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# The Relationship between Principals' Crisis Management Skills and School Health<sup>a</sup>

Elanur Ersan Albayrak<sup>b</sup> and Murat Özdemir<sup>c</sup>

## Abstract

The relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and school health was investigated in this study based on the opinions of teachers. The sample of the study consisted of 341 teachers working in public high schools in Çankaya district of Ankara province in 2021-2022. The research was conducted using the predictive relational survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods. The data were obtained with the "Crisis Management Skills of Primary School Principals" and "Organizational Health" scales. The results of the analysis revealed that there is a low level and positive relationship between school health and the "pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis" sub-dimensions of school principals' crisis management abilities. The investigation also revealed that a predictor of school health was the crisis management abilities of school leaders.

**Keywords:** crisis management skills, school administrator, school health

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## Introduction

With a rapidly changing, developing and globalizing world, educational organizations, like many other organizations, have been affected. Recent events such as earthquakes, pandemics, and epidemics have had a significant impact on school management (Dhawan, 2020; Karakose et al., 2021). These reasons contributing to the crisis have posed a risk to the continuity and effective management of schools (Bursalioğlu, 2019; Ozkayran et al., 2020). School leaders, who are one of the most crucial elements of educational institutions and help schools achieve their goals and objectives, play a key role in preventing and successfully managing crisis situations (Keleş et al., 2020). One of the important variables in the crisis management skills of school principals is school health. Stress and panic, chaos and conflicts that occur with moments of crisis can affect school health (Sayın, 2008; Var & Zafer Güneş, 2022).

Healthy schools can achieve some positive outcomes. One of the positive outcomes of healthy schools is high academic achievement of students (Farahani et al., 2014). Healthy schools play an important role in students' academic achievement. The organizational health of schools, which is a key component, has a significant impact on students' academic achievement by increasing efficiency in the educational environment (Farahani et al., 2014). Another positive result of high school health is the creation of an atmosphere of trust and understanding among individuals in the school and the facilitation of interaction within the school (Ekşi et al., 2020). In this circumstance, it can be argued that relationships within the school are an important factor affecting school health (Ayduğ, 2016). In addition, cooperative and productive work is done by students, teachers, principals, and communities in healthy schools. (Hoy et al., 1996). In schools with high school health, it is possible to encounter a school administration that is collaborative and includes all individuals in the making decision process at the schools (Akyürek & Çelik, 2020). In addition, another result of high school health is that institutions are able to successfully adjust to their surroundings and reinforce their core principles in all of their employees. (Korkmaz, 2007). It is very important for schools to admit to their inner and outer environment and manage the conflicts that occur in their environment in order to protect and maintain their health (Türker, 2010). Another result of healthy

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schools is that teachers are more productive (Recepoğlu & Özdemir, 2013). In healthy schools, it can be observed that teachers work more efficiently by using their knowledge, skills and experiences.

Unhealthy schools have some negative consequences. Unhealthy schools cause student failure (Korkmaz, 2005). The absence of a healthy and effective learning environment in schools negatively affects student achievement. On the other hand, unhealthy schools are under pressure from factors outside the school (Leung, 2001). It is seen that unhealthy schools cannot harmonize with their environment and are affected by communities outside the school. In addition to these, unhealthy schools lead to an increase in teacher burnout (Sabancı, 2009). Other consequences of unhealthy schools are inadequate encouragement and support from principals, teachers not feeling good about their jobs and other teachers, and acting distant, suspicious and defensive (Hoy & Fedman, 1987).

The literature review revealed that it was seen that there are various factors that cause school health. The ability of school principals to effectively resolve conflicts is one of the factors that lead to healthy schools (Çelik & Tosun, 2019). It can be interpreted that school principals who can effectively manage various problems and conflicts encountered in schools are needed so that school health is not affected. In addition to these, another factor in the health of schools is the organizational structure of schools (Ordu & Tanrıoğen, 2013). In this context, factors such as teachers having a high level of education and participating in professional activities can positively affect school health. Other factors that make schools healthy are the school's successful struggle against external forces, meeting its needs by directing its energy to its mission, and school principals, teachers, students and the communities around the school working together in a cooperative and effective way (Hoy & Hannum, 1997).

The ability of school principals to manage crises is one of the aspects that contributes to school health. Having crisis management abilities as a school principal has several positive consequences. The first of these results is that if school principals have crisis management skills, it is easier for them to take the crisis under control as a leader when a crisis occurs in and around the school (Haban & Bozkurt, 2017). Another result is that when school leaders have effective crisis management abilities, they can return to a normal working system after the crisis and turn the crisis into opportunities (Maya, 2014). In addition, another result is that since the crisis management abilities of school leaders are related to school development, the effective crisis management abilities of principals support the realization of an exemplary school improvement (Otto & Lumapenet, 2022). Another consequence is that the motivation of teachers increases when, for example, the school administrator adopts roles such as mediator and facilitator in a conflict and tries to solve this situation effectively (Genç & Hamedoğlu, 2012). School principals' lack of crisis management skills also has some negative consequences. One of them is that if school leaders do not have crisis management abilities, they pose a threat to the continuity of schools (Demirtaş, 2000). Another consequence is that the inadequacy of the administration in crisis management can cause the crisis occurring in the school to spread to other organizations and create chaos (Ocak, 2006). Even another result is that the inability of school principals to prevent the crisis with their inadequacies in crisis administration realizes the possibility of the end of the school (Can, 2005).

In the review of the literature focusing on the crisis management skills of school principals, it was seen that studies examined teacher perceptions of crisis management and visionary leadership (Aksu, 2009) and crisis management and transformational leadership (Ulutaş, 2010). On the other hand, in the studies, teachers' views on the level of crisis management skills exhibited by school principals were reached (Maya, 2014), and school crisis management was examined by considering the dynamic response model to the crisis life cycle (Liou, 2015). In addition to these, it was observed that the relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and principals' power type preferences (Kocabaş, 2016), the social capital level of the organization (Haban & Bozkurt, 2017), and the relationship between principals' crisis management attitudes and emotional intelligence (Yılmaz & Yıldırım, 2020) was examined; and school principals' crisis management skills were examined in terms of leadership styles (Ulusoy & Yavuz, 2022).

In the review of the literature focusing on school health, it was seen that the studies reached a comparative analysis of school health with organizational climate and effectiveness (Hoy et al., 1990), the relationship between teachers' perceptions of competence and school health (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993), the views of school principals and teachers on school health issues (Akbaba, 1997) and school organizational health and teacher commitment (Tsui & Cheng, 1999). On the other hand, it was observed that the relationship between school health and school vision (Licata & Harper, 2001), student achievement (Korkmaz, 2005), school culture (Özdemir, 2012), school principals' instructional leadership behaviors (Recepoğlu & Özdemir, 2013), and transformational leadership (Arokiasamy et al., 2016), teachers' workaholic levels (Yavuz Tabak et al., 2018), and school principals' conflict management styles (Çelik & Tosun, 2019). However, when the literature was examined, it was observed that the

issue of the relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and school health according to the opinions of teachers working in public high schools across Turkey was not addressed in previous studies and thus, it was seen that there was a gap in this issue. In this context, according to teachers at public high schools in the Çankaya district of the province of Ankara, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between school health and school principals' crisis management abilities. In this instance, the study sought to provide answers to the following questions.

1. What is the level of teachers' views on school principals' crisis management skills and school health?
2. Is there a relationship between teachers' views on school principals' crisis management skills and school health?
3. According to teachers' views, are school principals' views on crisis management skills a significant predictor of variability in school health?

One of the main reasons for conducting this research is that schools in Turkey face many crisis situations such as earthquakes and epidemics day by day (Özmen et al., 2015). In a school structuring system that is exposed to so many crises, school principals should have crisis management skills in order to maintain the school's effectiveness, efficiency and goals (Karaağaç et al., 2022). However, the managerial competencies of school principals who play an important role in crisis management and school health in schools are discussed. In this context, it is observed that the adequacy of in-service trainings of school principals regarding the crisis process is one of the issues discussed. Studies show that school principals who receive in-service training on the crisis management process have higher crisis scores than school principals who do not receive crisis training, thus showing the importance of in-service training on crisis (Karakuş & İnandı, 2018; Sayın, 2008). On the other hand, it is seen that an unhealthy environment in schools affects students, teachers and thus the education and training process. The concept of school health plays an essential role in helping schools to achieve their goals and teachers to work more effectively and efficiently, thereby increasing the success of students (Ekşi et al., 2020; Farahani et al., 2014; Korkmaz, 2005; Receptoğlu & Özdemir, 2013). Therefore, investigating the crisis management skills of school principals according to teachers' views and examining the deficiencies in this field is of great importance for the formation of a healthy school environment. Thus, in this study, crisis management skills of school principals and school health issues are addressed. In this framework, it is thought that this study will contribute to the literature by filling the gap in the literature on school principals' crisis management skills and school health according to the opinions of teachers working in public high schools. In line with this purpose, this study is expected to contribute to practitioners in the context of determining policies to increase the crisis management skills of school principals. In addition, this research will provide a scientific basis for some reforms to be made on this issue by identifying the deficiencies and inadequacies of school principals regarding crisis management.

## Literature Review

### School Health

It is of great importance for a school to be healthy in order for the school to perform the effective role expected of it. Miles (1965) defined a healthy school as a school that succeeds in surviving in its environment and continuously strengthens its potential to endure and manage while overcoming problems over time. In addition, according to Tsui and Cheng (1999), school health, which is an essential and powerful concept in the formation of an effective school environment, is the ability of schools to keep up with the ever-changing environment and to meet different demands from parents and society. It is seen that school health, which is also stated as teachers working in a safe and healthy school environment in terms of interpersonal relationships (Smith et al., 2001), is one of the main issues that educational researchers have recently focused on (Akyürek & Çelik, 2020; Ayduğ & Ağaoğlu, 2017; Cemaloğlu, 2011; Köse & Güçlü, 2018; Lee et al., 2014; Yavuz Tabak et al., 2018). In the studies, it is pointed out that school health affects school principals, teachers and students, schools can realize their goals, and a healthy school environment should be created in order to raise successful and healthy individuals.

The term *Organizational Health* refers to the idea that an organization's ability to function well in a variety of settings and adapt to changing conditions is reflected in its capacity (Cox & Howarth, 1990). The idea of organizational health was first used by Miles in 1969 to examine school characteristics. Miles (1969) created a conceptual scale to measure school health based on ten important factors. The first of Miles' three factors is the "task-centered needs group (goal orientation, communication competence, and optimal power equality)" of the



organization as a system; the second is the “survival needs group (use of resources, commitment, and morale)”; and the third is the “growth and development needs group” which constitutes the dimensions of organizational health and helps in terms of the overall performance of the organization (Omoyemiju & Adediwura, 2011; Smith et al., 2001).

Hoy and Feldman (1987) developed Miles' (1969) research by combining it with Parsons et al.'s (1953) research (Çoban, 2007). Parsons et al. (1953) stated that all social systems, including schools, need to find solutions to four basic problems in order to survive, progress and develop. He observed that each must adapt to its environment, set and implement goals, provide a coherent system, and create and maintain a distinct culture. To solve these problems, Parsons (1967) stated that schools have three levels of control over their activities: technical, managerial, and theoretical. According to Parsons (1967), the technical level is related to the primary mission of school teaching and learning. Teachers and school principals have the primary responsibility for creating a healthy learning environment. The management level controls the internal coordination of the school. School principals need to allocate resources and find ways to improve teachers' motivation, loyalty, trust and commitment. Finally, the institutional level connects the school and the community. For a healthy school, the school needs the support of its community. Support is needed for school principals and teachers to perform their duties effectively without undue pressure from individuals and groups outside the school. Healthy schools are thought to successfully adapt to their environment, achieve their goals, and instill common values and solidarity in teacher work groups (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). In addition, Hoy and Feldman (1987) used Parsons' (1967) theory to measure school health and linked it to the level of control to develop seven dimensions: “organizational integrity, principal influence, understanding, initiative structure, resource support, morale and academic importance.” Under these headings, they defined “healthy and unhealthy schools” (Hoy & Feldman, 1987, pp. 32-35).

In this study, school health was defined as a concept that helps to show the psycho-social status of schools that adapt and develop to their environment in order for schools to achieve their goals, have a healthy climate and an important structure that shows the relationship between school organization members (Akbaba Altun, 2001; Buluç, 2008; Korkmaz, 2007). Organizational health, which consists of five dimensions, includes the following dimensions: organizational leadership, organizational integrity, environmental interaction, organizational identity, and organizational product. The concept of organizational leadership is defined by Akbaba Altun (2001, p. 68) as “determining the management, goals and objectives of the organization, planning how the goal will be achieved or how the process will be, using the available resources according to the goals, controlling the process, preparing and developing organizational standards.” It is possible to define organizational integrity as a concept that includes the interaction between organizational members, activities, decision-making processes, and the ethical quality of the decisions made and shows organizational integrity (Hong, 2016; as cited in Kılıçoğlu, 2017). Environmental interaction is defined as the organization's communication and interaction with its environment, adapting to the changes and developments occurring in its environment, meeting the needs of the society, having a 'distribution of influence' within the organization and avoiding chaos and conflicts (Akbaba, 1997). Organizational identity is defined as a concept consisting of “organizational communication, organizational behavior and organizational philosophy” along with the logo, color and symbols of the organization (Ertürk, 2018). Organizational product is defined as how effectively and efficiently an organization receives its inputs, how it obtains resources and how it obtains healthy products (Akbaba, 1997).

