Full Length Research Paper

School managers' views about school safety from the invitational theory perspective

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The aim of this study was to determine the views of primary school managers about how schools can become safer places from the perspective of "invitational theory". The study sample included the interview responses of 35 randomly selected primary school managers working in the center of Elazıg City in Turkey. The views of school managers were analyzed by using the qualitative data analysis method. School managers' views on people; teachers should do mentoring for students. School manager views on places; classes should be a multi-purpose, schools should have security cameras and first- aid room. School manager views on policies; teachers and students should be evaluated based on their performance, collective management should be dominant in schools. School manager views on programs; schools should take into consideration expectations of families and students, schools should to organize courses for adults. School manager views on process; schools should have alumni association, schools should collaborate with non-governmental organizations.

Key words: School safety, safe school, invitational theory.

INTRODUCTION

School safety involves arrangements regarding the internal and external environment of the school. How-ever, it is not only limited to environmental adjustments but includes activities geared towards increasing school loyalty of staff, students and families. According to Kermit and Flanary (1996), acts of violence and unwanted student behaviors are more common in schools where students feel less loyal. Baginsky (2003) lists the main aims of school safety as follows:

1. Valuing students' psychological health,
2. Making students and teachers feel they are in a safe environment,
3. Enabling students and teachers to enjoy the school environment,
4. Motivating school members,
5. Focusing students on future success.

School safety not only focuses on factors within the school but also involves social factors which are in constant interaction with one another, school safety can be viewed as having four main dimensions student safety, family safety, school building safety and social safety (Schneider et al., 2000).

SAFE SCHOOLS

The term safe school has been defined by Donmez and Guven (2002) as places where students, teachers and staff feel physically, psychologically and emotionally free, and where enriched school programs hone students' skills. Ogel et al. (2005) have defined the term as places where positive relations exist between managers and teachers; teachers and students; students themselves; and school staff with each other and students. Stephens (1995) stated that safe schools enabled teachers to teach and students to learn in a warm and favorable environment where there is no room for fear and threats, while Celik (2000) described them as organizations where

learning and efficiency is important for everyone, and where students are expected to be successful and given space to display their social skills. In a similar vein, both Schneider et al. (2000) and Celik (2000) defined the term as a relaxed environment for managers, teachers and students. Offering a more detailed definition, Kadel et al. (1995) stated that safe schools are places where team-work is adopted as a policy, the school vision is clear, student and teacher expectations are valued, active cooperation from the environment is important, social activities abound, teachers and students are involved in the management decision-making processes, student success is targeted, and a rich library and multipurpose sports facilities exist.

According to Orpinas et al. (2003), safe schools implement effective instructional approaches, are aware of genuine student problems, and have a culture of respect and adequate physical equipment. Theories that are related to school safety are: Mental framework theory, social disorganization theory, social control theory, school climate theory, invitational theory family system theory, subculture theory and rational theory. The present study views school safety from the perspective of "invitational theory".

RESEARCH AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Some definitions that related to school safety are; Donmez and Guven (2002) who found in a study conducted in Malatya, Turkey with high school teachers and students that the most serious safety problems in school stemmed from a lack of control in school corridors and the playground. Isık (2004) conducted a study in Istanbul, Turkey and concluded that the most commonly valued subdimension of school safety was physical place. In a similar study, Kisioglu et al. (2005) evaluated school safety in the interior places of 37 primary schools located in the center of Isparta, Turkey and reported that 94% of these schools were not adequately designed, which had an adverse effect on both students and teachers. In the U.S., Klooster (2002) conducted a study to establish school safety perceptions of students in a Los Angeles, California high school, and found that 18.5% did not feel safe at school, and that 13.9% were even scared to go to certain places within the school. A total of 28.7% of these students reported that people other than students and staff could easily enter the school. In a study conducted in Istanbul Turkey, Baykan (1993) found that schools with inadequately planned or mediocre buildings increased students' stress levels. In the same vein, Koç (1999) con-ducted a study in the center of Ankara, Turkey and found that parents mostly value the cleanliness and adequate physical features of school buildings. These findings are evidence of the importance of physical places in school safety.

