among them, and were not fair when allocating classes, lessons and duties, for reasons such as being from the same union, being from the same city, having the same worldview or having a better relationship. According to their teachers, other unethical behaviors frequently exhibited by school principals were school principals' misuse of their authority for personal gain, failure to comply with courtesy and etiquette while addressing their environment, and insulting them. Similarly, in the literature there are findings showing that school principals exhibit some unethical behaviors. It was found that school principals exhibited unethical behaviors such as favoritism towards teachers, shouting / scolding, influencing the opposite sex by abusing their office, surveillance with cameras, and bias in the distribution of duties (Can & Can-Işık, 2013).

Teachers thought that unethical behavior of school principals had negative effects primarily on education and teachers, but also on students and society. According to the teachers, the effects of school principals' unethical behavior on education were that the school climate would be adversely affected due to anxiety and fear, the environment of respect and trust would disappear, the quality of education would decrease and academic success would decrease. According to the teachers, the effects of the unethical behavior of the school principals on the teachers were that the determination and motivation of the teachers to work would decrease, their productivity would decrease, and they would be restless and unhappy. School principals' failure to comply with ethical principles also had negative consequences. Studies showed that as school principals acted in accordance with ethical principles, they were more trusted by teachers and organizational insensitivity decreased (Işık & Paşa, 2017). In addition, the findings showed that teachers' job satisfaction increased as school principals acted in accordance with ethical principles (Cetin & Özcan, 2013).

In order to minimize the unethical behavior of school principals, teachers suggested that school principals should be chosen primarily with a merit-based system in which showing favors should not play a role, and that teachers, parents and students should also have an impact on these choices. Frequent supervision of school principals was another suggestion that was frequently stated.

Recommendations

Based on these findings of the study, the following recommendations can be put forward for practitioners and future research:

Schools should be inspected frequently and in a qualified manner to prevent unethical behavior and to detect existing ones.

In order to prevent unethical behaviors in schools and to detect existing ones, the unethical behavior hotline application should be started physically and online.

Ethical principles should also be used as a criterion in the selection of school principals.

School principals should be trained more on ethical principles.

Even small, unethical behaviors should not go unpunished so that unethical behaviors do not become widespread.

Schools should be supported more financially and technically so that they may not lead to unethical behavior.

Future research should examine schools more often from an ethical perspective, with quantitative research to see the big picture, and qualitative research to explore in-depth.

Future research should examine the behavior of school principals ethically through qualitative methods, in which school principals form the working group.

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Ethical approval

In the writing process of the study titled **Evaluation of school principals by teachers in terms of ethics compliance: phenomenological research**, the rules of scientific, ethical and citation were followed; it was undertaken by the authors of this study that no falsification was made on the collected data. Journal Action Qualitative & Mixed Methods Research [JAQMER] and Editor had no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, and all responsibility belongs to the authors and that the study was not submitted for evaluation to any other academic publishing environment.

Ethics committee approval

Ethics Committee Approval of this research was obtained from Akdeniz University Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the meeting of 17 decision numbered 353 on October 11st, 2022.