Organizational health is a concept frequently used in educational organizations. In order for personal, academic and social learning to take place in educational organizations, schools must have a healthy climate. A healthy environment, a healthy school, helps to raise healthy students (Akbaba Altun, 2001). According to Hoy and Feldman (1987), a healthy school, protected from society and parents, has a dynamic leader, teachers who are dedicated to teaching and learning, set high but achievable goals for students, respect and trust each other, are willing to work and have good relationships with the school. In addition, Korkmaz (2006) states that healthy schools successfully adapt to the environment and their staff promote the common values of the school.

### **Crisis Management Skills of School Principals**

It is substantial for school principals to have crisis management skills in order for schools not to be affected by crises and to continue the education and training process. In recent years, especially with the events such as epidemics, pandemics, and earthquakes, researchers have focused on the crisis management skills of school principals (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Kavrayıcı & Kesim, 2021; Otto & Lumapenet, 2022; Toklucu, et al., 2022). On the other hand, studies on the crisis management skills of school principals show that school principals have some competencies such as turning crises into opportunities, comprehending and solving

problems, keeping the level of communication strong in the school, influencing the personnel in the school (Topcu, 2017); giving confidence to the personnel and creating a safe structure between teachers and students (Haban & Bozkurt, 2017); making preparations with an effective crisis management plan against the occurrence of a crisis (MacNeil & Topping, 2007).

In this study, the crisis management skills of school principals were defined as the ability of a school administrator to effectively manage crisis processes within the framework of strong communication with school members by making effective decisions and creating order from chaos, without damaging the school and financial loss (Genç, 2009; Karaağaç, 2013). The crisis management process for school principals includes "three dimensions": "pre-crisis, crisis moment and post-crisis" (Aksu & Deveci, 2009). The "pre-crisis dimension" is defined as the period when some signs of a crisis begin to appear (Arslan & Sarı, 2019). Crisis preparation and crisis prevention are included in the pre-crisis dimension (Laugé et al., 2009). According to Coombs (2014), crisis preparedness includes identifying crisis vulnerabilities, creating crisis teams by preparing a crisis management plan, developing a crisis portfolio by creating a list of possible crises, and structuring a crisis communication system. "Crisis moment dimension" is the period when the crisis is fully realized (Ulutaş, 2010). Coombs (2014) mentions two stages in the crisis moment dimension: "crisis recognition and crisis containment". Recognition of the crisis involves the awareness of all members of the organization that the crisis has occurred and the process of responding to the crisis, while crisis containment refers to the importance and content of the first response to the crisis and the process of crisis intervention (Coombs, 2014). The "post-crisis dimension" is the final stage of the crisis process where school principals need to find solutions to end the crisis completely (Sayın, 2008). Coombs (2014) states that the post-crisis dimension includes actions to check whether the crisis has ended completely and to prepare the organization for the next crisis.

Schools can face a crisis at any unexpected time. There are two categories of variables that lead to crisis in schools: "in-school" and "out-of-school" (Döş & Cömert, 2012). It is seen that the factors that lead to crisis within the school are "school administration, teachers, students and staff", while the factors that lead to crisis outside the school are "parents, pressure groups in the environment and the labor market, equipment and material resources, top management and the structure of the central administration, natural disasters and epidemics" (Bursalıoğlu, 2021; Döş & Cömert, 2012; He & Li, 2020). It may be imperative for schools to respond to these crises, whether they are prepared for them or not. It seems possible that the crisis may affect part or all of the school, and for this reason, schools should definitely create a crisis management plan to prevent the crisis (La Pointe et al., 1996). In order to prevent a crisis, to prepare and plan for a crisis, and to manage the crisis process effectively, school principals' skills in dealing with crises play an active role.

### **School Health and Crisis Management Abilities of School Principals**

School health is crucial for schools to fulfil their goals effectively and for their continuity. There are many factors in the formation of school health, but one of the most important factors is that school principals have crisis management skills. In order to protect schools from outside negative influences and to foster organizational health, school leaders play a critical role (Hameiri & Nir, 2016). School leaders should have crisis management skills in order to overcome and prevent crises that occur in schools without damaging the school (Özalp & Levent, 2021). The qualities and skills required of school principals in times of crisis include handling situations, emotions and consequences in a way that minimizes harm to individuals and the school community (Smith & Riley, 2012). Thus, school principals with crisis management skills prevent crises with effective decisions, plans and strategies (Güngör & Yılmaz, 2021). By preventing crises that threaten the existence of schools, a healthy environment is created in the school instead of panic and anxiety (Ulutaş, 2010).

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

This study focused on the relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and organizational health using a predictive correlational survey model. "Relational survey models are studies that aim to determine the existence and/or degree of change between two or more variables" (Bedir Erişti et al., 2013, p.26). Quantitative techniques were used to analyze and interpret the sample data.

## Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of 3014 teachers working in Anatolian high schools, Vocational and Technical Anatolian high schools and Anatolian İmam Hatip high schools in Çankaya, the largest district of Ankara in terms of population, in the academic year 2021-2022. The general situation of the schools was analyzed by collecting data from all high school levels in Çankaya district of Ankara. The unit of analysis of this research is the teacher. As a matter of fact, it has been observed that the unit of analysis in studies on school health is teachers (Deniz, 2016; Yavuz Tabak et al., 2018; Türker, 2010). Since it was not possible to reach the whole population, the research was carried out through sampling. It was assumed that 341 teachers would represent the population of 3014 teachers (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016, p.96). Using the stratified sampling method, which is one of the random sampling methods, the population was divided into three sub-strata as three different school types of Anatolian high schools, Vocational and Technical Anatolian high schools, Anatolian İmam Hatip high schools. According to the “Ministry of National Education Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education” 2019-2020 general high school statistics (MEB, 2020), there are 699 teachers in 32 Anatolian high schools, 1136 teachers in 19 Vocational and Technical Anatolian high schools and 179 teachers in 5 Anatolian İmam Hatip high schools. Based on the ratio calculations, 192 teachers from Anatolian high schools, 128 teachers from Vocational and Technical Anatolian high schools, and 21 teachers from Anatolian İmam Hatip high schools were selected for the sample (341 in total). Considering the possible problems related to the procedure for collecting data, a total of 410 scales were distributed in schools; 363 of these scales were deemed suitable for data analysis. Demographic information about the participants is given in detail in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=363)*

Categories	Subcategories	n	%
Gender	Female	230	63.36
	Male	133	36.64
Age	20-30	14	3.86
	31-40	47	12.95
	41-50	155	42.70
	50>	147	40.50
Seniority (year)	1-5	12	3.31
	6-10	32	8.82
	11-15	45	12.40
	16-20	90	24.79
	21>	184	50.69
Types of High Schools	Anatolian İmam Hatip	27	7.44
	Anatolian	193	53.17
	Anatolian Vocational	143	39.39
Total		363	100

As seen in Table 1, the sample of the study consisted of 363 teachers. Of the teachers who participated in the study, 63 % were female and 37 % were male. Of the participants, 3.8 % were 20-30 years old, 12.9 % were 31-40 years old, 42.7 % were 41-50 years old and 40.5 % were 50 years old and above. 3.3 % teachers had 1-5 years of seniority, 8.8 % teachers had 6-10 years of seniority, 12.4 % teachers had 11-15 years of seniority, 24.7 % teachers had 16-20 years of seniority, and 50.6 % teachers had 21 years or more of seniority. 7.44 % of the teachers work in Anatolian İmam Hatip high schools, 53.17 % in Anatolian high schools and 39.39 % in Anatolian Vocational high schools.

## Data Collection Tools

The Elementary School Principals' Crisis Management Skills Scale (ESPCMSS) originated by Aksu and Deveci in 2009 and the Organizational Health Scale (OHS) developed by Akbaba in 1997 were utilized to gather data for this study.

### ***The Crisis Management Skills Scale***

The ESPCMSS was used to assess principals' crisis management skills based on teachers' views. The ESPCMSS consists of a five-point Likert-type scales that includes the options "never (1,00-1,79), rarely (1,80-2,59), sometimes (2,60-3,39), mostly (3,40-4,19), always (4,20-5,00)" scored from the most negative to the most positive. The ESPCMSS, which consists of "pre-crisis, crisis moment and post-crisis" dimensions, contains 31 items. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 31 and the highest score is 155. A high score from the scale means that school principals have high crisis management skills. To determine whether the scale was reliable, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. While 'the alpha reliability coefficient values' for the "pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis period" were .98 in general, they were calculated as .95 in the "pre-crisis and crisis period" sub-dimensions and .98 in the "post-crisis period" sub-dimension (Aksu & Deveci, 2009). According to the findings of the current study, "the validity and reliability of the ESPCMSS" were re-examined. CFA results confirmed the three-dimensional structure. Values for quality of fit from the CFA results were as follows: [ $\chi^2/df = 5.24$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.10$ ;  $GFI = 0.71$ ;  $AGFI = 0.67$ ;  $s-RMR = 0.077$ ;  $RMR = 0.062$ ;  $IFI = 0.98$ ;  $NFI = 0.97$ ;  $CFI = 0.98$ ]. According to these results, the ESPCMSS is a valid data collection tool for the current study. While the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the ESPCMSS was 0.98, the Cronbach's alpha value of the "pre-crisis dimension" of the scale was 0.94, the "crisis period dimension" was 0.94 and the "post-crisis dimension" was 0.97. On the basis of these results, it is concluded that the ESPCMSS is also reliable for this study.

### ***The Organizational Health Scale***

In order to examine the level of school health according to teachers' views, the OHS developed by Akbaba in Bolu in 1997 was used. In this study, the OHS was used with a "four-point Likert-type" scales that including the options "Never = 1" and "Always = 4." The scale consists of *Organizational Leadership*, *Organizational Integrity*, *Environmental Interaction*, *Organizational Identity*, and *Organizational Product* dimensions and includes 53 items. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 53 and the highest score is 2012. A high score on the scale means that the organization is perceived as healthy. To determine whether the scale was reliable, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. Alpha reliability coefficient value was calculated as .95 (Akbaba, 1997). Based on the current study data, the validity and reliability of the OHS were re-examined. CFA results confirmed the five-dimensional structure. The calculated CFA results were as follows; [ $\chi^2/df = 3.46$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.083$ ;  $GFI = 0.68$ ;  $AGFI = 0.65$ ;  $s-RMR = 0.088$ ;  $RMR = 0.088$ ;  $IFI = 0.82$ ;  $NFI = 0.76$ ;  $CFI = 0.8$ ]. Analyses of the validity coefficients of the OHS reveal that the scale is generally valid. The Cronbach's alpha value of the whole scale is 0.81. The organizational leadership dimension of the scale is 0.82, the organizational integrity dimension is 0.79, the environmental interaction dimension is 0.79, the organizational identity dimension is 0.75, and the organizational product dimension is 0.77. According to these results, it was concluded that the OHS was also reliable for this study.

### **Process and Data Analysis**

In the present study, the scales were applied to public high school teachers in Çankaya district of Ankara province in 2020-2021. Teachers are involved in the study voluntarily. The data collection process was directly managed by the researcher. The scales were distributed to the teachers during lunch and break times. It took an average of 10 minutes for each participant to fill out the scales. In this case, 410 teachers were given the scales and 363 of them returned as suitable for data analysis. The data were analyzed using LISREL 8.80 and SPSS version 23. Before the analysis, it was evaluated whether the data set contained outliers and missing data. The results of the analysis revealed that there were no outliers or missing data. In order to decide whether the data set meets the hypotheses of multivariate statistical analysis, skewness and kurtosis coefficients were analyzed on the basis of the sub-dimensions of both scales. It was found that the kurtosis coefficient values of the dimensions of both scales were between -0.42 and 1.75, and the skewness coefficient values were between -1.23 and 1.16. Since the kurtosis and skewness value ranges for the dimensions of the scales were between -2 and +2, it was assumed that the data set showed a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). In addition, linearity, which is one of the assumptions of simple regression, was also examined before the analysis. In this context, the scatter diagram was analyzed to determine linearity. As a result of the analysis, elliptical distributions were observed. This situation is interpreted as the linearity assumption between the variables is met (Çokluk et al., 2012, p. 29).

## Results

In the analysis of teachers' views on school principals' crisis management skills and school health, standard deviation and arithmetic mean data were used. The results are given in Table 1. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the variables of the study. Pearson correlation coefficient values of the research variables are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Variables (N=363)*

Variable	Avg.	SD.	The Lowest	The Highest
<b>Crisis Management</b>	119.64	22.98	31	155
Pre-Crisis Period	27.39	5.33	7	35
Crisis Period	30.45	6.60	8	40
Post-Crisis Period	61.79	12.07	16	80
<b>Organizational Health</b>	159.94	15.69	102	204
Organizational Leadership	44.64	6.15	16	52
Organizational Integrity	27.25	6.17	10	40
Environmental Interaction	35.03	8.00	19	55
Organizational Identity	26.36	4.17	12	32
Organizational Product	26.65	4.24	8	32

As seen in Table 2, the mean score of the teachers' views on school principals' crisis management skills is 119.64 ( $SD = 22.98$ ). Accordingly, the participants think that school principals have relatively good crisis management skills. On the other hand, the arithmetic mean value for school health was calculated as 159.94 ( $SD = 15.69$ ). According to this result, the participants find their schools relatively healthy.

