

## The Role of School Administrators in Organizational Learning Processes

Fatih Şahin

Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This study aims to explore school administrators' perceptions of their roles in organizational learning processes. In this phenomenological study, interviews were conducted with 30 school administrators in Ankara, Turkey. The data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed descriptively and evaluated within organizational learning processes. School administrators' roles in organizational learning processes were examined in three categories: information acquisition, information distribution, and information integration. The results show that school administrators support teachers in acquiring information and focusing on activities that will increase new learnings. Besides, school administrators facilitate disseminating information by engaging in activities that will bring teachers together at school. Moreover, school administrators focus on the school culture to institutionalize new and shared learning and make them permanent by ensuring that shared learnings were repeated frequently with various activities at school. This study contributes to the relevant literature by examining the phenomenon of organizational learning, which is frequently studied as a subject in educational organizations but lacking in organizational learning processes within the scope of the managerial role.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> December 16, 2020  <i>Accepted</i> July 6, 2021</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Organizational learning processes, information, school administrators</i></p>

**Cite as:**

Şahin, F. (2021). The role of school administrators in organizational learning processes. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 6(4), 833-868. DOI: 10.30828/real/2021.4.3

**Introduction**

The concept of organizational learning has generated interest in organizations for more than five decades (Cangelosi & Dill, 1965), and it has become a research subject, especially in the 1970s and 1980s (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Levitt & March, 1988). However, its principles have influenced organizations in pre-conceptualization times (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). Therefore, with the initial conceptualizations that started especially with Argyris and Schön's (1978, 1996) single-loop and double-loop models, Senge's (1990) Fifth Discipline work, and some other pioneering studies (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Levitt & March, 1988), organizational learning has been widely accepted. This trend has been continued recently (Oh & Han, 2020; Starbuck, 2017). Furthermore, in recent years, as the positive effects of organizational learning on organizations and group dynamics were seen, interest in this issue increased in many academic fields. This issue has also been studied frequently in educational organizations (Louis & Murphy, 2017).

Organizational learning is a tool that leads the organization to achieve its goals, achieve high performance, and strategic renewal (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999; Park, Lee & Cook, 2019; Silins, Mulford & Zarins, 2002; Vera & Crossan, 2004). In organizations with a high organizational learning culture, job satisfaction is found high, and conversely, staff turnover is determined less experienced (Egan, Yang & Barlett, 2004). Besides, organizational learning makes individuals more confident and competent, thus increasing the organization's



learning capacity, especially educational ones (Collinson & Cook, 2013). Therefore, organizational learning is indispensable if organizations are to produce desired outcomes.

The concept of organizational learning has been widely discussed by educators (Collinson, Cook & Conley, 2006; Fullan, 1995; Kurland, Peretz & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010; Leithwood, Leonard & Sharratt, 1998). Schools that care about organizational learning ensure that all school members learn in cooperation and continuously meet organizational needs or expectations through this structure (Silins et al., 2002). Some of these studies suggest that learning schools improve their effectiveness (Demiroglu & Alantas, 2016; Leithwood et al., 1998; Schechter & Qadach, 2012).

Many studies have been conducted in educational organizations, especially on the outputs of organizational learning (Kurland et al., 2010; Silins et al., 2002). However, the specific processes and actions that make up this form of learning have attracted relatively little research interest (Boreham & Morgan, 2004; Imants, 2003). It has been observed that this deficiency, expressed for the study of organizational learning processes in schools, has not been adequately addressed in recent studies (Louis & Murphy, 2017; Qadach, Schechter & Da'as, 2020; Schechter & Qadach, 2012). Especially in Turkey, the small number of studies (Şahin, 2000; Ünal, 2014) addressing organizational learning processes in schools motivated the researcher to work on this issue. In many studies examining organizational learning in schools in Turkey, quantitative studies have usually been conducted to determine the characteristics of the learning organization or the mechanism of organizational learning (Aydemir & Koşar, 2019; Omur & Argon, 2016; Ünal, 2014). Since organizational learning processes (obtaining, interpreting, disseminating, and

institutionalizing information) have significant effects on organizational life (Crossan et al., 1999; Huber, 1991), a detailed study of this phenomenon with a process approach can enrich our understanding.

It is not easy to fully understand the dialectical interactive processes of organizational learning in educational organizations and implement these processes in schools (Fullan, 1995; Schechter & Qadach, 2012). Fullan (1995) stated that learning organization was a distant dream in the context of teacher roles. In the school context, the current study focused on school administrators' role in organizational learning processes. Educational leadership influences school culture and climate, teaching and learning, trust and caring, which in turn affects student outcomes (Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Louis & Murphy, 2017). The opinions of the school administrators were used in the study, as they play an essential role in transforming individual learning into collective learning (Silins et al., 2002; Swart & Harcup, 2013). The following research question was posed to explore this issue further:

What role do school administrators play in transforming information from acquisition to institutionalization in their schools?

### **Literature Review**

In this section, firstly, the theoretical and conceptual framework of organizational learning was presented. Afterward, organizational learning processes were explained. Finally, organizational learning in schools and the importance of leadership in organizational learning were discussed.



## Organizational Learning

We are involved in a learning activity at every moment of our lives. The rapid changes around us force us to learn (Schein, 1993). Some of these learnings occur at the individual level, some at the group level, and some at the organizational level (Collinson & Cook, 2007; Collinson et al., 2006; Crossan et al., 1999; Schilling & Kluge, 2009).

