

Do Women Principals Really Face With Barriers in Schools? Critics of Glass Ceiling Syndrome in Turkey*

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ABSTRACT

Administration of schools and achieving the goals in democratic and transparent society requires gender neutral settings. Together with the researches that aimed to unveil the gendered stereotypical behavior in organizational settings, some other related topics have also been investigated such as women's barriers for principals, democratic and liberal discourse of gendered identity, cross-cultural perspective for gendered stereotypes. Although cultures are context specific and unique for each society depending on religious, historical, societal and geographical backgrounds; classification, stereotypes and cultural metaphors have more or less resembled each other, or the studies in different context seem as if they have reiterated one another. Women's traditional roles of domestic responsibility have begun to change since equality movements together with some legislation have put in force in different settings. Most of the researches that were conducted in different societal and cultural settings had resulted in conclusion that women face with unequal conditions in administration. The purpose of the paper is to present the clear insights of women principals. Qualitative research design was used to figure out unique perspectives of 8 women principals in school administration. The study reveals that women principals in this context have not exposed certain barriers or stereotypes on the process of selection, promotion and in practice; rather, they have been supported by superiors.

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Keywords:

Women principals, glass ceiling, school administration, gendered identities, barriers

Introduction

The under representation of women in educational administration have long been received significant attention in terms of race, gender and equity throughout the world since the beginning of the twentieth century. Issues related with women in administration have mostly been continuously debated under controversial headings such as gender, culture, (Blackmore, 2010, 55), tradition (Shah, 2010, 35), race (Leathwood, 2005, 401), religion (Allen, 2010, 187), modernization (Blackmore, 2006, 193), globalization, marketization, new managerialism (Chan, 2004, 505) and leadership in schools have sometimes been disguised with gendered identities (Coleman, 2007, 396). Drawing a historical analysis for women principalship Blount (1999, 60) voiced that the early decades of the twentieth century brought for women school administrators. During the first half of the twentieth century, thousands of women became superintendents and countless others rose to supervisory and other administrative positions. Some thought that eventually women would take over school leadership just as they had dominated teaching in the previous century. In fact, women made impressive gains in school leadership until around World War II.

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Then after the war, school administration experienced a significant period of restructuring that made the work more masculine-appropriate once again.

Barriers that are alleged possibly caused women's under representation in administration not only have correlated with outer and more general motives, it has also been reduced to role attribution and stereotyping for genders. Teaching is one of the well known professions that are mostly attributed for women; there is great resemblance between teaching and caring or motherhood. Domestic affairs in most of the families related with women's innately adapted or inclined job where as men have been prioritized with the jobs mostly related with governance and dominance. Although prevalent inclinations and presuppositions have been emerged as stated above, teaching also acknowledged as a non feminized profession as they were proportionally more underrepresented in leadership in developing countries, it would seem that the poorer the country, the less likely to find women in senior positions in education (Cannon, 2004; Matthews, 2009, 245; Strachan et al. 2010, 73). Whether traditionally constructed or produced in modern society or related with post modern paradigms, gendered identity have to be analyzed in closer and deeper understanding.

Women Principals in Turkey

Management roles of the women is not so common in Turkey when considering the schools in general as in the case for several states in the world such as Netherlands (Krüger et al. 2005, 250), Spain (Coronel et al. 2010, 150), USA (Sherman and Beaty, 2010, 171), Scotland (Ducklin and Ozga, 2007, 635), Hong Kong (Chan, 2004, 506), New Zealand (Court, 2007, 625) and England (Coleman, 2007, 390). In Turkey women had represented very low level before the years of 2005, 4 percent, of the principalship in K-12 schools in general (Çelikten, 2005, 214) and it has increased by nearly three times and reached to 11 percent in 2011 (KSGM, 2011), where as the proportion is rather higher, nearly more than half of the schools at girls professional high schools and pre-primary schools nearly 70 percent.

