

A Study of Early Career Principals' Perceptions of Their Induction Program¹

Serpil Tekir²

Abstract

Due to the dramatic changes in the roles and responsibilities of principals in the 21st century, there has been a need for professional development training and support for novice principals. In response to this need, a school district in a northern state in the USA started offering a Principal Induction Program (PIP) to the early career principals in the district in 2018. Regarding the program, there is a need to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the applications and the impact of the program. For that purpose, this study investigated the perceptions of new principles participating in the PIP. The study adopted a single case research design using qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with eight early-career principals and two mentors participating in the principal induction program. The qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. The results indicate that new principals have gained more knowledge about key components of effective practice and felt better equipped to carry out their role as school leaders, to establish positive learning environments in their buildings for all students, and to navigate the range of challenges associated with being a new principal. Based on the findings, recommendations were offered for future professional development programs designed for new principals.

¹ The ethical committee permission is not required in this study since the data were gathered before 2020.

² Serpil Tekir (PhD), Middle East Technical University, Department of Basic English, stekir@metu.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8160-2104

Keywords: *Early career principal, mentoring, novice principal, principal development, principal induction*

Yeni Mdrlere Verilen İe Balama Eēitiminin Etkileri

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21. yzyılda mdrlerin rol ve sorumluluklarında gerekleen nemli deēiiklikler nedeniyle, mesleēe yeni balayan mdrler, mesleki geliimleri iin eēitimine ve desteēe ihtiya duymaktadır. Bu ihtiyaı gidermek iin, ABD'nin kuzey eyaletinden birindeki bir okul blgesi, 2018 yılında blgelerinde mesleēe yeni balayan mdrlere İe Balama Eēitimi (İBE) vermeye balamıtır. Fakat bu eēitimin etkinliēiyle ilgili yeterli veri bulunmamaktadır. Bu amala bu alıma, ABD'nin bu eyaletinde mesleēe yeni balayan mdrlerin katıldıkları İe Balama Eēitimi hakkındaki algılarını aratırmıtır. alıma, nitel verilerin kullanıldıēı tek vaka aratırma tasarımıı benimsemitir. Veriler mesleēe yeni balayan sekiz mdrden ve onlara mentorluk yapan iki kotan, yarı yapılandırılmı grmeler yntemiyle toplanmıtır. Sonular, programa devam eden yeni mdrlerin etkili uygula iin gerekli temel unsurlar hakkında daha fazla bilgili olduklarını gstermektedir. Ayrıca veriler, okul lideri rollerini yerine getirmekte, okullarında tm ērenciler iin olumlu bir ērenme ortamı oluturmakta ve karılatıkları zorluklarla baa ıkma konusunda kendilerini daha donanımlı hissettiklerini gstermektedir. Bulgulara dayanarak, mesleēe yeni balayan mdrlerin mesleki geliimleri iin tasarlanacak programlara ynelik neriler sunulmutur.

Anahtar Szckler: *İe balama eēitimi, mesleēe yeni balayan mdrler, mentorluk, yeni mdrlerin mesleki geliimi, yeni mdrler iin ie balama eēitimi*

Introduction

Research shows that school principals with strong leadership qualities have a considerable effect on student achievement (Marzano, 2003). However, improving principals' leadership abilities does not happen immediately. It requires time and effort to develop (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Although it is well known that effective leadership can make a major contribution to student learning and success, the professional development supports provided to new principals remain surprisingly limited (Watkins, 2003).

The expectations from the principals of the 21st century are numerous. According to the report of the Institute for Educational Leadership (2005), principals are expected to serve not only as instructional leaders but also as a community and visionary leaders. These high leadership expectations, which are difficult for experienced principals, are far more challenging for early career principals. The increased expectations of school principals necessitate the provision of quality professional development opportunities and induction support for beginning principals (Aycock, 2006; Daresh, 2001; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Villani, 2006; Wardlow, 2008).

In a northern state of the USA, where the study was conducted, a mandatory principal induction program was started in 2018 to provide support for early-career principals. The program aimed to attend to the increased demands of principals' leadership skills and to enhance student achievement. By developing the leadership skills of principals, it was believed that the gaps in achievement, teaching, and participation would be filled. The participants of the induction program were early-career principals working in the school district for five years or less. As the program addresses the limited supports provided for school leaders, it is a great contribution to the research of the professional development of early-career principal skills. However, it was the first year of the program implementation; thus, there is a need to reveal the perceptions of the participants regarding the effectiveness and application of the program. In other words, this qualitative case study aims to examine if the new principal induction has had the intended effects on principals' practice and skill development. This study intends to contribute to the literature by adding to what we know about the professional development of early-career principals.

Research on leadership has revealed that school leadership has an important effect on school effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2003). This thought was further supported by Edmonds (1979), who claimed that the most significant element in school success is the strong leadership of the school principal.

Further studies by Edmonds in 1981 suggested that principals have important roles in their schools' improvement and student achievement as principals with strong leadership pay attention to the worth of instruction, make the instructional focus clear, create a safe and encouraging climate for teaching and learning, raise the expectation that all students can be successful.

In addition, Gentilucci and Muto's study (2007) showed that interactive principals who are genuinely interested in students and their learning are influential instructional leaders making a significant effect on student achievement. Similarly, another scholar, Archer (2004), claimed that a combination of direct and indirect instructional leadership skills leads to improved student learning. The direct instructional leadership qualities are being able to lead pedagogical change, encourage learning, and building instructional skills with teachers. The indirect instructional leadership skills required from a principal are knowing the teachers' understanding of their subjects and the gap between their understanding and the vision of the school for the subject to fill the gap between the two by planning learning experiences for groups of teachers (Robinson, 2006).

