

School Counsellors' Perceptions of School Justice and Awareness of Advocacy Duties

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine school counsellors' awareness of their advocacy responsibilities in relation to distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The participants in this case study were 14 school counsellors working in secondary schools. They were selected using criterion sampling and maximum variation. Research data were collected using a semi-structured interview form and analyzed using content analysis. According to the findings, school counsellors described their school environments as fair considering the democratic attitudes of principals and teachers. Participating counsellors reported that students complain about various issues regarding favoritism, discriminatory attitudes, problematic communication, and unfair grading. They also reported that when students experience injustice at school, they show emotional reactions such as anger, unhappiness, and helplessness, in addition to aggression towards teachers, school objects, or themselves. School counsellors stated that they encourage such students to share their feelings, claim their rights, and talk to their teachers. However, school counsellors who encouraged students to claim their rights rarely talked to teachers to solve such problems. It can be said that school counsellors who strive to prevent student victimization have played a mediating role rather than being an advocate. Future studies can explore the advocacy practices at private and public schools.

Keywords: School counselor, advocacy, school justice

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Introduction

The need for school counselling and guidance to improve student orientation and academic achievement has become increasingly evident today. However, school counsellors' roles, duties, and responsibilities are still discussed controversially. School counsellors' duties involve orientation, psychological counselling, parental guidance, individual recognition, consultancy, research and development, supervision and evaluation, orientation-placement, and gathering information (Yesilyaprak, 2013). It is also suggested that school counsellors should have different duties in the 21st century, such as removing the obstacles to academic success, acting as proactive leaders for the change and development of schools (House & Sears, 2002). In The Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2019), school counsellors are expected to have the knowledge and skills to utilize the social, environmental, and institutional opportunities as well as to eliminate the barriers to students' academic success and personal, social, and career development. It is also emphasized that school counsellors should have a personal and professional profile, reasonable visions and missions, and well-defined roles, one of which is advocacy.

Advocacy refers to a counselor's professional activities towards eliminating or reducing the institutional or external barriers impeding a client's well-being (Toporek & Liu, 2001; as cited in Keklik, 2010). Advocacy is an empowerment strategy that counsellors use for social change by empathizing with their clients (Green, McCollum, & Hays, 2008) and one of the main themes of the American School Counselor Association Model (ASCA, 2012). School counsellors should support student advocacy by removing any kind of barriers that prevent student success, assisting students in benefiting from the programs optimally, and developing the necessary policies (ASCA, 2012; House & Martin, 1998). Advocacy is an integral result of the principle, which states that "School counselling services are for all students, and every person is unique and worthy of respect" (Erkan, 2017). Advocacy is also a requirement of empathy (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino, and Toporek, 2011).

Advocacy focuses on removing the barriers that lead to differences in academic success between the poor and disadvantaged students and others (House & Martin, 1998). For school counsellors, advocacy requires defending the rights of disadvantaged groups and ensuring educational equality (Erkan, 2017). Disadvantaged students (e.g., based on gender, language, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, physical disability, or family structure) may suffer from social conflict, academic failure, and discrimination. Therefore, school counsellors ensure that these students benefit equally from academic achievement (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003) and are prepared personally and professionally for the future. Advocacy services should be provided to families as well as students because families may not defend their children's rights due to such reasons as poverty, indifference, or lack of education and awareness. Therefore, school counsellors can help students and parents with such bureaucratic problems by teaching them how to communicate their demands to school officials, and providing parents with the necessary information and opportunities such as private courses to support children's academic success (House & Hayes, 2002).

Trusty and Brown (2005) stress the importance of knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding advocacy. Advocacy knowledge can be grouped under four headings: the knowledge of resources (e.g., people, programs, institutions, NGOs), the knowledge of the system (e.g., school rules, students' and parents' rights, school counsellors' roles and responsibilities), the knowledge of dispute resolution mechanisms (e.g., the strategies to deal with conflicts and solve problems holistically), and the knowledge of systems change (e.g., the system and subsystems inherent in a school). Advocacy skills involve communicating, collaborating, assessing, and resolving problems. Correspondingly, advocacy dispositions are listed as being aware of advocacy roles, being autonomous in thinking and acting, empathetic, and willing to take risks for those in need. According to Gultekin (2004), school counsellors' awareness of their prejudices and positive/negative feelings for the groups they work with guarantees the objectiveness and effectiveness of the given services.