While cognitive structures are helpful in individual learning, sociocultural structures (Boreham & Morgan, 2004; Cook & Yanow, 1993) or social processes are more effective in group or organizational level learning (Schechter & Feldman, 2010). However, the idea that all learnings are provided as a result of individual thinking or questioning and transferred to group or organization level (Argyris, 1995; Collinson & Cook, 2013; Fauske & Raybould, 2005) makes individual learning an essential part of collective learning (Leithwood et al., 1998). Furthermore, Wang and Ahmed (2003) claim that individual learning significantly impacts organizational learning practices.

Organizational learning occurs by transferring personal knowledge or learning to group or organizational levels (Argote, 2013; Collinson & Cook, 2007). Cook and Yanow (1993) stated that individual action capacity should be transformed into group action to provide organizational learning. For this, it is crucial to have a shared culture (Cook & Yanow, 1993) that holds the group together, develop a shared understanding, and has leadership that supports organizational learning (Vera & Crossan, 2004). Furthermore, for an organization to learn, its collective activity must have a common goal; without this, it is challenging to create a unitary entity defined as organizational learning (Boreham & Morgan, 2004). It can also be stated that the process of dialogue that increases the interaction among members is also essential in organizational learning (Schein, 1993).

Moreover, Fiol and Lyles (1985) addressed four contextual factors that made organizational learning possible: a culture of collaborative learning, organizational strategies that allow flexibility, organizational structures and environments that allow innovation, and new ideas.

Organizational learning is a collective activity. Collective learning is that individuals learn something from others and develop a shared meaning in the learning process. Collective learning is a dynamic and cumulative process and emphasizes social interaction (Garavan & McCarthy, 2008). Although it is clear that organizational learning is a collective learning activity, due to a well-developed literature structure on organizational learning, the term has multiple definitions (Collinson et al., 2006).

Fiol and Lyles (1985) define organizational learning as developing organizational action where better knowledge and understanding occur. According to Argyris (1995), organizational learning occurs when incompatibilities identified and corrected in an organization, or when a match is achieved for the first time between the purpose and results. Popova-Nowak and Cseh (2015) define organizational learning as a social process in which individuals in the organization participate in collective practices and discourses where organizational information is reproduced. This information is simultaneously expanded. Collinson and Cook (2007) define organizational learning to use individual, group, and systemic learning to place new ideas and practices that will continuously renew and transform the organization to achieve common goals. Louis (2006) defines organizational learning as obtaining and sharing information through social processes to change its understanding and practices. According to Schilling and Kluge (2009), organizational learning reflects individual or group learning experiences on organizational



routines, processes, and organizational structure. Argote (2013) defines organizational learning as a change in organizational knowledge due to organizational actions.

### **Organizational Learning Processes**

Although there are similar aspects, different classifications have been made in the literature regarding organizational learning processes. It is seen that data, information or knowledge is expressed as an essential component in all these processes. According to Marks and Louis (1999), learning cannot occur without a knowledge base and access to new ideas. Huber (1991) categorized these processes as acquiring, disseminating and interpreting information, and organizational memory. Crossan et al. (1999) classified the processes as intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization. Firstly, there must be pre-existing or produced information; secondly, this information should be shared among the group members. Thirdly, this information should be evaluated among the group members, and finally, this information should be integrated into the organization. Schilling and Kluge (2009) discussed organizational learning in three processes: obtaining, interpreting, and storing information. Schechter and Qadach (2012) stated that organizational learning consists of five interactive cyclic processes: obtaining, sharing, interpreting, storing, and recalling them for organizational processes. In this study, organizational learning processes are considered in three dimensions as (1) information acquisition process, (2) information distribution process, and (3) information integration (or institutionalization) process by taking advantage of relevant literature and participant opinions.

### ***Information Acquisition (or Production) Process***

At the individual level, the information acquisition process is a cognitive process that initiates organizational learning (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). In this process, information can exist from the organization's establishment, or it can be created through experience or representative (social) learning. Information can also be gained through organizational environmental awareness or research into the environment (Huber, 1991; Schechter & Qadach, 2013). It is expected that the source of information will be reliable and that there will be a social trust in the environment in which information is created for organizational learning to occur through information transferred from outside to the organization. It is a complicated process for an individual or an organization to come out of the personal zone and interact with an individual or environment outside the organization and request information, which requires social trust (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). The organization can also gain new information through the recruitment of individuals who will benefit the organization and have the capacity to carry new information (Huber, 1991). Besides, it can be argued that conflicts of ideas among individuals in the organization can facilitate new information formation (Argote, 2013).

### ***Information Distribution (or Sharing) Process***

In this process, existing or produced information is shared and clarified between the members (Crossan et al., 1999). Through sharing information, individual learning becomes collective learning (Collinson & Cook, 2013). When information is not shared within the organization, what is known is unknown (Huber, 1991). Therefore, sharing information and the dialogues that initiate this process are essential in the organization (Schein, 1993). In this process, the





organization shares information in its subsystems and among its members in different ways such as letters, notes, informal interviews, reports, telephone calls, fax, e-mail, computerized conference systems, electronic meetings, document management systems. In interpreting information, meaning is given to the shared information (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). Language plays a vital role in making sense of information. In organizations, this process is a social activity that creates and organizes a common language, clarifies cognitive maps, and develops shared meaning and understanding (Crossan et al., 1999). Through information sharing, the organization has the opportunity to evaluate its learning. That may also provide new learning to contribute to information production (Huber, 1991).