Regarding the instructional leadership skills expected from effective 21st-century school leaders, the National Association for Secondary School Leaders (NASSP, 2010) conducted a longitudinal research study. The study revealed ten skills related to four areas: educational leadership, resolving complex problems, communication, and developing self and others. These ten skills are listed as "(a) setting instructional direction, (b) teamwork, (c) sensitivity, (d) judgment, (e) results orientation, (f) organizational ability, (g) oral communication, (h) written communication, (i) developing others, and (j) understanding your own strengths and weaknesses" (p. 1). In brief, as available research highlights, principals with effective instructional leadership skills have a positive effect on student achievement (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991; Elmore, 2000; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Murphy, 1990).

Professional Development for Early Career Principals

The role of a principal is complex and diverse as it covers paying attention to different domains such as managerial, instructional, transformational, and political (Spillane & Lee, 2013; Cuban, 1988). On a typical day, a principal may need to switch between different tasks like addressing situations and managing the school, evaluating staff, and studying for student learning improvements (Duke, 1988; Burkhart, Hough, & McDonald, 2007; Spillane et al., 2013; Peterson, 1982). All of these challenging demands may cause a principal to suffer from stress, lack of confidence, burnout, which may even lead a principal to leave the position early in the career (Friedman, 2002; Whitaker, 1996).

When new principals start their position as educational leaders of schools, they experience difficulty in managing the multiple tasks expected of them as well as more procedural tasks such as planing the budget and controlling the school building (Spillane & Lee, 2013). As a result, they often face feelings of fatigue, reality shock, isolation, and frustration (Duke, 1987). Such negative feelings decrease the new principal's effectiveness.

To handle different challenges and to prioritize and manage various tasks, new principals can be offered induction programs. As Aiken (2002) claimed, induction programs can help new principals to deal with inconsistency by offering them leadership practice and chances for collaborative and reflective learning. Duke (1987) stated that the first year of their leadership is so important for principals that it shapes their future performance as a leader. Induction support given to early-career principals enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to serve as effective instructional leaders (Killeavy, 2006; Rhodes, 2012; Wise & Hammack, 2011).

Characteristics of Effective New Principal Induction

Several researchers claimed that effective induction programs are the ones which are designed to help new principals handle the challenges they encounter in the early years of their profession (Burkhart, 2007; Lashway, 2003; Rooney, 2000; Villani, 2006; Walker & Qian, 2006). Working on principal induction, Aiken (2002) mentioned five important qualities that principal induction programs should have to be effective. These are “1) Finding one’s voice

and vision, 2) Forming networks and relationships, 3) Developing a leadership personality, 4) Finding a balance between maintenance and innovation, and 5) Making connections with the community at large” (p. 45).

Another researcher, Daresh (2001), asserted that inducing principals to their new careers does not happen by simply providing information to new principals. Instead, it requires shaping experiences that “require considerable skill in the area of effective human relations,” (Daresh, 2001, p. 47) with some knowledge of adult learning principles. According to Daresh (2001), effective induction and mentoring should involve some principles. These are “1) The learning activities are relevant to the learner, 2) The learning is related to personal and professional goals, 3) The learner receives usable feedback about progress, 4) The learner experiences success and 5) Motivation comes from within the learner” (p. 498).

In a similar way, Lashway (2003) studied the nature and quality of the experiences provided to new principals in effective induction practices and he defined three characteristics of good induction programs: “(1) Technical survival skills should be a part of new principal induction, (2) Effective induction needs to involve more than one-on-one mentoring; it should also involve principal networking, professional development, and finding ways to connect with the larger professional community, (3) Effective induction is most powerful when embedded in the actual work of the district, not tacking on irrelevant extra activities” (p. 3).

The literature review outlined the skills required to be a successful school leader, the impact of effective principals on student achievement, the change in the role of principals from a traditional manager to instructional leaders, the need for professional development practices provided for new principals and characteristics of effective principal induction programs.

Previous Research on Teacher Induction

The limited research on early career principal induction mainly focused on the satisfaction levels of principals. To illustrate, Correll (2010) studied a national database of new principals who had participated in different components of induction and their satisfaction levels. He found out that the principals, especially the ones who received mentoring support and were involved in a network with other principals, had high satisfaction levels. In a similar way,

Kingham (2009) studied the principal induction program in Louisiana and claimed that participants who took part in mentoring and in networking with other principals were content with these supports. Another researcher, Hudson (2009), investigated the early career principal induction program used in South Carolina. The program had four components, which were technical support, instructional leadership, effective school research and mentoring. His study revealed that participating principals were very satisfied with all of these components. Martin (2016) examined the principal induction programs offered to the new principals working in elementary schools in Kansas. At the end of his study, Martin could not find a significant relationship between the size of a school district and the level of principal satisfaction, which meant that principals from both small and large districts were satisfied with the support they received.

Principal Requirement in the District

In the district where the study was conducted, the hiring of principals is conducted by the school district. There are some minimum qualifications in order to apply for the principal positions. For example, a candidate should have a master's degree in educational administration or related field, evidence that s/he is eligible to be certified by the Department of Public Instruction as Principal PreK-12 and three years of successful teaching experience. The candidates should have the training, experience, and expertise in working within an instructional team, standards-based instruction and assessment, culturally relevant and differentiated instruction, and technology skills to enhance professional learning and instruction. They are required to demonstrate alignment to the vision and core values of the district as well. The selection panels in the district hold interviews with all the candidates. The candidates are examined thoroughly by the selection panels before a decision is reached.