In a study conducted with primary school teachers from Washington, U.S., Miller (2003) stated that 30% of teachers agreed that violence prevention programs and school safety policies were insufficient in preventing threats to school safety. A study conducted with 1,180 students (grades 3 through 12) by Katherine and Dana (1999) revealed that 22% of students were unwilling to go to school due to incidents or threats of violence at schools. Peach and Reddick (1991) conducted a study in the primary schools of Tennessee and found that 93% of teachers believed that police officers were needed in schools and that more legal protection was needed against people who hurt others. In a study aiming to determine the perceptions of families, students, teachers and school managers about the internal and external factors affecting school safety, Foster (2002) reported that social activities at schools made the perceptions of students more positive. Bass (2003) studied the relation-ship between school safety and school culture in Arizona, and stated that unwanted incidents were common in schools where an unappealing school culture existed. Perone (1998) studied the school safety and school climate perceptions of students and teachers in Philadelphia, and found that students and teachers who felt estranged from the school felt less safe. McMullen (1999) stated that schools with democratic and partici-patory management also had a strong school policy. This study emphasized the role of developing a democratic policy and investing in people toward making schools safer places.

Risk factors which pose a threat to school safety generally stem from underestimating student safety, school safety, family safety and environmental safety. Schools may come under the effect of negative forces not just from the inside but also from the social environment. From the perspective of "invitational theory", the present study has shown that developing and effectively managing human resources, places, policies, programs and processes, is necessary to minimize risk factors at schools.

INVITATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

Born as a reaction to the classical educational practices used in schools "invitational theory" aims to change the limited communication styles between school members (Purkey, 1991). A main tenant of "invitational theory" is to revitalize schools and to encourage students to want to go to school (Myers and Monson, 1992). According to the advocates of the theory, there are five factors that effect the appeal of schools: people, places, policies, programs, and processes. "Invitational theory" claims that these five factors make schools more socially appealing and safe

(Purkey and Schmidt, 1996).

People

The most valuable component of schools is human resources, which mainly comprises managers, teachers and students. In addition, the importance that schools attach to family and environment cooperation increases its appeal.

Places

A negative physical place affects school members negatively while comfortable and aesthetically pleasing features make schools more appealing. The entrance, classrooms, waiting areas, corridors, canteen, staff rooms, social and sports facilities and the overall environment of the school have direct effects on individuals in the school.

Policies

School policies consist of written or unwritten rules which regulate the continuous functions of individuals and the organization. Policies are often strong messages to school members about the importance of people, the development of skills, and the assuming responsibility. Schools with stricter, more negative rules and disciplinary principles lend toward an overall colder and more unfriendly environment.

Programs

A good impression may be made on school members and the environment by developing school programs that address human needs at large, instead of those that focus on narrow goals. Incorporating activities for families and the social environment into the school program, in addition to those geared towards students and staff, also make schools more socially appealing.

Processes

Another element that can make schools more appealing are the process used by managers to interact with the social environment and cooperate with other organizations. Processes include issues such as unity, democratic activities, cooperation efforts, guidance in ethics and human activities. More effective processes aim to develop the mutual interaction between the school, families

and students. They include all procedures and plans that assist long-term and continuous family involvement.

These dimensions of "invitational theory" are based on four main assumptions, which give the theory its aim and direction. These assumptions are Trust, Respect, Optimism and Intentionality (Purkey and Schmidt,1987).

Trust

One of the main aims of "invitational theory" is to enable people to get to know each other better. Trust cannot be earned through single actions but a pattern of welcoming behavior. When there is a welcoming environment, each individual can do their best. Therefore, each individual deserves to be trusted as the highest authority of their own existence.

Respect

The second assumption of the "invitational theory" is that people are talented, worthy and responsible, and that they should be treated accordingly. Sharing responsibilities with mutual respect is an indispensible component of a democratic environment. Respect may be displayed, formed and maintained through people's behaviors as well as policies, programs and processes. It may also be indicated by providing equal opportunities and equal sharing of power.

Optimism

The third assumption maintains that people have endless potential in all areas. of human existance. Humans are unique in that their potential does not have distinct boundaries. Being welcoming is not enough on its own; it is also necessary to be optimistic. School policies, programs, and process can be built on the premise that humans have untapped potential in all areas .

