



| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

The Corrosive Effect of School Administrators as Toxic Leaders on Teacher Accountability

Toksik Lider Olarak Okul Yöneticilerinin Öğretmen Hesap Verebilirliğindeki Yıpratıcı Etkisi¹

Nazik ŞENOL¹, Said TAŞ²

Keywords

1. Toxic leadership
2. School administrator
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Abstract

Purpose: To examine teachers' views on the corrosive effect of toxic leadership behaviours of school administrators on teacher accountability.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study group of this research, which uses phenomenology as a qualitative research design, was selected using maximum variation sampling method, which is a type of purposive sampling. This group consists of 20 teachers working in 10 public schools in the central district of Isparta. Data were collected from the teachers through a semi-structured interview form. The collected qualitative data were subjected to contextual analysis through MAXQDA software and visualised. The findings show that the majority of teachers reported that toxic leadership has a detrimental effect on teacher accountability.

Findings: Toxic leaders, characterised by behaviours such as micromanagement, lack of empathy, and aggressive communication, were found to cause teacher demotivation, alienation, and professional burnout. In addition, toxic leaders erode teacher accountability by creating a negative and insecure organisational climate.

Highlights: Toxic leadership behaviours of school administrators are a critical factor that significantly affects teacher accountability. The various dimensions of this impact are as follows: Decreased teacher motivation, psychological safety and job satisfaction, decreased performance and productivity, impeded professional development, stress and burnout. In addition to these, toxic leadership has a negative impact on school climate. A negative school climate leads to a decrease in teachers' willingness to cooperate and be accountable. This can also negatively impact student achievement because lack of co-operation and support among teachers reduces the quality of education. Therefore, it is important for school administrators to exhibit more positive and supportive leadership behaviours to increase teachers' motivation and strengthen their accountability.

Öz

Çalışmanın amacı: Okul yöneticilerinin toksik lider davranışlarının öğretmen Hesap verebilirliğindeki aşındırıcı etkisine ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerini incelemektir.

Materyal ve Yöntem: Nitel araştırma deseni olarak fenomenolojiyi kullanan bu araştırmanın çalışma grubu, amaçlı örneklemin bir türü olan maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak seçilmiştir. Bu grup Isparta'nın merkez ilçesindeki 10 devlet okulunda görev yapan 20 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır. Öğretmenlerden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığıyla veriler toplanmıştır. Toplanan nitel veriler, MAXQDA programı aracılığıyla içeriksel analize tabi tutularak görselleştirilmiştir. Bulgular öğretmenlerin çoğunluğunun toksik liderliğin öğretmen hesap verebilirliği üzerinde zararlı bir etkisi olduğunu bildirdiğini göstermektedir.

Bulgular: Mikro yönetim, empati eksikliği ve agresif iletişim gibi davranışlarla karakterize edilen toksik liderlerin öğretmenlerde motivasyon eksikliği, yabancılaşma ve mesleki tükenmişlik gibi olumsuzluklara neden olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca toksik liderlerin olumsuz ve güvensiz bir örgüt iklimi oluşturarak öğretmen hesap verebilirliğini aşındırdığı belirtilmiştir.

Önemli Vurgular: Okul yöneticilerinin toksik liderlik davranışları, öğretmenlerin hesap verebilirliğini önemli ölçüde etkileyen kritik bir faktördür. Bu etkinin çeşitli boyutları şu şekildedir: Öğretmen motivasyonunda azalma, psikolojik güvenlik ve iş tatmini, performans ve verimlilikte düşüş, profesyonel gelişimin engellenmesi, stres ve tükenmişlik. Bunlara ek olarak toksik liderlik, okul iklimini olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Olumsuz bir okul iklimi, öğretmenlerin iş birliği yapma ve hesap verebilir olma isteklerini azaltmaya sebep olmaktadır. Bu durum öğrenci başarısını da olumsuz etkileyebilmektedir, çünkü öğretmenler arasında iş birliği ve destek eksikliği, eğitim kalitesini düşürmektedir. Bu nedenle, okul yöneticilerinin daha olumlu ve destekleyici liderlik davranışları sergilemeleri, öğretmenlerin motivasyonunu artırmak ve hesap verebilirliklerini güçlendirmek için önem arz etmektedir.

¹ Süleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management, Isparta, TURKEY; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5046-2148>

² Süleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management, Isparta, TURKEY; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3013-9084>

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important forces shaping the future of societies and this power is realized through the devoted work of teachers working in schools (Cemaloğlu & Özdemir, 2019). The sustainability of dedication and commitment largely depends on the leadership style of school administrators. Leaders are individuals who directly affect the spirit and culture of the school and the professional lives of teachers (Turan, 2020). However, in addition to leaders who influence and develop positive behaviors, there are also leaders who undermine them. In the literature, such leaders are called toxic (Çelebi et al., 2015). Toxic leaders prevent employees from being creative by exerting strict control over them (Doğan & Aslan, 2024). By controlling communication and information networks, they encourage abstraction, suspicion and an unhealthy organizational environment (Orunbon & Ibikunle, 2023). By preventing the formation of good relationships between people, they reduce productivity and cause employees to disengage both from the organization and from each other (Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024). In other words, toxic leadership can have a corrosive effect on the entire education system (Dahlan et al., 2024). One area where toxic leadership has a particularly corrosive effect is teacher accountability. Teacher accountability is one of the most fundamental building blocks of an educational institution (Baidoo-Anu & Ennu Baidoo, 2024). Teachers' adherence to professional standards and providing students with the highest quality education is a result of their accountability (Jena, 2023). However, toxic leadership behaviors of school administrators can erode teachers' commitment to fulfilling these responsibilities (Rosenblatt & Wubbels, 2021). In such an environment, teachers may show weakness not only in fulfilling their duties but also in their responsibilities towards their students.

Educational administration and leadership studies have generally focused on positive leadership models, effective management strategies and factors that increase teacher motivation, but the effects of destructive leadership behaviors such as toxic leadership on teachers have not been sufficiently examined. By focusing on the dark side of leadership behaviors, this study reveals how toxic leadership undermines teacher accountability in educational institutions and its negative effects on the quality of education. By raising awareness of how negative behaviors exhibited by leaders, especially in the field of education, can erode teachers' professional accountability, this study shows that leadership behaviors have long-term effects not only on teachers but also on school climate and student achievement in general. At this point, the study not only makes a theoretical contribution to the educational administration literature, but also raises awareness of the need to reassess leadership behaviors in practice.

