

Gender Perceptions of the Leadership Abilities
of Principals in Turkey and the United States.

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Abstract:

The results of an international quantitative study regarding perceptions of the leadership abilities of school principals will be presented and analyzed. This study was conducted during the winter of 2009 in both Turkey and the United States to gain insights as to whether perceptions of the leadership abilities of school principals are influenced by gender-both the gender of the principal and the gender of the teachers.

Gender Perceptions of the Leadership Abilities of Principals in Turkey and the United States.

Recent research has revealed the critical role the school principal plays in improving schools and the achievement of students. (Andrews & Soder, 1987, Hallinger & Heck, 1996, Lashway, 2002, Marzano, 2003, and Marzano, McNulty and Waters). As expectations and accountability of principals continues to increase, newer models of leadership have begun to emerge during the past two decades. Efforts to restructure schools and improve student achievement have led to new models of governance in which the traditional “top-down” model of leadership has been replaced by a more “participatory” model. Stakeholders, including teachers, parents and the community, are being invited to participate in decision-making, strategic planning and formal school improvement initiatives. (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001, Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

As this transformation occurs, the gender demographics of the principal continue to evolve as well. In the United States, females have significantly outnumbered males in teaching. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2007), in 1985, almost eighty percent of teachers in American public schools were female; by 1993-94, that percentage had decreased to 72.9%, but by 2003-04, had increase to almost 75% of teachers being female. However, females have consistently been outnumbered by males as principals. From 1984-85 to 2003-04, the percentage of female principals in elementary schools increased from 21.4% to 49.7% (NCES, 2007). Furthermore, the percentage of female principals in secondary schools increased from 16% in 1993-94 to 26.9% (NCES, 2007).

In Turkey, on the other hand, the number of female principals is extremely low. Only about 4% of school principals are female. In Istanbul, for example, the most developed and

populated city in Turkey, only 18% percent of principals are female (Kenthaber, 2009). Similarly, in Burdur, the city where the surveys were administered to principals and teachers, there are only two female school principals. In Turkey, 44.9% of the teachers in elementary schools are female, and 41.4% of the teachers in secondary schools are female (Turkey's Statistical Yearbook, 2007).

As the change in the demographics of school principals continues to evolve, the question arises as to whether or not male and female principals lead schools in a similar or different manner, and if the gender of the principal, alone, has an impact on the perceived leadership abilities of the principal. Almost twenty years ago, Shakeshaft, Nowell and Perry stated, "We believe that gender affects both supervisory style and outcome" (1991, p. 339). Tyree (1995) suggest that there exists a perception that women lack support from the staff, parents and community that does not exist with male principals. Polka and Litchka (2008) found that female educational leaders not only face the traditional "glass ceiling" of discrimination in obtaining leadership positions in education, but also face a second "glass ceiling"-one in which women leaders are held to higher and different standards than men in similar positions. Bolman and Deal (2001) suggest that leadership through the perspective of a woman is very different from the traditional view of leadership.

Thus, these perceptions and attitudes could play a critical role in how principals perceive themselves as being an effective educational leader, and how the people these principals are leading-primarily teachers-perceive their leadership as well.

According to Lee, Smith and Cioci (1993), the United States "moves toward a more sex-equitable society" (p. 154), gender inequality in Turkey has been an issue of controversy, including education. The issue of women not being in positions of educational leadership in Turkey has been debated by educational researchers (Çelikten, 2004, Çelikten & Yeni, 2004).

As far back as 1990, Shakeshaft offered the following:

As historical record has shown, women have always been second choice in the selection of school leaders...the telling story of women in school administration doesn't explain why, in a large sense, women have been consigned to teaching while men are clustered in administration (p. 81).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of the leadership skills of principals in both Turkey and the United States. Specifically, the study attempted to determine if perceptions of the leadership skills of principals were influenced by gender-both the gender of the principal and the gender of teachers for whom they lead.

Both Turkey and the United States have a disproportionate number of female principals, in relation to the percentage of teachers who are female. Thus, the notion of perceptual differences between female leadership skills and those of males needs to be addressed. Gregory (1999) suggested that barriers to females to becoming and then succeeding as a principal are based upon barriers that they (females) have no control of-traditional perceptions of their leadership styles and roles (internal) and lack of resources and not being included in collaborative projects and processes (external).

The purpose of the study was to examine the following research questions:

1. Does the gender of a principal influence the self-perception of their leadership skills?
2. Does the gender of a teacher influence their perception of the leadership skills of their principal?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of the leadership abilities of principals between teachers and principals?