Intentionality

The last assumption of the "invitational theory" is that development is most welcome when human potential is willfully planned through inviting places, policies, programs and processes. Welcoming is a willful action so as to offer something useful in the environment to fulfill human potential.

METHODS

The aim of this curent study was to determine the views of primary school managers about school safety from perspective of "invitational theory".

Data collection instrument

This study utilized a qualitative survey interview form prepared by the researchers based on specific theory (Bas and Akturan, 2008) and was composed of 5 semi-structured items which covered the dimension of "ınvitational theory" people, policies, places, programs and processes.

Population and sample

The study sample included the interview responses of 35 randomly selected primary school managers from 107 primary school managers working at the schools in the center of Elazıg City in Turkey. The gender frequency distribution of the managers were as follows: 32 males and 3 females.

Data analysis

Responses obtained with semi- structured interview forms were evaluated by using the NVIVO 7 qualitative data analysis method. This qualitative data analysis method examines the answers of open-ended questions grouped in specific themes:

1. What are the views of school managers about "people"?
2. What are the views of school managers about "places"?
3. What are the views of school managers about "policies"?
4. What are the views of school managers about "programs"?
5. What are the views of school managers about "processes"?

The aim of this method is to seek participants perspectives toward the primary interest of the questions in the semi-structured form by producing charts which link the identified themes with respondents answers.

RESULTS

The views of primary school managers were analyzed by using the NVIVO 7 qualitative data analysis method. Proposals based on managers' views for developing new models to improve school safety with respect to the "ınvitational theory" are presented as follows.

Manager views on people

Some school managers' views about the "people" dimension are shown in Figure 1.

Voluntary student mentoring

"In addition to classroom teaching, the respondents suggested that every teacher at the school should do voluntary mentoring inside and outside the school in order to find solutions to the emotional and social problems of students, help them with their courses, share their own experiences which them and become their confidantes" (Manager, Male).

Personal space

"There should be a student workshop within the school where students can improve their talents in their free time and display their work" (Manager, Male).

Social activities

"All social activities to take place throughout an academic year should be planned at the very beginning at a teacher's board meeting, with the participation of student leaders" (Manager, Male).

Educational scholarships

"Schools should be able to grant scholarships to successful and needy students" (Manager, Female).

Technology assisted education

"The school should have classrooms compatible with distance education as well as computer and Internet based education" (Manager, Male).

Play based education

"Basic civil rights should be taught to students through drama and educational play based classes". (Manager, Female).

Field education

"Practicum classes should exist to improve the students' special talents and introduce them to the professions of their interest. As can be seen, school managers' views about people emphasized the need for schools to offer more opportunities to students and encourage their creativi*ty"* (Manager, Male) . It is generally emphasized that managers must give more importance to social activities of school. Therefore they advised practice classes and lessons in whice students can develop their social skills.

Manager views on places

Some school managers' views about the "school place" dimension are shown in Figure 2.