Toxic Leadership

Today, the concept of leadership is predominantly portrayed with a positive connotation (Gündüz & Dedekorkut, 2014). However, it is important to understand that leaders are not infallible heroes who positively guide their stakeholders without making any mistakes. This is because leaders may at times exhibit negative behaviors or make critical mistakes that jeopardize the interests of the majority. Recognizing this reality, some scholars have moved away from idealized portrayals of heroic leaders and have begun to view leadership from a more comprehensive perspective, including the negative aspects of leadership (Eliveren et al., 2023). Various studies examining manipulative, destructive and toxic leadership behaviors that lead to negative outcomes shed light on the darker sides of leadership, especially as it concerns individuals and groups (İlhan & Çelebi, 2021).

The beginnings of the toxic leader concept are attributed to Dr. Marcia Lynn Whicker, who first introduced it in her 1996 analysis and categorized leadership in organizations into three types: trustworthy, transient and toxic. Whicker (1996) characterizes toxic behaviors of leaders as complaining, vindictive, restless and malicious. Jean Lipman-Blumen later expanded the concept by suggesting that certain leaders exhibit toxic tendencies (Heppell, 2011). According to Lipman-Blumen (2005), toxic leaders are those whose destructive behavior and dysfunctional personality traits cause serious and lasting harm to individuals, organizations, and even the nations they lead. According to him, toxic leaders are managers who do not adopt constructive feedback, encourage approval instead of critically evaluating the leader's judgments and behaviors, and thus harm employees. Flynn (1999) adds that toxic leaders are rude and cruel and exhibit characteristics such as speaking loudly to stakeholders and engaging in hurtful and repulsive behavior.

Toxic school leaders exhibit an authoritarian leadership style that focuses on control rather than collaboration (Dahlan et al., 2024). This approach stifles creativity and discourages open communication, preventing the development of a supportive learning community. Toxic leaders engage in favoritism, giving undue preference to certain individuals or groups (Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024). This not only leads to resentment among staff, but can also undermine the principles of fairness and equity within the educational institution. Micromanagement is also seen as a common feature of toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Constant interference in the duties of teachers and staff leads to a culture of insecurity. Since educators may feel overwhelmed and demoralized, their professional development will be negatively affected. Toxic leadership occurs as a result of a lack of empathy, and this lack leads the leader to disregard the feelings and needs of others, creating insecurity and stress in the work environment. As Schmidt (2008) points out, toxic leaders tend to ignore stakeholders, lack empathy, and do not prioritize their individual needs, which leads to a loss of organizational trust. In these organizations, it is claimed that individuals who accept everything without question are rewarded, while those who approach things critically, think differently and have creative personality traits are punished by being removed from important positions. According to Lipman-Bluman (2005), toxic leaders expose their followers to humiliation, do not support them, demoralize them, instill fear, take away their rights, limit their abilities and engage in unethical behavior. In addition, they force stakeholders to submit to their authority through threats and withhold information.

Such harmful effects of leaders not only prevent the organization from achieving its goals but also harm its stakeholders (Dahlan et al., 2024).

Research on toxic leadership shows that the negative behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders have detrimental effects on both the work environment and the organizational climate, affecting stakeholders' organizational commitment and trust (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). In other words, there is a direct relationship between the negative leadership attitudes exhibited by managers and the level of organizational trust among employees. In addition, the level of organizational commitment among stakeholders also plays a role in shaping the organizational trust environment. Toxic leadership behaviors displayed by managers not only impact the organizational trust perception of the staff, but also reduce the overall level of organizational trust by eroding organizational commitment (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Toxic leadership behavior reduces the productivity of teachers and negatively impacts the benefit dynamics in organizations (Dahlan et al., 2024). This, in turn, can lead to increased absenteeism and anxiety levels, leading to below-average performance and eventually to the disengagement of education stakeholders.

Teacher Accountability

As a requirement of a global and social system, accountability plays an important role in ensuring success in organizations. For this purpose, various accountability policies targeting schools, teachers, administrators or students have been formulated and implemented (Erdağ, 2020). O'Day (2002) categorized accountability as managerial/bureaucratic, legal, professional and market accountability. Cendon (2000) defined it as political, managerial, professional and democratic accountability. Political accountability involves responsibility in public administration, extending hierarchically up to government leaders and involving the obligations of governments to parliament. Managerial accountability refers to accountability to senior management or external stakeholders for compliance with legal regulations. Professional accountability is linked to adhering to the norms and rules of a particular professional group and performing in accordance with professional standards. Democratic accountability is defined as direct responsibility to the public and fulfillment of the duty of proactive transparency towards citizens (Cendon, 2000). Rosenblatt (2017) conceptualized teacher accountability not only as an attempt to comply with external demands and expectations, but also as a two-dimensional subjective reality that encompasses teachers' professional competence, professional development needs, and professional ethics. Research shows that the concept of accountability is an important factor for organizations as it shows that employees' sense of responsibility affects their well-being, motivation and performance (Erdağ, 2020).

Hoy & Miskel (2010) base accountability in education on three basic principles: (1) Schools should be held accountable for high standards of performance; (2) Schools should be supported to strengthen their capacity to deliver quality education and (3) Schools should improve the rate and quality of performance outcomes, especially student outcomes. Education institutions have defined the accountability framework to include decisions on student performance, inputs and outputs, and various tools and methods to improve achievement in line with the goals set by school staff. In addition, the concept of accountability in education includes all activities, decisions, in-service courses, educational initiatives, and methods and techniques used to increase student achievement in line with the mission and vision of the school (Himmetoğlu et al., 2017; Kalman & Gedikoğlu, 2014; Yıldırım & Yenipinar, 2019). Accountability is often characterized as a process centered on results and outcomes (Türkoğlu, 2015). Therefore, as schools and teachers strive to achieve success by using state resources, they should be scrutinized according to the progress levels of their students (Ertan Kantos, 2010). Thus, it is widely believed that an increase in the perception of accountability in schools is associated with an increase in overall achievement (Himmetoğlu et al., 2017). According to Ingersoll & Collins (2017), considering that teachers are the main actors in school processes, teacher accountability is of great importance. Although each school has its own characteristics, it is an undeniable fact that teachers, as the individuals who are in the closest communication with students, actively shape the classroom environment and assume many responsibilities (Şişman, 2011). The teacher is usually solely responsible for the students in the classroom. Therefore, they are not directly accountable for their behavior and performance. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be accountable for their actions.