The appearance of the women in principalship dates back to the eighteen century in Turkish history according to unique study of *"women forerunners in Turkish Educational Administration"* researched by Prof. Dr. İnyet Aydın, one of the senior educational administration professors in Turkey. She has highlighted the points (Aydın, 2009, 3) that women occupied principalship position in 1871, the dates that Ottoman Empire still had power. Since then, it was not until the date 1968 when a woman was appointed as a district director of education and 1990 when the other became a province director in Turkey.

Women's proportionally more underrepresentation in leadership position have been related to the wealth and poverty of the countries in some respect that the poorer the country, the less likely to find women in senior positions in education (Strachan et al. 2010, 73). While data could support this argument when to look closer to the underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan (Malik and Courtney, 2010, 11), it is not the exact fact for developed countries such as Netherlands (Krüger et al. 2005, 251). The poverty could directly be correlated to underrepresentation of women's leadership, where as wealthier countries do not exactly place enough room for women leaders.

The Research

Due to the interpretive, meaning-making nature of this study based on the philosophical assumption that research is socially constructed activity and the goal of research is an understanding of a particular situation or context, highlighting the concern about the situatedness of knowledge (Willis, 2007, 98). It employed a qualitative research methodology to collect and analyze the interpretations and meanings of gendered perspective of women principals. Eight women principals were selected in a province of Düzce, one of the eighty one provinces of Turkey located in West Black sea Region, using the criterion of purposive and maximum sampling method to participate in this study. Two criteria were established for participant in the study. First, because gendered issue is considered by some to be private and the position of leading in public schools requires obeying rules and legal regulations, participants had to be willing to discuss their working conditions and atmosphere built around them. Second, participants had to be willing to discuss the unique work setting experiences and feelings wholeheartedly they had encountered in their respective principalship.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the principals by the researcher during the academic year of 2010–2011. An interview in which the principals were free to express their subjective interpretations and meanings provided with an opportunity to gain an understanding gendered problems based on the world of women. The interviews, lasting approximately an hour, were conducted in the principals' offices in their schools and included open-ended questions to gain the respondents' subjective conceptualizations of gendered issue. Each participant was, by and large, asked the same questions, throughout an interview guide developed by the researcher to ensure that similar questions were addressed in each interview. Depending on theoretical sampling, analysis of the data were run hand in hand concurrently as the first data gathered, then latter form was able to be reconstructed in the light of former analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the process of conversation, interviewers took the role of listener and promised the principals full anonymity and confidentiality in not sharing her account with anyone else. Participants could have chance to reorganize their ideas, clarify and deepen their thoughts while answering the questions (Ekiz 2009; Finch & Lewis, 2003; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2008). The analysis was conducted by researcher and was validated by structured analysis. In the study advantages and disadvantages of being women principal in schools tried to be explored throughout the questions and probes.

Advantages of Being Women Principals

Although the purpose of the study is to investigate what kind of barriers women principal face and whether we could come to conclusion why they prefer principalship less, it would be possible to begin with possible advantages and characteristics of being women principalship in terms of women' perspectives. Some stereotypes have been revealed in literature as results of the researches in relation to gendered perspectives that are underlined legitimization of barriers and gendered identity (Krüger et al. 2005, 250), and considered as complex, more fluid and shifting of stereotyping of gendered (Fuller, 2010, 375) such as communal traits, supportiveness, assertiveness and emotional dimension (Kruger, 2008, 160; Priola, 2007, 35; Sherman and Beaty, 2010, 170). Furthermore instructional leadership orientation (Loder and Spillane, 2005, 273), flexibility of handling the aggressive situation (Coleman, 2007, 396), gender of the majority of students (Matthews, 2009, 245), enthusiasm and ambition of hard work as super human (Strachan, 1999, 315), negotiation, cooperation and shared problem-solving based management (Goodman, 1997, 154), being gentle and gentle (Court, 2007, 625), multi-dimensional and multidirectional process of empowering others rather than having power over them (Coronel et al. 2010, 150), being empathetic when facing barriers (Bradbury, 2007, 90), association with domestic, nurturing, caring roles (Shah, 3010, 37), language reflected complexities with words such as creative and love (Isaac et al. 2009, 147), democratic and participatory component of their administration (Coronel et al. 2010, 150; Oplatka and Atias, 2007, 50).