4. Is there a difference in the teachers' perception of the principal's leadership skills, according to the gender of the principal?

Methodology

This study used the survey research design to compare the perceptions of the leadership skills of principals in Turkey and the United States. The instrument used to measure the leadership abilities of principals was the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (Kouzes and Posner, 2001). The instrument was modified slightly in order to assess perceptions of both principals and teachers.

In Turkey, the surveys were sent via e-mail to all principals and teachers who were working in Burdur, a province in the southern part of Turkey. To increase the return number of the surveys, each principal was contacted by telephone.

A total of 173 surveys were sent to principals in Burdur and 91 were returned (52.6%). Of the 91 principal responses, 2 (2.2%) were female and 89 (97.8%) were males. Since the number of female principals in Burdur was not sufficient to have statistical analysis, 120 surveys were sent to female principals in other cities throughout Turkey. Forty nine of them were returned (40.83%). Thus, a total number of 140 surveys from Turkish principals were in the study. Of the 140 principal responses, 51 (36.4%) were female and 89 (63.6%) were males. Ninety three of them were from primary schools (n=93, 66.4%), the larger group and 47 were from high schools (n=47, 33.6%). All the principals were working in public elementary and secondary schools.

A total of 1,828 surveys were sent to teachers in Burdur. In order to access much more teachers who were working in schools that had female principals, surveys were sent to teachers in other cities and 1,034 of them were returned. Of the responses, 524 (50.7%) were females and 505 (48.8%) were males. Five (0.5%) teachers failed to specify their gender.

Elementary teachers were the larger group (n=641, 62.0%). There were 389 (37.6%) high school teachers. Four teachers (0.4%) failed to specify their level of teaching.

Furthermore, teachers were asked to not only identify their own gender, but the gender of their principal as well. Almost quarter (n=261, 25.2%) indicated that they were a female teacher with a male principal, followed by female teacher with a female principal (n=265, 25.6%), male teacher with male principal (n=383, 37%) and male teacher with a female principal (n=120, 11.6%). Five teachers (0.5%) failed to specify their own gender, as well as the gender of their principal.

In the United States, principals and teachers from the state of Maryland were randomly selected and sent surveys via e-mail. SurveyMonkey.com, a web-based survey company, was used to allow principals and teachers access to the survey. Once survey responses were submitted, SurveyMonkey.com provided the researchers with data in Excel.

A total of 511 surveys were sent to principals in Maryland and 198 were returned (38.7%). Of the 198 principal responses, 128 (64.6%) were female and 69 (34.8%) were males. According to the level of the school, elementary school principals (n=127, 64.1%) was the large group to respond, followed by high school principals (n=37, 18.7%), and then middle school principals (n=28, 14.1%). A majority of the principals indicated that they were public school principals (n=142, 71.7%), while parochial school principals (n=40, 20.2%), private school principals (n=8, 4.0%) and charter school principals (n=4, 2.0%) were the other groups of principals in the sample.

A total of 1,956 surveys were sent to teachers in Maryland and 706 (35.9%) were returned. Of these responses, 550 (77.9%) were females and 153 (21.7%) were males. According to the level of school in which the respondents taught, elementary teachers made up the largest group (n=330, 46.7%), followed by middle school/junior high school (n=192,

27.2%) and high school (n=166, 23.5%). Fifteen teachers (2.1%) failed to specify their level of teaching.

Furthermore, teachers were asked to not only identify their own gender, but the gender of their principal as well. Almost half (n=349, 49.4%) indicated that they were a female teacher with a female principal, followed by female teacher with a male principal (n=200, 28.3%), male teacher with male principal (n=87, 12.3%) and male teacher with a female principal (n=69, 9.8%).

Instrument

The Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2001) was used to collect the data regarding the perceptions of principal leadership abilities. The instrument contains thirty items that are aligned to the following *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (2001):

- **Challenging the Process:** leaders search for opportunities to change the status quo. They look for innovative ways to improve their organization.
- **Inspiring a Shared Vision:** leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future, creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become.
- **Enabling Others to Act:** leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others and understand that mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts. They strengthen others, making each person feel capable and powerful.
- **Modeling the Way:** leaders establish principles concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued. They create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow.

- Encouraging the Heart: to keep hope and determination alive, leaders recognize contributions that individuals make and celebrate accomplishments.