Multicultural counselling competencies, which have become more prominent in recent years, have drawn attention to advocacy practices in school counselling (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). Social advocacy, an inherent component of social justice (Holcomb-McKoy, 2007, as cited in Erkan, 2017), refers to eliminating the inequities or improving conditions for all (House and Martin, 1998). It is indicated that school counsellors working with different groups should have social justice dispositions. Social justice is a strategy that strengthens the relationship between the client and the counselor (Green, McCollum, & Hays, 2008). Social justice is associated with organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987, as cited in Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997), which brings up the concepts of school and classroom justice (Kepekcioglu, 2015). Classroom justice, implying the perception of fairness regarding outcomes or processes in the teaching environment (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004), has three dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Distributive justice is characterized by the equal distribution of rewards or opportunities; procedural justice refers to objective decision-making processes of school administration independent of person, time, or conditions; and finally, interactional justice refers to the fairness and equality of interpersonal relationships (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005). In this sense, advocacy is important to alleviate the injustice students may feel in school.

Advocacy is a rarely addressed issue in Turkey. School counsellors' tasks and activities regarding advocacy are underestimated despite the various challenges of education, such as frequently changing curricula and examination systems, the issues of child labor, domestic migration and emigration, the education of physically disabled or gifted students, seasonal workers, disadvantaged girls, and refugees. Kagnici (2017) stated that school counsellors should have multicultural counselling and advocacy competencies to work with refugee children effectively. Gultekin (2004) characterizes advocacy as a service for everybody, especially for disadvantaged groups. Equality of opportunity in education is considered important for the future of all children, especially those students from minorities and low-income families (House & Martin, 1998). Advocacy provides flexible education opportunities with alternatives for individuals with different characteristics (Svec, 1987; Stone and Clark, 2001) and

reduces the school dropout rate. Thus, it is acknowledged as one of the main components of prevention programs (Berkowitz and Chwast, 1971, as cited in Svec, 1987). In the "School Counselor Professional Standards" (MYK, 2017) prepared by the Turkish Counselling and Guidance Association, the item "A school counselor is the advocate of the client's rights" also underlines the importance and function of advocacy. Besides, advocacy is included in the support services in the "Guidance Services Planning Booklet (OERHGM 2018) prepared by the General Directorate of Special Education and Guidance Services. It can be interpreted as the promising future of advocacy in school counselling services.

In this study, I worked with school counsellors working in secondary education institutions. By nature, secondary school students are skeptical and curious individuals who strive to find and prove themselves cognitively, emotionally, and socially, are concerned about their personal rights and justice, and desire to plan a future career. Therefore, school counsellors in secondary schools should be very active in advocacy practices. There are a few studies on the advocacy duties of school counsellors in Turkey. For example, Gultekin (2004) informed about the advocacy roles of school counsellors, and Nazli (2007) emphasized their changing roles. Keklik (2016) introduced the concept and history of advocacy and the advocacy competencies defined by the ACA. Kose (2015) focused on the paradigm shift in school counselling services and the leadership role of school counsellors. Gokmen (2020) drew attention to the importance of school counsellors' advocacy practices in inclusive education. However, no research is found in the literature directly examining the advocacy duties of school counsellors, focusing on their opinions on advocacy and fairness.

This study aims to investigate the school counsellors' perceptions of school justice and advocacy duties at school. In this regard, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do school counsellors think about school justice and fairness?
2. What are school counsellors' attitudes towards injustice experienced by students?
3. How do the school counsellors perceive their awareness about advocacy duties?
4. What do school counsellors think about advocacy duties?

Method

The Study Design

This study was designed as a case study, one of the qualitative research methods. A case study investigates one or more personal situations in real life (Yin, 2009, as cited in Creswell, 2018). That given situation is limited by time, place, and parameters (Creswell, 2018) and involves analyzing the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The study is completed with the conclusions and implications of the researcher (Creswell, 2018). Case studies mainly address the questions of 'how' and 'why' and allow an in-depth examination of a phenomenon or case that the researcher cannot control (Yildirim and Simsek 2011). This study attempted to investigate school counsellors' perceptions of injustice in school, their opinions about the concept of advocacy, and their advocacy practices.

The Study Group

The participants were selected using criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling methods. The criterion sampling method is used to select individuals who meet specified criteria regarding the research topic (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). The criteria used in this study included working in a secondary education institution and performing advocacy practices at the school accordingly. The advocacy practices in the selected schools were determined following the observations and interviews with school counsellors, teachers, and administrators.