When participants were asked if there were any advantages of being women principal in Turkey, Mrs. Taş clearly stated it in terms of students' perspective that:

“Although male teachers could also be principals at Girl Vocational High Schools, women principals are most preferable since most of the students are girls and they could easily engage in open communication with women principals. It is inevitable for girls to share whatever they think with men and our general director is also a women and emphasized women principals in order for girls' empathetic behaviors”

When examining the issue thoroughly on the base of advantage, women principals seem more effective to handle problems. Since the proportion of women principals is nearly one fifth of total numbers in high schools, being minority have seemed to be turned into advantage for women. Most of the women principals participated to research have implied that the barriers could be overcome easily when the principal is woman due to the courtesy and elegance of men superiors. Mrs. Öz pointed that:

“.....first of all, the doors could be opened to women principals in our society. To get information or get something for your school, it is easier to convince people if you are women and principals at the same time. When we had terrible earthquake before, I was the first principal among many others most of whom are men, to pitch tents in my school garden. I spoke to security officers, leded the trucks and by myself succeeded to pitch tents. Men are more cool and relaxed; they tend to leave things to be done by. May be we are more swift and

hustling to manage. If I am in the same condition as the men, I think women are always one step ahead”

The other principal of five years agreed with their colleague but isn't sure whether it is because of women principals extra effort or women principals tend to correlate it being femaleness, or as the other correlate it communicative strength of women. Mrs. Aslan points:

“I experienced the advantage of being women principalship in many cases, may be it seems so, although we are minority I always pride it, if you are experienced and sophisticated enough, surely welcomed more than your male counterparts.....I feel special, our advice is appreciated seriously by students' parents and superiors when to compare with my children' male principals,....not sure possibly I feel so, but it seems we are welcomed more respectfully, specially and trustworthy”

The idea of feeling special and advantaged then male principals have been stated before by similar studies (Coleman, 2007, 396) that women believed they could handle aggressive situations more easily than men, who might feel that he had to stand up to anger and return aggression in kind. Advantages and disadvantages of the principalship for women were investigated according to their opinions under some headings. First of all, they emphasized that being a women principal is advantaged for the schools that generally consisted of girls as it is the traditional case for other countries (Matthews, 2009, 245). Kruger alleged that (2008, 160) females score higher than males on communal (expressive) traits and males score higher than females on agnatic (instrumental) traits.

While male principals are considered of having general point of views, cooler, less energetic and so on, female principals are more correlated with detailed scrutinization, energetic, transformative and innovative. These stereotypes also shared by the male principals in this study. Most of the women think that they have special qualifications and priority when contrasting with males. Mrs. Çevik's and Mrs. Aslan's assertions symbolize it clearly:

“.....when think about institution and neighborhood, women are scrupulous and meticulous to do their jobs. We are soft and sensitive while handling the jobs and approaching to people.since huge workload at home and training children are on our shoulders, we are more capable of designing environment as we do at home. We are trying to decorate job setting.....”

“.....We are more focused on details and qualified enough to read the small print but males are superficially tackling the issues.....”

While the responsibly of in and out of the home considered and stated one of the basic hindrance for women in the work, sometimes it could be turned to the strength of women principals. All the women participated the study accepted huge responsibility of women in the society, they also confessed the advantage of it when to organize jobs and people in the school. Mrs. Bahçe underlined the reflection of motherhood to the work setting:

“.....since we are mothers the same time, I care students just as my children, we are more involved with students, it is our advantage to consider people and issues with motherhood compassion and sincerity.....”

