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Research Article

Instructional Leadership in a Centralized Education System: Revisiting the Practice of School Principals

Merkezi Bir Eğitim Sisteminde Öğretimsel Liderlik: Okul Müdürlerinin Uygulamalarının Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study examines teachers' and school administrators' views on principals' instructional leadership roles and the effects of these roles on educational processes.* ***Method:*** *Within the framework of a qualitative phenomenological research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants and analyzed using thematic analysis.* ***Findings:*** *The findings indicate that instructional leadership practices are concentrated in three main domains: defining the school mission, managing instructional processes, and developing learning environments. Participants emphasized that principals support instructional practices, foster a positive school climate, and strengthen student-centered learning approaches. Instructional leadership was found to produce multilevel effects, including the strengthening of organizational culture at the school level, the enhancement of teacher motivation and professional development at the teacher level, and the improvement of learning outcomes at the student level.* ***Conclusion:*** *The findings reveal that instructional leadership should be addressed not only in terms of individual leadership competencies but also in conjunction with sustainable professional development opportunities, collaborative school cultures, and supportive educational policies. In this respect, the study contributes to understanding the contextual, relational, and multilevel nature of instructional leadership from the perspectives of teachers and school administrators.*

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Öz

Amaç: *Bu çalışma, okul müdürlerinin öğretimsel liderlik rollerine ve bu rollerin eğitim süreçleri üzerindeki etkilerine ilişkin öğretmen ve okul yöneticilerinin görüşlerini incelemektedir.* ***Yöntem:*** *Nitel fenomenolojik araştırma deseni kapsamında, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilen veriler tematik analiz yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir.* ***Bulgular:*** *Bulgular, öğretimsel liderlik uygulamalarının okul misyonunun belirlenmesi, öğretim süreçlerinin yönetimi ve öğrenme ortamlarının geliştirilmesi olmak üzere üç temel alanda yoğunlaştığını göstermektedir. Katılımcılar, okul müdürlerinin öğretim uygulamalarını desteklediğini, olumlu bir okul iklimi oluşturduğunu ve öğrenci merkezli öğrenme anlayışını güçlendirdiğini vurgulamıştır. Öğretimsel liderliğin; okul düzeyinde örgüt kültürünün güçlenmesi, öğretmen düzeyinde motivasyon ve mesleki gelişimin desteklenmesi, öğrenci düzeyinde ise öğrenme çıktılarının iyileştirilmesi gibi çok düzeyli etkiler yarattığı belirlenmiştir.* ***Sonuç:*** *Elde edilen bulgular, öğretimsel liderliğin yalnızca bireysel liderlik yeterlikleriyle değil; sürdürülebilir mesleki gelişim olanakları, işbirliğine dayalı okul kültürleri ve destekleyici eğitim politikalarıyla birlikte ele alınması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yönüyle çalışma, öğretimsel liderliğin bağlamsal, ilişkisel ve çok düzeyli yapısına öğretmen ve okul yöneticilerinin bakış açısından katkı sunmaktadır.*

Introduction

The impact of school principals on learning and teaching processes has attracted increasing attention in education systems worldwide. However, despite this growing scholarly and policy interest, there is still limited clarity regarding how instructional leadership is enacted in everyday school practices and how these practices are experienced by different school actors (Neumerski, 2013). In this context, instructional leadership has emerged as a significant leadership approach that emphasizes the role of principals in shaping instructional quality and improving teaching and learning processes (Hallinger, 2008). Rather than conceptualizing the school principal as a purely managerial figure, instructional leadership positions principals as key agents who influence instructional improvement through interaction, guidance, and pedagogical support (Marks & Printy, 2003; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

The historical origins of instructional leadership can be traced back to the Effective Schools Movement, which examined how principals' direct involvement in instructional practices contributed to student achievement (Lamsal, 2022). Evidence demonstrating that principals are central components of effective schools triggered a paradigm shift, positioning them not only as administrators but also as instructional leaders who actively shape teaching and learning environments to enhance student outcomes (Vogel, 2018). As one of the most frequently referenced frameworks in educational leadership research, instructional leadership is commonly defined through the model introduced by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). This framework conceptualizes instructional leadership across three core dimensions-defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and

promoting a positive learning climate- encompassing ten leadership functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger et al., 2015). Although this model has provided a foundational structure for decades of research, scholars have increasingly questioned its principal-centered orientation and its limited attention to teacher agency and collaborative instructional processes (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Hallinger et al., 2015).

Early conceptualizations of instructional leadership primarily emphasized principals' roles in setting clear instructional goals, supervising classroom practices, and providing feedback to teachers (Yaacob, 2023). Over time, however, instructional leadership has evolved to include more collaborative and participatory approaches that involve teachers in leadership processes and promote shared responsibility for instructional improvement (Tahir, 2023). International initiatives aimed at strengthening instructional leadership highlight its growing importance for school improvement and sustainable learning outcomes (Anania & Bush, 2023). Moreover, integrating instructional leadership with other leadership models-such as transformational and distributed leadership-has been shown to increase its relevance across diverse educational contexts (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Amzat et al., 2022). Despite these developments, existing research offers limited in-depth qualitative evidence (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Neumerski, 2013) on how these leadership dimensions are reflected in daily school practices and how they are perceived by both teachers and school administrators.

More recently, instructional leadership has been conceptualized within the broader framework of leadership for learning, which emphasizes the dynamic interactions between leaders, teachers, and students in the learning process (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Shaked, 2022). This perspective underscores the importance of professional learning communities, where instructional leaders guide, support, and empower teachers to improve instructional practices (Salo et al., 2014). While this conceptual evolution expands the scope of instructional leadership, many studies remain at a theoretical level, offering limited insight into how leadership-for-learning principles translate into concrete leadership practices within specific national and institutional contexts. Consequently, understanding instructional leadership as a lived and relational practice remains an important research priority.