Contemporary accountability practices aim to ensure that schools meet the expectations of academic performance mandated by law, bureaucracy and professional standards (Türkoğlu, 2015). They are tasked with establishing the necessary mechanisms, ensuring their functioning and improving student outcomes. The ultimate goal is to change teacher behavior to increase effectiveness and efficiency, thereby improving overall school outcomes, especially student academic performance. In this framework, accountability is seen as both external performance expectations placed on teachers and internal systems designed to support teachers' intrinsic motivation and teaching skills (Erdağ, 2020). Teachers not only transfer knowledge, but are also responsible for students' individual development, academic achievement and social skills (Baidoo-Anu & Ennu Baidoo, 2024). In fulfilling these responsibilities, accountability requires teachers to adopt student-centered approaches and adhere to professional ethics (Jena, 2023). This approach builds transparency and trust in educational processes, while also improving the quality of education provided to students (Gore et al., 2023). Teacher accountability is one of the key elements that determine not only individual teaching practices, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of an entire education system.

The Relationship between Toxic Leader Teacher Accountability

Educational organizations are institutions where human interaction is deeply felt. In such situations, leaders recognize the psychological and social needs of individuals and try to meet these needs (Şişman, 2014). For this reason, effective leadership in education is crucial in fostering a positive and productive learning environment (Güçlü & Kılıç, 2011). However, when leadership

becomes toxic, its repercussions can be felt by the entire education system. Toxic leadership is characterized by behaviors and practices that harm the well-being of an organization and its members (Heppell, 2011). In the educational context, toxic leaders may exhibit characteristics such as micromanagement, lack of transparency, favoritism, and failure to provide support and resources. When these characteristics are prevalent in educational leadership, the negative impact on teacher accountability becomes evident (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). One of the primary effects of toxic leadership is the erosion of trust within the school community. When teachers feel that their leaders do not have their best interests at heart or that their efforts are not valued, a culture of distrust can permeate the organization. In such an environment, collaboration and open communication are inhibited, making it difficult for teachers to take ownership of their roles and be held accountable for student outcomes (Cendon, 2000). Toxic leaders often resort to fear-based management strategies, creating an atmosphere where teachers are motivated by fear of retaliation rather than a genuine commitment to student achievement (Heppell, 2011). This fear-based approach to accountability can lead to a culture of compliance rather than continuous improvement. Teachers may hesitate to take risks or implement innovative teaching methods for fear of negative consequences if their efforts are not aligned with the narrow expectations set by toxic leaders (Elmore, 2005). Teacher accountability is closely linked to continuous professional development. However, toxic leadership tends to prioritize budget constraints over investing in educators' growth and development (Baidoo-Anu & Ennu Baidoo, 2024). When opportunities for professional development are limited, teachers may struggle to stay up-to-date with best practices, hindering their ability to adapt to evolving educational standards and methodologies (Himmetoğlu et al., 2017). In general, most government reform initiatives that seek to make schools more accountable assume that principal leadership plays a key role (Padilla et al., 2007). This paper therefore examines how toxic leadership undermines teacher accountability and thus the quality of education provided to students.

Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the detrimental effects of school administrators on teacher accountability in the context of toxic leader behavior according to teachers' views and to explore its corrosive impact on teacher accountability with the aim of identifying factors that contribute to improving educational outcomes and potential mitigating strategies. In line with this main purpose, the study sought to answer the following questions;

1. What is the relationship between toxic leadership and teacher accountability?
2. Are school administrators a toxic leader?
3. What is the impact of toxic leader behaviors on teachers?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of teacher accountability?
5. What is the role of toxic leader in teacher accountability?
6. What strategies can be implemented to reduce the corrosive effect of toxic leaders on teacher accountability?

METHOD/MATERIALS

Research Design

Survey model approach was used in the research. This type of research method is typically used to capture the characteristics of a particular situation or event in its current state or as it was in the past. The aim, as stated by Karasar (2006), is to provide a detailed and accurate description of the subject within its natural context. In addition, the study adopted a qualitative research methodology, which was chosen for its effectiveness in providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic under study. Phenomenological design, a subset of qualitative research methods, was used in the study. Phenomenology generally focuses on phenomena that are familiar to us but do not have an in-depth and comprehensive thought structure. It is useful in investigating issues that are completely unknown but all their consequences and meanings cannot be fully grasped. The primary data sources in phenomenological studies, as defined by Yıldırım & Şimşek (2008), are individuals or groups who have directly experienced the subject or have the ability to express the subject clearly.

Universe/ Sample

This study was conducted with a total of 20 teachers working in 10 Anatolian high schools in Isparta Central District in the 2023-2024 academic year. The sample of the study was formed by purposeful criterion sampling method from the teachers of ten Anatolian high schools who volunteered for the research (Kıral & Karaman Kepenekçi, 2018). The reason for choosing purposive criterion sampling is that the students participating in the study have knowledge and experience related to the subject. Therefore, it is thought that their contribution to the research is significant. The demographic characteristics of the teachers participating in the study are given in Figure 1. and Figure 2.

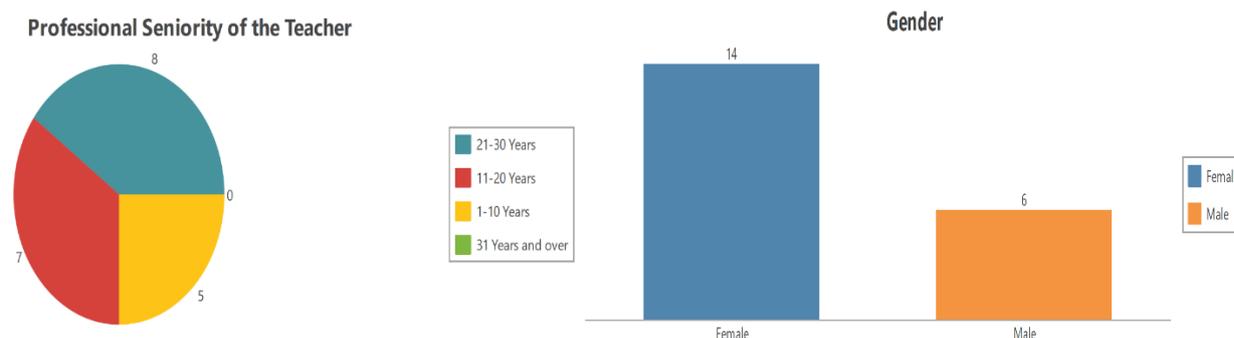


Figure 1. Demographic information of the teachers participating in the study group