The instrument was modified in several ways. First, the Likert-type scale rating was reduced from ten possible responses to five possible responses (1-Almost Never, 2-Seldom, 3-Occasionally, 4-Frequently, and 5-Almost Always). Next, teachers were asked to respond to each item with the following prompt: *To what extent does the principal of your school typically engage in the following behaviors?* Principals were given the same items, except their prompt was, *As principal, to what extent do you typically engage in the following activities?* Another modification to the survey included asking respondents to identify basic demographic data such as gender, type of school, experience and the gender of their principal (teacher respondents). Finally, the survey was translated from English to Turkish for the use of the researcher and participants.

For Turkish version of Leadership Practice inventory, both for principals and teachers, LPI was only one sub scale. In this research, for principal survey, $\alpha = .922$ and for teacher survey, $\alpha = .980$. For the United States version of the inventory, there were five sub scales of the LPI. For the principal survey, $\alpha = .843$ and for the teacher survey, $\alpha = .959$.

Analysis

Data collected from both the teachers and principals were placed into the computer statistical program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and a series of statistical tests were completed to analyze the data in relation to the research questions. First, independent sample t-test procedures were used to assess the extent to which there were differences in the perceived abilities of school principals. Second, one-way ANOVA procedures were used to assess the extent to which there were differences in the perceived

abilities of school principals. Scheffe *post hoc* procedures ($p < .05$) were used to determine significant group differences when the multivariate F ratio was statistically significant.

Results

The results are presented in two parts-the first is from Turkey, followed by the United States.

In response to the first question, female principals in Turkey rated themselves higher than male principals in their leadership skills. As shown in Table 1, the mean difference was not found to be statistically significant..

In response to the second question, the researchers in Turkey found that male teachers perceived the leadership skills of their principals to be higher than what female teachers perceived in leadership skills. As shown in Table 2, it should also be noted that no statistically significant differences were found between female teachers male teachers.

As can be seen in Table 3, the researchers found that in Turkey, no statistically significant differences were found regarding the gender of the teacher and the gender of their principal (female teacher with female principal, female teacher with male principal, male teacher with female principal, and male teacher with female principal).

In response to the fourth question, it was found that there is no difference in the teacher's perception of the principal's leadership skills, according to gender of principal (Table 4).

In response to the first question, female principals in the United States rated themselves higher than male principals in each of the five practices. As shown in Table 5, the mean difference was found to be statistically significant in only one practice (Shared Vision).

In response to the second question, the researchers in the United States found that male teachers perceived the leadership abilities of their principals to be higher than what female teachers perceived in four of the five leadership practices, with the difference being statistically significant for the practice of *Encouraging the Heart*. As shown in Table 6, the only practice in which male teachers perceived the leadership of their principals to be lower was with the practice of *Challenge the Way*, but the difference was not statistically significant. It should also be noted that no statistically significant differences were found between female teachers who have either a female or male principal, or between male teachers who have either a female or male principal.

In response to the third question, the researchers found that in the United States, while principals' self-perceptions of their leadership abilities were higher for each of the practices than the teachers' perceptions, no statistically significant differences were found regarding the gender of the teacher and the gender of their principal (female teacher with female principal, female teacher with male principal, male teacher with female principal, and male teacher with female principal). The data can be found in Table 7.

In response to the fourth question, it was found in the United States that there is no difference in the teacher's perception of the principal's leadership skills, according to gender of the principal (Table 8).

Discussion

Results show that gender does not play a significant role in the perceptions of the leadership roles of principals in both Turkey and the United States, as perceived by both teachers and principals themselves. These results support the conclusions of Barbuto et al. (2007) which explored that gender did not affect leadership.

This conclusion supports the research of Barbuto et al (2007) and of Thompson (2000) , in which it is suggested the ways in which women lead are held by three hypothetical explanations: “(1) women are obtaining more leadership and management positions in the workforce, leading to higher levels of self-confidence and job security, which translates into the application of more diverse and experimental methods of leading and managing people and organizations; (2) female gender stereotypes are continuing to be diluted from the traditional modes of “feminine” leadership characteristics (e.g., cooperative, supporting, and understanding) to a blending with “masculine” leadership characteristics (e.g., competitive, strong, and tough) as greater numbers of women are realizing the needed cognitive complexity in their leadership and management behavior in becoming the most effective leaders possible; and (3) women have demonstrated equally effective leadership skills all along, and their subordinates have finally become accustomed to the idea and no longer impose their stereotypes in analyzing the skills and abilities of their leaders.”