The Principal Induction Program

The Principal Induction Program was developed in 2018 by a school district in the northern state of the USA. The program was based on the idea that principals are essential for creating the conditions for effective teaching and learning inside schools. Principals are most successful when they are provided regular opportunities for reflection, access to mentors, early

remediation and support, intermediate support for typical challenges, and progressive support over time. Having this philosophy, the main focus of this program is to foster the leadership skills of new principals that they need to improve student achievement, instruction, and participation.

The development of the program was based on best practices in the field and co-constructed, drawing on the expertise of researchers and practitioners. Recognizing that induction, mentoring, and mentoring as embedded practices are important, the school district sought to establish induction and mentoring processes for new principals that are most likely to enhance their professional growth and capacity, providing them with opportunities for reflective practice. Through this program, experienced district principals mentored new school principals. The principal induction work focused on enhancing new principals' capacity to lead high-performing teams and to lead for equity.

The Principal Induction program included four learning academies per year for new principals. These leadership academies were co-planned and facilitated by the Faculty of Education in the district and the school district faculty and staff. It also included mentorship of new principals by experienced principals and weekly mentoring for ten principals new to the role.

The program was designed for new principals having five years or less leadership experience to help them develop their ability to "create a school culture where every student is fully engaged, educated, and accepted." This program deals with the restricted supports currently available for educational leaders' development and enhances the knowledge and skills of new principals based on best practice and current research (Villani, 2006). The program aimed to contribute to the professional development of early-career principals' skills; however, the effectiveness of the program has not been investigated yet. Thus, there is a need for research to find out if the induction supports have had the intended effects on principals' practice and skill development.

Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to understand the perceived impacts of principal induction to reflect the stated goals of the program. Namely, in order to show that principal induction has had an impact on practice, new principals need to perceive that the induction support has helped provide them with the relevant skills and understanding they need and that

their self-efficacy in key areas of practice has increased. In addition, if the induction supports have had the intended effects on principals' practice and skill development, principals and their mentors should report and describe specific changes and enhancements that have been made in key areas of their practice. The following research questions guided the research study:

1. What are the principals' perceptions of the induction activities and their effectiveness?
2. What are the challenges and facilitating factors reported by principals in implementing this program and its specific components?
3. What is the principals' perception of the changes in their practice in response to the induction support?

Based upon the data collected from the program stakeholders, this study aims to contribute to the body of research on early career principal professional development. It is expected that the findings of the study will provide the necessary information that program providers need to assess and continually strengthen the way the program operates to achieve its objectives and develop participants' skills, knowledge and capabilities. In addition, the results are expected to serve as guidelines for the design of professional support services that aim to add to the learning of new principals.

Methodology

Design

The study adopted a single case qualitative research design to examine the perceived effect of the principal induction program. According to Yin (2009), case study research is the study of a "contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (p. 18) and mentioned explanation, description, illustration, and enlightenment as the four foundations for using the case study methodology. In that respect, this study aligns with the definition of case study methodology and the rationale description as the participants' perceptions of the program was not yet known and the purpose was to describe the perceptions of the program.

Participants

The participants were the eight principals attending the Principal Induction Program and two principal mentors. All of the participants were within the first five years of their careers and they had three years of teaching experience before they became principals. Four of the participants were female, while the other four were male. Their age ranged from 25 to 32. The schools of the participants included three elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. The mentors were both females. They were above 40 years and had both teaching and leadership experience before they became principal mentors.

Table 1

Demographic Information about the Principals Participating in the Study

Principals	Gender	Age	Experience	School Type
P1	M	31	3 years	High S.
P2	M	25	1 year	Elementary S.
P3	F	28	2 years	Elementary S.
P4	F	30	2 years	Elementary S.
P5	F	32	5 years	High S.
P6	M	27	1 year	Middle S.
P7	F	26	1 year	Middle S.
P8	M	29	2 year	Middle S.

Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher developed the interview guides, which were informed by literature on topics including principal induction and professional development for school leaders as well as the documents of the principal induction program. Two experts on educational leadership provided feedback on draft interview questions. The questions in the interview protocol involved open-ended questions with follow-up probes so that further conversation would be facilitated and more clarification on specific aspects of the program would be received.

The researcher contacted the program directors and gave information about the research. Following the initial introduction, the researcher arranged in-person interview times with individual principals and their mentors and a quiet and private room was provided by the school administrations, which facilitated the confidentiality of the interviews without any interruptions.

Most of the interviews were conducted in person at the interviewees' school or at district offices in June 2019. Interviewers used digital recorders to record the interviews, with the consent of interviewees, for transcription purposes. The verbatim transcription of the audio recordings was done for the following qualitative analyses. Prior to the participation of the interviewees in the interview process, they all provided written informed consent.

All participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential and that no individuals or schools would be identified in the results. To help protect confidentiality in reporting the findings here, all pronoun references have been changed to "he" and "him" regardless of the respondent's gender.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this qualitative research is critical, as she collected data and implemented analysis. The researcher's role in this study was that of an external evaluator who could bring objectivity, accountability, and perspective to the evaluation. However, as the researcher was the main data collection and analysis instrument and she analyzed the data by finding the right codes and themes, there is the potential for bias on the researcher's part, which could impact the result of the study. To minimize the bias, the researcher kept a research journal to record her own thoughts and details of the research process throughout the research process, which was used to further document the relationship she had with the data and analysis. In addition, another expert in qualitative data analysis checked the data analysis and emerging codes and themes.

Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews with principals were transcribed to review and gain a general idea of the participants' perception of the program (Creswell, 2003). In other words, the researcher immersed in the details and got a sense of the participants' responses before the actual coding (Agar, 1980; Creswell, 2013). After reading the transcripts several times and gaining a firm foundation of the participants' responses, the data were

analyzed using inductive content analysis. The interview data were coded in light of the sub-objectives of this study. Subthemes and themes were developed, and all themes and sub-themes were reviewed and those associated with each other were combined. Cites and codes in the sub-themes and codes were read to check their suitability for the codes, sub-themes and themes. Then, findings were defined and interpreted. For reliability purposes, an expert on qualitative research checked the emerging codes and themes. These codes and themes were given in figures after reaching an agreement.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this qualitative study was assured, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To ensure the credibility of the study, member checking was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings were sent to the participants and they were asked to check the transcribed and coded data for accuracy. The participants checked for the inaccuracies and the minor revisions suggested by the participants were done. In addition to this, the content analysis made by the researcher (codes and themes) was checked by another expert in qualitative research. In this way, the trustworthiness of the study was supported by the peer debriefing method suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984). Lastly, to ensure the transferability of the findings, the researcher gave sufficient contextual information about the program by providing thick descriptions of the program so the audience can judge how to transfer the findings to their context, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Limitations of the Study

The findings of the research regarding the principal induction program were based on the perceptions of the participants. To illustrate, the findings about the effectiveness of the program were deduced from the perception of participating principals about the changes in their professional growth; however, the data collected from the teachers working at the same school with these principals would reveal more objective results about the program. Moreover, the study is a single case study, so the results may not be generalizable to other programs. However, the results will add to the professional development of early-career principals. The results are expected to serve as guidelines for the design of professional support services that aim to add to the learning of new principals.

Findings

The interviews captured a range of specific topics and were designed to address each of the evaluation questions pertaining to principal induction, as described above. The findings are organized into four sections: (1) overall perceptions of principal induction; (2) challenges and facilitating factors in implementing principal induction and (3) perceived impacts of principal induction.

Overall Perceptions of Principal Induction

New principals, in general, were very satisfied with their principal leadership mentoring experiences and with how specific mentors were matched to their individual needs. This finding of the study complies with the previous research finding that principals participating in an induction program were satisfied with the support they received (Correll, 2010; Hudson, 2009; Kingham, 2009; Martin, 2016). New principals reported that their mentors effectively supported them in various ways, including reflecting on their own practice, developing staff, building a positive school climate and culture, and tending to their own emotional needs. Some principals indicated that their mentors also helped them complete more practical duties, such as creating a master schedule, completing budget allocations, developing school improvement plans, and planning curriculum and instruction. The principals noted that while some of these parts of their job could be straightforward, they also could be very time-consuming, thereby diverting principals' efforts away from other more pressing responsibilities. Principals also expressed a desire for more planning and advance notice of when these key technical projects needed to be completed, such as a calendar of key tasks and deadlines, so that they could better plan to complete these duties. Mentors who were skilled at this aspect of the job typically notified new principals in advance of key deadlines, such as budget allocation and school improvement plans, and worked together over time with new principals to complete these tasks. As one principal noted, "Learning those technical details that are district-specific is probably one of the more time-consuming things, and I felt like I really needed someone that you could call easily."

Many new principals reflected on a theme common to leadership roles—that it's lonely at the top and often feels isolating—and reported that regular discussions with their mentors provided them emotional support and validation for the work they were carrying out. New principals expressed gratitude at how readily available their mentors were, especially during challenges and crises. Further, leadership mentoring enforced time in new principals' busy schedules to slow down and reflect on the successes and challenges of their practice. This reflection time also allowed principals to be less reactionary in addressing concerns brought to their attention. One principal described the value of reflection as follows:

“The pace can be really intense, and I think the part of leadership mentoring that helped really was, make sure I’m answering the right question if I’m not. The aspect of mentoring was powerful just to come back to things, and revisit things and building in that reflective time and the calendar and having that with the mentor... Just having that set time built in the calendar and making sure we prioritize our reflection really supported my development as a leader.”

New principals especially appreciated the support of their mentors in building relationships with and developing staff. While many new principals felt confident in their capacity to address difficult issues such as staff remediation and release from employment, they appreciated having a more experienced principal as a sounding board and as a person to provide advice based in experience. This was all the more so for principals who came from outside the district and needed to understand how tasks and challenges are handled within the school district. New principals also indicated mentoring was especially helpful in improving their practice around educator effectiveness (e.g., staff evaluation) and building walk-throughs, including how best to communicate about evaluation, how to implement it, and how to lead at a building level based on what has been learned from evaluation findings. As one principal described it:

“When I was assistant principal, the principle that I worked with wasn't as committed to instructional rounds or walk-throughs or some of those places like fidelity of scheduling and some of those aspects of things that my mentor was way more skilled and experienced in. So I would say that that really helped me to hone my skills and thinking around the messaging for teachers about what a walk-through is and what the purpose of that is versus like an educator effectiveness

evaluation or... observation. Then just the scheduling and what to do with that information and leadership on those things."