Empirical research suggests that instructional leadership encompasses a wide range of responsibilities for school principals, including setting instructional goals, coordinating curricula, and fostering a positive school climate (Nguyen et al., 2020). Direction-setting practices, such as articulating a shared vision and communicating high expectations, are consistently identified as core components of effective school leadership (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Principals' capacity to establish clear instructional priorities and cultivate a culture of high expectations has been shown to significantly influence teacher performance and student achievement (Raman et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of these practices largely depends on contextual conditions, leadership

capacity, and the extent to which teachers are meaningfully engaged in instructional decision-making.

Traditional models of instructional leadership have often emphasized a unidirectional approach, positioning principals as the primary actors responsible for defining instructional goals, monitoring teaching practices, and evaluating teacher performance (Parlar & Cansoy, 2017). In contrast, more recent perspectives advocate for shared instructional leadership models that emphasize collaboration among school stakeholders, particularly teachers (Sibomana, 2020). These models are grounded in the assumption that effective instructional leadership requires teacher participation, as teachers possess essential pedagogical expertise and contextual knowledge. Research indicates that involving teachers in instructional decision-making fosters coherence in instructional practices and contributes to improved educational outcomes (Zhan et al., 2023). Furthermore, empirical findings demonstrate positive relationships between shared instructional leadership, teacher self-efficacy (Alanoglu, 2022), and teachers' willingness to assume greater responsibility for instructional improvement (Romero, 2024). Nevertheless, there remains insufficient qualitative evidence examining how these collaborative leadership practices are negotiated and experienced within centralized education systems.

The capacity of principals to enact instructional leadership practices effectively is a critical factor influencing the quality and impact of this leadership approach. Studies have shown that principals' beliefs in their own leadership capabilities significantly shape their instructional leadership behaviors, which in turn affect teacher motivation, efficacy, and engagement (Hallinger et al., 2017). Accordingly, professional development initiatives aimed at strengthening principals' leadership self-efficacy are considered essential for improving instructional leadership practices. Cansoy et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of evaluating instructional leadership from teachers' perspectives, arguing that effective leadership is closely tied to principals' ability to support and interact with teaching staff. Variations in principals' instructional leadership competencies may therefore result in inconsistent effects on school performance and instructional quality (Ay & Boz, 2022; Cansoy & Polatcan, 2018).

In the Turkish educational context, interest in instructional leadership has grown considerably in recent years, reflecting efforts to understand how school principals can influence teaching and learning processes to improve student achievement (Ay & Boz, 2022; Gümüş et al., 2021). The centralized, hierarchical, and competitive structure of the Turkish education system creates both constraints and unique expectations for instructional leadership practices. Limited school-level autonomy, strong bureaucratic control, and accountability pressures shape how principals enact instructional leadership in practice (Ertem, 2021; Gümüş et al., 2021). These contextual characteristics make Türkiye a particularly relevant setting for examining tensions between traditional, hierarchical leadership models and contemporary, collaborative approaches to instructional leadership. Empirical studies indicate that principals' instructional

leadership behaviors play a critical role in enhancing school effectiveness by influencing teachers' professional learning and instructional practices (Bellibaş et al., 2021). However, the relationship between instructional leadership and school outcomes in Türkiye remains complex and context-dependent, highlighting the need for deeper qualitative inquiry (Gümüş & Akcaoğlu, 2013).

Criticism has also been directed toward the persistence of hierarchical leadership structures in Turkish schools, which may limit opportunities for collaborative and shared leadership practices (Gümüş et al., 2021). Recent policy developments, including the updated Law on the Teaching Profession in Türkiye (2024), emphasize school administrators' responsibilities in guiding curriculum implementation, fostering positive learning environments, and improving teaching quality. Despite these formal expectations, a noticeable gap remains between policy intentions and leadership practices at the school level (Ertem, 2021). This gap underscores the growing recognition that collaborative instructional leadership is essential for the successful implementation of educational reforms and the development of professional learning communities oriented toward continuous improvement and student achievement (Hallinger et al., 2017). Consequently, strengthening school leaders' competencies to navigate and implement collective leadership practices has become an important policy and research concern (Peralta, 2023).

Against this background, understanding instructional leadership as a relational and practice-based phenomenon requires close examination of the perspectives of those directly involved in school processes. The current study aims to contribute to the instructional leadership literature by examining the extent to which classical instructional leadership approaches are integrated with contemporary perspectives such as shared leadership, professional learning communities, and multi-actor participation. By focusing on the views of both teachers and school administrators, this study seeks to provide a context-sensitive and practice-oriented understanding of instructional leadership in Turkish schools. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do school administrators and teachers perceive the instructional leadership behaviors of school principals?

RQ2: What are the perceived consequences of principals' instructional leadership behaviors according to school administrators and teachers?

RQ3: What solutions do school administrators and teachers suggest for improving principals' instructional leadership behaviors?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in phenomenology to explore participants' lived experiences and perceptions of instructional leadership**.** According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological research seeks to understand how

individuals make sense of a particular phenomenon based on their direct experiences. Accordingly, this design was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of how instructional leadership is experienced, interpreted, and enacted by school administrators and teachers within their professional contexts.

