# SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENT SAFETY AT SCHOOL

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*Abstract*

*In this study, the concerns of school administrators about student safety in school were examined. The qualitative research method was used in the study. The data analysis of the study was performed by statistical procedures. The study group consists of school principals in Erzurum Narman District. The school principal whose knowledge on the subject is consulted is limited to 12 people. In the study, data were collected by interview technique and a semi-structured interview form designed by taking expert opinions was applied. According to the research findings, school principals consider themselves primarily responsible for student safety at school. They are aware of the need to ensure the safety of children who are sent to school for education in all aspects (psychological, social, physical) before education. While this awareness leads school principals to take precautions, they are concerned that students may be adversely affected by dangers that develop outside of what they can do and control.*

*Keywords: School principal, student safety, anxiety, education, qualitative research*

## PROBLEM STATUS

Living in safe and secure environments is one of the basic needs of human beings physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Security, according to Maslow, is an important need that pursues physical needs. Once a person feels safe, he fulfills his other needs. Today, people spend a considerable part of their lives in schools. The school provides people with academic and social skills. In order to gain these, the individual must first feel safe in school.

Parents send their children to school to get an education and to be better prepared for life. They are worried about their child's safety for various reasons when they send them to school. These concerns include peer bullying, traffic safety, wrong choice of friends, addiction, and other intra-school risks. While families experience this anxiety, students may experience similar concerns. Students are afraid of being exposed to threats such as physical violence, peer bullying, drinking, various addictions, and sexual abuse (Dönmez, 2001).

Schools have an important role in preparing children for life, ensuring their socialization, and determining their place and role in society. This also means protecting and improving the physical and mental health of the students who will perform them. School safety means making a positive impact on the environment but also improving itself. Student safety aims to ensure that the student receives a healthy education in the school and to protect them against risks, as well as to make the student love the school. From this point of view, school security is not only to protect from existing dangers, but also to ensure that the school is made demanded (Çankaya, 2010).

Schools must be psychologically, physically, socially, and emotionally safe environments for school staff and students. Accordingly, teachers will be able to work better, and students will be motivated to learn more comfortably. School safety needs to be looked at by considering more than one factor. It is important to ensure safety in terms of health, physical, public order, and food safety (Turhan and Turan, 2012).

School principals have many missions to fulfill. The most important of these is to ensure the execution and development of educational activities. To achieve this, some responsibilities must be

carried out under many subheadings. One of them is to ensure a safe school environment and student safety for a healthy education. In order to ensure student safety in the school, the school principal must take and implement the necessary measures. He has both official and conscientious responsibility for this. There is a need for school administrators who know their school and analyze all kinds of risks and have the necessary knowledge and equipment to eliminate these risks and ensure that security measures are carried out by using all kinds of facilities (Turan, 2006). School administrators are the school principals who will carry out a healthy school and make student safety comfortable. In this sense, they are people who know the legislation well and strive for its realization, exhibiting quality and exemplary behaviors (Turan, 2006).

In schools, the school principal is primarily responsible for the safety of the students. School principals who are aware of this responsibility must take measures by evaluating the occupational health and safety, the physical, psychological, and social security of the student both within the scope of the legislation and the risks specific to the institution. When taking these measures, it takes into account the available opportunities, economic opportunities, and personnel situation. School administrators and teachers need to demonstrate effective leadership in order for education to be delivered in a safe environment. While assigning important duties to school employees in taking physical precautions and creating the right school environment and culture, school principals are the main actors in perceiving, planning, and implementing risks. It is a fact that this can be achieved with a leadership approach (Dönmez, 2001).

It would be inadequate to think that school safety will be ensured by taking the measures required by the legislation. School safety does not reflect positively on society and students through written rules and laws alone. School security is not enough with in-school work and the measures of administrators and employees. At the same time, the external stakeholders of the school need to participate in the work of building the school of trust. In order to create a safe school, it will be possible for the internal and external stakeholders of the school to establish positive relations with each other (Çankaya, Töremen and Şanlı, 2011).

