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How Elementary School Principals' Change Tendencies Are Related With Their Opinion About Curriculum Change

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Abstract

Leadership is important in change process and change management. Turkish educational system is undergoing a constant change. One of those changes was the change of the elementary school curricula, which had been accepted in the 2004-2005 academic year. Therefore, it is important to understand how school principals, as the persons who are in charge of this change, handle this process. In this respect, this study was aimed to determine school principals' tendencies toward change. Furthermore, it will also be explored whether those tendencies show any significant differences on some variables. Finally, having incorporated school principals' views on curriculum, school principals' change tendencies will be interpreted within this change phenomenon. This study was designed with a mixed methodology. In order to understand school principals' tendencies toward change, a change tendency scale, developed by Akbaba-Altun and Büyüköztürk (2011), was utilized. In addition, school principals were asked to narrate their opinions regarding the changed curricula and its reflections on practice. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive and interpretive analysis whereas the qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. A total of 179 elementary school principals joined the quantitative part of this study, whereas 154 of them participated in the qualitative one. It was observed that school principals were generally homogenous in their change tendencies. Within this context, this finding was supported by the qualitative data, as well.

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1. Introduction

In 2004-2005 school-years, all elementary school curriculums have changed. School principals were expected to

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manage this change. During the change process as well as managing the change, leadership is important (Havelock, & Zlotolow, 1995; Snowden & Gorton, 1998; Erdoğan, 2002; Aydın, 2005). According to Schlechty (1993), school principals need to be aware of the fact that each person might have different views about change and each one might perceive a different skill of theirs to be supported. When planning a change, or even during the change, people's tendencies are important within an organization. If administrators determine and learn those tendencies, they could develop appropriate change strategies and implement them. Within Turkish educational system, a constant change is observed. During this change process, it is important for school principals to perceive their roles and administer the change process. Not only their technical competencies, but school principals' attitudes and behaviours are important. In this study, it was aimed to determine school principals' tendencies toward change. Furthermore, it will also be explored whether those tendencies show any significant differences on some variables. Finally, having incorporated school principals' views on curriculum, school principals' change tendencies will be interpreted within this change phenomenon.

2. Method

This study was designed as a mixed research. The change tendencies scale developed by Akbaba-Altun and Büyüköztürk (2011) was utilized to determine school principals' change tendencies. School principals were requested to reflect their views regarding the changed curriculum which was adopted in 2004-2005 school year. While the responses for the change scale were analysed through descriptive and predictive statistics, the open ended responses were analysed through content analysis. In content analyses, first, the reflections were grouped positive, negative and neutral. Secondly, these categories were recoded and frequency analyses were run. Finally, they were tabulated.

2.1. Sampling

179 school principals participated in the quantitative part of the study. 13(7%) of them were females and 165(92%) of them were males. One of the school principals did not reveal his/or gender. 86(37%) of them had a formal training education in administration whereas 66(37%) of them did not. 27(15%) of them did not reveal that information. 69(38%) of them had 5 years or less, 68 (38%) of them had 6-15 years, and 34 (19%) or them had 16 or more years of experience. 8(5%) of the school principals did not reveal their years in administration. When school principals' overall years in the profession are taken into account, 33 (18%) of them had 10 years or less, 50 (28%) of them had 11-15 years, 30 (17%) of them had 16-20 years, 26 (%15) of them had 21-26 years, and 36 (20%) of them had 26 years or more in profession. 4 (2%) of the school principals did not reveal their years in profession. Also, 154 school principals returned with open ended section of the questionnaire.

2.2. Data collection procedure

Data were gathered through Change Tendencies Scale (CTS) developed by Akaba-Altun and Büyüköztürk (2011). When developing the scale, first, an item pool was created according to a previous openness to change scale and five theoretical constructs to measure the personality characteristics during change process. Secondly, this pilot scale was administered to 284 administrators working at elementary and secondary schools on a voluntary base. Exploratory factor analysis revealed four subscales, which are entrepreneurship in change, belief in the benefits of change, resistance to change and holding the status quo. This structure was re-analysed through confirmatory factor analysis. The reliability coefficient was found to be between .67 and .91.