In line with the phenomenological orientation of the study, data analysis was conducted through a thematic analytic approach that combined both deductive and inductive procedures. Specifically, themes related to instructional leadership behaviors were initially examined using a deductive lens informed by an established conceptual framework, whereas themes concerning the perceived consequences of instructional leadership practices and suggestions for improvement were identified inductively from the data. This analytic strategy enabled the study to both examine the relevance of existing theoretical dimensions and capture emergent meanings grounded in participants' lived experiences. Thus, instructional leadership was examined as a multidimensional and context-sensitive phenomenon.

Study Group

Consistent with the phenomenological research design, purposive sampling was employed using a maximum variation strategy to capture a wide range of lived experiences related to instructional leadership (Patton, 2002). This approach was chosen to ensure diversity in participants' professional backgrounds and contextual characteristics rather than statistical representativeness**.** Participants were deliberately selected to reflect variation in gender, years of professional experience, school level, teaching branch, and regional location.

The study group consisted of 20 participants, including ten school principals and ten teachers working in public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Participants represented preschool, primary, secondary, and high school settings. Principals and teachers were not selected from the same schools; instead, participants were included based on their direct engagement with instructional leadership, either as leaders enacting such practices or as teachers experiencing them in daily school life.

This sampling strategy facilitated an in-depth exploration of instructional leadership experiences across diverse institutional and regional contexts. Although paired sampling from the same schools was not employed, this decision was consistent with the phenomenological emphasis on individual lived experiences rather than relational or organizational comparisons. Nevertheless, this choice may limit interpretations related to interactional dynamics within specific school settings, which is acknowledged as a methodological consideration. Participating teachers were coded as T1, T2, …, T10, while administrators were coded as A1, A2, …, A10. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics*

Participants	Gender	Education Degree	Professional Teaching Experience	Years at Current School	School Level	Province
T1	Male	Bachelor's	15 years	1 year	Primary School	Van
T2	Male	Bachelor's	20 years	2 months	Middle School	Malatya
T3	Male	Bachelor's	21 years	4 months	Primary School	Gümüşhane
T4	Male	Graduate Degree	21 years	1 year	High School	Gaziantep
T5	Male	Bachelor's	28 years	3 years	Middle School	Ankara
T6	Female	Graduate Degree	16 years	2 years	Preschool	Zonguldak
T7	Male	Bachelor's	4 years	2 years	Middle School	Isparta
T8	Female	Graduate Degree	2 years	2 years	High School	Uşak
T9	Male	Bachelor's	11 years	1 year	High School	Istanbul
T10	Female	Graduate Degree	12 years	7 years	Preschool	Bursa
A1	Female	Graduate Degree	18 years	7 years	Preschool	Antalya
A2	Male	Graduate Degree	32 years	7 years	High School	Konya
A3	Female	Graduate Degree	5 years	24 years	Preschool	Erzurum
A4	Female	Bachelor's	21 years	5 years	Primary School	Istanbul
A5	Male	Bachelor's	28 years	7 years	High School	Konya
A6	Female	Bachelor's	25 years	4 months	Primary School	Bursa
A7	Male	Bachelor's	10 years	3 months	Primary School	Şanlıurfa
A8	Male	Bachelor's	36 years	1 year	Middle School	Kayseri
A9	Female	Bachelor's	28 years	8 years	Primary School	Balıkesir
A10	Female	Graduate Degree	12 years	4 years	High School	Adana

Of the participants, nine were female, eleven were male, and seven held postgraduate degrees. Professional experience ranged from two to 36 years, and twelve participants had been working at their current school for fewer than four years. Four participants worked in preschool, seven in primary school, three in middle school, and six in high school. Six participants were classroom teachers, and the remaining teachers represented ten different subject areas.

Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers to explore instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals and their perceived effects on educational processes. The interview form consisted of a demographic information section and two parallel sections containing open-ended questions tailored separately for teachers and school administrators.

In its initial version, each interview form included three main questions, each supported by three follow-up (probe) questions, resulting in a total of three main questions and six follow-up questions per form. The main questions addressed are (a) instructional leadership practices, (b) perceived outcomes of these practices at the school, teacher, and student levels, and (c) suggestions for improving instructional leadership roles.

Interview questions were developed based on an extensive review of the instructional leadership literature. To ensure content validity, the draft interview form was reviewed by two experts in educational administration. Experts evaluated each item using a three-point scale ("Appropriate," "Should be revised," "Not appropriate") and provided written feedback where necessary. Following expert review, minor revisions were made to the wording and phrasing of some questions to improve clarity, comprehensibility, and role appropriateness for teachers and school administrators. These revisions involved rephrasing certain questions and simplifying complex expressions; however, no questions were added or removed. Therefore, the number of main questions and follow-up questions remained unchanged in the final version of the interview form. The content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated in accordance with Lawshe's (1975) method, resulting in a CVR value of .85, which exceeds the recommended threshold of .75.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted during December and January of the 2024–2025 academic year. Participants were drawn from sixteen provinces across different regions of Türkiye. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants in Konya, while interviews with participants from other provinces were carried out via the Zoom platform due to logistical constraints.

All interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted in a conversational and supportive manner, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences through probing questions.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure data accuracy. Interviews lasted approximately 25–30 minutes. Data collection continued until

thematic saturation was reached, that is, until no new codes or themes emerged from subsequent interviews. Following transcription, interview texts were reviewed and edited for clarity, and transcripts were shared with participants via email to conduct member checking.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis software. In alignment with the phenomenological orientation of the study, the analysis was conducted within a thematic analysis framework that incorporated both deductive and inductive coding processes. Combining these two approaches allowed the data to be examined in relation to existing instructional leadership frameworks while also enabling the emergence of new themes grounded in participants' experiences. Although the analysis was informed by the study's research questions and an established instructional leadership framework, these were used to guide the analysis rather than to predetermine its outcomes. In the initial stage of analysis, predefined instructional leadership dimensions were used as sensitizing concepts rather than fixed categories to guide the coding process. In this sense, deductive codes were employed to organize data related to principals' instructional leadership practices, while the coding process remained open to inductively generated codes that emerged directly from participants' perspectives through iterative reading and comparison of the data. Questions related to the outcomes of instructional leadership practices and suggestions for their improvement were also examined within this flexible analytic structure. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic approach that enables the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning across participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis followed the key phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. Although the final themes broadly corresponded to the research questions, their content, scope, and sub-themes were shaped through an iterative and primarily inductive process grounded in participants' experiences rather than being imposed a priori. Codes were generated primarily inductively from the interview data and subsequently organized into themes and sub-themes reflecting shared perspectives on instructional leadership practices, their effects, and development needs. During the data analysis process, the interview transcripts were read thoroughly to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' responses, after which the coding stage began. Initial codes were generated independently by two researchers using a common coding framework developed through iterative discussions. To assess inter-coder reliability, both researchers independently coded a randomly selected subset of the data. Following the independent coding process, discrepancies were discussed in a consensus meeting, and the coding scheme was finalized. Inter-coder reliability was established using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.78$), indicating substantial agreement between coders. Throughout this process, themes and sub-themes were refined through constant comparison across cases to ensure that analytic decisions were

grounded in the data rather than solely derived from the initial theoretical framework. Representative participant quotations were included in the findings section to support the themes and enhance trustworthiness (Merriam, 2015).

Research Ethics

The necessary ethical committee approval for the research was obtained from the Fırat University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee at its meeting dated 21.11.2024 and numbered 2024/23.

Findings

The findings obtained in the study should be presented in accordance with the research objectives and/or hypotheses. Relevant tables, figures, charts, or diagrams may be used to present the findings.

This section presents findings on the instructional leadership behaviors of school administrators derived from qualitative analysis. To enhance analytic clarity and transparency, the findings are organized hierarchically. Each main theme is presented together with its related sub-themes, followed by the descriptive codes generated during the coding process. These codes represent recurring instructional leadership practices emphasized by participants and constitute the analytic basis of the interpretations offered below.

Findings related to the instructional leadership behaviors of school administrators

Drawing on the instructional leadership framework proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), instructional leadership behaviors were initially examined under three sensitizing categories: defining the school mission, managing the curriculum, and improving school learning environments. These categories were not treated as fixed themes; rather, they guided the analysis while allowing patterns to emerge inductively from participants' accounts. As analysis progressed, participants' narratives both confirmed and extended this framework, revealing instructional leadership as a set of relational, pedagogical, and practice-oriented behaviors enacted in daily school life. Although frequencies are reported to indicate the relative emphasis of codes across participants, they are not intended for statistical generalization.

Defining the school mission

Within the theme of defining the school mission, two sub-themes were identified: setting school goals and sharing school goals. These sub-themes were represented by eleven descriptive codes, including student-centered education, stakeholder participation, consensus building, alignment with national and moral values, academic development, equality and justice, school culture, and consideration of the school's environment. Participants most frequently emphasized stakeholder participation in decision-making (f

= 10) and student-centered education (f = 8), suggesting that defining the school mission was perceived as a collective and inclusive process rather than a top-down administrative task. In addition, adherence to national and moral values (f = 6) and consensus building (f = 5) emerged as important normative dimensions of mission definition. One administrator described this collaborative and transparent process as follows: *"In determining the school's mission, we clarified its values and goals with the participation of all stakeholders and shared them openly to ensure alignment with student-centered and equality-oriented principles"* (A7). Another participant similarly emphasized alignment with broader national objectives, stating, *"We aim to raise responsible individuals with ethical values while aligning the school's mission with national goals and the views of stakeholders"* (A5). Likewise, a teacher highlighted the inclusive nature of leadership by noting, *"Teachers' opinions regarding the school's vision and mission are valued and discussed collectively"* (T9). Taken together, these findings indicate that defining the school mission is enacted as a collaborative, value-driven instructional leadership practice grounded in participation, ethical considerations, and student-centered principles.

Managing the curriculum

The theme of managing the curriculum comprised three sub-themes: supervising and evaluating teaching, monitoring student achievement, and coordinating the curriculum. Across these sub-themes, seven descriptive codes were identified, reflecting instructional leadership as active engagement with teaching and learning processes.

Supervising and evaluating teaching

Within this sub-theme, the most frequently emphasized code was monitoring and directing teaching practices (f = 10), followed by communication and collaboration (f = 6), indicating that instructional supervision was perceived as a continuous and supportive process rather than a purely evaluative one. Participants described supervision as facilitating adaptation and professional learning during periods of instructional change. One teacher explained this process by stating, *"The principal closely followed our weekly instructional processes and provided guidance during the curriculum change, focusing on professional support rather than control"* (T6). Similarly, an administrator noted that despite initial resistance from some teachers, instructional coherence was sustained through information sharing and experience exchange, stating, *"Although some teachers resisted the changes, we supported the process through meetings and lesson supervision, which helped ensure instructional alignment"* (A4). Taken together, these narratives indicate that instructional supervision functions as a collaborative mechanism that supports instructional alignment and professional growth.

Monitoring student achievement

The sub-theme of monitoring student achievement was represented by two descriptive codes: monitoring achievement on a course basis (f = 3) and investigating the reasons for failure (f = 1). Although mentioned less frequently, these codes highlight the role of data-informed practices in instructional leadership. Participants emphasized that achievement data were discussed collectively and used diagnostically rather than punitively. One participant described this process as follows: *"We analyze student achievement course by course and discuss the results together to identify potential problems"* (T5). Another participant noted that performance data informed both motivation and instructional improvement, stating, *"Student success is recognized and rewarded, and achievement data are used to support goal setting and motivation"* (T7). These findings suggest that instructional leadership involves using achievement data not only for evaluation but also for motivation and instructional improvement.