Leathwood pointed (2005, 399) that women constructed themselves as hardworking, caring, and committed to doing a good job for students and staff as Mrs Bahçe and Çevik agreed. Majority of principals have alleged that being female principals have advantages for schools and society and they experienced it in some cases. Mrs. Ülkü is hesitant whether it is advantage or not. Furthermore she is doubtful about the intent of the environment and thinks it pretended and pseudo-advantage what the others welcome as advantage. She alleged:

“I think we are more inclined to be influenced, you may be faced more organized and orderly settings, you may not be disoblged, but they apparently treated kindly, pretended to do so, not especially advantageous behavior.”

She is complaint of being loneliness and poor communication with male principals. She had some difficulties being accepted as a female principal by other male principals and limited female counterparts when to exchange views, Mrs. Koru underlined that:

“Since there is no other women principal at elementary schools, I was alone at the principals’ general meetings at directorate. Men principals discussed matters each other and decide by themselves and I felt lonely, but later they gradually began to get used to.”

The last two principals had uttered more directly and seemed more pessimist of being women principals who appeared in masculine-oriented atmosphere in schools and environment. A desire to eradicate school realities of injustice were interwoven into the narrative of each woman we interviewed (Witherspoon and Taylor, 2010, 145)

An important finding across all settings is that there was a tendency for female principals to adopt a democratic, participative style, whereas their male counterparts were more apt to display an autocratic, directive style. In addition, women were, by and large, inclined to work in a collegial manner and actively brought in other constituents to take part in decision-making (Oplatka and Atias, 2007, 50). For men, success is a well-paying position that provides career path opportunities, confers power and high status, and it usually does not matter where the job is. Women, on the other hand, see success as ‘seeing a project through’, ‘implementing the idea or project’, ‘making sure all the detail is taken care of’ (Luke, 1998, 257). Some earlier studies (Çelikten, 2005, 224) contradicted to this implication that women principals were underscored on good verbal communication, listening, problem solving, knowledgeable of curriculum and instruction.

Although stereotyped consideration have long been criticized to disguise the underrepresentation of women in senior positions (Luke, 1998, 257) most of the principals stated their opinions underlining gendered identity and emphasized how women principals differentiate and supersede men as in the case for similar studies. Feminine point of views also interestingly appeared in this study no matter how cultural and societal settings differ one study from others (Grummell et al. 2009, 199; Neale and Özkanlı, 2010, 557; Bradbury and Gunter, 2006, 497; Bradbury, 2007, 90; Coronel et al. 2010, 150; Shah, 2010, 37; Isaac et al. 2009, 147; Oplatka and Mimon, 2008, 145).

Disadvantages of Being Women Principals

Talking about the pitfalls and problems of women when administering schools have seemed strange at first, many of them said that they had never thought the issue as male or female. They stressed qualifications of successful principal are more prevalent than gendered distinction, their statements underlined that gendered discrimination isn’t so common in their job setting. Four of the participants’ first statement is prioritized being a principal more than female principal. Mrs. Aslan stated that:

“I don’t think it any more, I am here as a principal more than woman principal, I don’t believe the gendered discrimination in Turkey. Point of views and problems could change depending of the human quality or administrative behaviors, not male or female.

It is so uncommon for a senior woman principal, Mrs. Öz, which she couldn’t think of any negative example or experience of gendered discrimination in principalship. She has been teaching for 28 years, 13 years of which she administered schools stated nothing about disturbing her gendered profession:

“I don’t think gendered identity will cause any problem or hindrance, none, since I do my job voluntarily, I haven’t had any discrimination, I am not sure whether family responsibility considered a problem?.....”

It is surprising that four of the principals had nothing to say when talking about problems of being women principal they face in administration. What more interesting is that three senior women principals who have been doing principalship more than thirteen years only stated some technical and bureaucratic problems that is independent from gendered identity and discrimination, which were possibly hindrance for male principals as well. The tendency and assumption pretended that traditional and Eastern developing countries have offered less societal opportunities and more cultural barriers weren’t supported in this study

that was done in Turkey. Since they have not faced serious problems and obstacles depending on their feminine identity, all of them preferred to focus on the issue of principalship more than male-female perspective. Shah also (2010, 36) underlined that association between women and domesticity that is prevalent most of the eastern society have generally rooted in feudal patriarchal interpretation of religious text. Emphasis on the domestic role of women is culturally produced and not a religious proclamation.

