

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

School libraries through the eyes of primary school administrators: current status, functions and prospects ¹

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ABSTRACT

This study, which aims to determine the views of primary school administrators on school libraries, was conducted in basic qualitative research design, one of the qualitative research methods. Answers to the following questions were sought in the research: What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the staff, equipment and space features of libraries in their schools? What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the contribution of school libraries to students? What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the purposes of using school libraries by students? What are the opinions of primary school administrators about increasing the effectiveness of school libraries? The data of the study were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. The study group consisted of 12 school administrators. According to the results of the study, it was found that school administrators think that school libraries are adequate in terms of space, equipment and content, and that the most important deficiencies are the lack of library staff and the lack of independent workspaces. In addition, primary school administrators stated that the most important contribution of school libraries is that they provide students with reading habits and desired social skills and behaviors.

Keywords: Library, School Library, School Administrators.

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INTRODUCTION

Personal characteristics of the individual, family, environment, teachers and school, media, quality of books and libraries are the main factors affecting the development of reading culture, which is an extremely important quality today. The role of school libraries in the development of reading culture is undeniable (O'Connell et al., 2015). School libraries are the most indispensable element of a school because they have a wide variety of rich reading resources, offer an ergonomic space, and are accessible to students, which positively affects interest in reading and motivation. When the literature on school libraries was reviewed, the following definitions were found:

Alpay (1989) defines school libraries as an integral part of education that helps children acquire the habit of reading. School libraries were defined by Cevizbaş (2003) as an in-school facility organized according to the School Libraries Regulation and Önal (1985) as an important element that supports educational activities.

The school library is the most important part of the school. It would be wrong to call a school a school without a library. Beyond being one of the structural units of the school, school libraries have the potential to contribute to students' knowledge, to raise awareness about the skills of organizing and managing knowledge (Hannesdottir, 1995), and to provide a frame of reference for the school to become a learning community (Sharma & Tripathi, 2022). It has many different functions, such as contributing to social justice by providing easy access to the resources needed for teaching (Silbert & Bisto, 2015), enabling cultural transmission and integration (Salcedo & Alves, 2014), and providing an environment where children can gain emotional sharing and socialization skills that they cannot gain in rigidly planned classroom activities. Although innovative learning needs have emerged with the changing understanding of education, students still need traditional strategies such as reading and spending time in the library, and the school library has a very important function to meet these needs (Loh et al., 2019). In the study by İleri (2017), it is emphasized that more than half of the houses in Turkey have less than 25 books, and the number of school libraries with rich content is also very low, and that there is a significant relationship between the number of books at home and at school and student achievement in international education assessment exams. Therefore, a school without a library is incomplete and its contribution to the development of students' academic skills is very limited (Lonsdale, 2003).

In today's society, the functions of educational institutions and the expectations of society from schools have changed considerably compared to the past. To complement the new functions and goals that schools must fulfill, school libraries must undergo certain changes (Azura Mokhtar & Majid, 2005). In terms of the scope and planning of the needed change, the views of school administrators, as the people who should lead the change in the school ecosystem, on libraries, one of the most basic and most important structural elements of primary schools, are of course very important. On the other hand, one of the most important variables in the existence of primary school libraries, their rich reading resources and their efficient use by students is the opinions and attitudes of school administrators. For this reason, it is important to examine the views of school administrators on school libraries.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the views of primary school administrators on school libraries. The following questions were sought to be answered in the research:

- What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the staff, equipment and space features of libraries in

their schools?

- What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the contribution of school libraries to students?
- What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the purposes of using school libraries by students?
- What are the opinions of primary school administrators about increasing the effectiveness of school libraries?

METHOD

Research Design

This study reveals the views of primary school administrators on school libraries. For this reason, a basic qualitative research design was used in the study. The aim of basic qualitative research is to focus on how individuals make sense of the reality in the social world. Meaning is created, but it is not discovered. In other words, it reveals how people perceive their lives and experiences. In basic qualitative research, data are presented through observation, interview, and document analysis. In data analysis, repetitive patterns are aimed to be revealed (Merriam, 2015).