Coordinating the curriculum

Curriculum coordination was represented by three descriptive codes, with particular emphasis on curriculum knowledge and effective teaching (f = 7) and information sharing (f = 7), underscoring the importance of leadership competence in navigating curriculum reforms. Participants highlighted ongoing communication and pedagogical guidance as central mechanisms of curriculum coordination. For example, one teacher emphasized the supportive role of leadership during curriculum change, stating, *"We were guided through the new curriculum by administrators who were knowledgeable about the program"* (T5). Similarly, an administrator described facilitating curriculum innovations through structured communication, noting, *"We introduced curriculum changes through presentations and informational materials to ensure that everyone was informed"* (A4). These accounts indicate that curriculum coordination is enacted through continuous communication and pedagogical leadership rather than formal regulation alone.

Improving school learning environments

The theme of improving school learning environments included five sub-themes and eighteen descriptive codes: supporting professional development, encouraging learning, encouraging teachers, monitoring time spent on instruction, and being visible at school. Participants most frequently referred to rewarding teachers (f = 9), diversifying learning environments (f = 8), professional training (f = 7), and efficient use of resources (f = 7), highlighting instructional leadership as a multifaceted process shaping both instructional conditions and school climate.

Supporting professional development

Within this sub-theme, six descriptive codes were identified, with professional training (f = 7) and motivation (f = 4) being the most prominent. Participants described professional development as both structurally supported and motivationally reinforced. One administrator explained this support by stating, *"We made organizational arrangements*

to ensure that teachers could participate in in-service training while maintaining instructional continuity" (A1). Similarly, a teacher emphasized the encouraging role of leadership, noting, *"The principal actively encouraged us to participate in professional development activities"* (T4). These findings indicate that professional development support extends beyond encouragement to include practical facilitation.

Encouraging learning

The sub-theme of encouraging learning was characterized by five descriptive codes, particularly diversifying learning environments (f = 8) and providing material support (f = 7). Participants emphasized improvements in both physical and instructional resources. One teacher noted that learning environments were actively developed, stating, *"Laboratories and libraries were improved to support learning"* (T5). Another participant emphasized collaborative resource provision, noting, *"Administrators worked together with teachers to meet material needs"* (T8). These accounts highlight instructional leadership as fostering enriched and resource-supported learning contexts.

Encouraging teachers

Encouraging teachers included three descriptive codes: rewarding teachers (f = 9), supporting the application of training outcomes (f = 4), and providing support (f = 4). Participants described encouragement as combining recognition with sustained follow-up support. One administrator stated, *"Teachers were encouraged to apply what they learned in training programs, and we supported them during implementation"* (A4). Another participant emphasized motivation through recognition, noting, *"Teachers were motivated through material support and recognition of their preparedness"* (A8). These findings suggest that encouragement functions as a sustained instructional leadership practice rather than a symbolic gesture.

Monitoring time spent on instruction

Two descriptive codes emerged under this sub-theme: punctuality (f = 3) and monitoring instructional duration (f = 3). Participants noted that instructional time was monitored in a supportive manner aimed at maintaining instructional discipline. One administrator mentioned this approach by stating, *"We encouraged punctuality to ensure effective use of instructional time"* (A8). Similarly, a teacher emphasized guidance based on planning, noting, *"Instructional time was monitored through guidance aligned with lesson plans"* (T4). These findings indicate that time monitoring is framed as an instructional discipline rather than punitive control.

Being visible at school

Finally, being visible at school included two descriptive codes: accessibility to students (f = 3) and responsiveness to needs (f = 2). Visibility was described as contributing to approachability and relational leadership. One participant stated, *"Administrators were*

accessible to students during breaks" (T1), while another emphasized a participatory administrative approach, noting, *"Leadership was based on collaboration and responsiveness to needs"* (A8). Taken together, these findings indicate that visibility supports a positive school climate by fostering trust, accessibility, and open communication.

Findings related to the results of school administrators' ınstructional leadership behaviors

In this phase of the analysis, the results of school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors were examined at three analytically distinct but interrelated levels: *school-level outcomes, teacher-level outcomes,* and *student-level outcomes.* This categorization emerged inductively from participants' narratives rather than being predetermined. Codes were systematically organized according to the primary focus of the expressed outcomes, namely, organizational structures and school climate at the school level, professional experiences and instructional practices at the teacher level, and learning-related or developmental outcomes at the student level. This structure enabled a coherent and analytically grounded presentation of findings while preserving the distinct focus of each outcome level.

School-level outcomes of instructional leadership behaviors

School-level outcomes were identified when participants' statements primarily referred to organizational culture, collective practices, institutional climate, or whole-school performance rather than individual actors. Within this category, six descriptive codes were identified: school success, cooperation and participation, strong organizational culture, positive school climate, effective communication, and school happiness. Participants most frequently emphasized strong organizational culture (f = 8) and positive school climate (f = 8), followed by school success (f = 7) and cooperation and participation (f = 7), indicating that instructional leadership is perceived as a central driver of the school's collective functioning and emotional atmosphere. One teacher illustrated this influence by stating, *"The principal fostered an environment characterized by respect, cooperation, and innovation, which directly influenced educational quality and ensured continuity in teaching practices"* (T7). Similarly, an administrator emphasized the immediacy of leadership impact by noting, *"The school climate changed from the very beginning under the current leadership"* (A4). Taken together, these findings suggest that instructional leadership at the school level extends beyond managerial coordination and plays a pivotal role in shaping shared norms, collaboration, and a positive climate that supports both teaching and learning.