Contrary to this research’s conclusion, Garcia-Retamero, and Lopez-Zafra’s (2006) research support the general hypothesis that a stereotyping process automatically activates the concept of leadership as a masculine notion, and leads to a bias against a female candidate’s promotion for a leadership post. Rudman and Glick (2001) implied that devaluation of the female applicant’s social skills (and not her competence) mediated this gender discrimination effect. These findings were in line with previous research, the analysis by Rodler, Kirchler and Hölzl (2001) that found that although females were described quite differently than males in the years 1974 to 1986, the differences decreased sharply in 1992 and 1998. Female images have shifted over the years, whereas changes in male images are less apparent. Since stereotypes have remarkable stability (Deaux, 1993) results of the present study has to be treated with caution. Additional studies are necessary to underpin the present findings.

That there is no gender difference in the ability of the principals' leadership is contrary to findings of related researches in the literature such as Garcia-Retamero, and Lopez-Zafra (2006), Shein (2001), for female principals, this conclusion is very important because leadership abilities of the principals are not perceived differently by principals and teachers. The findings may confirm Garcia-Retamero, and Lopez-Zafra (2006)'s suggestion that claims that "there is a light at the end of the tunnel and this prejudice may change over time."

With respect to the limitations of the study, data were collected at a single point in time and in single geographic regions of Turkey and the United States. Further research might utilize a more global design to include a more inclusive geographic sample from both countries as well as a qualitative method involving teachers and principals.

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Appendices

Table 1

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Principals' Self Perceptions of their Leadership Abilities (Female N=51, Male N=89). Turkey

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
LPI Practice	133.68(9.2)	132.52(11.5)	-.614	.540

* $p \leq .05$

Table 2

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions of Principals Leadership Abilities (Female N=524, Male N=505). Turkey

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
LPI Practice	122.74 (24.2)	123.23 (24.6)	.324	.746

* $p \geq .05$

Table 3

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Principals Leadership Abilities, According to Gender of Both Teacher and Principal (Female Teacher with Female Principal, N=265, Female Teacher with Male Principal N=261), Male Teacher with Female Principal, N=120, Male Teacher with Male Principal, N=383). Turkey

LPI Practice	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups (4)			
LPI Practice	5	.499	.777

* $p \leq .05$

Table 4.

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions of Principals Leadership abilities, according to gender of the principal (Female N=388, Male N=646). Turkey

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
Leadership	122.99 (24.1)	122.91 (24.7)	-.051	.960

$p \geq .05$

Table 5.

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Principals' Self Perceptions of their Leadership Abilities (Female N=128, Male N=69). United States

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
Challenge the Way	24.52 (2.99)	24.17 (2.10)	.863	.389
Shared Vision	25.25 (2.62)	24.10 (2.09)	3.13*	.002
Enable Others	27.16 (2.05)	27.04 (1.41)	.436	.663
Model the Way	27.52 (1.88)	26.99 (1.99)	1.87	.062
Encourage the Heart	26.29 (2.88)	25.72 (2.38)	1.39	.165

* $p \leq .05$

Table 6.

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions of Principals Leadership Abilities (Female N=550, Male N=153). United States

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
Challenge the Way	20.61 (5.39)	20.40 (5.45)	.637	.525
Shared Vision	20.84 (6.08)	21.38 (6.07)	-.966	.334
Enable Others	22.06 (5.48)	22.71 (5.63)	-1.290	.198
Model the Way	22.78 (5.45)	22.97 (5.08)	-.389	.697
Encourage the Heart	21.04 (6.34)	22.43 (5.86)	-2.426*	.016

* $p \leq .05$

Table 7

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Principals Leadership Abilities, According to Gender of Both Teacher and Principal (Female Teacher with Female Principal, N=349, Female Teacher with Male Principal N=200), Male Teacher with Female Principal, N=69, Male Teacher with Male Principal, N=87. United States

LPI Practice	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups (4)			
Challenge the Way	3	.234	.873
Shared Vision	3	.980	.402
Enable Others	3	1.51	.210
Model the Way	3	.218	.884
Encourage the Heart	3	2.06	.104

* $p \leq .05$

Table 8.

Leadership Practices Inventory Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions of Principals Leadership Abilities, According to Gender of the Principal (Female N=388, Male N=646). United States

LPI Practice	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
Challenge the Way	20.60 (5.70)	20.52 (5.10)	.197	.844
Shared Vision	20.70 (6.37)	21.36 (5.61)	-1.406	.160
Enable Others	21.90 (5.85)	22.68 (4.97)	-1.840	.066
Model the Way	22.74 (5.65)	22.95 (4.95)	-.535	.593
Encourage the Heart	21.18 (6.63)	21.66 (5.74)	-.998	.318

* $p \leq .05$