



# School Principals' Instructional Feedback to Teachers: Teachers' Views\*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover school administrators' principals' instructional feedback during their supervision tasks regarding classroom observation. The research was carried out with a qualitative research design and a semi-structured interview technique was administered to collect the data. The data were analyzed with content analysis technique. The participants were 23 public school teachers working in Istanbul, Adiyaman and Şanlıurfa provinces in Turkey in 2018-2019 school year. They were determined with purposive sampling technique. Results reveal that school principals show poor competency in supervision work and perform the classroom supervision task once a year as a necessity of the formal procedure. Comparing to educational supervisors, results show that school principals may be more useful because they know the teacher and know the general operation of the school. Results also demonstrate that teachers do not benefit from the feedback given by the school principals, because they are claimed to give general suggestions. It is therefore incumbent on administrators to learn how to supervise teachers to support schoolwide instructional improvement. School principals should recognize how their own position within the supervisory system influences the feedback they provide to teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

Instructional feedback is basic element to improve teachers and eventually the school system. Glickman (2002) puts that teacher supervision provides them reflections on their teaching practices. And as a result of the feedback given, their teaching practices could be improved. Similarly, Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) emphasized that feedback should help teachers make decisions about their instruction and pedagogical behaviors.

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Without suitable feedback, teachers cannot develop their teaching capacity (Feeney, 2007: 193).

Blase and Blasé (1999) claim that effective feedback focuses on teachers' classroom behaviors, express care, support. It may also provide praise, trust and respect. In instructional feedback, supervisor and teacher discuss teacher-student interactions, relationships as well as teachers' teaching practices. In this regard, instructional feedback- *if given correctly*- produces positive influences on both teachers' expertise field and professional development. On the other hand, those who supervise teachers should show a reflective teacher behavior. That means, they should reinforce strong instructional strategies, broaden teachers' innovative ideas, provide variety in instruction as well as managing student diversity, careful planning/preparation of lessons, and focusing better instructional facilities.

Instructional feedback can be given by only educational supervisors or school principals who have competency in supervision field. In this context, Stein and Nelson (2003) claim that school administrators should possess an understanding of the content areas they are supervising. In addition, they should know how teachers teach, and how students learn the content area they are learning. Within this frame, instructional feedback can improve teachers (Lochmiller, 2016).

School principals perform the role of supervision in some school systems (Oliva, Mathers, & Laine, 2009). They are important figures regarding supervising and evaluating teachers as they spend a lot of time with them, coach them, and organize school's instructional program (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Horng and Loeb (2010) underline that strong administrators are leaders who are "hands-on" and work with teachers in school processes.

Supervision of instruction is often considered a core instructional leadership behavior (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Instructional leadership is described as a set of leadership practices that school administrators take to improve teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2005). Instructional leaders establish a clear vision for the school, set high standards for

students and staff, supervise classroom instruction and a school's instructional program, manage resources, and cultivate relationships with parents and the community (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In this regard, according to Stein and Nelson (2003) administrators who have knowledge of subject matter can provide more effective instructional feedback. Leithwood and Louis (2012) also noted that the field's understanding of school administrators can influence their instructional leadership behaviors. All these mean that school principals are expected to understand the principals of quality instruction as well as have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to know that appropriate content is being delivered to all students" (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008:458). Feedback is not effective when the administrator does not share a similar conception of the subject they teach (Lochmiller, 2016).

### 1.1. The Importance of Principal Feedback

Instructional feedback is a strategy for monitoring teacher teaching and student learning in response to instruction and providing tactics to improve them (Oakes, Lane, Menzies, & Buckman, 2018). An administrator's ability to provide feedback to teachers about their instruction is a central component of their supervisory practice (Blase & Blase, 2003; Danielson, 2007; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Denner, Salzman, & Bangert, 2001; Kimball, 2002; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Stein & Nelson, 2003). In this sense, principals use five strategies. These strategies are;

- (a) giving suggestions,
- (b) giving feedback,
- (c) being a model,
- (d) using inquiry and
- (e) providing praise (Blase & Blase, 1999).