Teacher-level outcomes of instructional leadership behaviors

Teacher-level outcomes were identified when participants linked instructional leadership practices to teachers' motivation, well-being, professional commitment, or instructional

engagement. Thirteen descriptive codes were identified under this category, reflecting a wide range of professional and emotional outcomes. The most frequently emphasized code was teacher well-being (f = 10), followed by motivation (f = 7) and organizational commitment (f = 4); other codes included trust, professional development, self-efficacy, interaction, innovation, interest in teaching, self-confidence, cooperation, socialization, and happiness. One administrator highlighted the relationship between leadership, well-being, and professional success by stating, *"Employees who feel comfortable and identify with the organization tend to be more successful, which motivates us to create a school environment where both teachers and students feel valued"* (A5). Another participant emphasized the motivational impact of leadership support, noting, *"Offering professional development opportunities and valuing teachers' ideas increased motivation and enabled more effective and creative instruction"* (A7). Overall, these findings indicate that instructional leadership at the teacher level functions as a relational and developmental process, supporting teachers' emotional well-being, professional growth, and sustained engagement with teaching.

Student-level outcomes of instructional leadership behaviors

Student-level outcomes were identified when participants explicitly connected instructional leadership behaviors to students' academic performance, behavioral changes, engagement, or social and emotional development. Seven descriptive codes emerged within this category: student achievement, interest in lessons, positive behavioral change, self-confidence, cooperation, socialization, happiness, and equal access to opportunities. Among these, student achievement (f = 5) was the most frequently mentioned outcome, followed by positive behavioral change (f = 3), while socio-emotional outcomes such as self-confidence (f = 2), socialization (f = 2), and happiness (f = 2) reflected a holistic perception of student development. One administrator noted the broader impact of these outcomes by stating, *"When parents observed improvements in their children's success and behavior, they provided increased financial and moral support to the school"* (A8). Another participant emphasized the developmental scope of instructional leadership, noting, *"Instructional leadership practices supported students' scientific thinking, teamwork, socialization, self-confidence, and research skills through project-based activities"* (A2). Taken together, these findings suggest that instructional leadership contributes not only to improved student performance but also to students' social, emotional, and motivational development, reinforcing the school's educational mission comprehensively.

Findings related to the development of instructional leadership behaviors among school administrators

This section presents findings related to the development of instructional leadership behaviors among school administrators. The categories reported here were generated inductively through iterative coding and constant comparison of participants' narratives. Codes were grouped based on whether they reflected *organizational and managerial*

practices, individual characteristics of administrators, structural and policy-related conditions, professional learning processes, or *collaborative relationships*. Through this analytic process, five interrelated categories and twenty-five descriptive codes emerged: *managerial roles, personal characteristics, policy, education,* and *collaboration*. Together, these categories reflect participants' lived experiences regarding the factors that contribute to the development and strengthening of instructional leadership behaviors.

Managerial roles

The category of managerial roles represents organizational mechanisms through which instructional leadership behaviors are enacted and reinforced in daily school practices. Eight descriptive codes were identified within this category, with participants most frequently emphasizing supporting professional development (f = 6), communication and stakeholder participation (f = 5), improving the educational environment (f = 4), and encouraging teachers (f = 4). Participants highlighted leadership practices that foster both teacher and student development rather than focusing solely on administrative control. One administrator articulated this view by stating, *"Instructional leadership requires encouraging teachers and students to develop new teaching models, and personal development is fundamental to this process"* (A3). The importance of participatory decision-making was also emphasized, as one teacher noted, *"The opinions of assistant principals, teachers, and other staff should be considered in institutional matters, and processes should be carried out transparently with everyone's knowledge"* (T1). Taken together, these findings suggest that managerial roles contribute to instructional leadership development by enabling professional growth, fostering collaboration, and creating supportive learning environments.

Personal characteristics

Participants consistently emphasized that the personal characteristics of school administrators play a crucial role in the development of instructional leadership behaviors. Within this category, six descriptive codes were identified, with leadership competence emerging as the most frequently mentioned (f = 11), alongside effective communication, being hardworking, having vision, being empathetic, and being flexible. One administrator described an effective school leader as *"confident, determined, open to risk-taking, capable of crisis management, and supportive of innovation and learning"* (A5), highlighting leadership competence as a multidimensional personal capacity shaping instructional leadership behaviors. Similarly, a teacher emphasized the importance of continuous learning by stating, *"Administrators should keep up with educational innovations and regularly follow professional publications"* (T2). These findings indicate that instructional leadership is closely tied to administrators' individual attributes, particularly their competence, communication skills, and commitment to ongoing professional growth.

Policy

The policy category captures structural and systemic conditions that participants perceived as influencing the development of instructional leadership behaviors. Five descriptive codes were identified, with increasing administrators' authority (f = 3) and improving personal rights (f = 3) being the most frequently mentioned. Participants emphasized the need for structured and formalized pathways for school leadership roles. One teacher suggested, *"Administrative positions should involve a specific academic and observational process, similar to teacher training, and should not be assigned to unwilling individuals"* (T3). Another participant highlighted the importance of contextual experience in policymaking, noting, *"Principals' regional experiences and perspectives should be incorporated into policy decisions"* (A6). These accounts suggest that instructional leadership development is shaped not only by individual effort but also by broader policy frameworks regulating authority, motivation, and career development.

