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The Role of School Management in the Prevention of School Violence

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Abstract

Reducing violent behavior in school to increase students' academic achievement in secondary schools, with training and guidance given to the administrators and teachers throughout the year. This study was carried out at intervals of one year in counties of Ankara (Pursaklar) and İzmir (Buca). Every month for a period of one year, administrators and teachers in the study group are given training and guidance support. As a result of the application, administrators and teachers' attitudes had changed significantly in favor of the study group. Also in favor of study groups, administrators, teachers and students' perception of violence has decreased significantly, a statistically significant increase in students' academic achievement were determined

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1. Introduction

School administrators at all levels must ensure a safe learning environment at school. According to the Ministry of Education Pre-School Regulation for Education and Primary Education Institutions, Article 39, published 26.07.2014, and numbered 29072, Official Gazette, schools are managed by Principals along with other school employees, and the Principal is responsible for fulfilling all school related tasks including education, security, maintenance, protection, nutrition, and hygiene in accordance with the relevant activity and legislation principles.

Violent acts in school are one of the primary problems threatening school safety. The World Health Organization (WHO) reviewed school violence in the 49th World Health Assembly, and accepted it as a public safety

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priority (Mertoglu, 2011). Providing a safe environment in schools, which are responsible for the well-being of numerous children, is a basic responsibility of the school administration.

“Violence against children at school” consists of attitudes and behaviors which harm the physical or cognitive health of children and negatively affects their development (Martin & Greenwood, 2006 p.17).

Definitions of violence vary according to different environments and cultures. The World Health Organization defines violence as; “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (WHO, 2011).

Violent acts in school could be; from teacher or administrator to student, between students, between teachers, between administrators and teachers, or from student to administrator or to teacher.

Violent behaviors of teachers are defined as; a behavior pattern inflicted from power differences that significantly harm students and have no legal, academic, or ethic purpose (Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Kent State University, 2003). Similar circumstances can be seen in violent acts between students.

Violence in school can be seen as damaging school property along with physical and emotional acts. Physical violence includes physically harming the opposite side, to cause injury, or even death.

Attitudes and behaviors from an adult or an elderly person towards a child that are derogatory, humiliating, and damaging to a child’s self-confidence are considered as emotional violence (Brand, Shim, Seitsinger, Dumas, 2003). Emotional violence also can occur among peers. Making offensive remarks, accusations, threats, giving derogatory nicknames, creating a scapegoat, insults or ignoring and blocking out are examples of emotional violence in school. In a similar manner, not creating the environment of trust and care that children need may be able to also be considered as emotional violence (Mertoglu, 2011).

Although legal sanctions against persons who exhibit violent behavior are important and necessary, creating social norms against violence acts are much more important. For example, in Turkey, beating a student was an illegal disciplinary action by a teacher or administrator according to Law Number 1702 dated 29.06.1930 and was punishable by a salary cut.

Even though this law went in effect 84 years ago (disciplinary provisions were abolished in 14.03.2014) is not effectively implemented until sometime in the last 15 years with the tactic understanding that “roses grow where a teacher hits”. More recently additional laws have been brought into force on the basis of research showing that all kinds of violence are destructive and incompatible with modern education.

A survey conducted by Guçlu in 2000 indicated that %57 of elementary and high school students in Turkey say that they have been beaten; %47,97 say that their ears have been pulled, %25 say that they have been beaten with a stick or bat, and 11,57% say that they have been beaten violently (by some other means). This is important in fact indicating that legal sanctions have not been enough to inhibit violence in schools, (Guçlu 2000).

Based on organizational psychology studies, material and spiritual aspects of a school’s environment are identified as “school climate”. The sense of a school’s climate affects a students’ attitude towards school, education, academic behavior, and social and behavioral harmony (Mertoglu, 2011).

Apart from exposure to violence, it has been determined that perception of personal safety within a school environment also effects general school performance. A teacher is not only an educator, he/she is also a socializing tool that provides basic social and emotional needs of students such as sense of belonging, self-confidence and personal safety.

Results of studies that indicating that behavioral problems and violence in schools can be addressed by improving the social skills of students, presents an important challenge for administrators and teachers (Piskin, Ogulmus, Boysan, 2011 adapted from Crone and Horner, 2003, Elliot and Shenton 1999).

A study by Yıldırım (1998) indicates that 72, 7% of children exposed to physical violence and 74, 5% of children exposed to verbal violence have a tendency of absenteeism. The success rate of 47.1 % of both groups decreases, and %12, 5 of them fail classes is an important suggestion that avoidance of violence can increase academic success and reduce absenteeism.

Violence in a school environment can have many sources. Its’ prevention requires considerable knowledge of these sources. It is inevitable that immigration, urbanization, poverty, and unemployment which are relevant to violence in general also reflect on school violence.

As a result of large migrations from rural settings, children from rural families trying to adapt to city life are more often exposed to poor communication and behavior at home. When the impacts of these behaviors are carried to school it makes things more difficult for teachers and administrators (Healy, 1997).

Addressing family related and genetic related violence sources is a difficult and long process. However, determining and managing school related sources of violence may be a more achievable (Mertoglu, 2008).