In the qualitative part of the research, a ground tour question "what is your opinion about the new curriculum" was directed. 154 school principals had responded to this question.

2.3. Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were run to determine the school principals' change tendencies. Then, MANOVA analysis was run to test whether these tendencies show significant differences across some variables. Open coding was done for the open-ended question and gathered under three categories. Once school principals' opinions were grouped as

positive, negative and neutral, then each category was re-analysed according to their frequency and presented in tables.

3. Findings

Elementary School Principals' Change Tendencies: This study started with a descriptive analysis of school principals' change tendencies. The following table displays these tendency scores.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for elementary school principals' change tendencies (n=179)

	Entrepreneurship (K=14)	Resistance (K=11)	Belief in its usefulness (K=12)	Holding the Status Quo (K=4)
Mean	55.22	42.30	50.36	15.85
Standard Deviation	6.21	6.98	7.01	3.08
Change coefficient (%)	11.24	16.50	13.92	19.43
Avr. Standard error	.46	.52	.52	.23
Median	55	44	50	16
Mod	56	44	48	16
Skewness	.03	-1.75	-1.21	-1.34
Kurtosis	.39	5.83	3.20	3.13
Min	37	11	19	4
Max	70	55	60	20

Table 1 shows that school principals' scale scores had lower standard deviations compared to their mean scores; their change co-efficiencies for the four factors changed between 11,24% and 19,43%. This finding indicates that school principals are homogenous in terms of their change tendencies. On the other hand, the change in factor mean scores, which are calculated by dividing the mean scores of each factor by its item numbers, are presented in Figure 1. According to this finding, relatively the highest score is the belief in its usefulness subscale. Overall change tendency scores are also found to be relatively high. Yet, in addition to the belief in the usefulness of change and entrepreneurship, it is important to note that resistance to change and holding the status quo scores were also high.

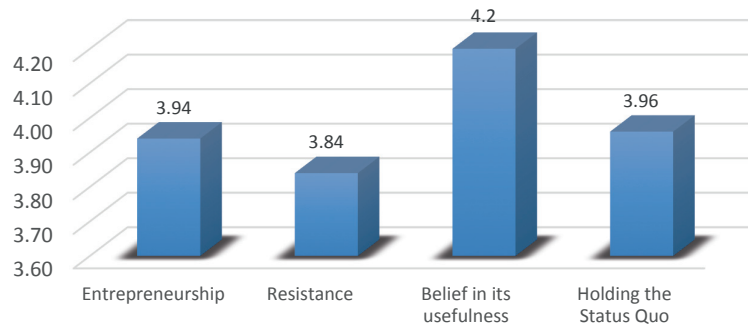


Fig 1. Mean sores for each factor in change tendencies scale

A MANOVA test was run to observe whether school principals' subscale scores change according to some variables. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between their change tendencies and their having attended a course, their years in the administration, and their overall years in the profession.

School principals' opinions about the constructivist curriculum: In general, school principals find the

curriculum affirmative (n=101, 65.5%), followed by neutral (n=29, 18.8%) and negative (n=24, 15.5%). This finding is another qualitative support to the findings in higher mean scores in belief in its usefulness and the entrepreneurship. Those who state affirmative responses used shorter sentences whereas those who find it neutral or negative tend to use longer statements and sentences.

By which factors school principals find the new curriculum affirmative? When the frequency was calculated for those who find the curriculum affirmative include; I like the new curriculum in a general way (f=49), new curriculum is student-centred (f=15), new program takes students' personal into account and help them learn by experience (8), students can easily express themselves with this new curriculum (5), the new curriculum is in line with changing and developing needs of the new era (4), new curriculum makes learning easier and increases the success (4), a better curriculum compared to the previous ones (4).