With regard to principal leadership academies, many of the principals interviewed felt that the leadership academy speaker was inspirational and that the topics presented helped provide context to what they were experiencing in their building. All of the new principals interviewed indicated that they found peer learning useful and valued space to reflect on how to apply what was learned with peers. As one principal stated, "I think hearing from your peers was useful. Hearing that people are going through similar circumstances and having that time to step back and reflect, bigger picture wise." Similarly, another principal shared that the academies were "really helpful, to really key in on those things that I know are problem practices in my building. Let me get some feedback from what's going on from principals in their buildings and how to support each other." Specifically, they valued the opportunity to build relationships with other principals, which helped to normalize what they were experiencing in their first year and helped to alleviate the isolation they felt in their role as leaders. One principal declared, "It was heaven-sent because coming in those are individuals that you develop, I feel have very strong relationships with because we came in together; even right now we lean on one another." Several principals perceived the academies as a place where they learned the importance of reflecting and utilizing their strengths in their role as a leader. One principal described the process they used:

"Building relationships and working with people is one of my strengths and it's also really important when we work on developing groups that we be very strategic. I mean I think I can rely on my strengths, but I really learned the importance of reflecting on that and how to take that to the next level. Then again aligning specific leadership modes that for one team might look different than another team."

When asked to reflect on what aspects of the academies could be improved, some principals felt that the topics that were chosen for the academies were a repeat of what they had learned in school and in some instances, took them away from their building at crucial times with

limited gain. These principals felt that the topics should be more aligned with the priorities for the school year. For example, as one principal described:

“I think the breadth and the scope of the work as an administrator is immense, and I think it’s important that we be able to... make sure we’re focusing our time on our priorities. I think that would have been some really great learning about how to use our time more wisely as administrators and how to make sure we were accomplishing our goals.”

Another principal suggested that the leadership academy organizers work closely with principal mentors to extend the learning from the academies and therefore allow principals more time to plan strategies, apply them, and discuss what they learned. He stated, “Some of the technical pieces, like scheduling our budget, could have been sessions for everyone because we all needed it. Our mentors could have followed up or supported within that too. Instead of some of the bigger picture stuff.” Similarly, some principals felt that the structure of the academies was focused too much on big picture topics and therefore lacked a cohesive flow across the year (e.g., topics that build on each other and focus on specific skill sets). As one principal explained, “It didn’t feel like a cohesive thing across the year, I guess. So we come in, not really knowing what we’re going to talk about, and there was interesting stuff around our leadership style... but I didn’t feel like I got necessarily what I wanted.”

A majority of the new principals interviewed highly valued the professional learning program (PLP) that was an element of the principal induction activities. Specifically, principals noted that the PLP helped them address several types of challenges or problems of practice during their first year, including building scheduling, effectively structuring planning time, providing instructional leadership by mentoring teachers around issues related to equity, adopting culturally and linguistically responsive practices, engaging in activities that fostered improved parent involvement and fostering a cohesive school improvement team. When principals discussed how the PLP supported them in making changes in their own leadership practices, their answers aligned with what research shows as the prevailing leadership roles effective principals play: setting direction, developing people (i.e., teachers), leading instruction, and redesigning organizations. More specifically, new principals noted that they learned from peers and PLP facilitators about the following: effective strategies for observing and mentoring

teachers to use strategies to improve engagement of some students, ways to maximize their conversations with teachers to improve student outcomes, how to effectively talk to building staff about ways the school should support the district vision and build buy-in, and methods to effectively tie feedback on equity practice into the teacher evaluation process.

Furthermore, a number of other resources or initiatives in the district lent support to the value of the PLPs for new principals. Several principals noted that the district's use of improvement partners really allowed them the opportunity to explore and use what they learned about leading school improvement in the PLP. Principals shared that the PLP allowed them to share equity-focused practices with school leadership teams and teachers and really gave them fuel to keep conversations in the building focused on equity and made it possible to make the equity vision come alive. The only criticism of PLPs offered by principals was the amount of time they were expected to be out of their school in order to participate in the PLP.