#### ***Information Integration (or Institutionalization) Process***

It can be argued that in the information integration process, information is stored in the memory of the organization so that it can be used in the future. Institutionalized information becomes independent from individual or group level learning (Crossan et al., 1999). In this process, information is placed in the organization's routines, and even if people leave the organization or despite all this time spent, this information continues to exist (Crossan et al., 1999; Levitt & March, 1988). Schechter and Qadach (2012) explained this process with organizational memory and mentioned organic and structured memory types. Organic memory is formed by individuals in the organization and represents the memory that originates from organizational culture. It is possible to consider the expected roles and behaviors in the organization and environmental factors affecting the organization within the scope of organic memory. Structured memory represents corporate memory and consists of consciously designed,

carefully protected, and stored information. Organization records, electronic databases, and archives can be evaluated within this scope.

### **Organizational Learning in Schools**

While educational organizations need to be more frequently associated with learning because of their nature, and while pioneering work on organizational learning should be carried out in these organizations, unexpectedly pioneering studies have been carried out in other organizations (Argote, 2013; Argyris, 1995; Cook & Yanow, 1993; Crossan et al., 1999; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Levitt & March, 1988; Schilling & Kluge, 2009). Later, with the expansion of organizational learning literature, this issue has been studied in educational organizations. Leithwood et al. (1998) tried to create a framework for educational organizations using concepts related to organizational learning produced in non-educational organizations. Pedder and McBeath (2008) stated that Argyris and Schön's (1978, 1996) concept of double-loop learning is based on a social learning process that allows teachers and students to explore and challenge the beliefs or information that shape their practices and the practices of their schools.

School is a system with social-cognitive features and structural-technical features, and one of the theoretical models reflecting this structure of the school is organizational learning (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). Educational organizations were seen as social communities specializing in speed and efficiency in producing and transferring knowledge (Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin & Llamas-Sánchez, 2006). Organizational learning has been conceptualized as a critical component of school effectiveness, especially in the light of growing knowledge in today's societies (Schechter & Qadach, 2012).



Organizational learning provides a sustainable path for change in schools and the opportunity for continuous renewal from within (Collinson et al., 2006). According to Schechter and Atarchi (2014), schools should develop collective learning activities and processes that can nurture new and diverse knowledge bases of teachers and foster their shared belief in their abilities to keep up with dynamic and uncertain environments.

To effectively carry out educational reforms, it is necessary to improve teachers' collective capacities alongside their capacities. In particular, it is necessary to develop a collective capacity to encourage student success. These happen quickly through professional learning communities. All school members, especially teachers, actively participate in school initiatives, and the organizational learning literature offers deep insights into these connections (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006).

### **School Leadership and Organizational Learning**

School leadership is an essential criterion in understanding school dynamics. It is claimed that the success of schools depends mainly on school leaders (Kurland et al., 2010). Recent studies have revealed that a leadership approach focused on learning directly or indirectly affects the teachers' instructional quality and students' achievements (Bellibaş, Gümüş & Liu, 2020; Qadach et al., 2020; Park et al., 2019). School leadership is effective in creating a learning culture at school (Louis, 2006). School leadership is an essential component in creating a learning school (Kurland et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 1998). Supportive school leadership positively affects professional learning communities and collective responsibility and affects students' academic achievement by affecting teacher behavior at the group level (Park et al., 2019). Hsiao and Chang's (2011) study found that if school

administrators adhered to transformational leadership and did not use an organizational learning strategy, this would have little impact on organizational innovation. On the other hand, the strong instructional leadership of school administrators is effective in establishing learning schools (Qadach et al., 2020). So, the role of school leadership in organizational learning is undeniable. In their study, Collinson et al. (2006, p.110) suggested that school leaders should adhere to the following principles to increase organizational learning in their schools.

- prioritizing learning for all members,
- facilitating the dissemination (sharing) of knowledge, skills, and insights,
- attending to human relationships,
- fostering inquiry,
- enhancing democratic governance, and
- providing for members' self-fulfillment.

### **Research Context**

An element that can impact organizational learning in Turkey is the frequent changes in educational practices. Organizational learning requires going through many processes and allocating sufficient time. However, the production of too much information in educational organizations and their rapid consumption (Fullan, 1995; Silins et al., 2002) and the prevalence of fashionable concepts in educational research (Oplatka, 2009) indicate that organizational learning processes in schools generally do not take place effectively. Much information produced in these organizations cannot be institutionalized. When this issue is evaluated in terms of education



policies and practices, it is believed that Turkey's frequent policy changes prevent permanent educational structures and complicate organizational learning. Rapid changes in education can lead to losses in the organization's memory.

Another element that can impact organizational learning in Turkey is the structure of the education system. The education system in Turkey is highly centralized, and the Ministry of Education has the authority to decide and implement any education policy (Kondakci & Beycioglu, 2019), especially in public schools. Education policies and structural reforms are created by policymakers and senior managers and transmitted to schools as directives. In Turkey, private schools are more autonomous than public schools, so organizational learning processes work more effectively in these schools (Şahin, 2000). It can be argued that this reality limits organizational learning in public schools and reduces innovative initiatives (see Leithwood et al., 1998). Despite all these conditions, it is essential to determine how public school administrators play a role in the organizational learning process in the current political and bureaucratic context.

### **Methodology**

Learning and transferring these learnings to social organizations are human phenomena that create the conditions of human existence (Mengüsoğlu, 2017). Therefore, the phenomenological approach was used in this study to examine organizational learning phenomena in depth. In the study, the researcher examined organizational learning as a feature of social organizations and aimed to reveal the role of school administrators in the emergence of this social phenomenon. Phenomenology investigates the meaning of people's living experiences in existential

or internal concepts. Phenomenological inquiry tries to understand the phenomenon's unique aspects under investigation (van Manen, 2020). According to Patton (2001), the phenomenology approach explores how the individual makes sense of experience and transforms the personal or collective experience into consciousness.