In order to provide all these, school principals should be “capable of providing constructive feedback to improve teaching (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008: 458). Indeed, as Marks and Printy (2003) underlined that school administrators are a “source of educational expertise” (p. 372). By visiting classrooms and making exchanges with teachers they obtain greater understanding various instructional approaches. Eventually, in order to empower teachers, school principals should have some degree of understanding about the instructional areas (Stein & Nelson, 2003; Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Sykes, 1990). However, it is a question of matter whether school principals provide effective instructional feedback to teachers. The findings that will be obtained from this research can help decision makers to develop the supervision and school system.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this research was to discover school principals’ instructional feedback they give to teachers during their supervision process regarding classroom observation. In realizing this aim, this study addresses the following research questions: Within the context of the feedback school administrators provide to teachers,

1. Who supervises you at school and how is the supervision process handled?
2. What kind of instructional feedback do they give? What does the feedback heavily focus on?
3. What are the differences between a supervisor’s instructional feedback and a principal’s instructional feedback? How does the principal’s feedback help you improve you professionally?
4. Who should supervise teachers?

## 2. Method

The current research employed a case study as a part of qualitative research design. These kinds of studies allow researchers to study on a case or more than a case, situation, social groups or systems which are tied to each other. These kinds of researches are also used to gain in-depth knowledge in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; McMillan, 2000, 45). This study approach suggests that participants should be regarded as individuals to create their own meanings in the social environment in which they live, the relations they have established, and they are re-creators of their social worlds with their own subjectivity (Balci, 2015; Kümbetoğlu, 2005; Punch, 2005).

### 2.1. Study Group

In this study, 23 public school teachers were interviewed. The participants are working in Istanbul (Kadıköy, Esenler, Bağcılar Avcılar townships), Adıyaman and Şanlıurfa provinces in Turkey in 2018-2019 school year. They were determined with purposive sampling technique which is more of a research purpose than methodological requirement. This technique allows researchers to select participants who are considered to be appropriate for the purpose of the research (Creswell, 2007; Marvasti, 2004). Moreover, qualitative researchers use this technique, because they do not work in large groups and do not intend to make generalizations. It enables researchers to choose rich situations/cases on an issue (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). It is considered that for phenomenological research a study group of 5 to 25 people is sufficient to conduct the study to maximize its variability (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1996).

Table 1: The participants' Demographics

Participants Code Names	Field Teaching	of School Type	Experience	City they work
Mehmet	Primary	Primary	8	Adıyaman
Tolga	Primary	Primary	6	Şanlıurfa
Canan	Primary	Primary	10	Adıyaman

Gülay	Maths	Elementary	4	İstanbul/Bağcılar
Meryem	Science	Elementary	7	Şanlıurfa
Özge	Turkish	Elementary	3	İstanbul/Bağcılar
Fatma Nur	Social sciences	Elementary	27	Adıyaman
Handan	English	Elementary	4	İstanbul/Kadıköy
Osman	Turkish	Elementary	25	İstanbul/Avcılar
Atilla	Maths	Elementary	9	Şanlıurfa
Sadık	Science	Elementary	3	İstanbul/Kadıköy
Aygen	English	Elementary	21	Adıyaman
Turan	History	Anatolian High School	4	Şanlıurfa
Ayhan	Maths	Anatolian High School	20	İstanbul/Kadıköy
Batuhan	Geography	Anatolian High School	5	Şanlıurfa
Elif	Literature	Anatolian High School	10	İstanbul/Bağcılar
Selman	Religious Classes	İmam Hatip High School	18	İstanbul/Avcılar
Savaş	Arabian	İmam Hatip High School	4	İstanbul/Bağcılar
Bekir	Maths	İmam Hatip High School	8	Adıyaman
Bedriye	History	İmam Hatip High School	14	İstanbul/Avcılar
Yusuf	Arabian	İmam Hatip Elementary school	8	İstanbul/Bağcılar
Sakine	Religious Classes	İmam Hatip Elementary school	2	Şanlıurfa
Aysel	Maths	İmam Hatip Elementary school	17	İstanbul/Bağcılar

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As presented in Table 1 above, teachers are between 26-49 years old. As for gender, while 11 were women and 12 were men. As far as their school type is considered, 3 of them work at primary school, 9 work at Anatolian High School, 4 İmam Hatip High School 3 work at İmam Hatip Elementary School. Regarding their experience, 8 teachers have 5 years or less experience, 8 of them have between 6-10 years and 7 of them between 11 years and more experience.