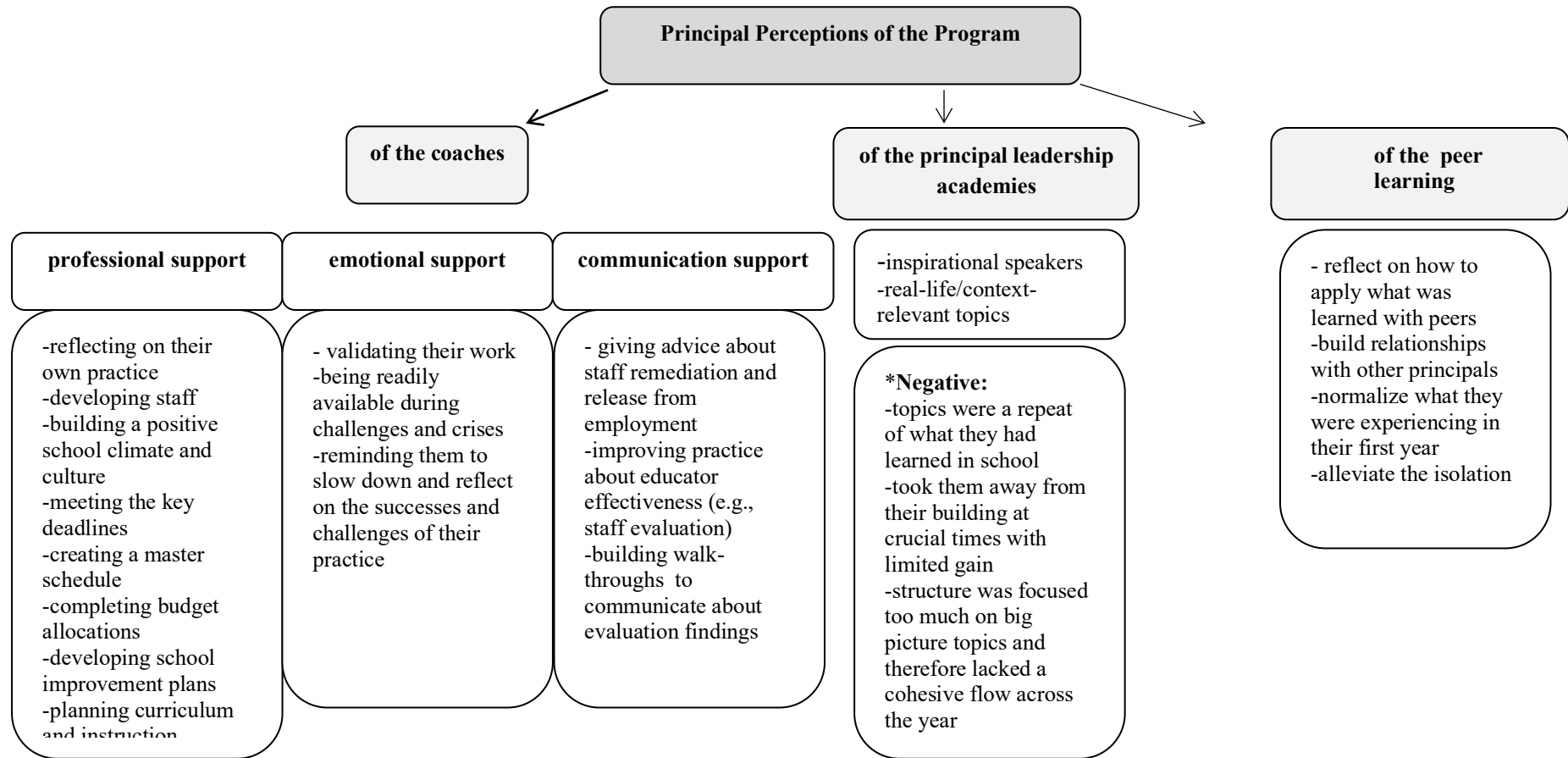


Figure 1. Perceptions of the principals of the induction program

Challenges and Facilitating Factors Reported by Educators in Implementing Principal Induction

Respondents shared a couple of challenges and mentioned several facilitating factors with regard to implementing principal induction support. With regard to challenges, respondents generally agreed that a lack of time to meet and interruptions to principals' planned schedules interfered with their ability to participate more fully in mentoring activities. As for facilitating factors, several principals mentioned mentors' consistent availability to address problems of practice, as well as confidentiality and openness to raise any questions or concerns as key to building trust. For example, as one principal noted, "Right off the bat, him letting me know that things that happen between us are going to be confidential; reach out and ask whatever questions; you can call whenever, and email; and text whenever... the confidentiality makes you feel like there is no question too small to ask."

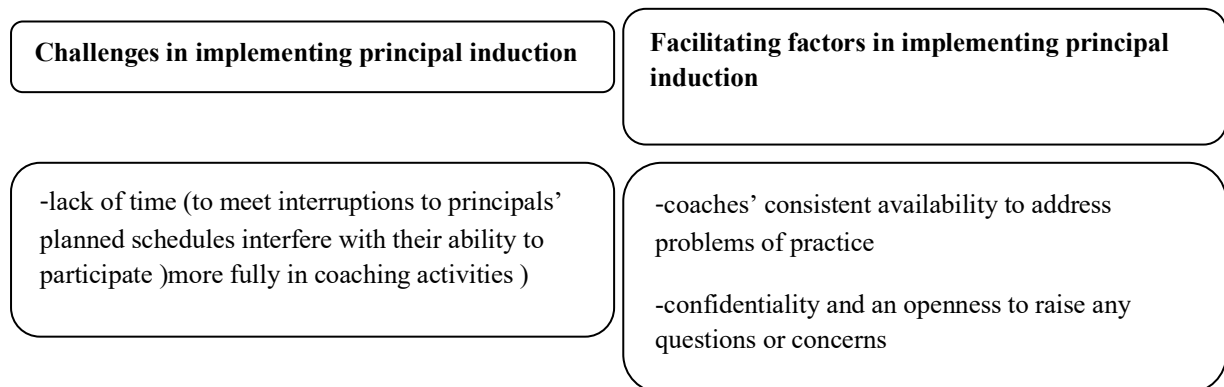


Figure 2. Challenges and the facilitating factors for the induction program

Perceived Impacts of Principal Induction

When asked to provide specific examples of changes they made as a result of what they learned through the induction support, the principals overwhelmingly described changes in the area of self-reflection. More than one principal indicated that the support helped them become a more proactive leader, rather than simply "responding to one fire after another." They felt that reflection led them to plan better and more often, which in turn allowed them to take more effective action. With regard to the leadership academy in particular, one principal explained,

"I wouldn't say practice changes, but more mindset changes, especially kind of the self-reflective piece. That was a strong aspect of the seminar. We looked at ourselves quite a bit and compared what type of styles of leadership we were using and what we would choose to do differently." Other principals took this question a bit further by describing the ways in which they applied self-reflection to problems of practice in their buildings. For example, one principal described how the support helped him develop and lead high-performing teams:

"It just gave me the time to kind of reflect, so then having that reflection, it was 'OK what do we do to take this team even further?' So it influenced like, what are the pieces that I put into place? Some of it was just like being more present with that team during grade level team meetings and then also being in their classrooms more to observe to make sure that those changes were being implemented in the classroom. So I was able to reflect on that."