Education

The education category reflects professional learning processes that support the development of instructional leadership behaviors. Three descriptive codes were identified, with professional development being the most frequently emphasized (f = 10), followed by self-development (f = 4). Participants stressed the importance of both institutional support and individual initiative in professional learning. One participant stated, *"Administrators should participate in training programs that help them realize their potential and develop their knowledge and skills"* (T8), while another emphasized continuous self-improvement by noting, *"Training in areas such as communication, public speaking, and personal development is essential"* (A10). These findings indicate that ongoing education is perceived as a central mechanism for strengthening instructional leadership capacity and adapting to evolving instructional and organizational demands.

Collaboration

The category of collaboration highlights the relational dimension of instructional leadership development. Three descriptive codes were identified, including collaboration with other school principals (f = 2), collaboration with teachers (f = 2), and valuing teamwork (f = 1). Participants emphasized that collaborative practices enhance leadership capacity through shared learning and collective problem-solving. One administrator noted, *"Working collaboratively with teachers and involving them in decision-making processes contributes to the development of a multifaceted leadership approach"* (A7). Similarly, a teacher emphasized shared responsibility by stating, *"Collaboration strengthens leadership by enabling shared responsibility and teamwork"* (T8). Overall, these findings suggest that collaboration functions as a supportive context in which instructional leadership behaviors are refined and strengthened through interaction and shared practice.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the development of instructional leadership behaviors among school administrators is a multifaceted and dynamic process

shaped by the interaction of managerial practices, personal characteristics, professional learning opportunities, collaborative relationships, and policy contexts. Rather than operating in isolation, these factors collectively contribute to strengthening instructional leadership capacity within schools.

Discussion

This study examines the instructional leadership roles of school administrators from a multidimensional perspective. It reveals the nature of leadership practices and their impact on the school community. Beyond describing leadership practices, the findings advance current instructional leadership literature by offering a context-sensitive interpretation of how instructional leadership is enacted and experienced within the highly centralized structure of the Turkish education system.

Research Question 1

The findings regarding participants' perceptions of instructional leadership practices were analyzed within the framework of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model and were found to be highly consistent with this framework. Principals were observed to be particularly proactive in defining the school's mission and vision and in involving teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in this process, indicating that mission definition extended beyond a technical administrative task to become a shared and relational leadership practice grounded in collaboration and collective sense-making. This finding demonstrates that instructional leadership is enacted as a participatory process rather than a hierarchical function, and in line with the shared instructional leadership approach described by Marks and Printy (2003), highlights the importance of distributed responsibility and stakeholder engagement. The literature similarly emphasizes stakeholder participation as a key component of school development (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Naz & Rashid, 2021) and notes that effective leaders not only determine the school mission but also facilitate its internalization and implementation (Gülcan et al., 2024; Dhandapani & Kaur, 2024). Importantly, this study extends existing research by demonstrating that participants' emphasis on values such as nationalism and spirituality reflects culturally embedded priorities, which shape instructional leadership practices within the centralized structure of the Turkish education system. Beyond mission-setting, principals were also perceived to actively support teaching processes through classroom observations, guidance, and periodic evaluations, illustrating an applied form of instructional leadership that integrates technical supervision with pedagogical support. Consistent with Wiyono et al. (2022), principals' active involvement as communicators and resource providers was operationalized through continuous interaction, feedback, and curriculum-oriented guidance, which in turn supported teacher motivation, professional development, and organizational commitment (Naz & Rashid, 2021). Participants further reported that instructional leadership practices extended to improving learning environments through organizing professional development activities, providing material support, monitoring instructional time, maintaining

visibility within the school, and closely tracking student achievement. Such practices, perceived as supportive rather than controlling, contributed to instructional coherence, trust, and enhanced teacher and student engagement (Effendi & Bumbungan, 2023; Hakim, 2021; Noor et al., 2020; Sibomana, 2020;). Moreover, the findings indicate that instructional leadership encompasses not only instructional supervision but also attention to teachers' emotional needs through reward, recognition, and supportive school climate practices, reinforcing the emotional and social dimensions of learning environments. In line with Akyürek et al. (2024), these results underscore that instructional leadership is closely linked to the creation of a positive and sustainable school climate and can enhance teacher autonomy and school satisfaction (Gülcan et al., 2024). Finally, while participants frequently emphasized practices such as monitoring teaching, rewarding performance, and engaging stakeholders, the comparatively limited emphasis on curriculum adaptation and systematic analysis of failure points reveals potential gaps in instructional leadership capacity, suggesting a need for targeted professional support and training in these less institutionalized yet critical dimensions of leadership.

Research Question 2

The findings related to the second research question indicate that instructional leadership behaviors have multifaceted and interconnected effects at the school, teacher, and student levels. At the school level, instructional leadership practices were found to strengthen cooperation, foster a positive school climate, and contribute to the development of a strong organizational culture, positioning instructional leadership as a catalyst for organizational alignment and sustainability. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that instructional leadership enhances collaboration among teachers and positively shapes the overall school environment (Cruickshank, 2017; Meyer et al., 2020). When principals actively involve teachers in instructional processes and distribute leadership responsibilities, school-wide coherence and collective efficacy are reinforced, supporting both school effectiveness and long-term development. At the teacher level, participants emphasized that instructional leadership practices support teachers' professional development and well-being, increase motivation and self-efficacy, and strengthen organizational commitment. This finding aligns with research demonstrating that leadership practices grounded in collaboration and shared responsibility positively influence teachers' job satisfaction, professional identity, and sense of efficacy (Bıyık & Şahin, 2024; Harris et al., 2017; Naz & Rashid, 2021). At the student level, instructional leadership was perceived to have a direct impact on academic achievement, classroom engagement, and behavioral outcomes, primarily through the creation of supportive learning environments and coherent instructional practices. Prior research has similarly demonstrated strong associations between positive school climate and student performance (Koundyannan et al., 2020; Rafiq & Gul, 2023) and highlighted the role of leadership in promoting instructional quality through collaboration and shared accountability (Mora-Ruano et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that

instructional leadership operates as an integrated, multilevel system, simultaneously influencing school structures, teacher practices, and student learning outcomes, thereby providing empirical support for multilevel leadership models (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Research Question 3