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficient Values of Research Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. Crisis Management</b>	1									
2. Pre-Crisis Period	0.93**	1								
3. Crisis Period	0.94**	0.84**	1							
4. Post-Crisis Period	0.97**	0.87**	0.87**	1						
<b>5. Organizational Health</b>	0.17**	0.16**	0.17**	0.16**	1					
6. Organizational Leadership	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04	0.61**	1				
7. Organizational Integrity	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.43**	-0.08	1			
8. Environmental Interaction	0.26**	0.25**	0.26**	0.25**	0.55**	-0.07	0.19**	1		
9. Organizational Identity	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.58**	0.52**	-0.01	0.03	1	
10. Organizational Product	-0.45	-0.05	-0.02	-0.04	0.54**	0.57**	-0.06	-0.05	0.38**	1

\*\* $p < .001$

As seen in Table 3, there is a low level and positive relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and organizational health ( $r_{CM \times OH} = 0.17, p < 0.001$ ). In Pearson correlation analysis, cut-off scores are used to interpret the calculated values. Accordingly, a correlation value between 0-.30 is interpreted as low correlation, between .30-.70 as medium correlation, and between .70 and 1.00 as high correlation (Büyüköztürk, 2007, p.32). In addition, there is a low level and positive relationship' between the 'environmental interaction' sub-dimension of organizational health and school principals' crisis management skills ( $r_{CM \times EI} = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ). The "pre-crisis period, crisis period and post-crisis period" sub-dimensions of school principals' crisis management skills have a low level and positive relationship with organizational health ( $r_{OH \times PCP} = 0.16, p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{OH \times CP} = 0.17, p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{OH \times POCP} = 0.16, p < 0.001$ ).

The multiple regression analysis was utilized to decide whether school principals' crisis management skills are a significant predictor of organizational health. The results are given in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*The Regression Analysis Results*

Dependent Variable: School Health	<i>B</i>	<i>Standard Error B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	2.757	.083		33.222	.000
Pre-Crisis Period	.064	.020	.165	3.171	.002*
Crisis Period	.063	.019	.177	3.408	.001*
Post-Crisis Period	.063	.020	.161	3.098	.002*

$R = 0.179, R^2 = 0.032, F(359-3) = 3.95, *p < 0.05$

As seen in Table 4, according to teachers' opinions, school principals' crisis management skills related to pre-crisis period ( $\beta = 0.165, p < 0.05$ ), crisis period ( $\beta = 0.177, p < 0.05$ ) and post-crisis period ( $\beta = 0.161, p < 0.05$ ) dimensions are significant predictors of school health ( $F = 3.95, p < 0.05$ ). According to teachers' opinions, 3% of the entire variance of school health is explained by the crisis management skills of school principals.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between organizational health and school principals' crisis management skills has been examined through taking the opinions of teachers in public high schools. This study has contributed to the related field and literature in terms of the fact that school principals' having crisis management skills and being able to manage the crisis effectively provide a healthy and productive environment in the school. Within the scope of the research, a whole of 341 teachers were reached in Anatolian High Schools, Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, Anatolian İmam Hatip High Schools in Çankaya district of Ankara province in 2021-2022. Predictive correlational survey model was used for this study and the collected data set was analyzed with arithmetic mean, standard deviation ratio, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. As a result of the analyses, the participants think that school principals have crisis management skills. This finding is similar with previous studies in the literature (Aslan & Sarı, 2019; Haban & Bozkurt, 2017; Maya, 2014; Çiçek Sağlam & Özsezer, 2015). One of the possible reasons for the participants' views on school principals having crisis management skills may be the crisis management skills shown by school principals against the recent pandemic. As a matter of fact, in Gundem et al.'s (2022) study, it was concluded that school principals were effective in this process with activities such as ensuring hygiene safety and taking instructional and regulatory measures to manage the crisis during the pandemic process.

When the results of the analysis are analyzed, the participants think that the schools they work in are healthy. This finding is coherent with the results of similar studies (Karagüzel, 2012; Özdemir, 2006). This finding is consistent with the finding of Özdemir (2006). Özdemir (2006) concluded that teachers' perceptions of school health were at the *medium* level. However, this finding contradicts the finding of Yavuz Tabak et al. (2018). In Yavuz Tabak et al.'s (2018) study, it was seen that teachers' perceptions of school health were at the "low" level. One of the possible reasons for the participants' views on the healthiness of the schools where they work may be the positive attitudes of the school principals. As a matter of fact, in Türker's (2010) study, the school administrator working in a healthy school was defined as a dynamic leader who effectively uses leader behaviors in intra-school relations, supports and motivates teachers. On the other hand, Cemaloğlu (2011) stated that school principals' having qualities such as effective communication, problem solving, motivation, guidance, and rewarding constitutes positive school health.

One of the important findings of this study is that there is a low-level relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and school health. Indeed, correlation analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between school principals' crisis management abilities and school health. In a similar study conducted on this subject, it was observed that there was a significant difference between school principals' crisis management attitudes and their perceptions of the level of organizational health according to various variables (Yıldız, 2014). On the other hand, in Atış and Dilbaz's study (2022), school principals' having crisis management skills in the context of organizational skills affects the formation of an effective environment in schools. According to this finding, it can be stated that there is a relationship between the management skills of school principals during the crisis process and the health of schools. The regression results of this study showed that school principals' crisis management skills variable was a significant predictor of school health variable. The findings show that school principals' crisis management skills are a factor, albeit low, on school health. In other words, the crisis management skills of school principals are a factor, albeit very partial, in the health of schools. This finding was found to be consistent with the findings of a similar study (Çelik & Tosun, 2019). In Çelik and Tosun's (2019) study, it was concluded that some of the conflict management styles of school principals significantly predicted organizational health. In this study, school principals' crisis management skills explain the variability in school health at a relatively low level. This result may be due to the relatively low level of crisis management skills of school principals. However, this result indicates that other factors should be taken into consideration for school health.

As a consequence, according to the results of the study, based on teachers' opinions, school principals have relatively good crisis management skills and teachers find their schools relatively healthy. On the other hand, this study has shown that there is a low level and positive relationship between school principals' crisis management skills and school health, and that school principals' management skills in the crisis process are a factor in the health of schools, albeit partially. Thus, this study has contributed to the gap in the educational administration field related to the crisis management skills of school principals and organizational health issues, as well as the relationship between the crisis management skills of school principals and school health.

### **Limitations, Future Research, Implications**

This study's limitations include its focus on the connection between school principals' crisis management abilities and school health. One of them is that this study was conducted with a cross-sectional survey design. A second limitation of this study is that the research data was collected at a single level. Future research can be conducted with a longitudinal survey design. In addition, in future research, this issue can be conducted with a mixed design, or this issue can be examined in depth with qualitative research. In addition to these, future research could examine the crisis management skills of school principals or school health variables and variables related to the climate of schools, students' achievement, and teachers' motivation. Some practical implications of the results of this study can be mentioned. In this study, it was concluded that there is a low level and positive relationship between school principals' crisis management abilities and school health. This research suggests that if practitioners want to realize school health in a school, principals can be trained on crisis management skills and principals should be prepared for such extraordinary situations. On the other hand, graduate level courses on crisis management can be developed for school principals. In addition, policy makers should give more importance and value to the selection and training of administrator candidates who will show leadership in the crisis process and thus contribute to the creation of a healthy environment in the school.

### **Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval**

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed. The ethical committee approval was obtained from Hacettepe University Ethical Committee, No: E-35853172-300-00001522288, Date: 01.04.2021.

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### Okul Müdürlerinin Kriz Yönetim Becerileri ile Okul Sağlığı Arasındaki İlişki

#### Öz

Bu çalışmada, öğretmenlerin görüşleri alınarak, okul müdürlerinin kriz yönetimi becerileri ile okul sağlığı arasındaki ilişkinin nasıl olduğu incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklemini 2021-2022 yılı Ankara ilinin Çankaya ilçesinde resmi liselerde görev yapan 341 öğretmen oluşturmuştur. Araştırma nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan yordayıcı ilişkisel tarama modeli kullanılarak yürütülmüştür. Veriler "İlkokul Müdürlerinin Kriz Yönetimi Becerileri" ve "Örgüt Sağlığı" ölçekleri ile elde edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları, okul sağlığı ile okul yöneticilerinin kriz yönetimi becerilerinin "kriz öncesi, kriz ve kriz sonrası" alt boyutları arasında 'düşük düzeyde ve pozitif yönlü bir ilişki' olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Analizler sonucunda okul yöneticilerinin kriz yönetim becerilerinin okul sağlığının anlamlı bir yordayıcısı olduğu da saptanmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kriz yönetim becerileri, okul yöneticisi, okul sağlığı



# Life Quality of University Students: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis<sup>a</sup>

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## Abstract

*Quality of life among students is considered an important contributor to academic success. Quantitative assessments of students' life quality have identified it as a risk factor for academic procrastination and higher drop-out rates. Nevertheless, subjective investigations into university students' life quality remain underexplored. In the present meta-synthesis, we identified six qualitative studies and implemented Critical Appraisal Skills Programme as an assessment tool. Three main themes emerged from our synthesis: pressures on students, social psychological barriers, and hierarchy. Our findings support the consensus that certain academic tracks such as medical and health sciences can act as a risk factor for life quality. We propose an integration of both quantitative and qualitative assessment to reach a more holistic perspective into students' life quality.*

*Keywords:* university students, subjective well-being, quality of life, meta-synthesis

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## Introduction

University dropout rates have been a growing problem all around the world (Lodi et al., 2017). For instance, one out of five college students in the US terminate their education after their first year in school (Ryan, 2004). A similar pattern can be observed in European countries such as Italy, as four out of ten university students eventually quit school before they could graduate (Turri, 2014). In Türkiye, more than 2.3 million students left university between the years 2015 and 2022 (Turkish Higher Education Quality Council, n.d.). Since these numbers present a serious problem, determining the factors that can facilitate undergraduate students to pursue their education is therefore of utmost importance for educational researchers (Pike et al., 2006). Quality of life is one factor that determines students' academic success (Kandemir, 2014; Lodi et al., 2017). To explore students' quality of life, it is essential to investigate student well-being because quality of life and well-being are two interconnected concepts. Social scientists have defined quality of life as subjective well-being, an emotional state. In this regard, life satisfaction and well-being are a set of universal criteria, against which life quality is assessed. (Shin & Johnson, 1978). According to Bradburn (2015), happiness and subjective well-being are defined as a state which consist of more positive feelings and less negative feelings. Life satisfaction and life quality can then be defined as living up to the standards set by individual objectives and demands (Chekola, 1974).

The academic quality of life is one factor that improves academic performance (Bailey & Miller, 1998; Cheung, 2006; Gilman et al., 2000; Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1995), especially in the context of reduced procrastination (Kandemir, 2014; Lodi et al., 2017). University students' life quality is influenced by many factors such as burn-out, the nature of interpersonal relationship and personality traits (Azizli et al., 2015; Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Bettencourt et al., 2010; Çapri et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018; Schlarb et al., 2017). For example, when students feel overwhelmed by various curricular factors such as long contact hours and exam anxiety, they suffer from stress (Bergmann et al., 2019; Veal, 2020). As a result, students' life quality is adversely affected and student

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retention decreases (Berger & Milem, 2000; Chen, 2012). To prevent high dropout rates, it is important to explore the underlying reasons for low life quality.

Recent studies on quality of life are mainly quantitative and based on the scale developed by World Health Organization (Çapri et al., 2012). World Health Organization defines quality of life as: “individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024, Tools and Toolkits section). As for quantitative studies on Turkish students' quality of life, the Turkish version of World Health Organization Quality of Life Scale (Turkish\_WHOQOL-BREF) was mostly preferred as a tool for data collection. The Turkish version of this scale was developed by Eser et al. (1999). The dimensions in this scale are comprised of physical dimension, psychological dimension, social relationships dimension and environmental dimension. Toker and Kalıpçı (2021) used this scale in their study to assess the quality of life of university students in Mediterranean University in Türkiye. They found a positive correlation between the psychological and environmental dimensions on students' general life quality. Therefore, they concluded that universities should improve the physical conditions of their study halls and buildings to increase the life quality of students. In addition, according to them it is important for universities to offer quality health counselling services to their students.

It is apparent that there is a gap in research studies in literature which investigate students' life quality at a deeper level. Our aim is to explore university students' life quality based on their university life experiences by conducting a meta-synthesis analysis involving university students in several European countries (i.e., England, Germany and Sweden).

### **Literature Review**

Up until 1960's happiness and life satisfaction were associated with such personal attributes as being pious, ethical, and wise (Diener, 2009). This definition was in line with Aristotle's concept of “eudaimonia”, which is a set of criteria used to make judgements as to how one should lead their life. However, recently quality of life was associated more with the following definition “individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHO, 2024, Tools and Toolkits section). Therefore, it can be said that today in addition to physical well-being, life quality refers to psycho-social well-being as well (Li & Zhong, 2022). The dimensions of quality of life in World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL) are as follows: physical well-being, mental well-being, interpersonal relationships, and environmental dimensions. Therefore, it is fair to say that research conducted on student quality of life has revolved around factors that affect these four dimensions.