Participants

The study group of the research consists of 12 primary school administrators who were determined on a voluntary basis. Six of them work as school principals and six of them work as assistant principals. While determining the study group of the research, primarily schools with school libraries were determined. Interviews were started with the school administrators who agreed to participate in the research, according to the easy accessibility among the pool of participants created. The data collection process was stopped after 12 participants were interviewed, assuming that data saturation was reached. Details of the working group are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

	Gender	Working years	Tenure at school	Title	Location of the school
Y1	M	13	9	Principal	Village
Y2	F	27	14	Principal	Town
Y3	M	22	8	Principal	Town
Y4	M	17	2	Principal	Village
Y5	F	21	9	Vice Principal	Village
Y6	F	16	3	Vice Principal	Village
Y7	M	28	8	Principal	Village
Y8	M	24	6	Principal	Town
Y9	M	15	8	Vice Principal	Town
Y10	M	32	9	Principal	Town
Y11	M	19	7	Vice Principal	City Center
Y12	M	30	9	Principal	City Center

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data of the study were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers, the "Form for Determining the Views of Primary School Administrators on School Libraries" (Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the school administrators who agreed to be participants, and the interviews took between 15-25 minutes to complete. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and then transcribed and digitized in writing. The raw data were coded separately by the researchers using the content analysis method and classified in the context of the research questions. In addition, the data analysis process and the codes, categories and themes that emerged as a result of the analysis were shared with an academican working in the field of reading education and their opinions were taken. In order to determine the inter-coder agreement, which is a frequently used method to ensure reliability in qualitative research, the codes and classifications created by the researchers were compared after the coding process carried out separately, and a 95% agreement value was reached using the formula $[(\text{Agreement}) / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})]$. This rate indicates a very high level of coder agreement for a qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These processes, operated in the data analysis process, also improved the credibility and transferability properties of the study.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are given in the order of the sub-problems.

Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

The findings obtained for the first sub-problem of the study, "What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the staff, equipment and space features of the libraries in their schools?" are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions of Primary School Administrators About the Personnel, Equipment and Space Features of Their School Libraries

Category	Sub-Category	Participant	Quotes
Staff	Absence of staff	Y1,Y2,Y3,Y4,Y5,Y6,Y7,Y8,Y9,Y10, Y11,Y12	Y1: " There is no staff. Our Librarian Club teacher and students take care of the library"
	Noise Pollution	Y2,Y11	Y2: "Our library was built at the end of the corridor just because there was not enough space. That's why the noise is so much"
Place	Easily Accessible	Y1, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y7, Y8, Y10, Y11, Y12	Y3: "Our library is in a good location"
	Having lighting, ventilation and heating system	Y1, Y3, , Y5, Y7, Y8, Y10, Y11, Y12	Y4: " Our library has no lighting, heating or ventilation problems"
	Having sufficient equipment	Y1,Y2,Y3,Y4,Y5,Y6,Y7,Y8,Y9,Y10, Y11,Y12	-
Equipment	Having enough books	Y1,Y2,Y3,Y4,Y5,Y6,Y7,Y8,Y9,Y10, Y11,12	Y5: "We have 1454 books. I think it's sufficient in terms of content"

When Table 2, which includes the opinions of primary school administrators about the staff, equipment and space features of the libraries in their schools, is analyzed; in the staff category, there is one sub-category named "Lack of staff (n=12)"; In the space category, there were three subcategories: "Noise pollution (n=2)", "Easy accessibility (n=9)", "Lighting, ventilation and heating system (n=8)"; and in the equipment category, there were two subcategories: "Adequate equipment (n=12)" and "Adequate number of books (n=12)".

Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

The findings obtained for the second sub-problem of the study, "What are the opinions of primary school administrators about the contribution of school libraries to students?" are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Primary School Administrators' Views on the Contribution of School Libraries to Students