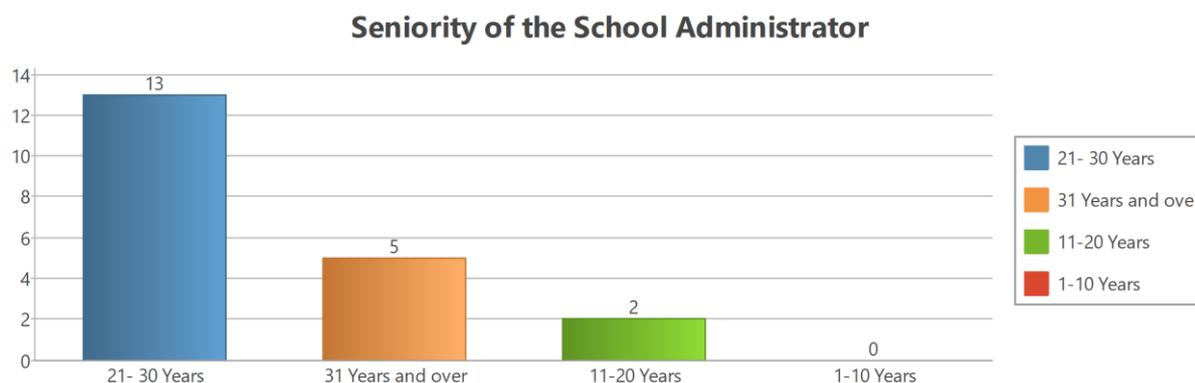


Figure 2. Demographic information of the school administrators of the teachers participating in the study group

As shown in Figure 1, the teachers consisted of 14 women and 6 men. The seniority of 9 teachers participating in the study is 21 years and above, 7 of them are 11-20 years, 4 of them are 1-10 years. In Figure 2, information about the professional seniority of the school administrators of the teachers participating in the study group is given. 13 school administrators' seniority years are between 21-30 years, 5 of them are 30 years and above, and 2 of them are between 11-20 years.

Data Collection Tool

In order to examine teachers' views on the corrosive effect of toxic leadership behaviors of school administrators on teacher accountability, data were collected through a semi-structured interview form. Teachers' opinions were obtained through face-to-face interviews. First, the literature on the subject was reviewed in detail by the researchers. Then, a semi-structured interview form was prepared based on the literature. The questions were examined in detail by taking the opinions of three faculty members who are experts in the field, and the comprehensibility and relevance of the questions were determined. The interview form consists of eight questions:

- 1.) How would you define toxic leadership? Does your school administrator show toxic leadership behaviors?
- 2.) What impact do your school administrator's toxic leadership characteristics have on teachers?
- 3.) How would you define teacher accountability?
- 4.) How do the toxic behaviors of your school administrator affect your accountability?
- 5.) To what extent does your school administrator's miscommunication and lack of appreciation as a toxic leader affect your level of internal accountability?
- 6.) How does your school administrator's toxic leadership affect trust and transparency in your accountability process?
- 7.) Does your school administrator's resistance to feedback or constructive criticism in your accountability process as a toxic leader affect your academic performance?
- 8.) What strategies should be implemented to reduce the corrosive impact of toxic leadership on accountability?

Data Collection and Analysis

The research was subjected to an evaluation by using content analysis, one of the qualitative data analyses, with the use of toxic leadership and teacher accountability forms. The main goal of content analysis is to reveal concepts and relationships that can illuminate the data obtained. The basic procedure in content analysis involves classifying similar data under certain themes and interpreting the data within a defined framework that the reader can understand (Ayyıldız & Akin, 2016). The first step in content analysis requires coding the data obtained; this is a comprehensive examination of the data to identify similar sections and to grasp the conceptual meaning of each section. Then, the codes are divided into certain groups, the data are organized according to the codes and themes, and the findings are interpreted and themes are formed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

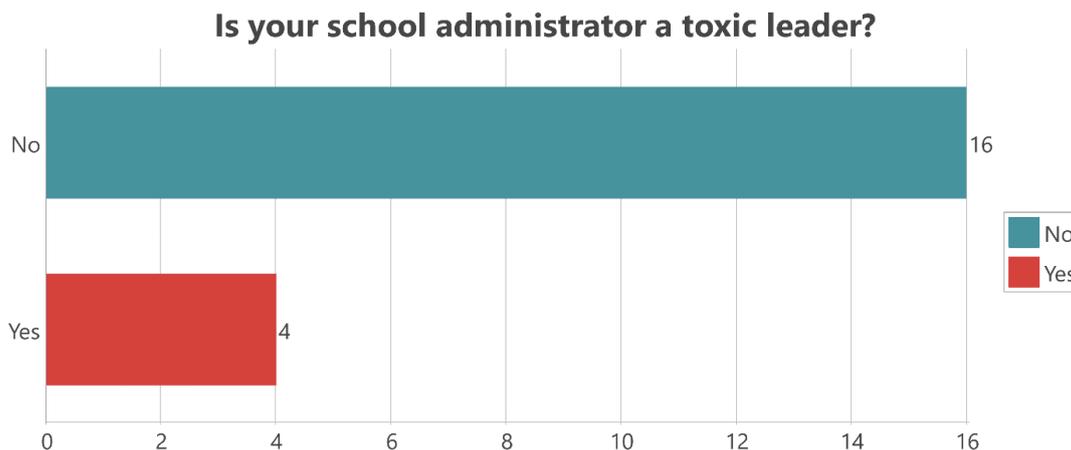


Figure 4. Table showing toxic leadership of school administrators

According to the results obtained, 4 participants stated that school administrators showed toxic leader behavior. Under the theme of yes, 3 sub-themes were formed. These are controlling, lack of transparency and negative organizational climate. Among the most frequently mentioned topics, there are codes related to school administrators creating controlling and negative organizational climate.

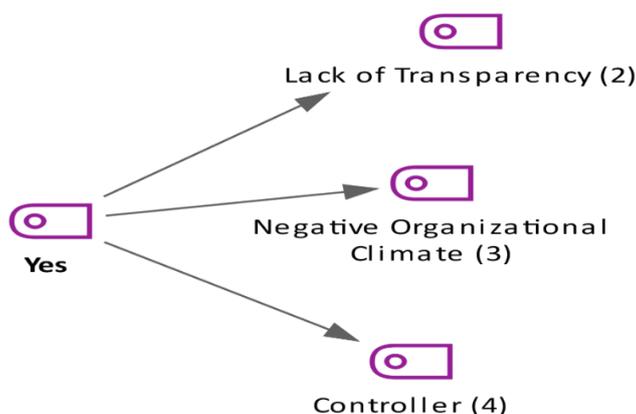


Figure 5. Classification of teachers' views on toxic school administrators

Below are the codes related to the meanings experienced and reported by the teachers and sample quotations for each code.