Maximum variation sampling is used to create a relatively small sample reflecting the maximum diversity of individuals in the sample. This study was conducted with school counsellors working in different types of secondary schools (e.g., Anatolian high school, science high school, vocational and technical high school, and imam hatip high school). The mentioned schools differed in terms of school climate, students' academic success and motivation, and parents' economic, social, cultural status. Thus, it was expected to obtain detailed and in-depth information about possible unfair situations in schools and the advocacy activities ccounsellors do against them.

14 school counsellors, eight females, and six males, participated in the study. Their professional seniority ranged from 1 year to 24 years. The participant school counsellors were kept confidential, so they were labeled as SC1, SC2. Ethics committee approval was granted by the university where the researcher works (No: 2020- SBB-0016)

Data Collection

The research data were collected using a semi-structured interview form. Accordingly, school counsellors answered open-ended questions, and further inquiry questions were used to encourage detailed answers. The interview questions were created after reviewing the relevant literature on school justice and advocacy, and receiving the opinions of an expert panel. Experts were an academician working in the field of school counselling and guidance, advocacy and justice, and a qualitative research

expert. A preliminary interview was held with a school counselor to assess the comprehensibility of the questions. There were five interview questions and two inquiry questions in the form and the participants' demographic information questions. The intention to use a semi-structured interview form was to gather detailed responses from the respondents. Interviews were held after making appointments with the school counsellors and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded after getting the permission of the participants.

Interview questions are as follow:

1. Do you find student-teacher communication fair in this school (e.g., grading, school rules, communication behaviors)? Why?
2. Do students complain to you about being mistreated? What do students complain about the most?
 - a. How do children react when exposed to injustice?
3. Have you seen any students being mistreated in school? What kind of situations are they?
4. If a student is exposed to unfairness at school, who should stand up for their rights? Why?
5. Do you have any idea about the advocacy duties of school counsellors? Are you willing to fulfill advocacy duties?
 - a. How do people react when you do advocacy?

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the content analysis method in which the initial attempt is to gather, categorize and interpret similar data according to specific concepts and themes. The analysis process involves coding and categorizing the data, developing the themes, and interpreting the findings (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). The interviews with 14 school counsellors lasted approximately 7 hours. The transcription of the audio recordings was completed, and the 56-page document was examined in detail twice. Then, the necessary coding, labeling, categorizing, and theming procedures were completed. Direct quotations from the interviews were used to present the findings, which were interpreted considering the relevant literature.

Validity and Reliability

Guba and Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 as cited in Spencer and Ritchie, 2012) emphasize the credibility in qualitative research and determined four basic criteria: credibility, reliability, and confirmability, and transferability. Similarly, Creswell (2018) mentioned some methods to ensure credibility in qualitative inquiry, such as prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, and collaboration. We used Creswell's methods to establish the credibility of our study.

According to Yildirim and Simsek (2011), in qualitative inquires, interviewees initially tend to be under the influence of researcher. However, as an atmosphere of trust is built, interviewees become more sincere in their responses. Long-term interactions between researcher and interviewee increase the credibility of the data. In this study, I visited school counsellors in their schools and extended my stay by conducting thorough interviews. Besides, my previous works with school counsellors played a supportive role in building an atmosphere of trust. Two experts, one of whom was a faculty member, and another was a doctoral student in counselling and guidance, supported the planning and implementation stages of the study. It served as peer debriefing method to increase credibility. Besides, the collaboration method was used to verify the analysis's accuracy, authenticity, and objectivity. Two or more people independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare the findings in the collaboration method. It also reduces potential biases that may arise from a single researcher in data collection (Patton, 2014, p. 560). Therefore, the mentioned experts also analyzed the data. The experts' statements that were agreed to be the most appropriate were presented in the findings section. Thus, "direct quotations" were also used to ensure validity.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) method was applied for the intercoder reliability in the data analysis. In this study, it was measured 90%, proving the reliability of the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), an 80% agreement between researchers is sufficient for reliability. It should be at least 70%, according to Hall and Houten (1983). A detailed description method is recommended for transferability/ generalizability in qualitative inquiry (Erlandson et al., 1993, as cited in Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). A detailed description is characterized by "the transfer of the revised data based on the given concepts and themes, without comments and by being faithful to the nature of the data as much as possible" (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). In this study, a detailed description was used to ensure transferability. The questions were asked similarly and recorded in the interviews in order to ensure consistency. All the study data were kept for possible revisions in the future, which assures the confirmability of the study.