### **Participants**

In pursuit of answers to the research questions, 30 interviews were conducted with one female and 29 male school administrators who participated in a school administrator training program in the Keçiören district of Ankara, Turkey. In this respect, the convenience sampling method has been adopted in the research (Marshall, 1996). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the interviews. It was stated that any information that could reveal the identity of school administrators would not be shared, and their confidentiality was ensured. Almost all of the participants were male school administrators. It is possible to claim that this low rate reflects the general situation in Turkey. Because this low rate is also seen in the TALIS 2018 report (OECD, 2019). Participants were between the ages of 34 and 60 years ( $M = 51$ ), and their approximate averages of total service and total service periods in school administration were 27 years and 17 years, respectively.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used. Semi-structured interviews are used to reconstruct the subjective theory of the interviewee about the subject under the study (Flick, 2009). In preparing the interview questions, expert opinion was taken, and a language expert provided support to ensure the clarity of the questions. Although there were questions



about personal information in the interview form, the researcher did not insist that the participants share their demographic information because it was not intended to make an assessment based on the demographic characteristics of the school administrators. One participant did not specify age information in personal information, 2 participants did not specify total service time, and 1 participant did not specify the total service time in administration, so the average value was assigned for these missing values. There were five main questions about learning processes supported by the literature (Crossan et al., 1999; Huber, 1991; Schechter & Qadach, 2012; Schilling & Kluge, 2009) in the interview form (The last question was not evaluated because it did not define the roles of school administrators in organizational learning processes):

1. What do you do to increase the school members' individual learning at your school?
2. How do you encourage school members to share their individual learnings with others?
3. What do you do to turn the new learnings shared between school members into organizational learnings and sustain these learnings in the school even when the member/s who produced these learnings leave the school?
4. As a school administrator, what do you do to have new learnings, share them with school members and turn them into organizational learnings?
5. What opportunities or barriers do you think are present in your school for obtaining, sharing, and transforming individual learning into organizational learning?

The data were collected in face-to-face interviews with the participants. One of the most effective ways of collecting data about a

phenomenon is the interview technique since it enables interpersonal interaction. This technique has been used throughout history to obtain information (Brinkmann, 2014). Expert opinion, participant confirmation, long-term interaction, and participant's reflections were applied to ensure the credibility of the research (Tracy, 2013). Three field experts were asked to mark 'Appropriate' or 'Not Appropriate' for each code generated by the researcher. The compliance between the scores given by the three experts was examined. Kappa coefficient was calculated using the address <http://justusrandolph.net/kappa/>. As a result of the calculation, the reliability of the study was calculated as 89%. Landis and Koch (1977) stated that if the strength of agreement in the kappa reliability calculation is over 0.80, the compliance is almost perfect. Therefore, it can be claimed that the credibility of the research data is high.

The phenomenology approach considers the research data to determine themes and draws out the essence and essentials of participant meanings (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Therefore, a categorical/ thematic approach was adopted in the research. While analyzing the data in the research, firstly, the data were scrutinized. Then the data were coded, and meaningful themes were created from the specified codes. Finally, while analyzing the codes related to each theme, a detailed understanding of the organizational learning phenomenon was aimed by directly including the participants' opinions.

## **Results**

In this section, the opinions of the school administrators were reported under three themes: information acquisition, information distribution, and institutionalizing information. The codes that



emerged regarding the roles of school administrators under these themes were given in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Roles of School Administrators in Organizational Learning Processes*

Themes	Codes (Roles)	N
Information Acquisition	Activities such as in-service training, seminars, courses	24
	Appropriate and flexible time	4
	Collaboration with universities	3
	Meetings	3
	Reading books, magazines, etc.	3
	Participation in scientific activities	2
	Graduate education	2
	New developments in education and technology	2
	Cooperation with non-governmental organizations active in the field of education	1
	Professional knowledge and experience	1
Information Distribution	Committees, meetings, seminars	23
	Sharing knowledge and experiences with teachers	8
	Personal conversations, one-on-one interviews	8
	Providing opportunities for sharing information and creating an environment for this	8
	Collaboration and teamwork	4
	A democratic school climate	3
	Individual attention, sensitivity	1
	A peaceful, safe, happy school	1
	Events organized on special days	1
Information Integration	Keeping new or old information on the agenda with various activities	8
	Extensive participation in the learning process, shared decision, shared understanding	6
	A strong organizational culture	6
	Apply new learning at school and disseminate it throughout the school	5
	Networking between teachers	4
	Generating projects, creating working groups or project groups through these projects, supporting these groups	4
	Following and rewarding good or successful practices	3
	Being planned	3
	Competitions	2
	Reading activities	2

To be connected with the former employees of the school, to maintain communication	2
Knowledge of new teachers, experience of old teachers	2
Sustainable structure and education	1
School policy to make learning permanent	1
Open-mindedness	1

### Information Acquisition

Information acquisition is the first stage of organizational learning, and school administrators talked about different experiences in this context. School administrators often try to ensure that their teachers acquire new information by organizing teacher training through in-service training, seminars, courses, and so on, within the scope of information acquisition which is the first stage of organizational learning. In this context, K3 stated that he tried to ensure the participation of teachers in in-service training. K8 likewise said, *"I ensure that teachers participate in in-service training. I organize seminars for them"*. K13 emphasized the importance of the same topic: *"I held one-on-one and group meetings with teachers at my school and asked my teachers what issues they felt lacking. We planned in-service training on issues they see themselves insufficient"*. K26 stated that they encourage and support teachers to participate in in-school or out-of-school training activities related to their branches and general education to increase their knowledge capacity. Moreover, school administrators stated that they consider the appropriateness of time and make flexible time arrangements when organizing the school program for teachers, thus supporting them in learning new information. In this context, K12 used the expression *"We make appropriate time arrangements for each teacher when preparing teachers' course schedules."* School administrators also mentioned the importance of cooperation with universities to increase the knowledge capacity of the school. K1 said, *"We provide*