School cleanliness

"Cleaning services for school premises and playground
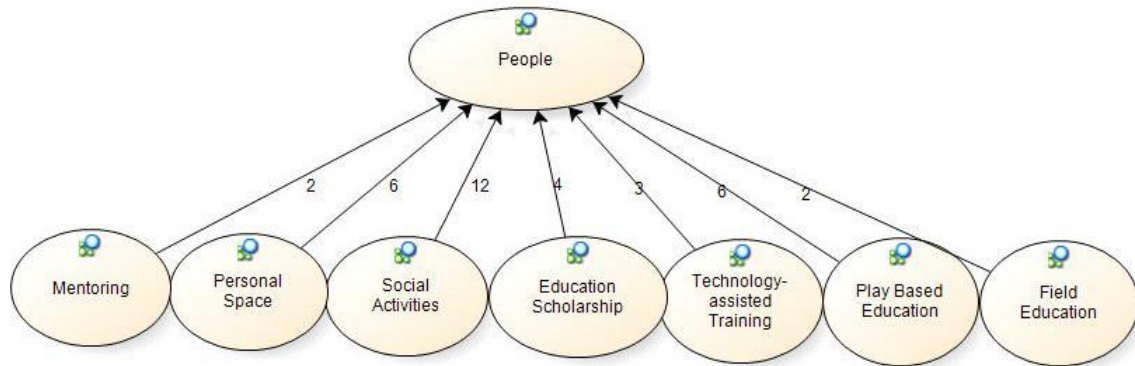
Figure 1. Managers' views about the people dimension. The numbers on the figure indicate how many managers gave the indicated suggestion.
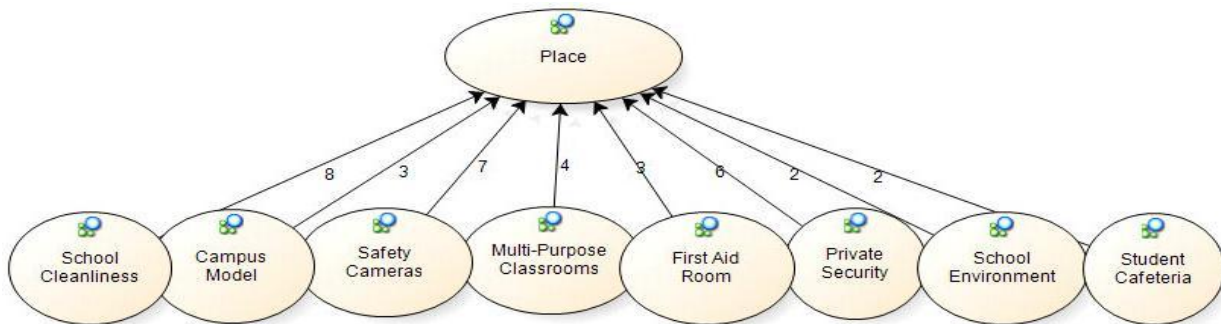

Figure 2. Managers' views about the school place dimension.

should be outsourced to a private cleaning company" (Manager, Female).

Campus model

"Schools should follow a campus model where there are social, cultural and sports facilities (conference hall, drama and Internet rooms, theatre and cinema halls, refectory, etc.)" (Manager, Male).

Safety cameras

"There should be safety cameras to check inside and outside school premises" (Manager, Male).

Multipurpose classrooms

"Classrooms should be places where students can get together to work collectively on projects and teamwork and use the Internet" (Manager, Male).

First aid room

"An emergency first aid room should be established within the school for injuries resulting from fires, earthquakes, accidents and so on" (Manager, Male).

Private security

"There should be private security responsible for the entrance-exit gates of the school and its surrounds" (Manager, Male).

School environment

"Street vendors around the school should not be permitted. Civilian policemen should exist around the school" (Manager, Male).

Cafeteria

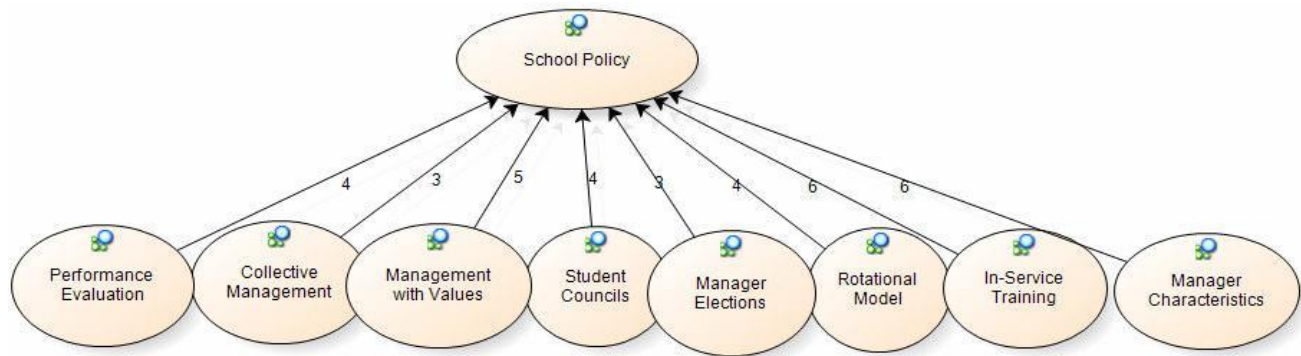"A student cafeteria should exist for students to meet

Figure 3. Managers' views about the policies dimension.

their food needs, sit during their free times and listen to music" (Manager, Male). As it is seen school managers emphasized the need of planning schools according to the needs of students. Managers drew attention to the point that constructing the school in the design of campus is very important for the safety and attraction of the school.