Findings

The findings regarding school counsellors' views on school justice and the concept of advocacy are discussed below.

1. School Justice

Participating school counselors were asked to comment on whether they perceived communication between students and teachers to be fair or unfair, considering the three dimensions of equity in the classroom: Distributive Justice, Procedural Justice, and Interactional Justice.

Table 1.

School as an Environment for Justice

Themes	Sub-themes
School fairness	Healthy/fair communication Experienced teacher Student participation Transparency Equality
School unfairness	Showing favoritism Bias/Prejudices/ Stereotypes Unfair grading Unhealthy/unfair communication Frequently changing attitudes

As seen in Table 1, some school counsellors found their schools fair, but some did not. Most school counsellors stated that experienced administrators' and teachers' communicative, clear, and consistent attitudes and their support for student participation played critical roles in school fairness, indicating a democratic attitude. Some school counsellors used the expression *democratic attitude*, but some mentioned those features to imply the democratic attitude.

Some statements of the counsellors who found their schools fair are presented below:

Our principal is an intellectual, understanding, democratic, and fair person who considers students as his children. (SC4)

Our school is a fair place. The teachers are very experienced and fair about communication with students, grading, and school rules. They strive to apply the school rules as much as they can consistently. (SC7)

Yes, there is a democratic atmosphere in our school. The student council can apply, by petition, to the school administration for any issue. (SC8)

On the contrary, some school counsellors did not find their school environments fair because some students were favored, academically unsuccessful students were mistreated, some were exposed to unfair grading, and there were disagreements about applying school rules between administrators and teachers. Example responses are given below:

It is a complicated issue with many dimensions, such as administrators, teachers, in-class and out-of-class practices. If an academically successful student misbehaves, it might be ignored. If you like a student or you are familiar with their parents, you might overlook the faults. (SC1)

Frankly, I do not find my school very fair. Students are not successful academically, and they do not want to learn anything. They misbehave, so teachers do not treat them fairly. (SC 5)

2. Unfairness in School

School counsellors were asked, "Do students complain to you that they are treated badly? What do they complain about most?" and "Have you seen students mistreated at school? What types of situations are these?" to understand how counsellors perceive injustice toward students. The analysis results showed a similarity between the students' statements and the unfair practices observed by the school counsellors. The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 2 shows the unfair situations that the school counsellors observed or reported from students' statements. Some students were favored because they were successful or an acquaintance of the teacher. However, some students were not tolerated for breaching the dress codes and using mobile phones at school. Besides, some students passed the class despite poor grades, while others experienced biased and inconsistent behaviors by teachers. Some statements from school counsellors are presented below.

Students mostly complain about the dress codes: "Teacher sees but ignores him, but he interferes with me." There are favored students. (SC1)

They usually complain about grades. They said: "My friend cheated, nobody saw him, and he got high grades. I study harder than my friend, but I cannot get it as I do not cheat in the exam" (SC2).

Table 2.

Unfair Treatments in the School Environment

Themes	Sub-themes
Injustice	Favoring
	Dress codes
	Mobile phone
	Exam/homework
	Prejudice
	Attitudinal differences
	Unhealthy communication
Negligence	Abuse
	Irresponsibility

They especially complain about teacher attitudes. There is no consistency among teachers. Even the same teacher behaves differently on different days (SC11).

School counsellors stated that some complaints stemmed from students' different perspectives or breaking the school rules.

Yes, they complain about dress codes. However, they break the rules. For example, girls wear much makeup or ripped jeans, so the principals react to such behaviors. When students complain about the dress code, I ask them, "Have they warned you before? Have you obeyed the rules?" (SC10)

They often complain about teachers' biased attitudes towards a specific student. A teacher tries to maintain the peace and security of the lesson, but when some children disrupt the lesson, they might be biased for those children (SC7).