*academics from universities to give seminars in our school"* K20 likewise said, *"We organize seminars for teachers in consultation with universities."* K25 said, *"We get help from our universities... Also, when our teachers wish to study for a master's degree or attend some courses, we support them and organize their programs flexibly"*. K14 stated that they help teachers participate in master's and doctorate programs and support their postgraduate education. Besides, school administrators also claimed that new learning was provided through meetings held at the school. In the research, it was stated that reading is essential for new information acquisition. It has been suggested that this acquisition is achieved by encouraging teachers to read publications. K24 stated that he bought educational books for his teachers to read. It was also stated that following new developments in education and technology, cooperating with non-governmental organizations operating in the field of education, and sharing professional knowledge or experience at the school provide new learning in the school.

### **Information Distribution**

Information distribution is the second stage of organizational learning, and again, school administrators talked about the different roles they played in this context. They stated that information distribution was provided in their schools through teachers' boards, branch teachers' boards, group meetings, consultation meetings, individual meetings, seminars, etc. School administrators stated that evaluations about new learning were done in such activities and care and support. K3 said, *"I would like to ask the teachers participating in the in-service training or seminar to make a presentation about what they have learned."* K24 said, *"Teachers attending the seminars share their information with colleagues and school administration,"* and K30 said, *"I encourage our teachers to present their opinions and suggestions in the seminars and the*

*teachers' board.*" Furthermore, school administrators stated that they shared their new information acquired through in-service training or professional experience with the teachers. K25 stated that he shared the information he thought was especially important for the teachers during the routine meetings in his school or the teachers' room. Besides, they stated that especially breaks or resting hours were an opportunity for information sharing. It was claimed that individual conversations or face-to-face meetings during these hours contributed to information sharing. K24 said that we often meet with teachers in the form of short conversations. Besides, they were trying to create an appropriate environment in the school to enable teachers to share information with their colleagues, create a democratic school environment, show individual attention to the teacher, and be sensitive to their problems. K7 stated that *"I am trying to create a democratic school environment"*; K12 said that *"We allow the teacher to share their learning with us"*; K16 used the expression *"I am preparing environments for teachers to express themselves."* It was also stated that supporting cooperation and teamwork, creating a peaceful and safe school environment for teachers, organizing events on certain special days increased information sharing in the school. In this context, K26 puts the following view:

*We are trying to ensure that they (teachers) are comfortable in the school. We endeavor to create an educational environment that they love. We strive to create an environment of mutual trust by dealing closely with all kinds of problems.*

K1 stated that *"Organizing activities on special days such as teachers' day ensures teachers' unity, and these activities are important for sharing information."*



## Information Integration

Institutionalizing information is the last and indispensable stage of organizational learning. Within the scope of this stage, school administrators frequently stated that they keep the new or existing information on the agenda by organizing meetings and similar activities, thus contributing to integrating the information into the school. K14 stated that *"School knowledge is improved at certain times. The new teachers are informed with this knowledge. Thus, the continuity of the information is provided"*. School administrators claimed that joint decisions were made and common understanding was developed through extensive participation activities involving teachers, students and parents, and that information was institutionalized. School administrators also stated that they are trying to make learning permanent for the school by creating an influential corporate culture. In this context, K7 said, *"I work to establish corporate culture"*; K13 said, *"A school culture needs to be created. I think things will go easier when new teachers adapt to this culture"*. K 28 said, *"We work to create and reinforce school culture."* They claimed that applying new learning in the school and spreading it throughout the school, establishing connections or networks for effective communication with teachers, designing acceptable practices by forming project groups or collaboration teams, following up successful practices, and rewarding them provided organizational persistence information. K1 put forward the idea that *"We try to share good examples by all teachers and apply them in the institution."* K22 claimed, *"When working groups are formed, the work continues even if a teacher leaves the group."* K30 stated that *"I allow implementing the work as a team and turn it into a project to cover the whole school if positive feedback is received."* K30 also put forward the following view that can be evaluated in this context:

*I follow up with the good practices implemented at the school level and present the works that I believe to be applicable in our school boards and meetings. Finally, I start the planning process for the works supported by a joint decision.*

Besides, school administrators explained persistence in learning through planned practices, school policies and sustainable structures to support this, and open-minded. They also stated that they tried to play a facilitating role in these issues. According to K22, *“Learning becomes permanent if necessary planning and school policy are established, a road map is drawn up with stakeholders, and this plan is implemented.”* K27 put forward the idea that *“I am making arrangements to make the structure and content of education sustainable in the school.”* The study also stated that organizing competitions throughout the school, organizing regular reading activities, maintaining communication with teachers who left school, and sharing information and experience between the new and old teachers of the school contribute to integrating the school’s information. In this context, K26 put forward the following opinion:

*We are constantly trying to improve ourselves. For example, we read books about management. To put this information into practice, we do the necessary practices at the school. For example, we organize reading competitions to encourage reading and give books as prizes.*

### **Discussion**

The present study explored the role of school administrators in organizational learning processes. In the study, school administrators’ role in organizational learning processes was determined in three main processes: information acquisition, information distribution, and information integration. In educational organizations, these learning



processes must function healthily because the continuous capacity development in schools is seen as possible through the effective functioning of these processes (Fullan, 1995).