Manager views on policies

Some school managers' views about the "school policies" dimension are shown in Figure 3.

Performance evaluation

"Teachers who spend more time at school for extra lessons and social activities should receive additional payment" (Manager, Female).

Collective management

"Schools need a "school council" led by school managers and including all teachers and student leaders so that they can make decisions collectively in this council. The council should also be a legal entity" (Manager, Male).

Management with values

"Cooperation should be established with non-goverment organization such as retirement homes, charities and orphanages in the city, so that students groups can volunteer in these institutions outside of school hours and under the supervision of a guide teacher for at least 10 days every semester" (Manager, Male).

School student assembly

"For a democratic school management, a school student assembly should be established to involve students in managing the school and to speak their minds, and elected student leaders should also attend school meetings" (Manager, Male).

Managers elections

"School managers should be elected by the teachers" (Manager, Male).

Rotational model

"Elected school managers should not serve longer than 5 years at their school" (Manager, Male).

In-service training

"School managers and teachers should undergo regular in-service training regarding communication, laws, and subject area education" (Manager, Male).

Managers' characteristics

"School managers should attach importance to values. They should act ethically and have advanced communication skills. They should have vision and know how to share. They should act like a team leader" (Manager, Male). According to managers the basic policy of the schools must be "forming a democratic school climate". In this process managers suggested participant management, detection of managers by members of school and group management.
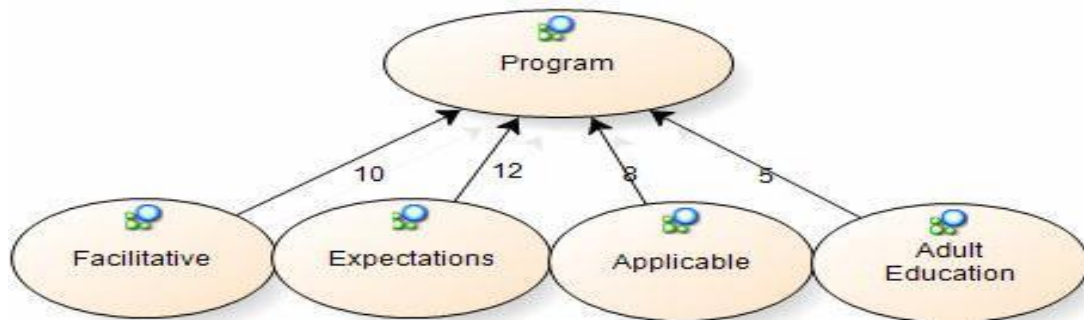
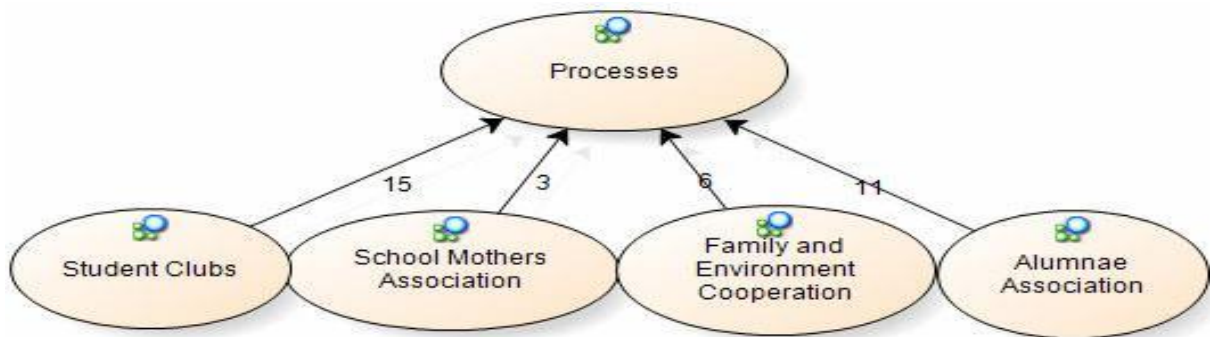**Figure 4.** Managers' views about the program dimension.