## *2.2. Data Collection and Analysis*

In this study, the data were obtained with a semi-structured interview technique. By employing such a technique, the respondents explain their ideas frankly about some certain topics (Bailey, 1994; DeMarrais, 2004; Kerkhof, 2006; Kümbetoğlu, 2005). For gathering the data, in the first place, the respondents were e-mailed to ask if they would like to join in this research process or not. In this manner, 23 teachers agreed to join the study voluntarily. The volunteer teachers were confirmed just after they were warranted safety of the data to be gathered from them. The participants were assured that their identification would be kept safe and would not be given anybody else. They were also promised that their names and their institution names would be kept in secret. After that, the interview days, time and place were determined. On that day, the participants were called on. After taking their allowance, the interviews were recorded. Each interview lasted nearly 25-30 mins.

After completing the interview, the data analysis process was commenced. The gathered data were analyzed with content analysis technique. This technique generally aims to analyze similar data on a particular subject and have comments on it (Mayring 2000). During this analysis process, first of all, the raw data were organized. That means that each interview record was reanalyzed several times by listening to recorded audiotape in order to provide the rightness of the data. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Glaser (1992) describe it as improvement of coding categories, mechanical sorting of the data, and analysis of the data within each category. In this process, every participant's interview was coded separately in accordance with their opinions. At the same time, new

emerging and repeated themes were categorized into three as category definition, exemplification, and codification regulation. Here, the answers of each question were disunited into meaningful categories. Then they were and coded. The separated codes were also compared with that of the researcher and the consistency was calculated (90%) (Miles & Huberman 1994). In the second place, the conceptualized statements were assembled. In the third place, it was purposed to avoid from repetition of the words. Finally, the determined results were expressed and provided relationships between each other. Establishing a cause-effect relationship among the existing parts was also aimed. The teachers' opinions were coded as T1, T2, T3, and T4...

### *2.3. Trustworthiness and Rigor*

In order to provide trustworthiness and rigor, some precautions were taken. First of all, the researcher here was in the role of facilitator and listener. In this process, the interviewer only asked questions and recorded the administrators' responds. They did not lead the participants. The interview questions were analyzed by five colleagues who were experts in qualitative researches in order to provide content validity. The questions were finalized after the experts' feedbacks and recommendations. Moreover, the teachers' hesitations about the confidentiality of the detailed answers were eliminated. Also, in order for participants not to be influenced by some power relations, the interviews were conducted outside school buildings.

In addition, in order to provide the validity and reliability of the research some further precautions were taken. In the first place, the interview form was finalized after a full research about the literature to ensure a good contextual framework. After interviews were scribed, each interview subscription was sent to the participants for member checking. In the second place, for increasing external validity of the research, the research design, participants, data collection, analysis and interpretation were described in a detailed way. In the third place, in order to provide internal reliability, all data were scribed having no interpretation. Moreover, the raw data and coded data have been preserved by the researcher and other researchers are welcomed to examine them.



## 2.4. Limitations

This study has some limitations. Firstly, in this study group the participant teachers were volunteers and they may not represent other teachers within other schools. For this reason, the conclusions drawn here can be limited this group of teachers. Therefore, while transferring these results to other teachers, it is necessary to be careful. In the second place, the data analysis and interpretations of the results reflect the researcher's perspective. Another researcher may infer differing results with same data sets (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2002; Koşar, 2018).

## 3. Results

In this part of the study, findings how school principals perform supervisory process and to what extent they provide instructional feedback to teachers are presented.

### 3.1. *Participants' Views on School Principals' Classroom Supervision Process*

The majority of the teachers who participated in the research evaluated that school administrators perform classroom supervision for the purpose of a legal procedure which is a part of their administrative responsibility.

For this purpose, teachers stated that during the classroom supervision process most school principals check legal documents, complete an evaluation form and sign the class notebook as a result of classroom supervision. It was also determined that some school principals give general suggestions about the things teachers should pay attention during the lessons without visiting classrooms. Moreover, some principals give directions during the school board meetings without going to classrooms and even send messages through mobile phones. In this regard, *Mehmet stated, "They do not supervise the lessons in our school. Our school principal generally underlines some deficiencies during one-to-one meetings and board meetings. Sometimes he sends reports*

*through whatsapp...” School principals sometimes give information about how lessons should be taught in general and course supervision process is formal and take less than one hour. Yusuf claimed, “...our principal usually comes an hour before the class with an evaluation form in his hand. He fills in the form, checks the lesson plan and the class book and signs the class notebook while I lecture”.*