Beginning from 1990's research findings of the investigation on life quality of students involved the factors affecting student well-being. These include age (Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1994), stress (Chang, 1998; Makinen & Pyschyl, 2001; Simons et al., 2002), physical health (Pilcher, 1998), study style (Cheung, 2006), parenting style (Seibel & Johnson, 2001), lifestyle (Bailey & Miller, 1998) and personal characteristics (Cha, 2003; Yetim, 2003). In addition, social support was reported to influence student well-being in many studies. For example, in a study conducted by Coffman and Gilligan (2002), the stress levels of junior students with high social support scores were found to be low and their quality of life was reported to be high. The primary reason for why students quit university education was found to be resulting from failure to interact effectively with their peers (Ostrow et al., 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Social support was found to be a recurring aspect which influences students' life quality in many other research findings (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Demakis & McAdams, 1994). Strong ties with family and peers were reported to have an impact on life quality (Newland & Furnham, 1999; Halamandaris & Power, 1999). These research findings, for example, could help explain why first year students might struggle with adaptation and thus suffer from high stress levels (Demakis & McAdams, 1994). Another factor associated with stress is burn-out. When students fail to cope with stress, it is likely that they will suffer from burn-out (Chow, 2005; Çapri et al., 2012). When students' life satisfaction was reported to be low, they were found to be more likely to suffer from burn-out (Chow, 2005; O'Neill, 1981).

Academic procrastination and low academic performance are the outcomes of low student quality of life (Betz et al., 1971; Elliott & Shinn, 2002; Lent et al., 2007; Nauta, 2007; Schmitt et al., 2008; Staats & Partlo, 1990). According to researchers, when students' quality of life is high, so is their academic success. Procrastination rates of students were observed to be low when their life satisfaction levels were high. This means that when the student has poor well-being, they will be struggling with their academic studies and thus they might

be more likely to leave school. Consequently, it can be said that there is a positive correlation between students' well-being and their academic life experiences (Bailey & Miller, 1998; Cheung, 2006; Gilman et al., 2000; Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1995).

Another outcome of low life quality is low life satisfaction. Life satisfaction of university students is associated with the social-cultural environment in which the student is living, department or faculty in which the student is studying, financial and psychological support provided by the university which the student is affiliated with (Arbues, et al., 2022). For example, in a study conducted in Spain, physical dimension was identified to be the highest score, and the lowest score was found in the psychological dimension. However, in a different study conducted in Canada, general life quality of students was found to be high, especially in the interpersonal relationships dimension (Chow, 2005). These differences in quality of life could be resulting from the factors affecting life satisfaction of university students such as social-cultural environment, the subject they are studying and the extent of the financial and social support they receive from the university administration (Arbues et al., 2022).

Apart from WHOQOL, there have been other scales developed by various researchers to assess students' life quality (Köse & Akyürek, 2022). For example, Köse and Akyürek (2022) developed "Life Satisfaction Survey" based on the data collected from 629 high school and 904 undergraduate students. Based on research findings, they concluded that undergraduates had a rather pragmatic approach to university education. The reason for why they were attending university was found to be to gain an income, rather than receiving quality education. Researchers concluded that university administrators and professors could devise a strategic plan that emphasizes self-actualization and such values as being a productive member of society.

In many different studies it was reported that medical and health sciences students are the ones with the lowest quality of life scores (Cai et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2017; Saul et al., 2021; Yorks et al., 2017) Therefore, it is fair to say that most of the recent studies on students' life quality revolve around health sciences and medical school students. The results of these studies are similar to each other in that the well-being of medical school students was found to be low (Li & Zhong, 2022). Veal (2020) for example, asserted that due to exposure to elevated levels of stress and burn-out, medical school and health sciences students were more likely to suffer from depression. For this reason, he suggested restructuring of medical school curriculum to address psychological needs of the students. He added that it was crucial to create mental well-being awareness programs. As a result, it can be concluded that the faculty in which the students are studying also has an impact on their well-being.

The recent change of focus from investigating more objective indicators such as academic performance and material well-being to subjective factors such as interpersonal relationships, psycho-social factors, personality and individual experiences inform the current synthesis. By synthesizing qualitative studies conducted with medical and health sciences students, we aim to inquire how university students view their individual experiences at school and what factors play a role in their life quality. To answer the research question, qualitative meta-synthesis method was utilized to a selected dataset of six studies out of twenty studies. We reckon that this meta-synthesis will contribute to the existing literature on students' life quality.

## Method

Qualitative meta-synthesis was adopted in this research. Qualitative research has the potential to inform policies and practices (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Qualitative meta-synthesis can be employed by researchers who intend to draw novel conclusions from a collection of qualitative research findings (Thorne et al., 2004). The reason why this method was selected was because "meta-syntheses [...] offer novel interpretations of findings. These interpretations will not be found in any one research report, but rather, are inferences derived from taking all of the reports in a sample as a whole" (Thorne et al., 2004, p.1358). Therefore, it can be said that since they have the potential to inform policy and make room for deeper understanding of the phenomena, meta - syntheses can provide valuable sources of information (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Because our aim in this research is to explore the life quality of university students, these procedures have the potential to provide invaluable insight into current higher education research and practice. Therefore, we believe we could explore our research question through this current meta-synthesis.



## Search and Selection Process

Initially, we tried to identify all qualitative studies of university students' life quality and well-being all around the world published in Scopus, BMC Medical Education and Science Direct. Table 1 demonstrates Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram. Search and selection process followed the guidelines outlined in PRISMA 2020 Statement (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA Statement was devised for reporting of quantitative and mixed-methods studies as in systematic reviews and meta-analyses, however when "addressing the presentation and synthesis of qualitative data", the use of PRISMA is highly recommended (Page et al., 2021, p. 2). Therefore, to present the studies used in the search and selection process in a systematic way, we decided to use the flow diagram shown in Table 1.

We selected Scopus, BMC Medical Education and Science Direct databases because they include journals which publish rigorous research and high-quality studies in the field of health, social sciences and humanities (Elsevier, 2024). Initial search terms that were used are as follows: "life quality", "quality of life", "well-being", "stress", and "university students". Certain criteria were applied to select studies to include. Our initial inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) included undergraduate students as participants 2) focused on life quality and/or well-being of students 3) used qualitative methods 4) met the criteria for peer-reviewed journal article. It is apparent from Table 1 that 13 articles were identified in our initial database search. In order not to miss any qualitative studies which met our criteria and to identify more relevant articles, we also conducted a Google Scholar search. The same search terms and the same criteria were employed in our Google Scholar search. Following these steps above, we adopted a quality check method by evaluating the rigor of the selected articles against Critical Appraisal Skills Program ([CASP], 2018). During the evaluation process, the following questions were used:

- (1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?
- (2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?
- (3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?
- (4) Is the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?
- (5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?
- (6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants been considered?
- (7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?
- (8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?
- (9) Is there a clear statement of findings?
- (10) How valuable is the research?

During our search we realized almost all qualitative studies revolved around almost exclusively life quality of medical school and health sciences students. Therefore, almost all studies which met our search and selection criteria were conducted with medical school and health sciences students. The studies that were maintained for analysis can be found in Figure 1. As studies on student well-being and life quality differ greatly in terms of context, we eliminated 14 studies out of 20 and continued our analysis with six studies. The geographical regions involved in these six studies were three European countries, namely England, Germany and Sweden. Therefore, in our meta-synthesis, we decided to include studies conducted in England, Germany and Sweden. It is also important to note that the reason for restricting the scope in this way is that "the sample must be homogenous enough to confirm the findings and at the same time heterogeneous enough to ensure abstraction but not too abstract to be meaningless" (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010, p. 250). These studies were found to meet all 10 criteria in CASP (2018) checklist. As part of enhancing validity, all the other studies which did not meet the quality criteria were excluded from the synthesis. It is important to note that other databases such as Web of Science and ProQuest included mainly quantitative quality of life studies. We found one PhD dissertation on medical students' subjective well-being, but it was conducted in the United States of America. Therefore, the dissertation we found in ProQuest was excluded from this review. Therefore, we continued the search process in Scopus, BMC Medical Education Database and Science Direct.

**Table 1***PRISMA Flow Diagram for Qualitative Research on the Life Quality of University Students\**

	Scopus	BMC Medical Education Database	Science Direct
Identification	Documents identified by initial Scopus research $n = 27$	Documents identified by initial BMC Medical Education Database research $n = 801$	Documents identified by initial Science Direct research $n = 18$
Screening	Books, book chapters, review articles, conference abstracts, editorials etc. excluded $n = 5$	Books, book chapters, review articles, conference abstracts, editorials etc. excluded $n = \text{null}$	Books, book chapters, review articles, conference abstracts, editorials etc. excluded $n = 11$
Eligibility	Articles assessed for eligibility $n = 22$ Articles excluded based on eligibility criteria $n = 19$	Articles assessed for eligibility $n = 801$ Articles excluded based on eligibility criteria $n = 793$	Articles assessed for eligibility $n = 7$ Articles excluded based on eligibility criteria $n = 5$
Include	Selected articles $n = 3$  Additional articles identified via Google search : 7 Total number of articles included: 20	Selected articles $n = 8$	Selected articles $n = 2$

Note:\* Search was conducted in December 2023.

### Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

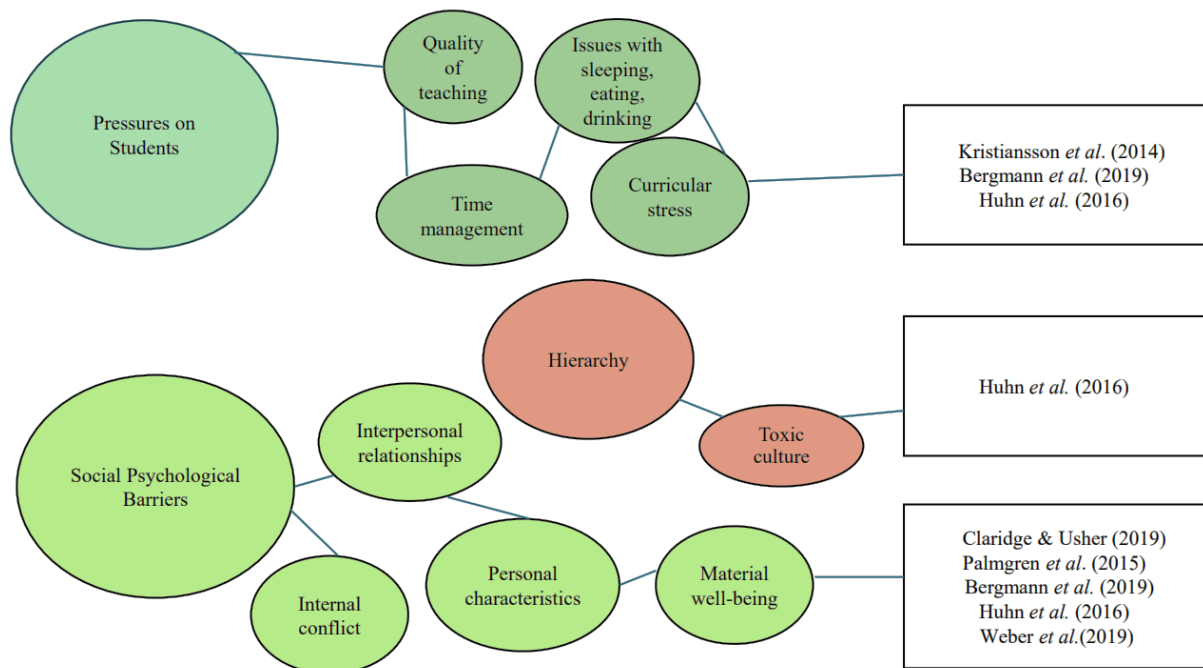
The participants in the reviewed studies were all comprised of medical and health sciences students studying in England, Germany and Sweden. The studies were published between 2014 and 2019. In the reviewed studies data collection tools were interviews with focus groups and questionnaires with open-ended questions. According to Finfgeld-Connett (2010), in meta-syntheses, “triangulation involves the use of findings from topically related qualitative research studies which have been triangulated a priori as part of the original research investigation” (p.249). This current meta-synthesis was carried out with qualitative studies conducted with triangulated data to ensure generalizability and transferability of findings.

### Data Analysis

Our data analysis followed the six steps suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. The analysis began by familiarization of the data. The initial ideas were annotated after immersion to the texts in the data set. In addition to the “findings” section of the studies, we decided to extract information from all relevant sections of the studies. Therefore, we did not rely only on the “findings” section of the selected studies. In this way, to create novel conclusions, we tried to avoid limiting our synthesis to “summarizing themes reported in primary studies” (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005, p.47). Key ideas extracted from the data set were transformed into codes and initial codes were generated systematically in this way. After this second step, researchers searched for themes based on codes. Common interesting features in the data set were analyzed to form themes. To extract themes from the data set, we used R Studio 4.2.1. software program to generate a thematic map of the analysis. Our initial thematic map was based on a sample data extraction as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data extraction and codes can be found in Table 2. According to Finfgeld-Connett (2010), trustworthiness “is enhanced by triangulation” (p.249). To ensure reliability, the researchers were also “attuned to personal perspectives that could introduce bias, and they carefully considered alternative interpretations”. (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010, p. 249). Next, these codes were collated to form themes. For reliability purposes, the themes were checked by an evaluator in the fields of education and psychology in relation to the coded extracts to evaluate whether they fit the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There was one disagreement on one sub-theme out of 12 theme categories. Disagreements were resolved between the two authors at this stage and the proportion of agreed judgements was calculated to be 91% (11 out of 12 themes). After this process, names were generated for each theme as a final step before the write-up. After several revisions, the analysis was finalized. Figure 1 demonstrates the finalized version of “descriptive themes” and sub-themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

**Table 2***Data Extracts with Codes*

Data Extracts	Coded for
"Well, you're not really appreciated here. They rush you through it and, uh, when you don't function, you'll be punished."	lack of appreciation fear of failure
"In the week before the exam I have at least one nervous breakdown because when I talk to friends who are more advanced I see that there are so many things I still have to do. You have no idea."	curricular stress stressful social interactions anxiety and stress need for support

**Figure 1***Finalized Themes and Sub-Themes*

*Note.* Figure 1 shows the six reviewed studies of students' life quality including the finalized three main themes and the corresponding sub-themes.