Figure 5. Managers' views about the processes dimension.

Manager views on programs

Some school managers' views about the "school programs" dimension are shown in Figure 4.

Facilitative

"School programs should be flexible and allow room for the socialization of students and the development of their special talents" (Manager, Male).

Expectations

"School programs should take into account teacher, student and family expectations and suggestions in the preparation stage" (Manager, Male).

Sociability

"School programs should aim to improve the cooperation between the school and its environment" (Manager,

Female).

Adult education

"While programs are being designed, students should not be the sole target. The interests of adults, particularly parents, should also be considered (such as organizing computer, foreign language and communication courses)" (Manager, Male). According to managers edu-cation program of the school must not be limited with only students. They mentioned the importance of educating managers, adults (parents) and cooperating with civil society organizations about this subject.

Manager views on process

Some school managers' views about the "school processes" dimension are shown in Figure 5.

Student clubs

"Social expectations and needs should be considered to

establish student clubs (such as charity, travel, sports, drawing, music, project development, technology clubs) and students should be able to join the club(s) of their choice" (Manager, Male).

School mothers association

"An association for and by the mothers of students should be established and led by the school manager. The association should develop solutions to the discipline problems at the school, create new economic resources for it, cooperate with and assist the school management. All mothers at the school should be encouraged to volunteer for this association" (Manager, Female).

Family and non governmental organizations cooperation

"At the end of every semester, a school-family festival should be organized by parents and residents of the neighborhood to bring income to the school by selling certain products (such as food or other items)" (Manager, Female).

Alumnae association

"The school should have an alumnae association and all graduates should be encouraged to become members. The association should have the power to collect donations from the alumnae to meet school expenditures and to offer scholarships" (Manager, Male) . According to managers schools must compensate their own expenses. Schools' dependency on environment must be reduced. Therefore advertisement income, graduate organization of school and voluntary campaigns of families for the sake of school are regarded as supportive elements.

DISCUSSION

Managers have provided some advices for schools to become attractive in the sense of human resources, construction of school, school policy, education programs and their relationship with social environment. These advices are parallel with the detection of Purkey and Schmidt (1987) on the point that elements which composes the school (People, Places, Policies, Programs, Processes) must be organized according to the needs of students and families. When the advices of managers especially about human resources, school policy and school-environment relations (technology calsses, education with games, socail activities, giving students

and teachers' right of electing school manager, students's voluntary participation in civil society organizations) are considered; it is seen that they support the view of Perone (1998) which is "students find school boring" and the detection of McMullen (1999) which is "non-existence of democratic school environment are one of the reasons of school safety". Moreover, advices of school managers to make school more attractive in the sense of human resources, construction of school, school policy, education programs and their relationship with social environment support the advices of Purkey (1991) on the point that "schools must provide social facilities to students and teachers in order to be attractive, schools must be governed democratically, they must have cooperation with civil soicety organizations and responsibilities of teachers in government must be increased". Being different in this study advices of "schools must be in the form of campus, teacher shall elect the managers, organization of school mothers' must be founded, mentor application must become widespread" were given.

Conclusion

Schools which attempt to shape their students in line with existing market conditions generally face dissatisfaction as such school systems ignore student preferences such as likes, interests and being able to decide by their own self perceptions. "Invitational theory" was born as a reaction to classical school practices and aims to make schools more appealing (Purkey and Novak, 1984) . In order to realize this, individuals need to be given an opportunity to use and maximize their potential. Schools can only offer these opportunities through purposeful activities to improve the school. This study focused on the views and suggestions of primary school managers on how to make schools a more secure and appealing environment in line with the principles of "ınvitational theory". Schools may be made more appealing according to the "ınvitational theory" and practice by making the 5 basic dimensions of the school (People, Places, Program, Processes and Policies) functional and consistent with people's expectations.

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