In this regard, Selman stated, “...instead of focusing on our lecture, our school principal looks at the documents and doesn't care about the course. In fact, school administrators actually visit the classroom in order to carry out a formal procedure.” Tolga underlined, “... our principal's knowledge about the teaching processes is not up to date. I have created a classroom layout suitable for cooperative learning, but he asked me to change the new order to the classical sitting order. He did not want the collaborative order ...” Therefore, it can be said that school principals are not flexible about classroom design and seating arrangement for implementing contemporary teaching methods. I do not think they are even aware of the limitations of classical seating order. Ayhan emphasized, “...Our school principal does not ask students any questions during the classroom supervision. This shows that they come without making any preparation for the supervision process.” Savaş put, “...My school principal marks an evaluation form and makes suggestions on issues that he thinks are incomplete” When asked what suggestions he /she makes he says it would be good for me to use the smart board more often.”

The majority of the participant teachers stated that the classroom supervision process lasts at most one hour or less. In this manner, Gülay noted, “...my school principal supervises my classroom once a year. He watches the course for only 30 minutes and leaves without giving any feedback.” It can be said that course supervision is not planned and performed regularly and in a discipline.

In addition, the participant teachers state that the school principal did not supervise each teacher's course and that the teachers, who generally have less than 5 years of professional seniority, and some senior teachers assigned to our school perform the course supervision. Atilla uttered “...I think they supervise teachers who are

*newly appointed* once or twice in order to help them lecturing, communication skills and professional attitudes ...”Aygen claimed, “...I think our school principal aims to determine whether the newly arrived teachers need in-service training in terms of lecture skills, communication or teaching methods...” They may have a thought of supervising the lessons of newly appointed teachers to make them more professional ones.

### *3.2. Participants’ Views on How School Administrators Provide Feedback After Lesson Supervision*

Almost all of the participants stated that the school administrators were inadequate in giving feedback after the classroom supervision process. The participants claim that they repeat the things that are known. In fact, teachers think that school administrators' knowledge of supervision is not sufficient to solve the problems related to the teaching process. Similarly, some participants state that their school principals' knowledge of classroom management, teaching methods, curriculum, lesson plans, determination of achievements, instructional technologies, classroom discipline and effective communication are not up-to-date because of their long years of administration. They do not give them a new vision. In this context, Batuhan said, “...*my school principal advises me to care about entrance and exit times. He also advises me to tailor the course according to students’ level. When I ask him how to do it, he could not answer properly.*”

Hence, it is important to explain clearly what a teacher wants to know. Only this can contribute to teachers to develop professionally. They give general suggestions to teachers during classroom supervision. Canan says “*At the end of the supervision process, my school principal suggests that I work in harmony with the other teachers and cooperate with them*”.

This may mean that school principals have poor competency in supervision process. In fact, it is a part of their instructional leadership roles. The instructional leadership role of the school administrator is related to the coordination of the group

of teachers and branch teachers. Indeed, with the supervision process, school principals should give feedback on how to draw the attention of the students before and during the lesson, explain the purpose of the course, introduce to the lesson using the body language and voice tone, and be able to ask questions, use technology and assess the course and assignments.

### *3.3. Participants' Views on the Differences Between Educational Supervisor's and School Principal's Feedback*

The majority of the participant teachers state that the feedback given by education supervisors and school principals did not differ much in terms of content. *They noted that they benefit neither both education supervisors and school principals' feedback. In this regard, Sadık expressed, "...there is a lack of feedback on course supervision. I have not been able to receive feedback from my school principal or supervisor to contribute to my professional development." On the other hand, teachers whose professional seniority was less than 5 years state that they benefit from the both supervisory feedback. When asked these benefits, Sakine said, "... educational supervisor contributed too much by suggesting resources for teaching methods, preparing lesson plans and writing target behaviors..." Similarly, Özge said "...when my school principal from the same branch first supervised my course, she offered resources for me to read and had suggestions on how to prepare course target behaviors. It was good."*

Moreover, most participants underlined, "Although some students are quiet and silent, they show an artificial effort during the course supervision in order to help me. In this manner, Sadık said,"... *the supervision does not contribute to my professional development. Rather, it causes more stress and creates anxiety. I cannot say that I have benefited from the recommendations of both groups". Bedriye emphasized, "...education inspectors once supervised my lesson. It was an inspection that went no further than a paperwork control. It was not feedback. To me, supervision should be conducted by an independent organization". Handan imported, "Although I was an English teacher, the inspector was from another branch. He checked my class, filled out*

the documents he brought, and left the class after thanking me. He did not say anything good or bad.” *Elif* phrases, “*Educational supervisors cannot go beyond the paperwork control, but school principals can develop concrete proposals in accordance with the conditions of the school. It can be said that when supervised by someone inside the school, it becomes more valid in terms of concrete and applicability of the proposals.* Despite all these negative sides, it can be concluded that teachers evaluate the supervision process as a development method. As seen, when compared with educational supervisors, although they have poor competency, it can be said that some school principals provide more accurate and useful feedback.