Fuller underlined (2010, 377) sociological and parental outcome of women principals' hindrance they mostly confront in the society that women secondary school head teachers are more likely to be single, separated or divorced; fulfill domestic responsibilities; move location to follow their partner's career; have fewer children; and draw on a wide range of careers to look after sick children than men. Women teachers continue to choose between having a family or a career; inequalities with regard to domestic responsibilities continue to impact on whether women 'choose' and/or gain promoted posts. Mrs. Çevik who has been working as a principal for 15 years and at the same time had been engaged first to organize the institution as a founder principal asserted that somebody had surprise when recognize a woman principal:

"I have never faced with disadvantageous circumstance for 15 years, sometimes newcomers ask "Is Mr. Principal here?" I politely correct "Mrs Principal is here,"

Administering schools in a highly centralized educational system have some drawbacks especially for providing human and material sources. Division of labor as a means of bureaucracy requires more people responsible for different branches and if there is lack of coordination, procedures could be longer and longer, consequently people have to wait until anyone to complete the circle. Since Turkish Educational System is highly centralized and bureaucratized, it takes longer to decide and act independently at schools. Some principals stated the frustrating structure of system by underlying coping strategies of being female. Mrs. Taş underlined both sides of the situation:

"Since principals usually do their external jobs bilateral relations when to face with bureaucracy, we are incapable of building strong and extensive relations as men do even it is usual dealing with superiors. We should keep the balance and act more carefully. On the other hand, people could hardly reject women principals in the bureaucracy when you deal with formal issues, I am more practical and effective than male colleagues, even once I overcame bureaucratic barriers in ten minutes that my superior couldn't.

Mrs. Aslan as a middle aged woman principal nearly 35 stated that instead of disadvantages based on gendered identity, there are certain workloads that are difficult to overcome beside responsibilities of home and children. She also points that some parents got surprised when facing middle aged and female principal:

"Working within minority profession could be disadvantages that some got surprised facing with me "aaa are you principal?", they got accustomed to see principal as old and male, if you are overcome this stereotype, it is a success, home business and child care could be hindrance if you are unable to organize them. Your responsibility hasn't ended when you get home; you are telephoned and asked for schools' affairs. Construction foreman telephones for ongoing building

Similar to these, Chan pointed (2004, 506) a principal's total commitment of his teachers that they were a service occupation and had to commit to their customers even at weekends, summer holidays are only for students, teachers have no holidays. Mahony, Hextall and Menter (2004, 140) drew a bright picture of how women principals experience dilemma between home and work both for this work and other studies in the literature. Family responsibilities either for young children or for ageing parents were most often cited as operating to restrict women's capacities to make the kind of contribution to the life of the school which they saw being demanded. Women cope with leadership roles and being perceived as an 'outsider' in leadership terms is to try twice as hard to conform to the male model of career and the perceived male model of leadership. The stereotypical male model of career involves putting work first at all times, and women may struggle to combine this attitude with having children (Coleman, 2007, 396). They had sought ways of reducing their workloads, not only because of the stress involved but because it also isolated them from friends and family more than they were prepared to accommodate (Strachan, 1999, 315). Behind every successful man is a woman and behind every successful woman is a team of servants' (Luke, 1998, 255).

Discussion

Oplatka and Atias, (2007, 54) has drawn attention on the complex situation revealed in literature that a stark distinction between male and female principals in term of leadership style is less likely to exist, but rather both sexes attach different meanings to the same leadership style. It is likely that the differences are actually a matter of degree. The current study addresses the issue of women principals with respect to gendered barriers from the standpoint of a qualitative research paradigm that focuses on the subjective meanings given by the participants.