Principals noted several specific impacts and changes in their professional practice as a result of their induction experiences, such as becoming more effective at using systems (e.g., budgeting, scheduling, and communication) and using multiple sources of data to inform improvement decisions. Moreover, one principal described efforts to tie culturally responsive practices to the teacher evaluation process by including equity in mentoring and feedback to teachers. "I had takeaways from both content covered on the evaluation system and on culturally responsive strategies, and now I'm trying to tie things together into the feedback that I'm giving to teachers." Another principal noted personally using routine reflection on practice and described how that influenced his efforts to create a culture of reflection in the building: "

"Through reflection I got the importance of being clear and connecting the dots of all that we're doing and why we're doing it in all my work with staff in the building. Clear about my belief in students, ALL the students and their families. And making sure that I call on all staff to serve all our students."

Finally, several principals made a clear connection between their participation in the induction activities and their capacity to achieve building-level goals. Several noted that they added an equity focus to a number of building goals, and others highlighted how induction supports really kept the focus on their role in driving school improvement. Specifically, the expectation of routine reflection helped them better support their school leadership teams in changing course if they were not making progress on school improvement goals.

New principals noted that a majority of the changes in practice that resulted from the induction support were related to equity. They found many ways in which the induction supports shaped and shifted their thinking about their role as steward and champion for issues of equity. Changes in practice included adding an equity focus to school improvement goals and infusing the teacher evaluation process with conversations about using equity-focused strategies. Principals also examined disaggregated data to understand differences in academic and behavioral results by student subgroup. They also shifted the school culture to one where all educators are focused on improving the climate for and engagement of all students. Principals discussed changes in equity-focused practice in the following ways:

“I think a lot of the equity issues we’re having here is holding all adults accountable for our students. So that’s really the focus I’m shifting to. Making sure all adults are helping all students reach their full potential. All of them. Not just picking and choosing. Not accepting a practice of ignoring the ones that are difficult. We have to provide them, even when they have challenges we have to be willing to provide them what they need.”

Being very specific about having conversations about what is happening around academics and around behavior. Checking some of our standing beliefs at the door and looking with fresh eyes at the issues.

“I got partway through the year [and realized] that I need to clearly communicate expectations for all students and to all teachers. I don't think anyone wants to do harm to our students but it's important that I make clear what I expect and why and how many things are about equity.”

New principals expressed mixed findings as to how mentoring addressed educational equity and opportunity gaps within their schools. Some new principals indicated they were provided examples of how to address equity concerns as well as support thinking through how to measure efforts toward educational equity and closure of opportunity gaps at the building level. Others felt that equity issues were not dealt with in-depth or collaboratively and that mentoring around equity was more a presentation of information that new principals were to take back and implement in their own school. Finally, some principals interviewed noted that the local communities that schools served and the principals themselves were at different stages in their

readiness and capacity to address equity-based concerns and that new principals might be better served by accounting for this variability as part of their mentoring. In addition, it was suggested that mentors should assess principals' readiness and capacity to address equity issues when embarking on their mentoring.

When asked about how the academies helped new principals in leading around the issue of equity, the principals struggled to offer specific examples. However, some principals valued the conversations they had with peers during the academies around issues of equity. One principal shared: "I think having some conversations with colleagues at the academies were helpful... The big leadership institutes have been invaluable, but I would say the smaller meetings for new principal induction were not."