In a comparative study of school violence and its' precautions between high schools in Turkey and United States a number of contributing factors identified were analyzed including: the student's perception of violence in the school, the physical conditions of the school, the effectiveness of the school's academic program, and the positive attitudes of the teachers and administrators towards the students. In this study it is seen that even though family and socio-economic factors vary, if administrators and teachers are supportive, and negative behaviors are low, the perception of violence decreases significantly (Mertoglu, Dogutas, Cemalcilar, 2012).

For the prevention of violence in schools, an unprecedented, both in Turkey and in the world, experimental application and research model is developed based on the mentioned research.

In the 2010-11 school year two elementary schools in Ankara-Pursaklar neighborhood, were chosen for a comparative study. One school served as a control group and the second school as the test group.

The study comprised a total of 570 students; 292 in the control group and 278 in study group. Additionally, 98 administrators and teachers participated in the study. A more positive approach was observed in the attitudes of the study group compared to the control group following monthly seminars and consultations with teachers and administrators by a group of experts. A significant decrease in some violent acts and student absenteeism was observed in the study group. Academic success of students in some courses on placement test statistically improved (Mertoglu, Aydın, 2013).

Because of the positive results of Ankara-Pursaklar study on raising academic success and decreasing absenteeism a similar program was undertaken in İzmir over a 3 year period. Similar results have been obtained. Previously unpublished data from the İzmir-Buca study (Program & Abstract, 2011) presented in this study has results similar to the Ankara-Pursaklar study.

The programs aimed at the prevention of violence in schools and improving academic achievement were repeated in Ankara and İzmir during different years. School administrators and teachers participating in training programs have only been supported with education and guidance. Changes were not made to other variables in the teaching environment that could affect the results.

The positive results of these programs suggest that similar result can be obtained by repeating these programs in other school districts. The results also suggest that administrators and teachers plays a huge role in schools and continuing training of these groups can lead to measureable improvements in school results and a decrease in school violence.

The purpose of this program is to demonstrate that levels of school violence and absenteeism can be lowered and academic success improved by giving training seminars to teachers and administrators. To test this concept, multiple seminars were conducted with teachers and school administrators in the Ankara-Pursaklar School District of Turkey and later repeated in the İzmir-Menderes School District of Turkey.

2. Materials and Methods

Four elementary schools from low socio-economic environments, two functions as the study groups and two functions as control groups, were chosen in collaboration the İzmir Directorate of National Education. The schools were considered to be equivalent in terms of academic performance and teaching standards

The study group consisted of 308 students (7th and 8th grade) there were 116 in the control group and 192 in the study group. Teachers and administrators totaled 131.

At the beginning of 2009-2010 school years, between September 7 and September 18, 2009, administrators and teachers in study group were given 45 hours of "Nonviolent Communication Training". Monthly education and supervision support continued throughout the year.

2.1. Data Collection Tools and Process

The following scales were applied to the study and control groups before and after training.

2.1.1 “Teaching Attitude Scale”

The scale consists of 68 phrases. Phrases such as “I Agree Strongly”, “I Agree”, “I can’t Decide”, “I Don’t Agree”, “I Strongly Disagree” were used. Alpha degree is 89 in preliminary and final test applications. Degree of reliability is very high.

2.1.2 “Teacher’s Perception of Violence Scale”

Is consists of 40 questions and was used for scaling students’ and teachers’ perception of the school violence.

2.1.3 “Students’ Perception of Violence Scale”

Rating Scale of 5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) consisting of 36 phrases was used to determine students perception of students.

2.1.4 Academic Success

2007-2008 and 2009-2010 National Test Results were used to determine academic success of students.

2.1.5 Demographic Information and Absenteeism

Statistics on absenteeism levels and the demographic background of students were obtained from the data collecting forms prepared by researcher and filled by the students.

2.2 Analyses of Data

Analyses for Determining the Efficiency Level of the Project

- SG Final Test Point - SG Preliminary Test Point = SG Difference Amount
- CG Final Test Point - CG Preliminary Test Point = CG Difference Amount
- SG Difference Amount – CG Difference Amount = Efficiency Amount

“Unrelated Group t Test” is used in the data analyses.”

2.3 Content of Training for Teachers and Administrators

Teachers and administrators were given seminars in the following subjects:

- Professional Teaching
- Reflections of Brain-Learning Relationship on Education
- Coping Strategies for Problematical Student Behaviors
- Anger Management for Administrators, Teachers, and Students by force of Nonviolent Communication (Causes and Anger Management Technics)
- Efficient Class Management
- Prevention of Crime and Violence in Schools
- Crisis Management, Crisis Intervention
- Efficient Communication Skills

3. Findings

Training and supervision support for teachers and administrators for a school year,

3.1. Effects on Teaching Attitude

On teachers attitudes there is a meaningful difference at $p < 0.049$ level. In other words teachers attitudes change in a positive manner. When this result is taken into consideration, it is seen that the primary goal of this research which was to “affect a positive change in teachers’ attitudes” was reached.