The complaints are generally about dress codes and permissions. They come to take a tardy slip. They sometimes say, "The headmaster didn't give a tardy slip to me because he didn't care about me." For some students, being late has become habitual, so when the administrators realize, they behave accordingly and might not give them a tardy slip. (SC12)

Then, I asked an inquiry question to school counsellors: *"How do children react when exposed to injustice?"*

It was observed that students showed emotional and behavioral responses to injustice. Students who experienced an unfair situation felt anger, despair, intimidation, and unhappiness. Thus, they demonstrated certain behaviors such as self-harming, damaging school property, challenging and threatening the teachers, interrupting the lessons, and not attending the lesson. School counsellors' expressions are given below:

If a student is exposed to unfairness, s/he feels intimidated and despair. (SC1)

They get angry. (SC2)

Our students are mostly violent. When exposed to unfairness in the classroom, they harm themselves. (SC5)

They generally challenge teachers to demoralize them. For example, they do not listen to the teacher, chat with friends, and often distract others. (SC6)

Table 3.

Students' Responses to Injustice

Themes	Sub-themes
Emotional responses	Anger, despair, intimidation, unhappiness
Behavioral responses	Self-harming behaviors Damaging school property Standing up to/challenging the teachers. Spoiling the lesson Not attending the lesson

We asked school counsellors, “What do you do if you see a student exposed to unfairness at school?” to understand better what they do in the face of an unfair situation.

Table 4.

School Counsellors’ Interventions for Justice

Themes	Sub-themes
Support	Allowing self-expression
	Claiming their rights
	Peacemaking
	Informing the principals
	Making self-assessment

As seen in Table 4, school counsellors listened to the mistreated students, allowed them to express their feelings and thoughts, and soothed them. They also encouraged them to talk to their teachers and claim their rights. Some school counsellors played the peacemaker role between the student and teacher. However, some counsellors stated that they had difficulty communicating with teachers, so they reported the problem to the school administrators. Some school counsellors wanted students to make self-reflection. Some statements are presented below.

I advise them to claim their rights legally. (SC1)

Especially when someone complains about a teacher, I report the problem to the administrators on behalf of the student. We never talk to that teacher; we just inform the administrators, assuming their responsibility. (SC6)

I objectively listen to students’ complaining and don’t favor a party. Then, I politely and carefully talk and listen to that teacher. Then, I advise both sides to talk together for a solution. I mean, I have a mediator role. (SC8)

I allow them to communicate their feelings, and I soothe them. Then, I try to learn their plans. I encourage them to make a self-assessment and talk to that teacher. (SC11)

3. School counsellors’ advocacy duties

The participant school counsellors were asked, “Who should claim a student’s right when exposed to unfairness at school? Why?” to determine their views on the advocacy duties by school counsellors.

Table 5.

Student Advocacy

Themes	Sub-themes
Skill	Student
Duty	School principal
	Form teacher
	School counselor

According to the school counsellors, students should claim their rights. However, some stated that it could not be confined to students or school counsellors, but school administrators and form teachers should also defend students' rights. Some sample statements are presented below.

Students should be able to claim their rights. As a counselor, we teach them problem-solving skills. (SC9)

I think form teachers should defend student rights. In case of a deadlock, the school counselor should interfere in the case. (SC7)

School counsellors' opinions about advocacy duties

The participant counsellors were asked: "Do you have any idea about the advocacy duties of school counsellors?" It was understood that none of them had a clear idea about the concept of advocacy and advocacy duties. However, after a brief introduction to the concept, school counsellors noted that some of their school-based activities already fall within the realm of advocacy, citing examples such as orientations, voluntary career counselling, providing free meals and tuition to needy students, interventions to reduce absenteeism and support students with special needs, parent interviews, probation services, and substance abuse interventions. Some school counsellors' opinions about advocacy duties are presented below:

After your explanations, I realize that I have already done my advocacy duties. For instance, I asked some teachers to stay after school or on their duty days to teach disadvantaged students who could not afford private lessons. It worked very well. If it is an advocacy duty, I mean in terms of the right to education, I do it. I try to support children. (SC2)

I had not known much about it, but I realized that I did when you explained it. For example, a 10th grade student came from a different city. He was mostly absent, making his family worried about it. Unfortunately, even parents did not know their rights. We talked to the family and the student and helped them submit a petition to support their attendance at school. (SC4)

I primarily advocate for the rights of inclusive students. Some teachers do not prepare individualized education programs for those students and cause them to fail the class. I raise my voice against such unfair treatment. (SC14)

School counsellors indicated that they sometimes had to defend the rights of teachers. In addition to parents' unfair demands and complaints about teachers, counsellors also mentioned the unfair treatment of disadvantaged students from broken families towards empathic and kind teachers. Some responses are given below:

Teachers sometimes complain about being mistreated by students or parents. For example, we witnessed a parent yelling at a teacher due to his child's low final exam grade. We reported that case and parent to BIMER. (SC2)

A very caring teacher taught well and talked to students personally and sincerely. However, that teacher was not rewarded for his efforts. As usual, the students acted out, so the teacher got disappointed and felt burnout. I also try to talk to students as calmly as possible, but they do not understand their mistakes. (SC5)

The participant counsellors were asked, "Are you willing to fulfill advocacy duties?" to encourage them to share their concerns about fulfilling a task described as "advocacy."