### Findings

Figure 1 demonstrates the three analytical themes identified in our analysis. Pressures on students include the stress imposed by the general demands and regulations of the institution, issues with sleeping, eating, time management and material well-being. Social psychological barriers are related to relationships with peers, family and supervisors, feelings of inadequacy, feelings of guilt when engaging in stress relief activities, and personality traits. These traits may affect the perception of stress (Huhn et al., 2016, p.9). Finally, our third theme, a culture of hierarchy, stresses how mistreatment of instructors, supervisors, peers and the demanding nature of the studies may lead to a toxic work culture, which affects the life quality of university students.

## **Pressures on Students**

Our analysis suggests that curricular and academic stress make it hard for the students to manage their time effectively and thus affect their material and psychological well-being adversely. Furthermore, poor physical conditions of the classrooms and buildings such as classrooms lacking chairs were reported to have an influence on students' life quality. According to the reviewed studies, to avoid the adverse effects of stress, students develop certain coping mechanisms, but not all of them are healthy strategies. For example, in some studies it was reported that stressed students may resort to unhealthy habits such as smoking and drinking (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.4).

### ***Curricular Stress***

Some students reported that long contact hours affected their life quality. A medical school student in Düsseldorf, Germany said that their previous top-ranking student status could be lost in medical school because of the high demands. Therefore, this leads to feelings of stress and pressure. This situation will eventually lead to "resentment among fellow students due to competition" (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.4). Overall, unfair grading systems, having to pass multiple exams, feelings of being unprepared for exams, and mandatory attendance are what were considered by medical students to be related to curricular stress (Weber et al., 2019, p.5).

### ***Quality of Teaching***

Another important aspect that affects students' life quality was found to be the quality of teaching (Huhn et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2019). Among the stressors related to teaching quality were reported to be lack of guidance and supervision, inadequate feedback, "arrogant teachers" viewing teaching as burdensome, unpleasant experiences with teachers showing intimidating behavior (Weber et al., 2019, p.3). Negative experiences as such were reported to be demotivating and counterproductive. Some students voiced their concerns over low quality teaching in medical schools. In addition to all these, concerns over the grading system and exams which test rote recall rather than deep understanding of the subject matter were also raised (Weber et al., 2019, p.5).

### ***Issues with Sleeping, Eating, Smoking and Drinking***

Among the reviewed studies, in relation to the curricular/academic stress, issues with sleeping, eating, smoking and drinking were reported as elements that have an influence on university students' life quality. In relation to the emotional distress resulting from excessive workload, many students reported to suffer from unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking, lack of sleep and skipping meals (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.4).

### ***Time Management***

Our fourth subtheme under *pressures on students* is time management. Since time management appeared to be one of the most common themes in the reviewed studies, some students suggested time management strategies. Procrastination was reported to be an issue when it came to time management. Exhaustion and extreme tiredness due to having to balance between academic workload, internships, exams, courses and leisure time were some of the recurring issues reported related to time management and life quality in some of the reviewed studies (Weber et al., 2019, p.6). Another study conducted in Sweden showed that some students try to manage their stress by achieving "a sense of good enough" (Kristiansson, 2014, p.6). They manage to let go of perfectionism for the sake of their well-being. In this way, they could "leave space for private life" (Kristiansson, 2014, p.4).

### ***Material Well-being***

Final sub-theme under *pressure* was found to be material well-being. Most medical school students reportedly said they were unable to work part-time due to "unpredictable timetable", which caused increased costs due to relocation and lack of extra income. On the other hand, if they managed to find and maintain a side job related to their studies (e.g., medicine), then this contributed to one's motivation for their studies and career (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.5). Another critical issue that was expressed was related to receiving bursaries. Being a bursary receiver meant that they could stay in residence halls because they would be able to afford the excessive costs. One participant expressed their concern by saying "surviving from day to day is a never-ending difficulty. The financial burden is strongly felt especially by medical students in London considering the length of their program, which lasts 5 years (Claridge & Usher, 2019, p.5). Therefore, international medical students tend to prefer Germany, where the education is less costly compared to America or Japan. One student reported that "studying in Germany is virtually free of charge" (Huhn et al., 2016, p.3). Financial stress is a key factor that affects student

well-being. In addition to tuition fees, one needs to think about the costs regarding the commute between home and university, “the price of textbooks and other working material, as well as the money spent on food” (Weber et al., 2019, p.7). Finally, factors adversely affecting the material well-being of students were found to be the inability to work part-time due to uncertain timetables, difficulty covering the living expenses such as accommodation, textbooks, food and the likewise. In addition to these, a strong link between material well-being and social psychological well-being as well as academic performance were among the findings of the reviewed studies.

### **Social Psychological Barriers**

Our analysis suggests that social psychological barriers are linked to interpersonal relationships, internal conflict and personality traits. Research suggests that when students establish healthy connections to their peers and professors, they are less likely to suffer from burn-out (Byrnes et al., 2020). However, due to the high demands of the medical program, students fail to find a balance between those duties and their private life. When they engage in leisure activities, they risk feeling guilty and face an internal dilemma. Therefore, their mental health and psychological well-being are adversely affected. Finally, the reviewed studies revealed that personal characteristics are associated with levels of stress that students experience (Bergmann et al., 2019; Huhn et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2019). Each of these subthemes are explained in detail below.

#### ***Interpersonal Relationships***

Social relationships can have both positive and negative impacts on students’ life quality. Some students reported that they deliberately avoided medical discussions and thus preferred to meet with their non-medical friends to avoid stress because they believed “stress is a contagious feeling” (Weber et al., 2019, p.7). One student reported “(when) I talk to friends who are more advanced, I see that there are so many things I still have to do. You have no idea what they’re talking about” (Weber et al., 2019, p.7). These students reported communication between fellow students as additional stressors. On the other hand, there are studies revealing friendships are useful especially for medical students because bonding helps them adjust to school (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.6). A study conducted with Swedish chiropractic students revealed that students saw “the amicable atmosphere” and “the small size of the institution” as positive contributors to their life quality (Palmgren et al., 2015, p.8).

#### ***Internal Conflict***

In some reviewed studies students reported that having to balance between studies and leisure time activities could cause feelings of guilt and dilemma about which area of life they should prioritize. On the one hand, they would like to engage in social activities such as meeting with family and friends to cope with stress, on the other hand when they do, they can find themselves more stressed because they could have spent that time studying. One student emphasized this by saying “when I meet with friends or do something with my family, then I always think in the back of my mind that I could just as well study. You can’t enjoy it” (Weber et al., 2019, p.7). These feelings are reported to stem from fear of failure and expulsion from the medical school (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.4).

#### ***Personal Characteristics***

Some of the reviewed studies pointed to the relation between personality traits in the Big Five Model (i.e. conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience) and life quality (Bergmann et al., 2019; Huhn et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2019). In a study conducted in Germany about medical students’ perceptions of stress it was found that except for openness to experience, the other four personality traits in some ways were related to how students perceived stress (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.5). For example, elevated levels of conscientiousness would increase the levels of stress a student might experience. Neuroticism was found to be associated with elevated levels of guilt when students engaged in leisure time activities instead of studying. As for extraversion, these students might be more vulnerable when they must prioritize studies over spending time for social bonding. They are said to “suffer more from social isolation”. Finally, students with low agreeableness scores found it hard to cope with academic failure and they fell behind others in rank (Bergmann et al., 2019, p.6). In addition to the association between personality traits and stress levels, another study conducted with international students in Germany revealed that personality attitudes such as “shyness, openness to experience, curiosity” were associated with how well a student would be socially integrated into the host country successfully. These are counted as internal factors affecting students’ individual experiences. (Huhn et al., 2016, p.5).

## **Hierarchy**

Abuse culture in medical school stemming from hierarchy was repeatedly reported in some of the reviewed studies. The subtheme under hierarchy culture was found to be toxic culture. Moral abuse such as “servant demands of arrogant teachers”, sexist comments from patients against female students in the hospital and problems with grievance procedures due to “the networking culture” are some of the negative experiences affecting students’ life quality adversely (Huhn et al., 2016, p.6).

## **Toxic Culture**

A culture of “self-sacrifice” was normalized in medical school. Doctors were reported to put pressure on students and thus this resulted in low life quality. In certain reviewed studies “nepotism” and “corruption” were also among the concepts that appeared under the theme of toxic culture. In a study conducted in Germany with international students, it was found that when choosing a school to study, students strived to find a place in countries where “they are able to progress through personal merit rather than personal connections” (Huhn et al., 2016, p.6). Overall, it was clear that the implications of a hierarchy culture in academia, especially in the medical field, had a role in students’ reported life quality and well-being.

## **Discussion**

This synthesis drew novel conclusions from the findings of six studies of life quality of university students to provide an insight into students’ individual experiences and feelings within their own unique context. In this section, we discuss the limitations of this study, share the interpretation of our findings and future implications.

### **Limitations**

Although there are studies which include graduate students’ well-being and life quality, we focused only on studies which included undergraduate students’ perceptions and views as young adults (Falk et al., 2019). As a result, our findings are not generalizable for graduate students. A second limitation of the study is concerning the nature of meta-synthesis, which is a method used to draw novel interpretations from a collection of qualitative studies (Thorne et al., 2004). Therefore, generalizability of the research findings remains to be a limitation of this synthesis. A third issue arises from the specific search terms used to locate the most relevant research articles on university students’ life quality. We strived to select the most appropriate key concepts related to the life quality of university students. There is ample research in relevant literature that confirms the fact that medical students are those with the lowest quality of life scores (Cai et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2017; Saul et al., 2021; Yorks et al., 2017) Therefore, it is possible that the views of students from other departments may be underrepresented in this study due to the fact that most of the recent studies on the quality of life revolve around health sciences and medical school students. Finally, the rigor of this research study is dependent on the quality of the articles included in the synthesis. The rigor of the articles used in this synthesis was checked against a checklist that is most commonly and widely used in evaluating the quality of qualitative research. However, the validity of the findings of qualitative studies remains to be a limitation as most of the studies relied merely on interviews and focus groups for data collection.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Our synthesis highlights several crucial issues affecting university students’ life quality. Our findings are in line with existing literature. First, studies on medical school students dominate current research. This is because existing literature suggests that students studying medicine or health sciences suffer from negative feelings most frequently due to the demands of their faculty (Veal, 2020). Our research findings also highlight similar issues with medical students. Therefore, it can be said that our research contributes to the existing literature on university students’ life quality.

Firstly, medical students and health sciences students feel the burden of academic stress resulting from grand expectations of their teachers and family. Some students report struggling with internal conflict and feelings of guilt when engaging in social activities instead of studying (Weber et al., 2019). Overwhelmed by all of these pressures, students resort to unhealthy habits such as smoking or drinking (Bergmann et al., 2019). On the other hand, a study conducted with Swedish students shows that there are those who can “let go of perfectionism” and by using “effective study techniques”, they can find a balance between study time and private life (Kristiansson,

2014). Thus, it is suggested that medical school curriculum needs to be updated to fit the needs of students. Kligler (2013) asserts that “shaping a curriculum that incorporates the noncognitive learning process that plays an important role during the 3rd year” (p.539). This is supported by Veal (2020), according to whom mental well-being awareness programs should be incorporated into curriculum. Thus, academic performance pressures such as mandatory full-time attendance, long contact hours, fear of failure in exams contribute to the excessive workload. Finally, all of this could lead to burn out and depression among students, who struggle to manage their time effectively.

Another issue arising from our synthesis is the relationship between students and their teachers, family, and peers. Those who report a positive and healthy relationship with their social circle are less likely to have low quality of life (MacArthur & Sikorski, 2020). Quality of teaching has a role in interpersonal relationships as well (Weber et al., 2019). When there is satisfactory supervision and guidance, students feel less stressed. To the contrary, when professors’ attitudes are negative to the extent that there is a toxic learning environment, then students feel uncomfortable and distressed (Colenbrender et al., 2020). Our research reveals that support and the quality of the learning environment play a key role in students’ reported life quality. Furthermore, those who can establish healthy ties with their peers are more likely to control their stress levels and therefore less likely to suffer from depression or burn-out (Bergmann et al., 2019).

Financial issues are a prevalent issue in students’ reported life quality. Material well-being plays a part in student life satisfaction because financial resources enable students to achieve academic success, to have the time and money for academic studies and social activities. In addition, as campus accommodation provides students with increased social interaction, those who can afford halls of residence on campus are more likely to be satisfied with their lives (Harrison et al., 2018).

Personality appeared to be related to students’ perception of stress. For example, an extroverted student might be more likely to struggle with lack of communication and social interaction during stressful examination periods. Therefore, those students could report lower life satisfaction than introverted students. Furthermore, those with high conscientiousness could feel guiltier and they struggle with internal conflict when they spend their free time with their family or friends instead of studying. Therefore, it is also important to note that personal traits could also play a role in students’ perceived stress and well-being (Bergmann et al., 2019).