There are many issues in the title of measures to be taken when it comes to school safety. It may not always be possible to fulfill each of them completely. Whether school administrators have not taken security measures due to lack of facilities, ignorance, operational deficiencies, etc., or on the contrary, have taken all precautions as much as they can, it is estimated that they may still experience anxiety for student safety due to unforeseen or unforeseen risks that may occur for any reason.

**Purpose**
This study aims to determine which concerns school administrators experience in order to ensure student safety and to contribute ideas to the studies that can be done to eliminate these concerns. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.
1. What kind of responsibility do school principals feel in terms of student safety in schools?
2. Do school administrators feel they are taking adequate precautions regarding student safety?
3. Do they know enough about all the measures that can be taken for student safety?
4. Despite the measures taken, is there still a concern that there is a shortage? What are these concerns?
5. When and in what situations do school principals experience the most security concerns?
6. For what reasons do school principals think that despite the precautions taken for their safety, there may be problems?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**
A program for the education of its citizens has been prepared by the state and the aims and objectives of this program have been determined. Schools are places where these goals are realized, and they also have their purpose of existence. The principal of the school is primarily responsible for the healthy functioning of the school in line with these purposes (Taymaz, 1995). The school

principal coordinates the school staff so that the school can successfully serve its purpose (Başar, 1995).

Recently, the responsibilities of school principals have increased. In order to reach the level of developed countries in terms of education, school principals have been entrusted with important responsibilities. For this reason, it is important for school principals to be aware of their roles and to have a vision for a successful education (Haberman, 2003).

Based on the motto "A school is as much as its principal", school principals today should educate themselves in the context of continuous professional development, follow innovations, use technology sufficiently, and communicate positively and effectively with people (Aytürk, 1999). For a successful school, the principal has to ensure school safety. Otherwise, it is deemed not to have fulfilled this role because healthy education cannot be done.

**Duties of the School Principal to Ensure Security**

The school exists to provide educational services to the community. In order to provide this service, it is necessary to be safe inside the school and to take precautions against the factors that threaten the school outside. The school principal has a key role in ensuring school safety. The principal of the school is the person who carries out both the maintenance and supervision of the educational practice effectively and competently for the functional operation of the school as an educational home in accordance with its purpose. It is determined who will work according to which rules, and who will follow which rules. The school principal supervises whether the rules communicated are complied with within the scope of responsibility. In addition, it communicates with students and parents and provides necessary information about school safety. It is among the duties of the school principal to direct the behavior of students and employees, which is one of the most important steps in ensuring safety in the school, in a way that creates a positive school climate. The school principal analyzes all risky situations in the school and makes a comprehensive plan and carries out studies to eliminate the dangers. The school principal should also constantly refresh his knowledge with trainings in order to gain knowledge in the field of occupational health and safety.

School management is the process of producing solutions to the problems that are experienced or may be experienced in the school. The school administration has many work items that have responsibilities in the school. School safety is the most important and leading of these jobs. It is not possible to talk about education without ensuring the security of the school. It is the responsibility of the school principal to provide a safe environment for students and school staff so that education can take place. The school principal can do this in cooperation with internal and external stakeholders (security forces, municipalities, mukhtars, and school parents' associations), especially teachers. Here, the experience, knowledge, and leadership of the school head play an important role. The above-mentioned stakeholders are also required to work on their duties sincerely. The correct identification of the problems and the factors causing the problems should be discussed and the right decisions should be taken and implemented at the point of solution (Payne et al., 2003).

The landscaping works of the school, the effort to improve the school in every aspect, the fact that the speeches of the school employees are respectful and loving, the individual differences are accepted as natural and not compared with others, the application of current learning approaches and teaching methods, contributing to the solution of people's problems, including the employees in the administrative decisions, providing opportunities for the socialization of the students, the ability of the staff, making plans by taking into account their thoughts and situations, creating programs by taking into account attitudes and judgments, giving seminars to students' families by teachers on various topics and realizing many subjects that we can count are the things that school administrators should do for a safe school climate (Çankaya, 2010).