Findings related to Research Question 3 highlight that the development of instructional leadership behaviors requires a multidimensional and systemically supported approach, encompassing principals' managerial roles, personal characteristics, policy development processes, professional education, and collaboration. Principals were found to undertake a wide range of functions aimed at collectively enhancing the quality of education in their schools, indicating that instructional leadership cannot be reduced to individual effort alone but must be sustained through coordinated organizational and systemic practices (Wibowo & Wakhudin, 2021). This study further emphasizes that structural support is as critical as individual leadership capacity, as principals' active participation in policymaking processes, the improvement of their rights and benefits, and the effective implementation of training and professional development programs significantly enhance their ability to fulfill instructional leadership roles. In line with previous research, strong instructional leadership was associated with the integration of quality-enhancing practices at both institutional and individual levels, while systemic support was identified as essential for sustaining improvements in educational standards (Arif et al., 2018). Such structural support enables principals to function more effectively within economic and political contexts that often constrain their authority and decision-making capacity, a finding consistent with earlier studies emphasizing the importance of contextual and policy-related conditions for instructional leadership development (Lamsal, 2022; Yaacob & Ishak, 2023). In addition, professional development opportunities emerged as a pivotal mechanism for strengthening instructional leadership, as participation in education and development programs was perceived to enhance managerial competencies while fostering a collaborative school culture (Dea & Tekalign, 2022). Alongside structural and professional supports, the cultivation of principals' personal characteristics—such as flexibility, empathy, and vision—was identified as a key contributor to creating school environments conducive to instructional leadership. These findings suggest that instructional leadership has evolved from a predominantly managerial orientation toward a more distributed and relational leadership model that encourages collaboration among teachers around shared educational goals (Lamsal, 2022; Yaacob & Ishak, 2023). Overall, while individual leadership competencies remain important, the findings underscore that sustainable instructional leadership depends on systemic reforms that address economic, organizational, and policy-related constraints, enabling principals to enact and sustain effective instructional leadership practices.

Conclusion

This study presents important findings that reveal the implications of educational leadership theories in practice. The instructional leadership model proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) is validated in this study not only as a descriptive framework but also as an explanatory model grounded in participants' lived experiences, supporting its relevance at both theoretical and practical levels. In this respect, leadership theories are better understood as requiring a dynamic, multidimensional, and situational framework that responds to the complexities of the school environment. The findings demonstrate that instructional leadership approaches are not limited to discrete or isolated behaviors but are embedded in a multilayered network of organizational, relational, and contextual factors that collectively shape the school's learning culture, extending existing leadership theories by highlighting the interaction between individual leadership capacities, collaborative practices, and systemic conditions. Accordingly, instructional leadership should be conceptualized through its pedagogical, sociological, and managerial dimensions rather than being viewed solely as an administrative function.

Overall, the results reveal that instructional leadership is a multidimensional and context-sensitive process involving all members of the school community and that these practices have meaningful implications for school climate, teacher motivation, and student learning outcomes. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that training programs aimed at developing school principals' leadership competencies should move beyond technical and managerial skills to emphasize vision-building, flexibility, communication, and the capacity to foster collaborative learning cultures, while educational policies should be designed to empower school leaders by expanding their authority and improving working conditions, thereby enabling sustainable and system-wide impact. Finally, the study underscores the importance of expanding instructional leadership approaches to include the active participation of teachers and other stakeholders in instructional decision-making processes, strengthening shared responsibility for teaching and learning, and enhancing organizational coherence within schools.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the findings are derived from a relatively small and context-specific sample, which may constrain the generalizability of the results to other educational environments. Second, the phenomenological research design relies on participants' self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability, and does not allow for causal inference. Third, data collection was conducted exclusively through semi-structured interviews, limiting methodological triangulation due to the absence of observational or document-based data. Additionally, the highly centralized structure of the Turkish education system constitutes a contextual limitation that may shape instructional leadership practices in ways that differ from those in more decentralized systems. Future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to examine the development of instructional leadership practices over time and to explore potential causal relationships among leadership behaviors, teacher practices, and student

outcomes. Moreover, comparative studies conducted across different educational systems could provide deeper insights into how contextual and policy-related factors influence the enactment of instructional leadership. Such research efforts would contribute to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of instructional leadership and support the refinement of leadership theories and practices in diverse educational settings.

Ethical Approval

All procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of our institution's research committee, BUEFAD publication principles, and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and subsequent amendments. The necessary ethical committee approval for the research was obtained on November 21, 2024, from the Fırat University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee under number 2024/23.

Author Contributions

Müslim Alanoğlu: Literature review, Method, Data Analysis, Results, Conclusion

Gürsen Vural: Method, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Conclusion

Cihat Turan: Literature review, Method, Results

Zeliha Kuzgun: Data Collection, Results, Conclusion

Zülfü Demirtaş: Method, Results, Conclusion

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Plagiarism Checks

The current article was checked with Turnitin/İntihal.net and met journal standards.

Artificial Intelligence Usage Statement

Artificial intelligence tools were used solely for language editing and translation purposes during the preparation of this manuscript. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation of findings, or generation of scientific content.

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