### **Roles of the School Administrator on Information Acquisition**

When the roles played by school administrators in organizational learning processes are examined separately within each category, it is seen that the information acquisition process is primarily experienced in the schools through activities such as in-service training, seminars, and courses. It can be claimed that such activities strengthen the teacher professionally. Both education and school improvement are related to the development of human capacity (Hallinger, 2011). Marks and Louis's (1999) study reveals a consistent relationship between teacher empowerment and organizational learning. Also, considering that the initial process of organizational learning is carried out on an individual level (Schechter & Qadach, 2012), it can be claimed that such activities targeting cognitive development are essential.

School administrators also stated that they were flexible when scheduling time at school so that teachers could take time off for their personal development. It can be argued that such flexible planning facilitates teachers' access to graduate education and their participation in scientific activities. As can be understood from the research findings, the school administrator's supportive leadership behaviors were valuable in organizational learning. In the related literature, it is seen that supportive leadership increases the level of professional learning, and this is related to student achievement (Park et al., 2019).

It can be argued that cooperation with universities and non-governmental organizations in education also contributes to the information acquisition process in organizational learning. For example, Fullan (1995) stated that teachers in learning schools could conduct collaborative studies inside and outside the school.

According to the research results, reading is one of the critical concepts related to acquiring new information. Some school administrators stated that they play a supporting role in this matter.

According to the research results, it can be claimed that a school staff following the change in education and technology will increase the information capacity. Besides, it is seen that organizations' learning processes are interrelated interactive processes (Schechter & Qadach, 2012), and new learning will be provided by sharing information.

When the school administrators' opinions about the roles they play in the information acquisition process are evaluated in general, it is seen that learning is generally associated with in-school processes, and individual learning is emphasized. However, the participants did not address issues such as learning from their own mistakes, learning from the surrounding educational organizations, and learning by observing the environment reveals an incomplete understanding of obtaining information. However, it is seen that these issues are significant in terms of organizational learning in the relevant literature (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000; Argyris, 1999; Huber, 1991; Levitt & March, 1988).

### **Roles of the School Administrator on Information Distribution**

The school administrators mentioned the importance of the boards, meetings, seminars, and similar activities organized in the school within the information distribution scope. According to the





results, the school administrators' interviews with the teachers, the teachers among themselves, or the administrators in formal or informal environments facilitate the sharing process of information.

School administrators stated that they are making an effort to create a democratic, peaceful and safe environment in information distribution. The results show that having a culture supporting cooperation or teamwork in school is also essential for information sharing. Similar to the research findings, Collinson and Cook (2007) stated that effective relationships and collaborations in schools depend on concepts such as empathy, communication, and trust. Therefore, organizational learning will be realized more through democratic principles to be implemented in schools. Similarly, in other studies, the climate of trust-based cooperation has been considered an essential component for organizational learning (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Silins et al., 2002). Collaboration is vital for sharing information because individuals, especially in organizations with the competition, may not share information because they see it as a valuable product and power source (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). In a culture that supports organizational learning, some sub-units know how to make learning and perform their learning in harmony, and together they form a learning ecology (Levitt & March, 1988). Therefore, it may be helpful to reduce the organization's emphasis on competition to ensure the necessary cooperation for organizational learning (Argyris, 1999; Garcia-Morales et al., 2006).

When the opinions of school administrators about the roles they play in the information distribution process are evaluated in general, it is seen that as in the production process of information, the activities that are frequently held in the school and in which teachers come together are emphasized, trying to create a suitable environment

for this unity. There are many ways to share information. Face-to-face interviews or meetings in the same physical environment emphasize only a limited aspect of this sharing (see Schechter & Qadach, 2012). With the widespread use of technology and information systems in schools (for example, management information systems such as e-schools), school administrators were expected to address this changing context. However, they did not provide any opinion in this context. For example, no school administrator talked about sending e-, using information management systems, or organizing electronic meetings when discussing their role in sharing information. These tools can be related to traditional culture. If teachers do not maintain their connections with the school after completing the school's course load, it may be reasonable to share information commonly through physical interactions.

### **Roles of the School Administrator on Information Integration**

School administrators emphasized the importance of keeping the learning in school always on the agenda and repeating these activities in various ways. They stated that they play a supporting role in this issue within the scope of information integration. According to the results, it is seen that broad participation in the learning process, influential learning culture in the school, a school structure that will ensure the continuity of learning and school policy to support it, and the close ties between the employees contribute to the permanence of knowledge in the school. Schechter and Feldman's (2010) study shows that organizational learning is unlikely to be effective without schools' influential learning culture. Because organizational learning involves social learning processes and has a close relationship with cultural structures (Cook & Yanow, 1993), it would be appropriate to define this culture that supports organizational learning as a school culture



with cooperation and colleague solidarity (Leithwood et al., 1998). The fact that development in learning organizations is never completed requires teachers to be in continuous learning activities throughout their professional lives (Fullan, 1995). A structure that will ensure the continuity of learning in schools can contribute to this process. This structure enables teachers to participate in decision-making processes in the school is considered necessary in terms of organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998).

According to the results, to institutionalize learning, it should be generalized throughout the school and applied continuously. For this purpose, it may be functional to form project groups or working groups, make learning within a specific plan, and organize activities that will make learning enjoyable. Similarly, Silins et al. (2002) stated that organizational learning is encouraged in schools where employees communicate openly and supportively. In addition, they actively seek information to improve their work, and that there is an administrator effort to establish structures or systems to support experience and entrepreneurship in these schools.