Table 6.

Advocacy Barriers

Themes	Sub-themes
Advocacy Barriers	Concerns about not being supported
	Concerns about balancing between teachers and students
	Problem-solving skill development
	Giving responsibility

As seen in Table 6, the school counsellors hesitated about fulfilling their advocacy duties for the fear of not being supported by their superiors and not balancing between teachers and students when they witness unfair treatment. They also stated that counselling services provided students with responsibility and improved their problem-solving skills, so they did not find it right to defend students' rights on their behalf. Some sample statements are as follows:

We explain that we must report sexual harassment and violence cases even though they do not want to report them. Nevertheless, we sometimes become helpless when nobody wants to shoulder the responsibility. (SC1)

We have challenging work; it is important to find the balance. (SC9)

We should not defend students' rights but teach them how to defend themselves. After all, children have rights, and encouraging self-defense by rights makes much sense. Teaching self-defense changes their perspectives and improves self-confidence. (SC3)

We help whoever needs help, but I think labelling this as "advocacy" might lead to problems in the future. When we defend someone, our relationships with others are damaged here. (SC13)

We asked, "How do people react when you do advocacy work?" to understand better the concerns of school counsellors regarding their advocacy duties.

Table 7.*Reactions to Advocacy*

Themes	Sub-themes
Positive response	Trust
	The time spent together.
	Goodwill and effort
Negative response	Criticism

It was revealed that school counsellors received positive and negative reactions when they did advocacy work. The positive ones involved the trust relations between school counsellors and students and teachers. Besides, the school counselor's tenure at the school, professional experience, and the quality of the communication and bond of trust with teachers and students are considered goodwill and advocacy efforts. Some school counsellors' statements are given below:

...That is why students often visit me; they trust me and know that I care about them. We ask for help from teachers to encourage students to express themselves and defend their rights. Fortunately, most teachers are willing in this sense. Maybe, that is because I have been working here for a long time. (SC2)

If a teacher sees your goodwill and efforts, they will support you. Communication with the teacher is very critical. The more time we spend together, the better relationship we have. (SC10)

School counsellors admitted that they had problems fulfilling their advocacy duties when some teachers were unwilling to communicate or were too young and inexperienced. For example, a school counsellor mentioned a negative reaction as follows:

When you defend a student's rights against a teacher or the school administration, they might think you were a smart aleck and a wet blanket. For instance, you cannot talk to some teachers about grades, and they do not let you comment at all. (SC14)

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study was conducted to find out how school counsellors perform their duties as advocates in the context of distributive, interactional, and procedural justice, which are three components of justice in schools. Some of the participant school counsellors perceived their schools as fair environments and stressed that school principals' and teachers' democratic and communicative attitudes contributed to school justice. On the contrary, the school counsellors, who perceived their school environments as unfair, complained about inconsistencies in applying the school rules, unhealthy communication, and discriminatory practices. In addition to their observations, school

counsellors indicated that students complained about dress codes, unfair grading, mobile phone use, communication problems, hostile and discriminatory attitudes of teachers and principals. Such complaints underscore the importance of three dimensions of school equity - namely distributive, procedural, and interactional equity (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005 and Chory, 2007). Our findings are consistent with those of Tarhan (2018) who found that students were exposed to similar unfair practices in their schools, such as unfair grading and distribution of school/educational materials (distributive justice), dress code and school rules (procedural justice), and lack of communication and favoritism (interactional justice). In this sense, it can be inferred that school counsellors and students had similar views on unfair treatment in schools.