### 3.4. *Teachers’ Views on Who will take part in the lesson supervision*

Currently, classroom supervision is carried out by school principals. In fact, it is assumed that the performance of teachers in increasing students' achievement in educational processes will increase at the end of the supervisory process. However, it can be said that school principals’ supervision it is not enough and even this may cause some negative results. In this regard, Aygen said, “*Educational supervisors’ course supervision deteriorates the natural atmosphere in the classroom. Therefore, supervision can be done by people in the same positions instead of the supervisor. It is peer observation.*” Similarly, Sadık underlined, “*my students realized the situation and made an unnatural effort to show me more successful. For this reason, I think peer observation can be better.*” Meryem also said, “*I believe that the supervision of expert colleagues in the field will provide more benefits*” Turan emphasized, “*We share information with our colleagues, develop common materials and use them in class. Therefore, it would be more beneficial to turn this process into course supervision.*”

However, it can be said that if poorly-organized, peer observation may lead to rivalry among teachers. Giving importance to the development of corporate culture and improving the health of the organization in schools, empowerment of the head of the department and determination of the selection criteria may strengthen the peer review.

Some teachers state that it is not necessary to conduct a course supervision and teacher achievement can be evaluated according to different outcomes.

#### **4. Discussion and Recommendations**

The current study was carried out discover school principals' instructional feedback during their supervision tasks. To this end, some results were obtained. One of the result reveals that school principals perform the classroom supervision task once a year as a necessity of the formal procedure. It can be said that during the supervisory visits, they show poor competency in supervision work. In this regard, they only sign the class notebook, check documents and complete the supervision assessment form. This result is consistent with the findings Kosar and Buran (2019) obtained. They found that the supervision tasks are conducted as a formal procedure. Similarly, Ucar (2012), Ergün and Memişoğlu (2018), Yeşil and Kış (2015), Ergen and Eşiyok (2017) and Koşar and Buran (2019) disclosed that during their supervisory visits, school principals focus on plans, formal documents, files and some other formal requirements. As a result of these findings, it can be said that teachers do not make much use of formal supervision, and sometimes this process causes anxiety and stress in teachers. It also affects students' classroom behaviors negatively and causes stress. It is not enough for school administrators to review only legal documents and complete evaluation forms during the course supervision. As Zhang (2003) claimed during the classroom observations principals should not rely solely on checklists.

Comparing to educational supervisors, results show that school principals may be more useful because they know the teacher and know the general operation of the school. This finding is similar to the results of the study conducted by Oğuz, Yılmaz and Taşdan (2007). In that study, it was concluded that school principals have more democratic beliefs than educational supervisors, and therefore, it would be more accurate for school principals to conduct classroom supervision.

Results also demonstrate that teachers do not benefit from the feedback given by the school principals at the end of the lesson supervision, because they are claimed to give

general suggestions. In fact, they expect more effective feedback from principals or supervisors to develop themselves. They claim that as principals have poor supervisory competency, they do not contribute to teachers' professional development. This result is consistent with the findings that Koşar and Buran (2019) obtained. In their study, they found that school principals do not contribute much to teachers' professional development. School principals face a problem of competence regarding supervisory process. Also, their involvement in supervising process causes anxiety and stress on teachers and students. Therefore, they argue that peer observation may be more beneficial. This finding is consistent with the results Bozak, Yıldırım and Demirtaş (2011) found. They found that peer observation has positive effects on the professional development of teachers. Also Ergen and Eşiyok (2017) discovered that teachers' group leaders should be a part of supervising system. As a result of these findings, following suggestions were developed;

- As school principals have poor supervisory competency, school principals should be trained in supervising process both theoretically and practically especially in time management, teaching methods and techniques, technology literacy, effective communication skills, democracy in the classroom, classroom discipline and rule development.
- Based on the assumption that conducting course supervision by school principals leads to some limitations in the supervision, it can be suggested that school health plan should be developed, teachers group leaders should be included in the course supervision process.
- School principals should be appointed according to their competency in administration and supervision.

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