Lack of Transparency

As a result of the research, teachers stated that school administrators were not transparent as toxic leaders and some issues were kept secret. Teachers shared their experiences about this issue as follows:

"I think he is not transparent, some things are kept secret, and he does not share them with us." (T1)

"I think it is not transparent, it is not clear enough." (T11)

Negative Organizational Climate

Teachers stated that school administrators created a negative organizational climate by showing toxic behaviors, harmed the cooperation between school stakeholders and engaged in offensive behaviors. Teachers' views on this issue are as follows:

"Due to excessive supervision, it does not have an equal effect on the employees and causes deepening of groupings in the environment. It disrupts the relationship between friends and tries to isolate people." (T1)

"It has a negative effect. They show offensive behaviors in public. This affects the working environment negatively." (T13)

Controller

Within the scope of toxic leadership behavior, teachers stated that school administrators behaved in a controlling manner the most. They stated that school administrators intervene in everything from the teachers' entry and exit times to the documents they bring to the class and that they do not want any step to be taken without their knowledge. Teachers' views on this issue are as follows:

"We have an overly controlling and perfectionist school administrator. He follows every step we take." (T10)

"He has an attitude that is too interventionist and controlling, and hardens when what he wants is not realized." (T11)

Teachers' Views on the Effects of Toxic Leader Behaviors on Teachers

The questions asked to the teachers about the impact of toxic leadership of school administrators on teachers revealed the codes under the theme of the impact of toxic leadership on teachers presented in Figure 6. These codes were divided into four groups as negative situation and self-regulation. The negative situation sub-theme was also divided into four categories. These are inefficiency, passivity, psychological pressure and alienation. As can be seen in Figure 6, passivity and psychological pressure categories are the most frequently mentioned issues.

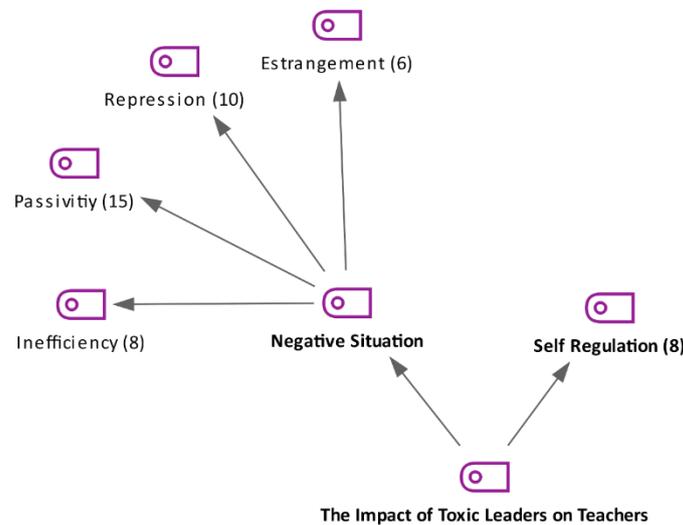


Figure 6. Classification of teachers' views on the effects of toxic leaders on teachers

Negative Situation

Toxic leader behavior can lead teachers to negative situations in many ways. Within the findings, the negative situation theme was divided into four sub-themes; inefficiency, passivity, psychological pressure and not feeling belonging. The most frequently mentioned issue in the negative situation theme is the sub-theme of passivity. Teachers stated that the fact that school administrators were toxic leaders caused reluctance in teachers, decreased commitment to school, unwillingness to work and distancing. Secondly, the sub-theme of psychological pressure was mentioned the most. Teachers stated that they entered into a negative psychological state within the scope of toxic leadership behavior. They stated that they could not be comfortable because they felt that they were constantly under surveillance, that they were humiliated even in a minor incident and that they could not be peaceful for these reasons. In the sub-theme of inefficiency, teachers stated that toxic behavior of school administrators would decrease productivity. They stated that their creativity would be hindered because they would be negatively affected by toxic behavior, they would be timid when implementing a new idea because of toxic behavior, and therefore they would not update themselves. In the alienation sub-theme, teachers stated that they would move away from the school and school stakeholders, become alienated and weaken their sense of belonging due to toxic behaviors. Teacher views on these sub-themes are as follows:

"Since it will create an unhealthy working environment, I will come to school reluctantly and become a teacher who only wants to do his/her job and escape. In the educational environment, especially such situations will primarily affect the students and bring along many negative problems." (T7)

"I definitely do not make an extra effort outside my duty. A teacher has many more duties than attending the lesson. I do not take part in any of these." (T15)

"The fact that teachers and other employees feel that they are under surveillance creates a feeling of psychological pressure and discomfort." (T12)

"I avoid using new methods and techniques in the lesson because it would decrease my motivation. This prevents me from updating myself as a teacher and I cannot provide efficiency to my students." (T3)

"The negative climate of the school environment can reduce my working efficiency, I cannot realize my new ideas and my creativity is hindered." (T1)

"I do not feel that I belong to the school and I move away." (T9)

"I get cold from school. I don't want to come." (T17)

Self-regulation

Some of the teachers, on the other hand, stated that they were not affected by the toxic behaviors of school administrators, that they protected themselves from toxic behaviors and that they were able to re-motivate themselves by self-regulation. Teachers' opinions on this issue are as follows:

"I try to move forward by re-motivating myself in terms of self-renewal, enjoyment (of the work), the pleasure of being able to teach new things to students. If informal accountability provides you with positive feedback, this increases your strength, and you continue on your way." (T1)

"Aiming to fulfil the necessity of the profession by making a logical and conscientious accounting by ignoring the corrosive effect of the toxic leader, not making concessions to the toxic leader." (T8)

Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Accountability

Teachers' perceptions of the concept of teacher accountability were divided into two sub-themes: internal accountability and external accountability as shown in Figure 7. The internal accountability sub-theme was categorized as conscience. The external accountability category was coded as responsiveness.

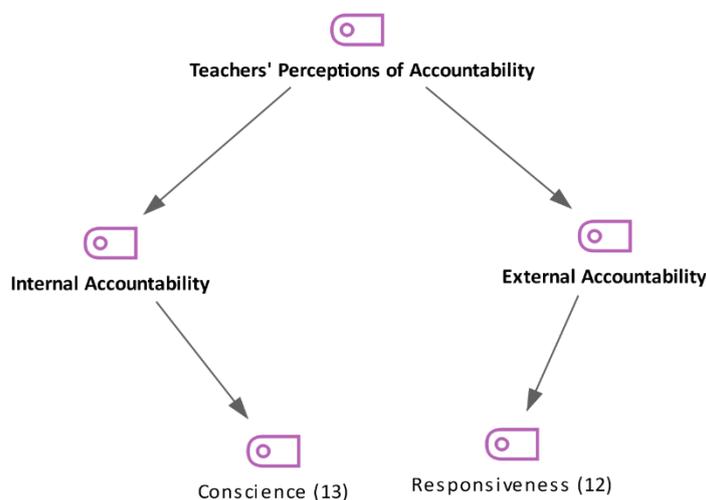


Figure 7. Classification of teachers' views on teachers' accountability perceptions