Finally, a culture of verbal and emotional abuse prevalent in medical schools was reported to be an issue among students. Some students felt disrespected and mistreated by their supervisors and teachers. Moreover, those students who experienced abuse were unable to report the issue for fear of being seen as “problem-maker”. They thought this label could affect their grades and even pursue them after graduation in their career. Therefore, it is essential that immediate action is taken to avoid such incidents. Overall, the challenges affecting the life quality of medical students can be summarized as excessive workload, time management issues, mediocre quality of teaching, financial issues and a toxic learning environment, where self-sacrifice and mistreatment are normalized. There are several actions that can be taken to lower the level of stress students are facing. For example, updating the curriculum to include programs that increase awareness towards mental health, time management can help decrease the stress levels of students. In addition, providing professional development courses for university instructors might increase quality of teaching. Reviewing grievance procedures and checking whether they are followed to protect vulnerable students could prevent a toxic learning environment. Finally, increasing bursaries and scholarships to cover the expenses of all students who are in need are some of the measures that can be taken to tackle these issues affecting students’ life quality.

## **Implications**

Our findings reaffirm that there are several factors affecting students’ life quality such as stress (Chang, 1998; Makinen & Pyschyl, 2001; Simons et al., 2002), personal characteristics (Cha, 2003; Yetim, 2003) and social support (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002). Depending on how much social support they have, for example, students’ perception of stress and therefore their likelihood for burn-out may differ. We found that some students could be more resourceful and deal with stress more effectively than others by using certain coping mechanisms such as effective study techniques to manage time more effectively (Kristiansson, 2014). Also, so far studies done with medical and health sciences students dominate the existing research on university students’ life quality. Therefore, we argue that more studies involving students from different faculties should be conducted to address their needs and voice their concerns over their life quality. It is of crucial importance to have a multidimensional perspective towards studies focusing on university students’ life quality. Finally, to better the quality of universities worldwide

and improve the living conditions of university students as young adults, it is recommended that action is taken not only by university administrators but also by governmental bodies on a larger scale.

### ***Pedagogical Implications***

One of the themes which emerged from this synthesis is the quality of teaching and a culture of hierarchy. Many medical students complained about the lack of guidance and supervision. Some students felt that teachers were more interested in their own research than teaching and that teachers could be intimidating due to a culture of hierarchy pervasive in medical school. Therefore, some reported that this affected the relationship between teachers and students adversely. More research is needed to explore the underlying reasons behind this negative view. It might be that teachers' well-being and life quality could be affecting their daily teaching practices. Another qualitative study which focuses on teachers' working conditions might be conducted to shed light on their perspective. It is apparent from this current study that quality of teaching is an important factor which affects students' life quality. In addition, quantitative studies have shown that university culture has a significant effect on teacher-student relationship and quality of teaching (Argon & Kösterelioğlu, 2009; Erdem & İşbaşı, 2001). In these studies, it was found that students preferred interactive lessons which focused on critical thinking rather than rote learning (Argon & Kösterelioğlu, 2009). In this current synthesis, it was found that some students reported similar concerns regarding quality of teaching. They complained about lectures focusing on rote recall rather than deep understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, it can be concluded that lectures could be planned in a way that foster critical thinking and higher order thinking skills. In addition to quantitative studies, it is important to conduct more qualitative studies to explore and understand the individual stories of students so that measures could be taken to improve the life quality of young people who will make significant contributions to the development of a country.

### **Conclusion**

This current meta-synthesis focuses on university students' life quality. By synthesizing six qualitative studies conducted with medical and health sciences students, we identified three main themes, namely pressures on students, social-psychological barriers and hierarchy. It can be concluded that there are several stressors which cause anxiety and lower the motivation of students. Some of them are specific to the demands of the medical school, but some can also be faced by students studying in other faculties such as quality of teaching and teacher-student relationships as well as a culture of hierarchy (Argon & Kösterelioğlu, 2009; Çalışkan & Zhu, 2019; Erdem & İşbaşı, 2001).

Some of the measures to tackle challenges affecting students' life quality might be updating the curriculum to include programs that increase awareness towards mental health. In addition, providing professional development courses for university instructors to increase the quality of teaching can be considered by university administrators. Finally, increasing bursaries can also help students focus on their studies and increase their economic well-being. It is important to conduct more research with university students studying at different faculties to explore the challenges faced by students and address their needs so that they could have an improved quality of life.

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## Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Yaşam Kalitesi: Bir Metasentez Çalışması

### Öz

*Yaşam kalitesi, öğrencilerin akademik başarısında önemli bir role sahiptir. Alan yazında, öğrencilerin yaşam kalitesine yönelik yapılan birçok nicel çalışma sonucunda, yaşam kalitesindeki olumsuzlukların akademik erteleme ve okul terk oranlarında bir artışa yol açtığı gözlemlenmiştir. Fakat, üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşam kalitelerini inceleyen nitel çalışmalara pek rastlanmamaktadır. Bu meta sentez çalışmasında, Kritik Değerlendirme Becerileri Programı (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) kriterleri göz önünde bulundurularak altı makale seçilip incelenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, öğrenciler üzerindeki baskılar, sosyo-psikolojik engeller ve hiyerarşi olmak üzere üç tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Aynı zamanda, alan yazın ile paralel olarak tıp ve sağlık bilimleri alanlarında öğrenim görmekte olan üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşam kalitesi bağlamında daha büyük bir risk altında olduklarına dair bulgular elde edilmiştir. Bu alanda yapılacak çalışmalarda karma yöntemlerin kullanılarak daha bütüncül bir bakış açısı getirilmesi önerilmektedir.*

*Anahtar kelimeler:* üniversite öğrencileri, öznel iyi oluş, yaşam kalitesi, meta sentez

## An Examination of School Administrators' Opinions About the School Through Sociological Theories

Hatice Turan Bora<sup>a</sup>

### Abstract

*Sociological theories put forward to understand society are closely related to education, which is one of the social institutions. According to the common sociological perspective, which sees education as a function of society, every theory has the power to influence schools. The aim of this study is to examine school administrators' views on the definition of school, its purpose, teachers and administrators, and what should and should not be in schools through four sociological theories: Functionalist, conflictualist, interpretivist, and critical. Knowing the theoretical background of school administrators' views on the school, which have direct and indirect effects on school development, and explaining school administrators' perspectives on the school will enable us to understand the foundations of school management and educational leadership behaviors. In addition, being able to reveal the intersection between sociology and school administration can develop action plans for getting support from the school to improve society.*

*Keywords:* school administrators, sociological theories, leadership, society

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### Introduction

The society we live in, along with its identity and integrity, as well as the ability to understand and accept other societies, is substantially shaped by our schools. Education at school helps people understand changes and develop sustainability, including lifelong learning (Mulford, 2003). With the sociological view of school, Emile Durkheim defines education as a function of society. Educational processes, practices and decisions are influenced by processes, practices, and decisions of the society (Durkheim, 2016). Schools have undergone radical changes influenced by alterations in society, such as structurally, economically, culturally, politically, and technologically. Paradigm changes occurring in society have also affected the emergence of new types of schools beyond educational routines. For example, when class distinctions were important and worth protecting in society, caste schools became widespread, where each individual attended the school of their own class. Along with the beginning of the industrial process, students from different social classes received basic education jointly, whereas economic schools became prevalent for students to attend after basic education. The demand for education as a legal right, the illegitimacy of the distinction between social classes, and democratization led to the emergence of the democratic school type. Although the class structure left over from the feudal system has disappeared, socio-economic levels constitute the basis of class distinction in today's society. The most convenient example of this is private education institutions. The presence of private institutions in education can create options in favor of those with better socio-economic status. Globally, private schooling increased by 9% from 1997 to 2021 (UNESCO, 2022). In Türkiye, 14,179 out of 70,383 schools are private schools (Ministry of National Education [MEB, English acronym MoNE], 2023), indicating a high demand for private education institutions. The private schooling rate can be evaluated in the sense that there are class differences arising from socio-economic levels in society and that these differences are reinforced through education. There are policies that provide financial support by the government to families who want to send their children to private school in Türkiye.

Social structures, processes, phenomena, and orientations create new educational systems, routines, and types of schools. In other words, education, as a function of society, is inevitably influenced by social changes. Examples from the history of education and school support this idea. Sociologists have tried to explain societies

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and social changes with a number of theories. The theoretical framework includes the main sociological theories that form the background of our work and the studies of these theories in the field of education.

### Sociological Theories

Functionalism, rooted in the positivist tradition of Comte and Durkheim, sees society as a set of integrated parts that are in a certain order with each other. The functionalist sociology of education focuses on the function of education within the social structure. Durkheim states that the most basic function of education is to strengthen social morality (2010). According to Durkheim (2010), children should be taught discipline, commitment to society and autonomy of will through moral education. Like Durkheim, Parsons and Merton also emphasize the concept of morality and state that balance in society can be established through common values and common consciousness (Üsküplü Yeniay, 2019). According to Shepard and Greene (2003), the function of schools is to develop academic skills, transmit the culture of the society, create a common identity among the members of the society and support individual development. Dreeben (2013), another functionalist thinker and author of the book "How Schools Work", focused on the functions of the socialization experiences offered to children by the school environment.

This approach has provided a field for the development of administrative theories that focus on the leaders' need to supervise and control their employees (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2021). The reflection of functionalist theory on educational leadership can be seen as an authoritarian leadership approach in which the leader structures the school because, according to this theory, it is emphasized that school administrators must ensure the protection of certain values in order to maintain social order.

*Conflict theory*, which emerged as an alternative to the theory of functionalism, has its roots mainly in the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Conflict theory views society as an arena of inequality, which fosters conflict and change, with a primary focus on disparities. Marx's theory has influenced the sociology of education with the theories of class conflict, alienation and ideology (Üsküplü Yeniay, 2019). However, Weber focuses on the need for education to give the individual the competence needed to place them in their future status (Hurn, 2002). Status and power also cause social stratification, just like the economy. Individuals can sometimes be at the top and sometimes at the bottom of stratification (Ritzer, 2012). This situation may cause conflict. Schools are bureaucratic, rational, and authoritative structures. Tensions and conflicts between teachers, students, administrators, and parents are possible. According to Collins (2012), education functions as a separation mechanism rather than talent development, and the task of education is to teach status culture, moreover, if a school prioritizes academic and professional development, it is because there is a certain element of status culture.

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2015), who conduct research on class distinction within the education system, the relationship between cultural capital in this distinction and the position of schools in ensuring the continuity of occupational strata, school culture constitutes the process that will ensure the continuity of inequalities. Bowles and Gintis (2012), known for their work on conflict theory, have suggested that the education system legitimizes the production of inequalities and stratification in the labor force. According to the "Affinity Principle" put forward by Bowles and Gintis (2012), social relations in the educational environment are similar to those in the working environment. For example, just as the student's control over the curriculum at school is less than that of administrators and teachers, in the workplace, workers have less control over their managers. The ability to manage social change emphasized by conflict theory can be considered in conjunction with the adaptive leadership approach, which has an understanding of a leader who effectively manages multi-layered personal, organizational and social change in society (Heifetz, et al., 2009; Northouse, 2021). It points to a leadership approach in which school leaders encourage school stakeholders to confront and cope with problems, challenges and changes.

In the background of *the interpretive theory*, which is another theory that tries to understand society, lies symbolic interactionism, which argues that meaning emerges in the process of interaction between people (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Üsküplü Yeniay, 2019), phenomenology, which argues that knowledge is socially constructed by individuals (Bruce & Yearley, 2006), and ethnomethodology, which focuses on the method by which the order of daily life is established (Tezcan, 2005). Interpretive theory holds the view that functionalism and conflictism neglect the free will of the individual. The essence of the theory is the concepts of daily activity, freedom, meaning, interaction, compromise and subjectivity (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, as cited in Üsküplü Yeniay, 2019). According to the interpretative sociology of education, in order to understand the education system, it is necessary to examine the daily activities of students, teachers and administrators. The roles and behavior patterns of individuals are formed in the school. Individuals attach meaning to their own actions and to the actions

of others. These meanings are interpreted subjectively by individuals and are not immutable. Meanings are shared between individuals, and this leads to consensus. Bernstein (2003), an interpretive theorist who studies symbolic interaction within the framework of class conflict, argues that the forms of classroom relations in education cannot be understood without considering the principles that regulate symbolic and linguistic relations between teachers and students.

The transformational leadership approach, which takes the understanding of leadership to a completely different ground, emphasizes the importance of emotions, values, ethical codes; satisfying human needs; in other words, the leader should approach his followers with the fact that they are fully human. This approach is recognized as a critical paradigm shift in leadership literature, just as interpretivism opposed functionalism (Northouse, 2021). It will be easier for a leader who is so aware of the world of meaning and signification of his followers through their eyes to accompany them on their journey to realize their potential at the highest limit (Northouse, 2021). In this context, it can be said that the school administrator who can create common value for teachers and students at school and ensure that this value is adopted by others can gain the notion of transformativeness.

Distinctively, *critical theory* criticizes society, the ruling class, power elites, and institutions. Critical theory has been reflected in the field of education as critical pedagogy. It has been shaped as a part of the radical democracy plan that aims to support the development of a culture of democracy and active citizenship (Esgin, 2019). Freire (2014) argued that education should raise free and conscious citizens, that individuals who can transform the world they live in can only be raised in this way, and that students should focus not only on getting information, but also on relating this information to the world and using it in practice. The idea that inequality of opportunity can be addressed through social justice aims for an emancipatory education that puts the student experience in educational environments ahead of the student's race, language, gender, and socio-economic status (Esgin, 2019).