**Safe School and School Safety**

School safety is a condition that must first exist in order to carry out education in a healthy way. When students and school staff do not feel safe, we cannot talk about the realization of education in

accordance with its purpose. School safety is very comprehensive. Even out-of-school situations can directly affect in-school safety. The district in which the school is located, the size of the number of students, the structural size of the school, the adequacy of the physical security measures in the school, and many other factors directly affect the school's security (Chen, 2008). If the number of students in the school and the structural size of the school are proportional, it is more manageable in terms of security. Schools take their inputs from their surroundings and deliver outputs to the environment. In other words, it affects the environment as well as the environment. Therefore, the school in a safe environment is positively affected by this situation. Conversely, a safe school climate has a positive impact on the environment. It is difficult to ensure school safety in schools where there is a constant circulation of students and teachers.

A safe school is an environment where students and teachers care about education, have success goals, easily carry out social activities, there is no fighting and noise, where the problems that arise are solved by reconciliation, and where respect and love prevail (Çelik, 2005: 88). Safe school is the environment where those who receive education at the school and the school staff find themselves comfortable and peaceful in every way (Dönmez, 2001). A safe school is a school where students and employees feel safer against dangers that may come from inside or outside the school (violence, substance abuse, crime, bullying, physical assault, banditry, sexual abuse) and where the highest level of protection measures are taken against all kinds of dangers within the school (Çalık, Kurt and Çalık, 2011). School security generally refers to a more limited security framework that refers to technological hardware systems (security cameras, etc.) to carry out the security of the school (Çankaya, 2010).

It should not be possible to refer to the concept of an unsafe environment with the words education and school. Naturally, there will be security risks in areas where people come together for many reasons. However, the administrations make a good analysis of the current situation before and during the training process, make plans to eliminate the identified risks, and work to eliminate these deficiencies. In other words, if there is an unsafe environment, necessary studies should be done to turn it into a safe environment (Işık, 2004). Safety is an important requirement for people. With psychological pressure, it can have negative effects on the vital activities of individuals. It affects the educational life of individuals psychologically and socially (Çetin, 2002).

**METHOD**
In this study, a situation determination study was carried out with the qualitative research method. Qualitative research method and case study were used in the study. The research was conducted on the opinions of 12 school principals working at each level of education in the Narman district of Erzurum province. A semi-structured form was used in which school principals could answer questions on the subject. As a result of the interview, the thoughts of the school principals who wrote their thoughts on the relevant form were interpreted with expert opinions and turned into findings. It is aimed to contribute to the relevant literature.

**Participants**
The universe of the research consists of school principals. The sample is of school principals working at all levels in Narman district of Erzurum province. Taking into account all the schools in the district, 4 school principals from primary schools, 4 from middle schools, and 4 from high schools were interviewed. Of the 12 participating school principals, 11 are male and only one is female. Their age ranges from 30 to 50 years.

**Data Collection Tools and Techniques**
In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. According to the purpose of the subject, 6 questions were prepared by the researcher to be directed to the school principals. The questions are intended to determine the concerns of school administrators about student safety at school. The questions are:

1. What responsibility do you feel in terms of student safety in your school?
2. Do you have enough information about all the measures that can be taken for student safety? What are your sources of information?
3. Do you think you have taken enough precautions regarding student safety in your school? Explain.
4. Despite the precautions you have taken, are you still worried that there is a shortcoming? What are these concerns?
5. When and in what situations do you experience the most security concerns?
6. Despite the precautions you have taken regarding your security, what reasons do you think may cause problems beyond your control?

**Analysis of Data**
The answers given by the people in the researcher sample group in the interview form were summarized without disturbing the meaning of the expression while preserving their thoughts. School principals who comply with the confidentiality principle are referred to as "Participants". The questions of the interview form, which is used to determine the concerns of school administrators about student safety at school, were evaluated by the experts as sufficient to determine the relevant situation. Thus, the validity and reliability level of the research was deemed sufficient.