Internal Accountability

The theme of internal accountability was divided into the sub-theme of conscience. Teachers defined the conscience code as being conscientiously comfortable with the behaviors of teachers within the scope of their duties. They mentioned the requirements of their profession and being responsible for student success. Teacher opinions on this theme are as follows:

"First, I am accountable to myself so that my conscience is comfortable. Therefore, whether my school administrator is toxic or not does not affect my accountability at this point."(T4)

"The most beautiful accountability of the teacher is the smiling eyes of the students. I recognize no mechanism other than my conscience." (T15)

"To do his/her job according to the legislation and moral principles and not to refrain from expressing what he/she did and did not do with his/her deficiencies and mistakes when asked." (T11)

External Accountability

The teachers coded the concept of external accountability as responsiveness. They defined accountability as giving an account of what they did to the authority during the supervision. The opinions supporting these ideas were stated as follows:

"Being able to evaluate the results of his/her lessons or social and cultural activities." (T18)

"It is the supervision of a teacher against external authority about his/her lessons and responsibilities and the teacher's ability to respond to these supervisions." (T5)

Teachers' Views on the Role of Toxic Leader in Teacher Accountability

As a result of the findings, teachers' views on the role of toxic leaders in teacher accountability were divided into two themes: negative impact and resilience. As seen in Figure 8, the themes of lack of motivation and insecurity were among the most frequently mentioned issues.

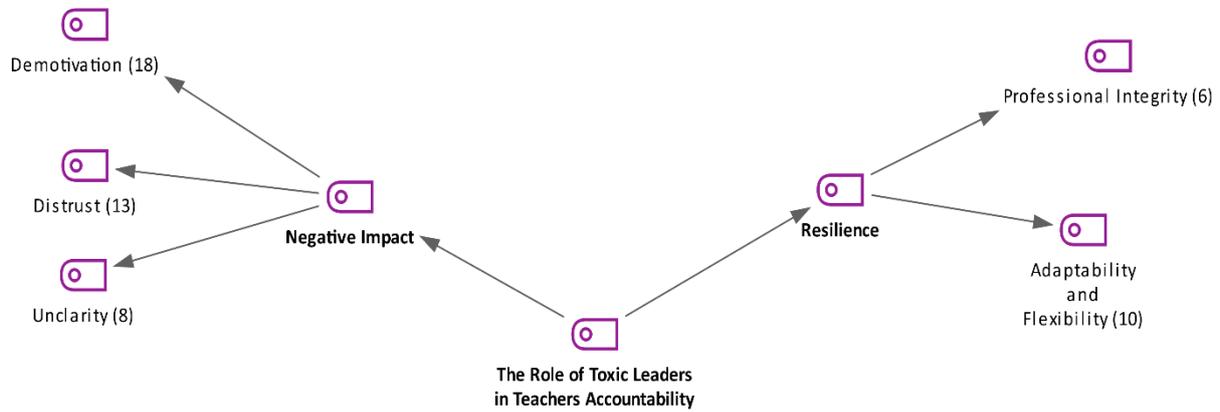


Figure 8. Classification of teachers' views on the role of toxic leader in teacher accountability

Negative Impact

The negative impact theme was divided into three sub-themes: lack of transparency, lack of motivation and insecurity. Lack of motivation was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme in line with teachers' opinions. Toxic behaviors of school administrators cause a decrease in teachers' motivation. This significantly affects the academic performance of the teacher. It is concluded that they are negatively affected both academically and in terms of classroom effectiveness. The insecurity sub-theme was the second most frequently mentioned issue. Teachers stated that they lost their trust in school administrators in the face of toxic behaviors and therefore did not want to communicate with them. In the sub-theme of not being transparent, teachers stated that they could not be transparent to school administrators in the accountability dimension because they did not trust the toxic leader and could not express everything openly. The opinions supporting these thoughts are as follows:

"Of course it modifies my trust negatively. This increases in proportion to the severity of the negativity experienced." (Ö19)

"It might have been more difficult to be transparent in the face of school administrators who exhibit pressure and intimidating behaviors. The existence of an environment of mutual trust and confidence in a school can help us to be comfortable and more transparent in the process." (S8)

Resilience

Teachers' views were divided into two sub-themes under the resilience sub-theme: professional integrity, adaptability and flexibility. As seen in Figure 8, adaptability and flexibility were the most frequently mentioned topics. Most of the teachers stated that the toxic behaviors of school administrators did not affect their academic performance and teaching. In this way, it can be concluded that they were able to adapt themselves to the situation and show flexibility. They stated that they further strengthened themselves and increased their accountability dimensions by updating themselves in line with technological developments. As for professional integrity, they stated that working under toxic leadership is emotionally and mentally exhausting, but teachers' continuing to fulfill their duties effectively and fulfilling their obligations internally and externally will increase their resilience and they will be able to stand upright in the face of toxic leaders. Teacher statements supporting the views are as follows:

"As a teacher, I question my accountability not according to a toxic administrator, but within the framework of the rules required by my profession and in a way that I can be accountable to my own conscience." (T8)

"Since I do not do my job for someone else to inspect, the behavior of the toxic leader cannot affect my academic performance and accountability. I do my job." (T18)

"I complete the tasks required by my duty, complete the documents, and do not interfere too much. I take myself under protection." (T6)

Teachers' Views on Strategies to Mitigate the Toxic Leader's Corrosive Effect on Teacher Accountability

The strategies that should be implemented in order to reduce the corrosive effects of school administrators' toxic leadership behaviors on teacher accountability were classified into two themes in line with teachers' views. These themes are self-awareness and legislation. As a result of the interviews, self-awareness was the most pronounced theme.