In consideration of the studies of critical pedagogical theorists, Paulo Freire, the author of the book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", criticizes the understanding of education that the teacher tells, the student listens, the teacher is the subject, the student is the object, the student does not make decisions, the teacher is the authority, the student obeys the authority. According to him, this type of education system sees people as passive beings and aims to make students compatible with the world (Freire, 2014). According to Giroux (2008), the purpose of education should be to prepare individuals for work and to create consciousness that can interfere with life, to provide social design skills for a different future, rather than solely providing critical thinking skills. Apple (2012) emphasizes the link between creating individuals who adopt the values appropriate to the needs of the social division of labor of the school, comprehending the economic and cultural roles of schools, and teaching what needs to be known in the society where inequality is prevalent. This theory proposes a major change in the leadership process, namely servant leadership. According to Greenleaf (2003), the leader is actually the servant of the group and leads the group by serving them. In schools, this means less authority, less formal power and the removal of all classical, authoritarian and hierarchical walls. The school administrator serves the school to ensure the development of teachers and students by valuing them.

In recent years, there have been studies on the leadership behaviors of school administrators (Hallinger, 2016, Heck & Hallinger; 2005;), the function of school administrators in school development (Jackson, 2000; Leithwood, et al., 2010), as well as studies that combine sociological paradigms and leadership literature (Çelik, 2023). However, there are no studies examining school administrators' perspectives on school in the context of sociological paradigms. Research on school administrators focuses on outputs such as administrators' behaviors and practices. It is seen that the theoretical background of administrators' leadership behaviors is not sufficiently covered in the literature. The main reason for this situation may be that the influence of sociological theories in explaining practices is ignored. Sociological paradigms and their effects on ontological and epistemological views are as close to us as the atmosphere surrounding us. In addition to filling a gap in the field, this study is also valuable in terms of recognizing the importance of sociological paradigms.



## Method

### Research Design

This research has been designed as qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method that approaches the problem interrogatively and interpretatively, in an effort to understand the form of the problem it is studying in its natural environment (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

### Participants

Ten school administrators were interviewed in this study. The participants of the study were determined by maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is employed to identify main patterns within outlier cases (Miles & Huberman, 2021). In this study, school administrators working in schools in different districts, different socio-economic environment conditions, and different levels of schools in Ankara were sampled in terms of gender, management levels, and education levels. In the study, generalization was not aimed with maximum diversity. With diversity, similarities and patterns in the views of different administrators were focused on. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential. Each participant was given a code and number by the researcher to ensure participant confidentiality.

### Data Collection

In this study, the opinions of school administrators were gathered through a face-to-face interview format. The main purpose of choosing the interview method as the data collection tool in this study was to enable school administrators to express their perspectives in their own words. According to Patton (2014), the purpose of interviewing is to understand how the participant sees the world, to learn the terminology and judgments used, and to capture the complexity of personal perspectives and experiences. The basic principle of qualitative interviews is to provide a framework in which participants can explain their understanding in their own words.

Ethical permission was obtained from the Başkent University Ethics Committee for this research. Appointments were made for each administrator on different days to conduct the interviews at their convenience. The purpose of the research and why they were selected as participants were explained to them during the interviews. They were informed that the research was conducted confidentially and that ethical permissions were obtained. Additionally, it was emphasized that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research process at any time if they wished. A semi-structured interview form was used in the research.

### *Objectivity, Reliability, Credibility, and Transferability*

Validity and reliability criteria in qualitative research differ from those in quantitative research. According to Miles and Huberman (2021), validity and reliability in qualitative research can be assessed using the standards of "objectivity, reliability, credibility, and transferability." Objectivity seeks to answer the question "are the results based on the subjects and conditions of the research, not the researcher?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 2021). In this study, to reduce bias and ensure objectivity, the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes were clearly presented in a sequential order, and the study data was preserved for potential reanalysis. Reliability is defined as "the consistency of the study process and its relative stability across time, researcher and space" (Miles & Huberman, 2021). In order to ensure reliability in this study, interview questions were included by the researcher and it is possible to control the compatibility between the questions and the design. Additionally, the coding of the research was constructed independently by researcher, it was attended to clarify the roles of the researcher in the research process. Credibility is also referred to as the "accuracy value of the research" (Miles & Huberman, 2021). To enhance credibility, the researcher made sure that participation in the research was voluntary, checked the consistency between the questions and the answers, presented the findings and results in a clear and understandable way, and included quotations from the participants' views. Transferability addresses the question of "can the results of a study reach broader contexts?" (Miles & Huberman, 2021). Maximum diversity sampling was chosen to ensure transferability in this study.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used to analyze the data. According to Patton (2014), content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and interpretation effort to identify basic consistencies and meanings by

taking qualitative material. The codes that emerged in the content analysis were categorized in the context of four sociological theories.

### Findings

The codes derived from content analysis of school administrators' responses were matched with themes based on sociological theories and presented in the findings. The findings are exhibited under the headings of school definition, teacher, school administrator, school purpose, what should not be in school and what should be in school.

#### School Definition

In the answers given by school principals about how they define school, the concepts of socialization, value and culture transmission under the theme of ensuring continuity of society emerged. Some examples from the answers given by the administrators are given below.

*"The school combines socialization, culture transfer, and values, making it more than just a teaching-oriented institution."*

*"School is an environment where socialization takes place at a high level."*

*"School is not merely a place for academic learning, but also a valuable setting where children discover their identity in the company of their friends and teachers."*

Socialization, value and culture transfer are the concepts defended by the functionalist theory. According to this theory, schools have the function of socializing students and transferring values and culture to ensure the continuity of society. In the context of educational leadership, autocratic leadership behaviors of administrators emerge. Administrators can show a dominant management style to ensure socialization in order to ensure the transfer of values and culture and the continuity of society.

#### Teacher

In the answers given by school principals about teachers, the concepts of appealing to emotions, touching lives, love under the theme of meaning; communication, role modelling, guidance under the theme of interaction emerged. Some examples of the answers given by the principals are given below.

*"We touch the lives of children. If you don't appeal to the emotions of this generation, transferring information alone doesn't mean anything. You need to love them; you cannot be successful if you are not on the same wavelength."*

*"The teacher must touch the heart of the child. A teacher who does not know the student cannot be useful, the student should be reached through communication. Every child is different; teachers cannot step in that world with a stereotype. A teacher should be a role model rather than just a knowledge transmitter."*

*"Students don't really need knowledge, if they are determined, they do it themselves. If the teacher can access to the inner world of the student and touch it, this is the best. Every person's world is different, their expectations are different, the main thing is to step in their world."*

*"The first priority is academic; the teacher will embrace them with love while doing them. What you told the child will be forgotten, but if I touched his heart and caressed his head, he will not forget it."*

*"Teacher is not just a teacher, but an exemplary character, an element that touches lives, and guide who shapes students' future."*

*"The function of the teacher is to prepare for life, to guide the student, to shape the dough, to guide them to reach information, to contribute to their self-knowledge, besides education."*

*"The teacher should be a guide to the student rather than conveying information, more like a fellowship of knowledge, like a mentor."*

School administrators referred to the interpretive and critical paradigm while defining teachers with their answers. In the context of educational leadership, it can also be interpreted that administrators expect transformational and servant leadership behaviors from teachers. According to these models, teachers should basically understand and support students. This finding is surprising in the following way. School administrators, who refer to value transfer and socialization when defining the school, focus on emotions, understanding and support when defining the teacher. They may expect teachers to show transformational and servant leadership behaviors in their classrooms by establishing a deep connection with students.

### **School Administrator**

In the answers given by school principals about school administrators, leadership, planning, organizing under the theme of political function, providing good working environment and motivation under the theme of interaction, source point and relieving under the theme of reconciliation emerged. Some examples of the answers given by the administrators are given below.

*"The function of the school administrator is to ensure the healthy functioning of the school, set a mission and vision, and enable it to move forward with stakeholders."*

*"The school administrator should create a productive working environment, motivate teachers and students, ensure they are happy at school, and facilitate education and training in a healthy way by preparing the necessary equipment."*

*"The job of the school administrator is to alleviate the burden on teachers and eliminate factors that can disrupt their motivation."*

*"The school administrator should be a leader who can organize well and serve as a source point between students, teachers, and parents."*

*"The administrator should plan education. The school administrator's job should be the student."*

*"The administrator should be a watcher and an example."*

*"The administrator should relieve people's burdens."*

*"It is the duty of the administrator to organize the distribution of responsibilities along with the planning of education and training"*

There are traces of functionalist and interpretivist theories in school administrators' views on administrators. What is surprising in this finding is that the administrators who explain the school with the functionalist paradigm refer to the interpretivist paradigm when explaining school administrators. In the context of educational leadership, it can be interpreted that the participants emphasized both autocratic leadership behaviors and transformational leadership behaviors of school administrators.

### **Purpose of the School**

In the answers given by school principals about the purpose of the school, the concepts of education in accordance with the dynamics of society, national values, culture; raising cognizant citizen under the society continuity; person of age, self-actualization and creativity under the theme of social design skills; self-confidence and the dreaming individual under the theme of emancipatory education emerged. Some examples of the answers given by the administrators are given below.

*"If education is aligned with the dynamics of society, the school can achieve its purpose. Education must evolve into the future."*

*"The school's purpose is to develop individuals who can keep up with the times, create an environment where students can self-actualize, get to know themselves, and test themselves."*

*"The purpose of school is to prepare the individual for the future."*

*"The aim of the school is to prepare the individual for life."*

*"The perspective on education and training should be standardized to raise children who are in line with national values, and who know their culture and history."*

*"The aim of school is to give children self-confidence. We should raise children who can dream and strive for that dream."*

*"The purpose of school is to encourage children to find ways of accessing information, to research, to learn problem solving and to learn how to learn."*

*"School should be a place that develops children's creativity."*

The answers of the administrators to the question of what the purpose of the school should be have reflected the traces of three theories: functionalist, interpretive and critical theories. While the school administrators only referred to the functionalist theory when describing the current school, they were more utopian about what the purpose of the school should be and the themes of social continuity, social design skills and liberatory education emerged. This situation is surprising. School principals expressed what the purpose of the school should be in a different way from the current definition of the school. At this point, it can be said that in addition to autocratic leadership, transformational and servant leadership can be used effectively in achieving the purpose of the school.

### **What Should Be and Not Be at School?**

Under the theme of emancipatory education, the concepts of standard school structure, standard class hours, school bell and standard tools emerged. Some examples of the answers given by the administrators are given below.

*"If possible, I would like a classroom without tables and chairs. Let the child listen to me while lying down. The person sitting in the front never forgets that they are sitting in the front, so the desk system affects us a lot. This has permeated even our present life. For example, there was a break in a seminar, and I was sitting in between. Someone came and tried to remove me from my seat, saying, "That's my seat." The habit that this education system has remained with us... The lesson time should be left to the teacher, who should be able to lengthen or shorten class hours. We must trust the teacher, who should be equal to the students in the classroom. There may not be a teacher's desk."*

*"There can be flexibility in class hours."*

*"There should not be standardized class hours at school, these restrict students and narrow their imagination. There shouldn't be desks, uniforms, blackboards, bells and tables at school either, these restrict students and narrow their imagination."*

*"There should not be standardized tools in schools; they should be flexible. Schools should be different according to local differences."*

*"Schools should be differentiated according to geographical region. There should not be a standard school structure. There may not be standardized class hours either."*

*"The concept of recess may vary from class to class. Depending on the content of the lesson, 40 minutes may not be enough, while for some, it may be too much. There is no need for a teacher's desk or desks in the classroom; it should be empty."*

*"There may be no bells at school. If the children feel belonging to the school, they will use all the tools. School should not become torture."*

*"School time can be changed. The perspective changes, the understanding changes, and if the student becomes able to move comfortably, phenomena such as rows and tables can be removed."*

*"We restrain self-control with the bell. Somehow, children will learn without it. In life, it may result in not engaging in work without reminders from others."*

In the answers given by the school principals about the things that should be available in the school the concepts of uncrowded classroom, functional classroom, social environment and communication under the theme of interaction; the concepts of sport area, art area and self-confidence under the theme of emancipatory education;

the concepts of experiential learning and schoolyard under the theme of relating knowledge to the world; the concepts of democracy and talking student under the theme of democracy culture emerged. Some examples of the answers given by the administrators are given below.

*"Classes should not be crowded. With a U or round classroom arrangement, all students can reach the teacher and be equidistant. Social environments outside the classroom should be created. Adolescence is a challenging process, and social communication is very important. There should be an environment where students can sit with their friends and teachers."*

*"Classes should be organized according to their function, and students should not have to watch their friend's back. The teacher should be able to see all students in the classroom... The school should have a wide area, and children should be able to quickly access the schoolyard. They should be able to see nature... In the garden, they can see animals, grow plants, learn by doing, produce projects, and perceive and solve problems, which will open up their horizons."*

*"A large area is needed for the school. We are surrounded by the seas, yet there are many who do not know how to swim. If the school area is large, there should be sports areas, swimming areas, art areas. These areas will prevent the students' skills from being polished off."*

*"School can be a more life-like environment. There can be gardens, animals, plants. Student should be able to plant tomatoes there and eat them two months later. It is a very nice feeling to grow something... I don't like discipline. The child should be comfortable. There should be noise and humming in the classroom. If the teacher doesn't make students talk, it will harm them in their future life."*

*"Workshop concepts can be expanded for parents to come to the school once a week and participate in the activities there... Preparing children for professional life starting from primary school can be provided with workshops, sports fields and theaters."*

*"Students should be involved in artistic activities. The aim should be to internalize art and science... A school where students have high self-confidence, can communicate with administrators without fear, and where the doors of the administration are open. A school where there is no problem of absenteeism and yet there are students who are not absent."*

*"A democratic school is my dream. The doors would always be open. It is easy to rule those who speak, but it is dangerous if they keep silent."*

The answers given by the school administrators to the questions about what should or should not be in the school overlap with critical theory and interpretive theory. The administrators approached these questions more utopian and criticized the standardized and crowded environment and talked about more free, democratic and diverse areas. This finding coincides with the finding about the purpose of the school. The answers of the school administrators about what should or should not be in the school can be evaluated as they suggest that transformational and servant leadership should find a place in the school.