Dress code was the main complaint reported by school counsellors. Although with parents and student council permission, students were allowed to wear casual clothes (only school t-shirts) only on Fridays, they occasionally ignored that rule. Many researchers have studied dress codes in schools in Turkey. For example, Ugurlu et al. (2015) found that teachers, students, and parents made adverse comments about the free dress code. Kapucu and Sezgin (2015) indicated that although most students supported the free dress code, other stakeholders in education preferred school uniforms. In their study, Demir and Kose (2017) showed that some students were optimistic about free dress codes while others were pessimistic. Thus, it can be asserted that teachers, students, and parents had different opinions about free dress codes, which led to unfairness and discipline problems at school. School counsellors also emphasized that the complaints might have stemmed from students' different perspectives, disobedience to the rules, or misunderstanding them. It highlights the phenomenological perception that constitutes the reality of an individual, so the point is not the reality of the event but the perceptions of that event. Therefore, students should be informed about the school rules, the reward-punishment system, and regulations about passing a grade level. Besides, guidance activities should be provided to improve responsibility and self-awareness among students. Thus, misunderstandings and misperceptions can be prevented, and problem attitudes and behaviors can be eliminated by enriching students' perspectives.

School counsellors intervene in unfair treatment to students by calming them and allowing self-expression, reminding the school rules and their responsibilities, encouraging them to talk to teachers personally, or reporting the event to the school principals. The selection of appropriate intervention methods depends on the school atmosphere, teachers' communicative attitudes, and the age and experience of the school counselor. The school counsellors expressed that in schools with a strict atmosphere with very old teachers, student failure, and behavior problems, they could not communicate with teachers and only had to report the problem to the school administration. However, in democratic school climates, school counsellors' advocacy efforts are readily accepted, they are allowed to take initiatives, and healthy communication can be established with teachers of all ages and seniority.

School counsellors emphasized that students spoke out about the complaints and unfair treatment they were subjected to and strived to cope with them within the limits of the school environment. Tarhan (2017) argues that three of the primary duties of school counsellors are participating in school meetings to express their professional opinions, providing individual guidance services, and doing activities for individual recognition. This finding is important for school counsellors to fulfill their advocacy duties. When school counsellors attend the meetings and provide information on fair/unfair practices, it might raise awareness of teachers, administrators, and even parents on a given issue. It is necessary to recognize a student, his family and conditions, and the educational risks to advocate for him. Thus, student recognition programs should be expanded, and form teachers should be a part of such practices. Anyone related to a child can review their own attitudes and behaviors and cooperate for the sake of that child.

Students who are exposed to unfair treatment feel angry, desperate, intimidated, and unhappy. Some students consult school counsellors to reveal their problems kindly, but others might be very aggressive, verbally and behaviorally. Aggressive students sometimes do self-harm or disturb the classroom environment, damage school properties and create problems for the teacher, which overlaps with the findings of Horan, Chory, and Goodboy (2010) and Tarhan (2018). Both studies revealed that unfairly treated students experienced negative feelings such as sadness, anger, despair, anxiety, rage, and hatred, and they were alienated from school. Suppressed negative emotions might lead to increases in anger and anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and social maladjustment. Therefore, students should be encouraged and taught to effectively express their feelings and thoughts. Efficient and objective mechanisms should be established to help their self-expression and solve unfairness.

According to school counsellors, students exposed to unfairness should defend their rights. They believe that counsellors must teach students problem-solving skills and support them. Similarly, according to Field and Baker (2004), school counsellors aim to empower students by teaching them self-protection skills to overcome their academic, emotional, and social problems. They also play an essential role in students' career planning (Martin, 2002) that is defined as *developmental advocacy* in the literature and refers to supporting the healthy development of students by improving their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Galassi & Akos, 2004).

School counsellors stated that although they did not have theoretical knowledge about "advocacy," they already provided advocacy services to students due to counselling and guidance's professional and ethical requirements. They considered their works, such as supporting economically disadvantaged students, integrating inclusive students to appropriate educational opportunities, and holding parent meetings to prevent school dropout and promote academic success in the scope of advocacy. In the literature, as a student advocate, school counsellors are expected to cooperate with teachers, principals, parents, and public organizations to promote students' academic, professional, and personality development (ASCA, 1997; Field and Baker, 2004; Baker, Robichaud, Westforth Dietrich, Wells and Schreck, 2009). School counsellors

stated that even teachers were sometimes subjected to unfair treatment by parents or students. In such cases, they listened to those teachers and supported them to defend their rights. Dixon et al. (2010) emphasized that school counsellors could also advocate on behalf of parents and teachers within the scope of their advocacy duties.