By which factors school principals find the new curriculum negative? When the frequency was calculated for those who find the curriculum negative include; 1) New curriculum was designed without taking geographical and economic conditions into account (7); 2) Poor infrastructure (6); 3) It is not applicable (4); 4) School conditions are not appropriate (4).

By which factors school principals find the new curriculum neutral? Those who stated neutral statements usually emphasized both positive and negative sides. Those who have neutral views make an important point to take into account: School principals state that before putting the new curriculum into action, the resistance should be expelled first by saying that "before realizing the new curriculum, we need to break the barrier of resistance toward change". School principals who stated neutral statements emphasize various dimensions of the new curriculum. Although they perceive this change as a positive action, the weaknesses they emphasise are the lack of infrastructure, time problem, insensitivity toward regional and school conditions, parents' views, student numbers and lack of materials.

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

When school principals' change tendency scores were examined and observed that the mean for their belief in its usefulness is relatively higher representing one group; another group seemed to be more entrepreneur whereas the other group holds the status quo. It is important to emphasize that there will be one group of people who are resistant to the change therefore, MoNE should take the necessary precautions, such as holding information meetings and making people believe in its usefulness, when implementing a change in Turkish Educational System. If an administrator shows a resistance or holds the status quo, then people at the lower level will find themselves in difficult position even at an impossible stage to realize the change. This study can be extended to a nation-wide sample and general tendencies could be determined. Moreover, outliers could be determined for in-depth interviews.

In this study, whether school principals' change tendencies showed any significant difference across some variables, a MANOVA analysis was run. The results indicated no significant difference for the variables such as having attended a course, years in administration and years in profession. The effects of personality characteristics could be explored more in depth.

Quantitative data was supported by qualitative data. Those who consider this curriculum change as a positive one are more in numbers and emphasized especially on the following points: new curriculum is more student oriented, makes learning to be realized easier, curriculum itself is in line with change and has the potential to make a change. Those who do consider it as a negative one put their emphasis on the lack of infrastructure, the nature of geographical and school conditions, supporting their claims by saying that these were not taken into account when realizing this curriculum.

Those who have neutral views, on the other hand, raise a caution about the change and implementation of the program. School principals emphasize that first the resistance should be melted. In all change process, organizations

face the challenge of resistance and the feeling of keeping the status quo. Before taking actions, some strategies are to be developed before realizing such a change. Those school principals also made it clear that teachers who are at the centre of implementing this curriculum did not receive any quality training. In addition, they said young generation teachers are more successful with the new curriculum. The school principals who have neutral views had brought up both advantages and disadvantages of the new curriculum at various levels.

The school principals who participated in this study generally find the new curriculum change as a positive stance, but stated some issues to be considered: not being ready in infrastructure, ignorance of regional and school wide conditions, parents' views, student numbers and lack of materials. School principals stated that in order for this new curriculum to be a success, the issue of infrastructure should be solved first. Lack of infrastructure and preparations are mentioned to be the main barriers in front of its success. Those school principals with neutral views also hold the belief that this change will be settled in time and the advantages and disadvantages will be observed after 3-4 years.

School principals also emphasized that when developing new curriculum and its implementation, regional and school conditions should be taken into account. Furthermore, consistency with the curriculum change is a must, according to those school principals who perceive this change as a neutral one. In addition, they go further to add that parent support is crucial when making the curriculum a success and increase the quality. Those school principals suggested that when designing new curriculum, school teachers' views should also be sought. They also made the connection between curriculum and measurement and evaluation. They indicated the need to have a relevant measurement tools for the new curriculum. Finally, the number of students in each class and their relation with the new curriculum are added as other points to be tackled with. For the new curriculum to be a success, they believe that the number of students per class should be decreased.

As a conclusion, those who perceive the change as a neutral one put emphasis on development and implementation phases. Their views should also be taken into account by the change planners and practitioners. Those with neutral views state both positive and negative issues and since their attitude is neutral, it would be easier to get their support when their views are taken into account. It would be a better description to call this group as a balance group in the organization.

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