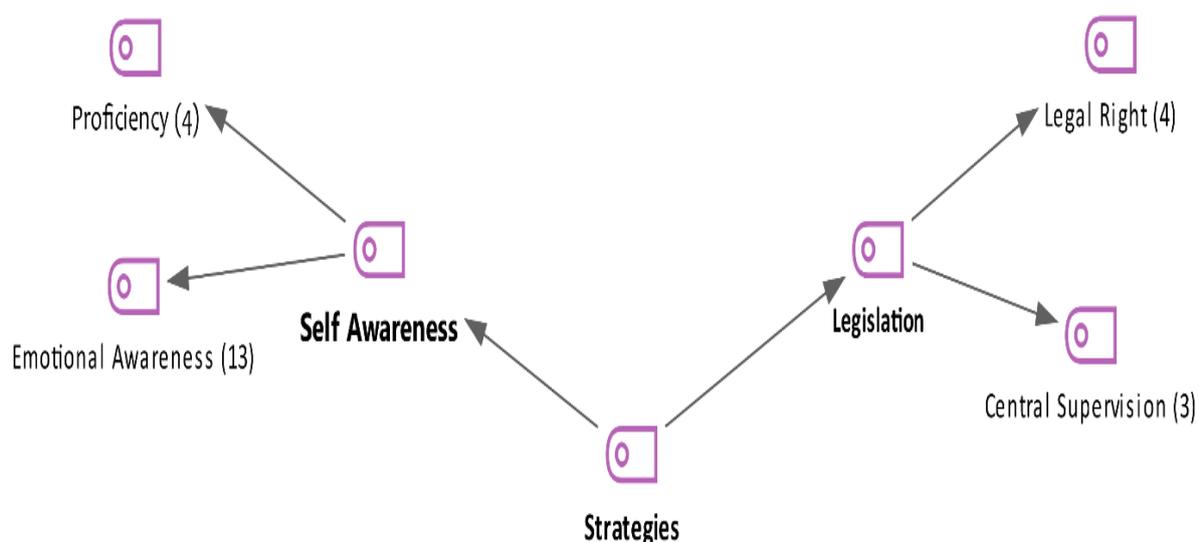


Figure 9. Classification of teachers' views on strategies to mitigate the corrosive effects of toxic leaders on teacher accountability

Self Awareness

The self-awareness theme was divided into two sub-themes: competence and emotional awareness. The most frequently mentioned theme was emotional awareness. Teachers stated that school administrators should be made emotionally aware of the fact that they show toxic behaviors. They stated that they should be made aware of how to solve this issue and create affective awareness by giving feedback through the questionnaire or by communicating with them and explaining how they behave. They also stated that school administrators should be enabled to empathize and allowed to develop their affective intelligence. In the sub-theme of competence, opinions were expressed that school administrators should create personal awareness by developing themselves not only in cognitive but also in affective terms. Teachers shared their opinions on this issue as follows:

"First, toxic behaviors of school administrators should be prevented, and they should be made aware of this issue. MEB should conduct research on administrator behaviors at certain intervals in schools. Awareness is the beginning of everything. If awareness is created, school administrators can criticize and correct their behaviors. Thus, the corrosive effect can be reduced or eliminated." (T4)

"The competence and emotional intelligence of school administrators are very important not only in terms of legislation but also psychologically." (T13)

"Not everyone should be appointed as school administrators. People who are educated, self-realized and competent in every sense should be brought to management." (T16)

Legislation

The legislation theme consists of two sub-themes: legal rights and centralized supervision. Teachers stated that school administrators showing toxic behavior should be centrally audited by the Ministry of National Education at certain intervals. However, these inspections should not only be documented, but also the psychological soundness of the school administrator should be questioned. In the legal rights sub-theme, teachers expressed the opinion that teachers should know their personal rights well and apply to the necessary authorities when faced with toxic behaviors. In this regard, teachers expressed their opinions as follows:

"First, in order to prevent the emergence of such leaders, a system of checks and balances should be provided. Central control activities should be carried out at certain intervals." (T10)

"It would be a good strategy to know our personal rights and legal obligations well and not to hesitate to seek our legal rights when necessary." (T5)

"The units that will implement this are the higher units. We teachers can only report this to the higher units and seek our legal rights." (T7)

DISCUSSION

Administrators are an important element in shaping the culture and success of educational institutions. However, when leadership becomes toxic, the consequences can be corrosive, especially in terms of teacher accountability. When teachers feel that their leaders are not interested in their welfare or that they are being blamed without taking a broader view, their trust is destroyed. The result is a fragmented school community where collaboration is inhibited and teachers can become reluctant to

take risks or share innovative ideas. Toxic leadership, which affects many areas in this way, has a corrosive effect on teacher accountability by creating an atmosphere of fear and vulnerability.

As a result of the findings, it was determined that most of the school administrators did not show toxic leadership and some of them showed toxic leadership behaviors. The behaviors of school administrators as a toxic leader were coded as controlling, lack of transparency and negative organizational climate. Controlling behavior of school administrators creates anxiety and discontentment among teachers. Their controlling nature permeates every aspect of the educational experience, from stifling academic creativity to inhibiting teacher autonomy. Toxic leaders often show favoritism, creating a climate of competition and resentment among teachers. Personal biases can influence decisions about evaluations, creating a culture of distrust and division within the school community. Toxic leaders who work in secrecy, wield power behind closed doors and keep their followers in the dark demonstrate a deliberate lack of transparency, hiding their goals, decisions and actions from teachers. Lack of transparency fosters speculation, undermines trust and breeds suspicion. Trust, an important element of a successful school environment, is eroded when employees feel they are kept in the dark about decisions that directly affect them. As teachers lose faith in a leadership style that values confidentiality more than openness, their sense of belonging disappears. As toxic leaders, school administrators create a negative organizational climate. Communication breaks down, information flows unidirectional from top to bottom, and employees feel disconnected and uninformed. The lack of open dialogue leads to misunderstandings, rumors and a pervasive sense of uncertainty. Collaboration becomes challenging in this environment where employees are afraid to share ideas or collaborate for fear of punishment. Moreover, toxic leaders often exhibit favoritism and divisive behavior, creating factions within the workforce. This leads to resentment, demotivation, and feelings of injustice, undermining morale and team cohesion. The results of the research reflect the results of previous studies. Dobbs (2014) stated that employees perceived their leaders as exhibiting low levels of toxic leadership behaviors. In another study, when teachers' average perceptions of toxic leadership were evaluated, it was concluded that school principals exhibited low levels of toxic leadership behaviors. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it can be argued that teachers mostly do not perceive principals' leadership behaviors as toxic. This result overlaps with the results of Demirel's (2015) study conducted with a sample of teachers and is consistent with İzgüden et al.'s (2016) study conducted with health personnel. In contrast to these results, Green's (2014) study focusing on toxic leadership in educational organizations revealed that 90% of educators reported that they encountered toxic leaders. When the international literature is examined, it is seen that employees generally perceive their managers as people who exhibit toxic leadership characteristics.