It was observed that although school counsellors protected the aggrieved students and strived to solve their problems, they were skeptical about the concept of advocacy. It might stem from the assumption that advocacy is to take sides and should be avoided school balances at school to not upset the school. Additionally, school counsellors especially emphasized their efforts to mediate between students and teachers while seeking solutions to unjust situations. There might be two reasons, one of which was that students were the real guilty ones in a problem. Secondly, school counsellors sought to balance the relationships with other teachers. Such attitudes of school counsellors remind Bemak and Chung's (2008) "good child syndrome." Counsellors displaying good child syndrome generally do not conflict with anyone, treat everyone with respect, mediate, and cooperate with others at school, which might be a barrier to the proper performance of duties. In this regard, school counsellors must use their skills to communicate, cooperate, recognize and solve problems, and organize efficiently, which are the critical advocacy competencies (Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Some issues challenge school counsellors' advocacy efforts, such as inclusion procedures and the students who abuse advocacy practices. Inclusion students mostly experience difficulty in almost all education settings due to crowded classrooms, teachers' inadequate knowledge of special education, orientation, and placement problems. The efforts to report and prevent sexual crimes against children are sometimes inconclusive due to bias, cultural values, family privacy, or the difficulty of legal acts. Hayli and Durmus (2005) remark that school counsellors are expected to undertake important duties in cases of sexual abuse, although they do not have the authority and responsibility to find solutions and are not supported by their schools. Besides, in Turkey, educational policies are developed without taking the opinions of school counsellors. Despite the high number of students, not enough counsellors work at schools, leading to less support for parents in solving problems. The lack of counselling and guidance lessons in the 1-7 grade levels also challenges to reach students. In this sense, school counsellors must reach all students and solve all problems, which is a utopian expectation. The reasons mentioned above led to no return on school counsellors' efforts, which disappointed and demotivated them. Trusty and Brown (2005) emphasize that school counsellors should make an effort to protect themselves against burnout, and they need to know that they cannot solve all cases. Therefore, school counsellors argued that advocacy duties might be fulfilled not only by counsellors but also by form teachers, who know students better, and school principals. The literature supports this finding. In addition to the fact that school counsellors do not have the necessary knowledge and skills on advocacy in education (Toporek, 2000; Field and Baker, 2004), advocacy duty is neglected due to conventional approach to counselling that should focus on clients' inner worlds (Erkan, 2017). Besides, professional organizations do not support advocacy, considering it

political in nature, so they prevent the popularity and prevalence of advocacy in schools (Erkan, 2017; Keklik, 2010).

In addressing the issues about advocacy, school counsellors' efforts to exist in school should not be ignored as well. School counsellors have to strive to maintain their position and be active members of the school community without combining their professional identity with a principal or teacher (Field & Baker, 2004). Despite the rapid changes in Turkey's social, economic and cultural structure and the challenges in education, it is also emphasised that school counsellors should see themselves as an essential part of the school system in the 21st century (Yalcin, 2006), as they are prominent advocates in schools today (Keklik, 2010). As change leaders, cooperation providers, and advocates, school counsellors must create new ways of communication and pioneer systemic changes, educational regulations, and social and economic globalization (Dahir, 2009). In this regard, school counsellors hold an optimum position to challenge the systemic barriers and other achievement-related factors (Martin, 2002). School counsellors who are aware of school events and better know and understand students, teachers, and parents contribute to students' achievement by drawing attention to educational equity, developmental school programs, and student support services (House & Hayes, 2002). They cooperate with students, teachers, principals, parents, other members of society. Thus, they improve students' academic, career, personal, and social competencies, respect for differences, and commitment to social justice (Galassi and Akos, 2004). The critical point here is to improve school counsellors' advocacy competencies that refer to the necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding to do advocacy ethically and effectively (Toporek, Lewis, and Crethar 2009). Thus, advocacy knowledge and skills, its basic philosophy, limits, and intervention methods should be taught to school counsellors during pre-service education. The counselling service programs should include activities that raise awareness about possible unfair situations in schools and should cover the school principals, teachers, parents, and students.

The following can be suggested for future studies on advocacy:

- Whether school counsellors prepare activities to determine possible unfair practices and conduct intervention programs within the scope of school counselling programs can be addressed.
- Qualitative and quantitative studies can be carried out to assist school counsellors to be informed about the concept of advocacy and their advocacy duties.
- Future studies can compare support and advocacy practices provided by school counsellors in private schools and public schools.



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