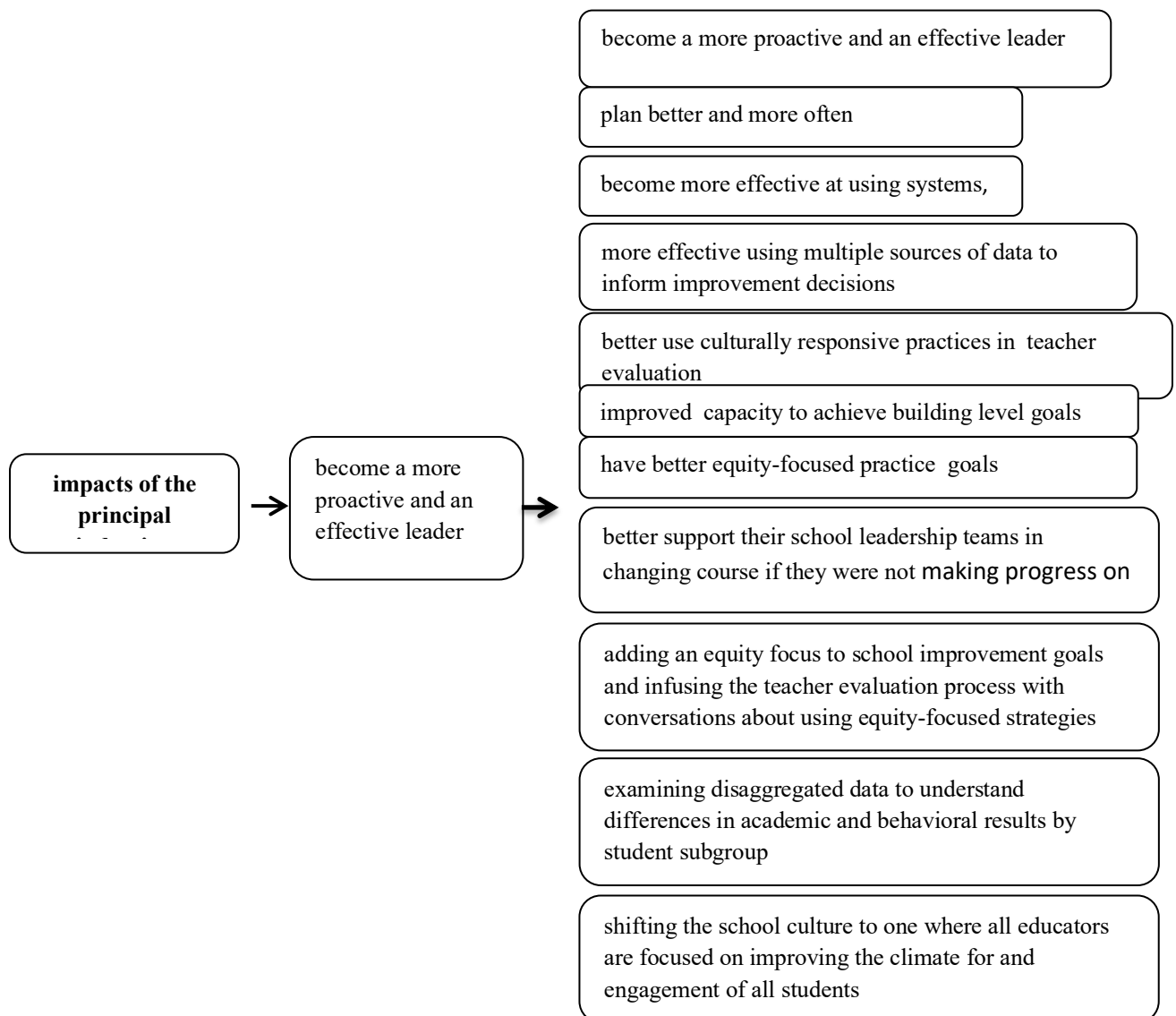


Figure 3. The perceived impacts of the induction program

Recommendations and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify early-career principals' perceptions of the impact of the Principal Induction Program and determine necessary improvements for the future. Below, several recommendations were offered by the researcher to help address potential challenges in implementing the principal induction program in the future.

First of all, it is recommended that the leadership academies should be modified to include more intentional planning of academy topics. The schedule of topics needs to be aligned to leader priorities throughout the year. The same idea was suggested in previous research as well. In his study, Daresh (2001) claimed that effective induction and mentoring should incorporate learning activities that are relevant to the personal and professional goals of the principals. In addition, based on the research findings, it is suggested that there should be a partnership with the mentors to extend learning from the academies in mentoring sessions, and time should be added to follow up on prior topics. Based on the claims made by new principals, it was clear that the leadership academies were a valuable venue that provided time to collaborate with peers and advance one's skills in developing strategies to address commonly encountered problems of practice. This characteristic of the specific principal induction program should be kept as it is since it is one of the qualities of effective induction programs that Aiken (2002) described.

It is also recommended that a combination of more intentional planning, building in opportunities for principals to provide feedback after each session, and using the feedback to inform future sessions would help enhance an already effective component of new principal induction support. Principals would be especially appreciative of more opportunities for principals to share how they applied strategies discussed and reflect on how successful their strategy was (or was not) in addressing problems of practice. As one principal shared, "We didn't come back to the table say next time we met and asked 'how did that go?' To be able to really pressure test how did that go for you. What do you need to do differently?" Daresh (2001)

described a similar principle about effective induction and mentoring. He claimed that the learner receives usable feedback about progress and experiences success.

Additionally, community building among new principals as well as between new and veteran principals should be fostered, as Aiken (2002) suggested for effective induction programs. Several principal induction components, including mentoring, leadership seminars, and PLPs provided opportunities for principals to reflect together and solve problems related to their practice. Equally important was the sense of social support and the reduction in isolation that principals reported as a result of these induction activities. Educators felt that social support opportunities such as these helped prevent burnout and had the potential to retain professionals in the field for longer durations.

It is also advisable to continue to capitalize on the knowledge and experience veteran principals can share with new principals. A similar point was highlighted by Lashway (2003). He claimed that effective induction is most powerful when based on in the actual work of the principals, not tacking on irrelevant extra activities. Several new principals noted the significant time and effort required in learning operational tasks such as budget allocation and building a master schedule. Being able to learn from veteran principals' experience saved these new principals valuable time and energy that could instead be invested in other activities, including instructional leadership and staff development.

Finally, the new principal support components need to be coordinated in order to develop a seamless set of supports that further extends and deepens principals' knowledge and skills while maximizing resources. As noted similarly with respect to teacher induction, it is recommended that aligning academy content with principals' requested professional development needs and/or significant principal milestones (e.g., educator effectiveness evaluations), as well as aligning mentoring support with the content covered in academies to help consolidate learning and better support practice change. According to Daresh (2001), effective induction and mentoring should include topics relevant to principals' professional needs.

Recommendations for Further Research

The current research was conducted at the end of the one-year induction program. The researcher recommends that further research that may study the impact of the program on the participants after the program ends would provide data on the sustainability of these educational leaders if the program participants are still in the field of education, how they practice what they have learned in the program and if this has an effect on student achievement. If we know about the effects of these programs we will guide the design and implementation of induction programs for principals. Also, as the program is aimed at increasing student achievement, future research will study if there is any change in the achievement of students of the early career principals attending the program.

Statements of Ethics and Conflict of Interest

"I, as the Corresponding Author, declare and undertake that in the study titled as "*A Study of Early Career Principals' Perceptions of Their Induction Program*", scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed; Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry Journal Editorial Board has no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, that all responsibility belongs to the author/s and that this study has not been sent to any other academic publication platform for evaluation."

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