The category of teacher perceptions of the concept of accountability is divided into two codes: internal and external accountability. An important component of intrinsic accountability is not only meeting professional standards or legislative requirements, but also ensuring that teachers fulfill their duties with a clear conscience. A clear conscience in teaching involves making ethical decisions that put the interests of students first. Having a clear conscience also involves a commitment to continuous reflection and improvement. Teachers should regularly evaluate their teaching methods, identify areas for improvement and actively seek opportunities for professional development. This proactive approach helps to ensure that educators remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of their students. Teachers' transparency in accountability creates an environment where trust flourishes, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for student achievement. Transparent teachers contribute to a positive and collaborative learning community by actively engaging with students, parents and colleagues through open communication and clear practices. Teachers described accountability as being able to answer to external authorities about their authority and responsibilities. Teachers are accountable for their teaching practices and supervision provides a mechanism for administrators or mentors to observe and evaluate these practices. Supervision involves ensuring that teachers comply with school policies, curriculum guidelines and educational standards. Responsiveness to supervision is an important component of teacher accountability and demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and a collaborative approach to achieving educational goals. According to Bakioglu & Sanduz (2014), teachers emphasized that course audits should be conducted by other stakeholders rather than school administrators. Koçak et al. (2012) argued that supervision of teachers from external sources is not sufficient in terms of supervision processes and that it is difficult to adopt such a form of supervision due to the increase in administrative workload. Erdağ & Karadağ (2017) emphasized the importance of active participation of school principals in supervision to instill accountability among teachers. Erdağ (2013) found that the above-mentioned differences in approach are managed differently according to the type of school, and that there is a relationship between the role undertaken and the degree to which the sense of accountability is felt. Himmetoğlu et al. (2017) explained the accountability of school administrators with concepts such as transparency, information provision and responsibility. They also argued that accountability plays an important role in issues such as school choice and success. These findings support the external accountability aspect of the study because in this dimension, teachers basically perceive themselves as accountable with an orientation towards success. Koçak & Sezgin Nartgün (2018) concluded in their study that teachers' perceptions of internal accountability are at the forefront. Similarly, Altıparmak (2019) reported teachers' positive responses to the accountability scale in line with the research results.

The category of teachers' views on the role of toxic leaders in teacher accountability was categorized as negative impact and resilience. The negative impact code was sub-coded as lack of transparency, lack of motivation and insecurity. Teachers stated that school administrators could not be open and clear in the face of toxic behaviors and could not express everything transparently. In addition, it was observed that teachers' motivation decreased as a result of destructive and negative criticisms of toxic leaders. Without a foundation of trust, teachers can become demoralized and less responsible for their actions. The resilience code refers to educators' ability to maintain commitment to their professional responsibilities, adapt to challenging

circumstances, and persevere in the face of unfavorable leadership conditions. Resilient teachers maintain their professional standards and ethical principles even in the face of toxic leadership. Resilient teachers show adaptability and flexibility in their teaching approach. It can be interpreted that despite toxic leadership, they find creative ways to overcome challenges, adjust their strategies and meet the needs of their students while taking responsibility for their role. According to the conclusion reached, leadership types have various effects on teacher accountability. Kandemir & Akgün (2019) concluded that the presence of servant leadership qualities in a school administrator encourages a positive impact on the school environment by leading to increased accountability among teachers.

The category of teacher views on strategies that should be implemented to reduce the corrosive effect of toxic leader behaviors on teacher accountability was divided into two codes. These codes are personal awareness and legislation. Increasing personal awareness of toxic leaders in schools is crucial to empowering educators to recognize, respond to, and deal with toxic leadership behaviors. Organizing workshops and training sessions to educate school administrators on the characteristics of toxic leadership, and raising their awareness with examples and case studies to help them understand how toxic leadership can manifest in educational settings was emphasized. In addition, establishing a formalized feedback mechanism for teachers on their leadership practices and regularly reviewing this feedback to identify patterns and areas for improvement is identified as an element that can help reduce the corrosive impact on teacher accountability. Teachers expressed the need for legislation to provide legal recourse for teacher accountability that is undermined by toxic leadership. This should include the ability to file a complaint, seek compensation, or take legal action against leaders who engage in harmful behavior. Legislation should outline a process for institutions to intervene and provide support or oversight where toxic leadership is identified. It is important to note that the effectiveness of legislation depends not only on its content but also on implementation, enforcement and ongoing evaluation. Teachers, administrators, policymakers, and community members collaborating to ensure that legislation effectively addresses and prevents toxic leadership in educational settings is interpreted as helping to reduce the corrosive impact of toxic leaders on teacher accountability. In Kandemir & Akgün's (2019) study, it was stated that school administrators have a positive impact on the school when they exhibit behaviors such as accepting that their authority stems from their position rather than their personal identity, seeing themselves as equal to others, and avoiding seeing themselves as more talented than their peers. Salduz (2013) emphasized in his study that it is very critical for school administrators to initiate transparent and effective communication in order to increase teachers' dedication.

CONCLUSION

The research showed that teacher accountability is a critical element for educational quality and student achievement and can be threatened by toxic leadership. It has increased awareness of the concept of accountability and raised consciousness about the need to protect this concept. Overall, our study highlights the critical role of leadership behaviors in education for the Turkish education system and reveals how significant avoiding toxic leadership is for teacher performance and student achievement. It reveals that toxic leadership has a devastating impact on teachers, severely damaging their motivation, professional commitment and thus their accountability. Under toxic leadership, teachers face negative experiences such as exclusion from decision-making, constant criticism and feelings of worthlessness. This reduces teachers' willingness to take responsibility for the success of their students and jeopardizes the quality of education. Teachers reported a lack of trust and support under toxic leadership, weakening their commitment to maintaining professional standards and providing the best education for their students. These results suggest that the quality of leadership in the education system has a direct impact on teachers' accountability. Therefore, establishing a culture of positive leadership and supportive management in educational institutions is a critical requirement to increase teacher accountability and improve the overall quality of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To combat the harmful effects of leaders who lack transparency, organizations need to prioritize a culture of openness and accountability. Leaders must actively share information, encourage dialogue and embrace feedback as a catalyst for growth. By fostering an environment where transparency is valued, organizations can break down the barriers created by toxic leaders and pave the way for a healthier, more collaborative workplace. By doing so, they can rebuild trust, empower their teams and lead the organization towards a more transparent and sustainable future. To counter the corrosive impact of toxic leadership on teacher accountability, it is imperative that educational institutions prioritize a culture of support, open communication and empathy. Leadership development programs should emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence and creating a collaborative and positive work environment. By fostering a climate where teachers feel valued, heard and empowered, educational institutions can reduce the harmful impact of toxic leadership and enable teachers to fulfill their important role in shaping the next generation.

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Statements of publication ethics

We hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

Researchers' contribution rate

The study was conducted and reported with equal collaboration of the researchers.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

It has been approved with the decision of Süleyman Demirel University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, numbered 149/ 33 and dated 20.05.2024.

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