## **Discussion**

Referring to the findings, concepts of socialization, value, and culture transfer in the administrators' definitions of school were combined under the themes of social development and continuity of society and matched with the functionalist theory. Socialization, value and culture transfer are the concepts defended by the functionalist theory. Durkheim (2016) referred to education as "methodical socialization," and schools are the secondary place of socialization that individuals attend after the family to acquire a socio-cultural personality. Through socialization, individuals become members of society and develop social and emotional skills. While Dreeben (2013), one of the functionalist theorists, has stated that the socialization experiences offered by the school environment cannot be obtained elsewhere, Sadovnik (2013) has explicated that in integrated, well-functioning societies, schools socialize students with appropriate values.

Learning social values through education and gaining a status in society are the goals of functionalist theory (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). On the other hand, the school definition drawn by administrators also has the feature of highlighting autocratic leadership. School administrators may show autocratic leadership behaviors at school to transfer values and maintain social order.

The concepts of appealing to emotions, touching their lives, love, communication, role modeling and guidance have emerged from the administrators' views on the teacher, and these concepts were grouped under the themes of meaning and interaction. These views have matched with interpretive and critical theory. Educators who embrace critical theory can make decisions with all their members. Thus, while presenting change and proportions of the school, they also support the school's progress towards becoming a democratic school (Selvitopu & Kavurgacı, 2019). Bernstein (2003), one of the interpretive theorists, also argues that the principles that regulate the symbolic and linguistic relations between teacher and student should be taken into account in understanding classroom relations. Shi et al. (2016) stated that the teacher uses the "guidance" role primarily to encourage students to think positively, find, explore and create, and that the teacher should fully commit himself to the role of guidance in the classroom. Freire (2014), one of the theorists of critical pedagogy, has represented the idea that the educational system in which the teacher is the subject and the student is the object makes the student passive, while Giroux (2008) has argued that the purpose of education should be to create consciousness that can contend with life, to gain social design skills for a different future, rather than deceiving critical thinking skills. In order to increase interest in science in a teacher's classroom and encourage talented students, the teacher can tell about the achievements, difficulties they face, and dedication of scientists who have received the Nobel science prize in physics or chemistry. This may not create a change for every student, yet it is still valuable if it guides even one student. On the other hand, it can be interpreted that administrators expect transformative and servant leadership behaviors from teachers with the concepts they put forward when defining teachers. According to these models, teachers basically need to understand and support students.

Observably, the concepts of leadership, planning, organizing, providing a good working environment, motivating, being a source point, and being relieving has come forward from the participants' views on the school administrator. These are grouped under the themes of political function, interaction, and reconciliation, which matches functionalist and interpretive theories. Functionalist theorists emphasize the political function of education (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, as cited in Cookson & Sadovnik, 2002), which involves schools adopting a status, bureaucratic structure, and political structure through education. The leadership, planning and organizing tasks of the school administrator can be interpreted as being related to the function of adopting the roles of the school administrator status. Unlike functionalist theory, interpretivist theory focuses more on the individual and free will. The themes of reconciliation and interaction that emerged from the answers given by the administrators are related to the interpretive theory. Interpretive theory, which seeks to understand the education system through everyday activities, is concerned with the meanings that individuals attach to their own actions and those of their heads. School leaders have interpreted their own functions as providing a good working environment, motivating others, providing resources, and relieving stress. Bernstein (2003), in his studies focusing on communication in education, emphasized the importance of the principles governing linguistic relations. Interaction and reconciliation in school are also influenced by linguistic relations and the sharing of meanings between individuals. As Gronn (1985) revealed in his research, management literature has largely focused on the processes of planning, commanding and executing. While the participants attributed autocratic leadership behavior to school administrators by emphasizing these elements, on the other hand, they also deemed transformational leadership behavior necessary by emphasizing the individualism and freedom themes of the interpretive paradigm.

The themes that generated from the participant's views about the purpose of the school are the continuity of society, social design skills and emancipatory education. The views are matched with functionalist, interpretive and critical theories. The aim of societies with education is not only to educate human capital, i.e., manpower, but also to raise the good citizens who will ensure the continuity of society. Societies use education to transfer their cultures, values, and habits to the new generation, and in this way, they raise the citizens that society desires. Durkheim, one of the functionalist theorists, explicates that the most important function of education is to strengthen social morality. According to Durkheim (2010), children should be taught discipline, commitment to society and autonomy of will through moral education. Soder (2003) also suggests that the principles of good citizenship can be taught to everyone similarly only through education and in schools. Considering the ideas of Westheimer and Kahne (2004), it is argued that developing students' capacities and commitment is important for effective and democratic citizenship. We strive to develop student capacities and commitments in educational settings. Schools have the task of gaining or changing behavior. Individuals learn to acquire behavioral principles and social norms at school and to develop behavior accordingly. This is how society's values are transmitted and maintained. Critical theorists also emphasize active citizenship. Freire (2014) defines the purpose of education as raising cognizant citizens, Giroux (2008) as creating awareness to intervene in life, and Apple (2012) as creating individuals who adopt values appropriate to the needs of the division of labor in societies. Good citizen development and behavior acquisition are social and aim at the continuity of society. However, preparing the student for the future and developing their creativity is individual and change-oriented. Future-oriented skills were

also proposed long ago by John Dewey, who suggested an "experience-based" education in which students interact with an "ever-changing world". Young (1998), one of the interpretivist theorists, suggests that the curriculum of the future should be prepared according to 21st-century skills, taking into account the needs of young people. Moreover, in the society of the future, education should drive the economy rather than the economy driving education. Despite the growing knowledge of how the brain works and the continuing emphasis on developing innovative thinking and problem-solving skills, many students function at Bloom's levels of knowledge and understanding. It is crucial that teachers encourage students to apply knowledge, analyze that knowledge (in multiple ways), synthesize or create new knowledge, and continually evaluate it (Larson & Miller, 2011). Craft et al. (2008) define creativity in education as a "significant capacity for imaginative achievement", Runco and Jaeger (2012) define it as a necessity to develop critical thinking skills in students. Research on creativity in schools has, in many cases, strengthened creativity as a national and educational priority. England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and European countries (Creative Scotland 2013; Creative Partnerships UK, 2012; European Parliament and Council, 2006) value the importance and diversity of creativity in the curriculum and pedagogy at compulsory education levels across Europe. Focusing on social change, the value of individual action, which is one of the dimensions revealed by Schlecty (2011) in the transformation of the school, is also discussed extensively in his research on young generations. In Deloitte's (2021) study on generation Y and Z, the participants expressed the necessity of being creative in order to be successful.

While the school administrators only referred to the functionalist theory when describing the current school, they were more utopian about what the purpose of the school should be and the themes of social continuity, social design skills and liberatory education emerged. This situation is surprising. School principals expressed what the purpose of the school should be in a different way from the current definition of the school. At this point, it can be said that in addition to autocratic leadership, transformational and servant leadership can be used effectively in achieving the purpose of the school.

The participants expressed that there should be no standardized school structure and tools, standardized classes and bells. Emancipatory education emerged as a theme, which is aligned with critical theory and interpretive theory. Additionally, participants stated that schools should be differentiated according to the dynamics of the region. Standardization in education can also be evaluated as an effort to reach a predetermined "result/outcome" level by assuming the differences in educational opportunities and possibilities among schools (Kurul, 2011). However, standardization efforts should not prevent schools from revealing their unique differences. Schlecty (2011) argues that society's emphasis on standardization has shifted to quality, choice, and individualization. The concept of standardization, which first involved in businesses and then schools through industrialization, has begun to create contradictions with creativity, originality, individualization, and quality.

In the current information age, the main demands from schools are individuals who have high imagination, creativity, free enterprise, self-confidence, self-control, self-motivation, self-discipline values, who are not like everyone else, who think, act, and produce differently (Şahin, 2004). In order to raise creative individuals with high self-confidence at school, environments, where contemporary management principles and flexible programs are applied by isolating them from the strict rules of the school, are essential (Taş, 2010).

The participants' answers about what should be in schools were grouped under the themes of interaction, emancipatory education, relating knowledge to the world and democracy culture. These views align with interpretive and critical theories. While everyone needs to improve themselves and have their own experiences through interaction with others, there should also be opportunities to develop personal skills such as cognitive, psychomotor, emotional, and social skills. This is linked to the development of students' attitudes, values, beliefs, and self-perceptions (Pollin & Retzlaff-Fürst, 2021). Interpretive theorists also focus on daily activity, interaction and meaning (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, as cited in Üsküplü Yeniay, 2019).

Democratic education is an education in which the principles and rules of democracy, human rights and freedoms are transformed into explicit or implicit goals in educational programs and provided to young people of society through learning experiences. The goal of democratic education is to educate citizens who are independent, questioning and analytical in their view of the world and yet know the rules of democracy and its applications in depth (Karakütük, 2001). Dewey argued that democracy and education are inextricably linked, and only through democratic education can a democratic society be achieved. In this context, the school should be a miniature society. Children acquire the basic principles of a democratic lifestyle in such a school (Guttek, 2001). Critical pedagogy theorists have emphasized the importance of educating individuals who possess a free, democratic mindset and the ability to engage in critical thinking (Freire, 2014; Giroux, 2008).

## Conclusion

In this research, the opinions of school administrators regarding schools were examined through the lens of sociological theories. Social development and ensuring the continuity of society in the definitions of the school; meaning and interaction in the function of the teacher; political function, interaction, and reconciliation in the function of the school administrator; society continuity in the purpose of the school, social design skills and emancipatory education themes have emerged. Also in the opinions of school administrators, what should and should not be in school were grouped under the themes of emancipatory education, interaction, associating knowledge with the world, and democracy culture. Another important result of the study is that the views of school administrators do not show traces of conflict theory. Conflict theory basically emerged as a reaction to inequalities and stratification in society. School administrators did not make any comments on inequalities and social class distinctions in their opinions. This may be because the power of the school to provide equality of opportunity or inequality or to create class distinctions is taken for granted.

## Limitations

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, the study did not include the opinions of other school stakeholders such as teachers, students, and parents. Future studies can include these stakeholders' opinions to get a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. In addition, the sample size in this study is relatively small, a larger scale study may increase its potential contribution. Although it is common to use the interview method in qualitative research to refer to experiences, the context in which school administrators interacted in this study could have been better understood through observation. In an interview, the participant needs to be aware of the information in order to provide information, and people often take their habits for granted and fall into these habits without realizing it. Good observation can reveal situations and experiences that the participant is not aware of.

## Recommendations

In this study, it is seen that while school administrators define the school as functionalist in the current situation, their desires are in line with interpretivist and critical theories. Studies in the field of educational administration prove the effects of school administrators on school development and change. In this context, the first suggestion of this study is to increase the awareness of school administrators that they can transform the school into the place they desire by changing their leadership approaches. The recommendation of the current study for policy makers and decision makers is that changing social paradigms should find their places in education policies. The school practices constructed by policies that are far away from the society may be insufficient to reveal the future of humanity that will develop the society.

## Future Research

- Further research can be conducted on the most prominent sociological paradigms in Turkish society and the role of the school in the establishment of these paradigms.
- Studies can be carried out on the school's function of influencing and transforming society.

## Conflict of Interest and Other Declarations

The author did not receive any financial support before and during the article writing process. If the article is published, the author will not receive any support. In addition, there is no non-financial conflict or role conflict.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.



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## Okul Yöneticilerinin Okula İlişkin Görüşlerinin Sosyolojik Kuramlar Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi

### Öz

Toplumunu anlamak için ortaya atılan sosyolojik teoriler, toplumsal kurumlardan biri olan eğitimle yakından ilgilidir. Eğitimi toplumun bir fonksiyonu olarak gören yaygın sosyolojik bakış açısına göre, bu teoriler okulları etkileme gücüne sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul yöneticilerinin okulun tanımı, amacı, öğretmenler ve yöneticiler ve okullarda olması ve olmaması gerekenler hakkındaki görüşlerini dört sosyolojik kuram (işlevselci, çatışmacı, yorumsamacı ve eleştirel) çerçevesinde incelemektir. Okul gelişimine doğrudan ve dolaylı etkileri olan okul yöneticilerinin okula ilişkin görüşlerinin kuramsal arka planını bilmek ve okul yöneticilerinin okula bakış açılarını açıklamak, okul yönetimi ve eğitim liderliği davranışlarının temellerini anlamamızı sağlayacaktır. Ayrıca sosyoloji ve okul yönetimi arasındaki kesişimi ortaya koyabilmek, toplumu iyileştirmek için okuldan destek almaya yönelik eylem planları geliştirebilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** okul yöneticileri, sosyolojik kuramlar, liderlik, toplum

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