There are perceptions in England and elsewhere that gender problems have been overcome. Women tend to deny that there is a problem whilst at the same time they are able to give examples of their own or others' experiences of discrimination (Coleman, 2007, 396). This perception is not only prevalent for England, modernization and globalization process have fostered more women involvement to management. Although it was claimed that contemporary paradigms have played disguising role to legitimize the traditional gendered identity (Chan, 2004, 505; Gill et al. 2008, 227; Coleman, 2007, 394; Blackmore, 2006, 193; Priola, 2007, 35; Fealy and Harford, 2007, 280), and stereotypes that 'men govern, women obey', researches and statistics showed opposite. Even it is considered modest change (Bown, 1999, 20), the more societies modernize, re-define the societal roles, and women take part in more working life and management (Loder and Spillane, 2005, 273). As the social structure transforms into nuclear family from traditional, then single parents, women could have more chance to move superior positions. This fact revealed by Chan (2004, 506) more straightforwardly that young single women can be useful resources to be exploited to bolster school development whereas married women with their childbearing capacity become organizational liabilities and have to be excluded. While it is possible that a few women, who are young, single and have no family responsibilities, could have benefitted from the changes, most women are likely to be locked into increasingly exploitative roles.

There are some critical implications appeared in this study that are different from in the literature. Firstly, women principals in this study defined barriers more related with familial characteristics and their social roles that is stemming from biological identity. Although they did not voice their biological identity of femininity, motherhood, caring, partnership and domestic inclination as a barrier for their principalship; they thought these could be the most important barriers that prevent women teachers for superior positions. They all married and had at least one child, some had two and three children never been considered as a barrier, furthermore all of them implied to fulfill traditional responsibilities of women in society (Neale and Özkanlı, 2010, 555). As discussed earlier paragraph that legitimization of socially constructed gendered identity by contemporary paradigms and cultural stereotypes (Strachan et al. 2010, 75) have not been supported in this study in general. Way of thinking, biological structure and genders societal roles that people handle (Malik and Courtney, 2010, 11) so as to satisfy themselves could be stated reasons that need to be investigated more. Even it could be observed gendered stereotypes in developed and leading countries and highly educated institutions and universities need more critical analysis together with socially constructed inclination.

Secondly women principals tend to emphasize advantages of being women principal more than that of disadvantages. Nearly all spoke of the popular gendered stereotypes as their essential strengths against male counterparts, contrary to the feminist point of view in the literature. What is more interesting of being a women principal is that most of the time, it could facilitate to overcome bureaucratic procedures, principals could hardly been refused if they are female. They said to have been welcomed more than their male counterparts in a society. However, there has been an increase in the proportion of women who feel to prove their worth as a leader, and this may be linked with increased levels of accountability in schools (Coleman, 2007, 392), furthermore, none of them complaint about the barriers that were embedded in the working environment of the principals and school culture different from the similar studies (Krüger et al. 2005, 255). Leadership does not reside in binaries but in multiplicity. For example, even if leadership appears primarily masculine and hierarchical, it also includes the feminine dimensions of collaboration and participation (Isaac et al. 2009, 147). Discrimination against women principals either from superiors or environment were not been accepted as a cause of women's less appearance in administrative positions. It is also not same as the studies conducted in different cultures (Leathwood, 2005, 402; Coleman, 2007, 392; Strachan et al. 2010, 73). Moreover, women think of superiors' and society's positive and supportive behavior in administration.

Thirdly, although it was not purpose of the study and included in the semi structured questions, women principals underlined characteristics of hardworking and energetic teachers no matter their genders were. Principals who prefer to work together with either male or female teachers; they have asserted the qualifications of hardworking, enthusiastic, and energetic to work without limitation of time and family. As they have not considered family issues for their principalship, so have for teachers if they were determined enough. Finally, appearance of the women in the higher positions such as ministry, under secretary or general directorate often valued by principals as a positive psychological factor for women whom are hesitant about principalship or higher positions. What is more effective they have underlined is the functions that superiors do. If the women occupied higher positions do not perform strategically more than men, it has no value for women principals even they were as same gender with them.

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