Table.1. Effect of Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Students’ Perception of Violence

Items	Group						
		n	x	ss	t	sd	p
Administrators are making fun of students.	Test			1,60162			
	Control	135	,1778			-	
There are students who had disciplinary penalties in our school.	Test			1,64150			
	Control	38	,8158		1,55712	2,182	171
There are students that brings knives and other sharp objects to school.	Test			1,87872			
	Control	141	,5106		1,52443	2,724	178
I got in trouble with teachers every so often.	Test			1,54628			
	Control	39	1,3077		1,55229	1,796	179
Teachers are rough to us.	Test			1,72136			
	Control	143	,1399		1,41948	3,132	175
	Test			-			
	Control	40	,7250		1,41948	3,132	175
	Test			-			
	Control	139	,2950		1,41948	3,132	175
	Test			-			
	Control	38	,6579		1,41948	3,132	175

3.2. Effect of Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Students’ Perception of Violence

There is a significant decrease in the number of students who bring sharp objects to school at level $p < .048$, students who have received disciplinary penalties at level $p < .0007$, and administrators’ mocking behaviors at level $p < .030$.

Table.2. Effect of Training for Teachers and Administrators on their Perception of Violence at School

Items	Group						p
		n	x	ss	t	sd	
Are there students who brings knives or sharp tools to school?	Test	27	-	6,19742	-		
	Control	30	1,4452	15,39353	2,115	55	,039
Do teachers behave respectfully to each others?	Test	27	,4074	1,21716			
	Control	29	-	1,60510	3,226	54	,002
Do administrators behave respectfully to teachers?	Test	27	,1481	1,23113			
	Control	29	,4483	1,15221	1,873	54	,050
Do teachers insult students?	Test	26	,6154	,98293			
	Control	29	-	,79871	2,272	53	,027
		29	,0690				

3.3. Effect of Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Perception of Violence at School

According to teachers’ perception, in study groups that had training and follow-up support during the school year, there was significant decrease in study group, in the perception of the number of students who bring sharp tools to school at level $p < .039$, significant increase in teacher’s respectful behaviors towards each other at level $p < .002$ and a significant decrease in the perception of teachers insulting their students at level $p < .027$.

Table.3. Effect of Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Students’ Absenteeism

	n	x	ss	t	sd	p
Test Group	130,00	2,92	3,30	-4,52	178,00	0,000
Control Group	50,00	5,88	5,25			

3.4. Effect of Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Students’ Absenteeism

There is significant decrease in absenteeism in the study group.

3.5. Effect of Yearly Trainings for Teachers and Administrators on Students’ Academic Success

3.5.1. On Class Variable: No significant difference has been seen on 7th grade students. On 8th grade students’ academic success (according to SBS results), for Science Class increase at level $p < .000$, for Mathematics at level $p < .007$ on behalf of study group.

Significant increase on 8th graders can be explained with the motivational increase of teachers and administrators who received training.

3.5.2 On Immigration Variable: On the contrary of observations, “End of the Year Achievement Scores” and “Math Class Achievement Scores” of students comes with immigration, there is a significant increase on behalf of study group (at level $p < .0007$ -.0000). For other students this difference is only seen in “Science” and “Social Studies” ($p < .050$, .0002).

3.5.3. In Sex Differences: Regarding Science and Math scores in SBS results; the scores of female students are higher than male students ($p < .040$, $p < .000$). However, in Social Studies it is seen that male students had higher points than female students ($p < .037$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

When we look at the results of the research study we see that 455 hours of training in the beginning of school year, and educational and guidance support throughout the academic year changes teachers’ and administrators’ attitude on a positive manner.

There was also a decrease in the perception of violence in the groups that had trainings and increase in academic success on nationwide tests and a decrease in students’ absenteeism. This can be attributed to the training programs.

Research indicates that it takes time for attitudes to change into behaviors (Kagıtçıbaşı, 2008). Moreover, there are lots of different variables that affect students’ and teachers’ behaviors and there is no way to measure them all. Therefore results of this study are considered very important.

Students in groups with trained administrators and teachers participate more in artistic, cultural, and sportive events, and have better results in competitions nationwide and citywide. Even though the same administrators and teachers have been working in the same school for years, they were not able to achieve similar activity levels from their students. This supports the idea that increasing teacher motivation will have a beneficial result.

Results of this research project show that teachers and administrators can have an effective role in decreasing violent acts in schools.

5. Suggestions

- This training model for administrators and teachers which was developed for avoiding violence in schools while improving academic performance can be further developed and generalized. Administrators and teachers can be educated on how to response violent acts by experts.
- Considering that violent behaviors can be learned from the environment, school management should try to set good behavior examples in schools.
- Students and teachers can be better informed about the laws and regulations regarding violent behavior, which could also reduce the level of violent behavior.
- School management can try to teach the benefits of success and obeying rules to students.
- Provide the necessary school environment for students to feel appreciated and a sense of belonging.
- Taking necessary to better understand students’ behaviors and to help solve their problems.
- Social and cultural activities can help create a culture of tolerance.
- Efficient school guidance services could be helpful.
- Prevention of violence and intervention measures that will be applied by teachers and administrators should be chosen scientifically.

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