Considering the roles played by school administrators in the information integration process, it is seen that subjects such as school structure, school culture, and school policies are mentioned. When compared with other learning processes, it is seen that there are more opinions in scope. However, to integrate information with the organization, it is not considered sufficient to carry the past information to the present day, and it is also necessary to have robust predictions. For organizational learning, organization memory must also cover the future (Huber, 1991). Therefore, it may be considered a deficiency that the school administrators do not mention the predictions or scenarios about the future when expressing their roles.

## **Conclusion**

Information acquisition is the first process of organizational learning, and it is necessary to concentrate on individual learning at this stage. In this study, it was seen that school administrators support teachers in this direction and focus on activities that will increase their learning. Information distribution is the following process of organizational learning, and in this process, it is necessary to transfer individual learning to the group or school level. In this study, it was found that school administrators carried out activities to bring together teachers in the school at this stage, thus facilitating the dissemination of information. Information integration is the final process of organizational learning, and in this process, it is necessary to transform shared information into a school-owned acquisition and institutionalize it.

It can be claimed that school administrators' activities in the organizational learning process do not differ from their organizational learning literature. On the contrary, the results show that they play simple roles in organizational learning. As can be predicted, this is possibly related to concepts such as autonomy, taking the initiative, organizational structure, and professional support (Arar, Beycioglu & Oplatka, 2017; Bellibaş & Gümüş, 2019; Şahin, 2000). In this respect, it is clear that the schools need improvement and the school administrators need professional development more.

The current qualitative study advances existing research literature by focusing on organizational learning processes in education. However, the research also has some limitations. Clarifying organizational learning through school administrators' self-evaluations is the most critical limitation of this research. Since our



perceptions of facts may not accurately reflect reality, different ways can be tried to overcome this limitation, such as observing schools or interviewing different school members (e.g., teachers) (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Thus, we can have a more detailed understanding of how the organizational learning process works in schools. Research also has limitations in the sampling aspect. However, choosing a large sample and considering school characteristics as a sampling unit can produce effective results. Although this study is one of the few studies dealing with the role of school administrators on organizational learning processes in Turkey, considering the idea that organizational learning is a collective activity and that all the school members should be included in these processes, teachers, school administrative staff and other school members can also be interviewed or observed on this issue and the knowledge on this issue can be further developed.

### References

- Alanoglu, M., & Demirtas, Z. (2016). The relationships between organizational learning level, school effectiveness and organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(4), 35-44.
- Andrews, K. M., & Delahaye, B. L. (2000). Influences on knowledge processes in organisational learning: The psychosocial filter. *Journal of Management Studies* 37(6), 797-810. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00204>
- Arar, K., Beycioglu, K., & Oplatka, I. (2017). A cross-cultural analysis of educational leadership for social justice in Israel and Turkey: Meanings, actions and contexts. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 47(2), 192-206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2016.1168283>

- Argote, L. (2013) *Organisational learning: Creating, retaining and transferring knowledge*. New York: Springer.
- Argyris, C. (1995). Action science and organisational learning. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 10(6), 20-26. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683949510093849>
- Argyris, C. (1999). *On organisational learning*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1978). *Organisational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1996). *Organisational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Aydemir, Y., & Koşar, S. (2019). Ortaokul öğretmenlerinin öğrenen örgüt algılarının çeşitli değişkenler açısından incelenmesi (Ankara ili örneği). *Başkent University Journal of Education*, 6(2), 250-264.
- Bennett, J. V., Ylimaki, R. M., Dugan, T. M., & Brunderman, L. A. (2014). Developing the potential for sustainable improvement in underperforming schools: Capacity building in the sociocultural dimension. *Journal of Educational Change*, 15(4), 377-409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9217-6>
- Bellibaş, M. Ş., & Gümüş, S. (2019). A systematic review of educational leadership and management research in Turkey. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(6), 731-747. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-01-2019-0004>
- Bellibaş, M. Ş., Gümüş, S., & Liu, Y. (2020). Does school leadership matter for teachers' classroom practice? The influence of instructional leadership and distributed leadership on instructional quality. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2020.1858119>
- Boreham, N., & Morgan, C. (2004). *A sociocultural analysis of organisational learning*. *Oxford Review of Education*, 30(3), 307-325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305498042000260467>
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. In P. Leavy (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.



- Cangelosi, V. E., & Dill, W. R. (1965). Organisational learning: Observations toward a theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 10(2), 175-203. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2391412.pdf>
- Collinson, V., & Cook, T. F. (2007). *Organisational learning: Improving learning, teaching, and leading in school systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Collinson, V., & Cook, T. F. (2013). Organisational learning: Leading innovations. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 1(1), 69-98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/ijelm.2013.03>
- Collinson, V., Cook, T. F., & Conley, S. (2006). Organisational learning in schools and school systems: Improving learning, teaching, and leading. *Theory into Practice* 45(2), 107-116. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4502\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4502_2)
- Cook, S. D. N., & Yanow, D. (1993). Culture and organisational learning. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 2(4), 373-390. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105649269324010>
- Crossan, M. M., Lane, H. W., & White, R. E. (1999) An organisational learning framework: From intuition to institution. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 522-537. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1999.2202135>
- Donaldson, S. I., & Grant-Vallone, E. J. (2002). Understanding self-report bias in organisational behavior research. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 17(2), 245-260. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1019637632584>
- Egan, T. M., Yang, B., & Bartlett, K. R. (2004). The effects of organisational learning culture and job satisfaction on motivation to transfer learning and turnover intention. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 15(3), 279-301. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.1104>
- Fauske, J. R., & Raybould, R. (2005). Organisational learning theory in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(1), 22-40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230510577272>