**FINDINGS**
To the first question, 7 participants stated that they felt responsible for the creation of a safe environment in the school for the students, 3 participants stated that they acted by accepting that the students were entrusted to them, and 2 participants stated that it was important to ensure safety in boarding and transportation education. To the second question, 9 participants answered yes and 3 participants answered no. To the third question, 10 participants answered yes and 2 participants answered no. To the fourth question, 10 participants stated that they were worried about encountering unexpected situations despite the precautions they took, 2 participants stated that they took all kinds of precautions and were not worried. To the fifth question, 6 participants stated that they were worried about recess times, lunch breaks and game times, 3 participants stated that they were worried about student safety during the arrival and departure times of the students who came to the transportation training, 1 participant was worried when they were not at school, 1 participant always experienced security concerns, and 1 participant was not worried. To the sixth question, all participants answered dangerous situations caused by unpredictable student and parent behavior.

**DISCUSSION**
In order to ensure school safety, it is necessary to consider and evaluate the school as a whole. The school should be integrated with all aspects of life and should be made capable of providing quality education to students. It is the responsibility of the school administration to ensure student safety. Security in the school is not enough just by improving the physical conditions. It also needs to be made good in social and psychological aspects. In addition, parents, students and teachers need to contribute to a safe school climate. When evaluating the school as a whole in terms of security, it is necessary to make short and long-term plans and implement them in order to eliminate the identified problems. Naturally, these applications require a source of finance (Çalık, Kurt, and Çalık, 2011)

In recent years, as in developed countries, problems have increased in terms of school safety in our country. There are social reasons for this. For quality education, each school needs to take its measures. At the beginning of these measures, technological facilities can be utilized. Again, the communication of the school employees with the students and informing the families, making the purpose of the existence of the school felt to the stakeholders in various activities, and being in

cooperation with the stakeholders will contribute positively to increasing the security in the school (Taşar, 2019).

School principals have a responsibility to create a positive school climate in the school so that students receive a quality education in a safe school (Taymaz, 2003). Students must be safe and ensure that peaceful school environments are maintained. The necessity of achieving this can be attributed to three main reasons. Humanitarian, economic, and legal obligations (Stock, 1991 cited in Barhan, 2001).

The school needs to have security plans in place to ensure adequate student safety in schools. In these plans, the name of the school, the responsible persons and the duties assigned to them, the communication channel and speed, the readiness of the applications to be made, the readiness of the existing security equipment, the details of the evacuation plans should be (Dew, 1995).

## SUGGESTIONS

As it can be understood from the research, quality education is important for individuals in particular along with social necessity. The main place where education is given is the school. It is also important to ensure student safety before education at school. The principal of the school is the chief responsible and competent person in ensuring this security. The headmaster cannot be expected to tackle the security problem alone, which has a lot of space. For this, it needs legal, material, social, environmental, and cultural support. These needs need to be met and put into practice in an organized manner. Missing any of the listed support items will increase the school principal's concern to ensure student safety.

In order to create a safe environment in the school, physical deficiencies, if any, should be identified and reported by the occupational health and safety teams in cooperation with the school administration. Based on this report, a material discovery of the deficiencies should be made. If the deficiencies are to be made by the school concerned, the school should be provided with supervised financial resources, or the higher authorities themselves should correct these deficiencies. It is not enough just to identify the deficiencies and eliminate them.

Creating a safe school climate requires sincere efforts from stakeholders that are fit for purpose. We should act together in the implementation of the rules set. The fact that any person is not serious about the incident and behaves casually, and recklessly leads to security risks.

In addition to meeting the physical needs of the schools in terms of security, guidance teachers should be assigned to support the social and emotional development of the students and to provide them with healthy guidance. In particular, although not every school, its needs should be identified and if necessary, security guards should be assigned to schools.

Schools should focus on social activities that protect students from bad habits and behaviors. This can be achieved with the material and moral support of all stakeholders.

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