- Fiol, C. M., & Lyles, M. A. (1985). Organisational learning. *The Academy of Management Review*, 10(4), 803-813. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1985.4279103>
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Fullan, M. (1995). The school as a learning organisation: Distant dreams. *Theory into Practice*, 34(4), 230-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543685>
- Garcia-Morales, V. J., Lopez-Martin, F. J., & Llamas-Sánchez, R. (2006). Strategic Factors and Barriers for Promoting Educational Organizational Learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(4), 478-502. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.11.012>
- Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2018). System leadership and school leadership. *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership (REAL)*, 3(2), 207-229. <https://doi.org/10.30828/real/2018.2.4>
- Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(2), 125-142. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116699>
- Hsiao, H. C., & Chang, J. C. (2011). The role of organisational learning in transformational leadership and organisational innovation. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12(4), 621. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-011-9165-x>
- Huber, G. P. (1991). Organisational learning: The contributing processes and the literatures. *Organization Science*, 2(1), 88-115.
- Imants, J. (2003). Two basic mechanisms for organisational learning in schools. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 26(3), 293-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0261976032000128157A>
- Kondakci, Y., & Beycioglu, K. (2020). Social justice in Turkish education system: Issues and interventions. In R. Papa (Ed.), *Handbook on promoting social justice in education* (pp. 309-329). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14625-2\\_34](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14625-2_34)
- Kurland, H., Peretz, H., & Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (2010). Leadership style and organizational learning: The mediate effect of school



- vision. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(1), 7-30.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231011015395>
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159-174.
- Leithwood, K., Leonard, L., & Sharratt, L. (1998). Conditions fostering organisational learning in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(2), 243-276.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X98034002005>
- Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organisational learning. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14(1), 319-338.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.14.080188.001535>
- Louis, K. S. (2006). Changing the culture of schools: Professional community, organizational learning, and trust. *Journal of School Leadership*, 16(5), 477-489.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460601600502>
- Louis, K. S., & Murphy, J. (2017). Trust, caring and organizational learning: The leader's role. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(1), 103-126. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2016-0077>
- Marks, H. M., & Louis, K. S. (1999). Teacher empowerment and the capacity for organisational learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(5), 707-750.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X99355003>
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522-526.
- Mengüşoğlu, T. (2017). *İnsan felsefesi* [Human philosophy]. Ankara: Doğu-Batı
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (Edition 3). London: Sage.
- Mulford, B., & Silins, H. (2003). Leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes - what do we know? *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2), 175-195.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640302041>

- OECD. (2019). *TALIS 2018 results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing.  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>
- Oh, S. Y., & Han, H. S. (2020). Facilitating organisational learning activities: Types of organisational culture and their influence on organisational learning and performance. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 18(1), 1-15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2018.1538668>
- Park, J. H., Lee, I. H., & Cooc, N. (2019). The role of school-level mechanisms: How principal support, professional learning communities, collective responsibility, and group-level teacher expectations affect student achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(5), 742-780.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18821355>
- Patton, M. Q. (2001) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Pedder, D., & MacBeath, J. (2008). Organisational learning approaches to school leadership and management: teachers' values and perceptions of practice. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(2), 207-224.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450802047899>
- Qadach, M., Schechter, C., & Da'as, R. A. (2020). From principals to teachers to students: Exploring an integrative model for predicting students' achievements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(5), 736-778.
- Omur, Y. E. & Argon, T. (2016). Teacher opinions on the innovation management skills of school administrators and organizational learning mechanisms. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 66, 243-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2016.66.14>
- Schechter, C., & Feldman, N. (2010). Exploring organisational learning mechanisms in special education. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(4), 490-516.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231011054734>

- Schechter, C., & Qadach, M. (2012). Toward an organisational model of change in elementary schools: The contribution of organisational learning mechanisms. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(1), 116–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11419653>
- Schechter, C., & Qadach, M. (2013). From illusion to reality: Schools as learning organisations. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(5), 505-516. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541311329869>
- Schein, E. H. (1993). On dialogue, culture, and organisational learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, 22(2), 40-51. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(93\)90052-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(93)90052-3)
- Schilling, J., & Kluge, A. (2009). Barriers to organisational learning: An integration of theory and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(3), 337-360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2008.00242.x>
- Silins, H. C., Mulford, W. R., & Zarins, S. (2002). Organisational learning and school change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(5), 613-642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X02239641>
- Starbuck, W. H. (2017). Organisational learning and unlearning. *The Learning Organization*, 24(1), 30-38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2016-0073>
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 221-258.
- Swart, J., & Harcup, J. (2013). 'If I learn do we learn?': The link between executive coaching and organisational learning. *Management Learning*, 44(4), 337-354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507612447916>
- Şahin, A. E. (2000). Seçilmiş devlet liselerinde ve özel liselerde örgütsel öğrenme süreçlerinin nitel bir değerlendirmesi [A qualitative assessment of organizational learning processes in selected

Turkish public and private high schools]. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 25(117), 34-41.

- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- van Manen, M. A. (2020). Uniqueness and novelty in phenomenological inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(5), 486–490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419829788>
- Vera, D., & Crossan, M. (2004). Strategic leadership and organisational learning. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(2), 222-240. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2004.12736080>
- Wang, C. L., & Ahmed, P. K. (2003). Organisational learning: A critical review. *The Learning Organization*, 10(1), 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09696470310457469>

**About the author:**

**Fatih Şahin**, is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Sciences at Gazi University, Turkey. His research interests include educational administration and organizational behavior in education.

E-mail: [sahinfatih@gazi.edu.tr](mailto:sahinfatih@gazi.edu.tr)