Category	Participant	Quotes
Developing the habit of reading	Y3,Y5,Y7,Y8,Y9,Y10,Y11,Y12	Y9: " Developing the habit of reading, taking responsibility and developing positive behaviors such as not disturbing others and obeying the rules "
Gaining a research discipline	Y2,Y11	Y2: " I think it brings the discipline of research. It creates a discipline because it has a time interval. "
Developing a sense of responsibility	Y3,Y9	Y3: " Students gain the habit of reading. It also brings responsibility for borrowing and lending. "
Positive behavior development	Y1,Y4,Y6,Y7,Y9	Y7: " I think it got into the habit of reading. I think that he has developed a positive behavior towards being respectful with his other friends. "
Supporting educational programs	Y10	Y10: " It enables the development of reading, research and thinking. It allows students to access information easily. Increases success as it supports the education program "
Supporting the acquisition of 21st century skills	Y11	Y11: " It supports personal development by gaining the habit of reading. Develops a positive interest and attitude towards reading. Supports individuals with 21st Century skills "
Developing responsibility for homework	Y1	Y1: " When they have research assignments, they do their homework. I think it keeps you away from the internet, from the tablet, from the phone partially. "

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that primary school administrators' opinions on the contribution of school libraries to students are concentrated in 7 sub-categories: "Gaining reading habits (n=8)", "Gaining research discipline (n=2)", "Developing a sense of responsibility (n=2)", "Developing positive behaviors (n=5)", "Supporting education programs (n=1)", "Supporting the acquisition of 21st century skills (n=11)", "Developing responsibility for homework (n=1)"

Findings Related to the Third Sub-Problem

The findings obtained for the third sub-problem of the study, "What are the opinions of primary school administrators on the purposes of students' use of school libraries?" are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Opinions of primary school administrators on the purpose and use of school libraries by students

Category	Sub-Category	Participant	Quotes
Purposes of Use	borrow a book	Y1,Y3,Y7,Y8, Y10, Y11; Y12	Y3 : “ Generally, our 3rd and 4th grade students are used to borrow books. Not used very often ”
	do homework	Y1	Y1: “They do their homework when they have research assignments”
	research	Y2	Y2: “ Used mostly for research and not often ”.
Issues Preventing Their Use	existence of class libraries	Y4, Y6	Y4: “ The library is not used frequently because there are too many books in the classroom libraries. In addition, since there is no study room, it is only used for borrowing books.”
	lack of visual and auditory devices	Y5	Y5: “ I think it does not attract much attention because there are no visual and auditory devices. There is no separate study room”

When Table 4 is examined, the categories of "Purposes of Use" and "Issues Preventing Students from Using" were found regarding the opinions of primary school administrators on the purposes and usage status of school libraries by students. In the category of "Purposes of Use", "Borrowing books (n=7)", "Doing homework (n=1)", "Doing research

(n=1)"; in the category of "Obstacles to Use", "Existence of classroom libraries (n=2)", "Lack of audio-visual devices (n=1)"

Findings Related to the Fourth Sub-Problem

The findings obtained for the fourth sub-problem of the study, "What are the opinions of primary school administrators on increasing the effectiveness of school libraries?" are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Opinions of primary school administrators on the issues that school libraries need to be improved

Category	Participant	Quotes
Must have staff	Y1,Y2,Y3,Y4,Y7,Y11	Y2: "There should be a staff, there should be enough space, sufficient equipment and hardware materials that can be used in common"
There should be a separate study area within the library space.	Y1, Y2, Y4, Y7, Y8, Y9	Y1: "There must be a book system, a separate study room and staff. There should be individual desks for each student, not a common desk"
Barcode system should be introduced	Y4, Y5,Y6,Y8, Y9	Y9: "Barcode system should be developed. In addition, a working area should be created and there should be a staff"
Teachers should be trained on the use of the library	Y10, Y12	Y10: "Teachers should be trained on this subject, students should be encouraged more and libraries should become more interesting"
It should be supported with visual material.	Y5	Y5: "It should be supported with visual, moving materials and made interesting, a staff member and a barcode system should be introduced"

When Table 5 is examined, five sub-categories were reached when the opinions of primary school administrators on the issues that school libraries need to be developed were taken into consideration. These categories are as follows: "There should be staff on duty (n=6)", "There should be a separate working area in the library space (n=6)" "Barcode system should be introduced (n=5)", "Teachers should be trained on library use (n=3)", "It should be supported with visual materials (n=1)"

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the results obtained from the first research question, one of the most striking ones is the views on the lack of school library staff. All of the school administrators emphasized that this is an important deficiency. When approached from a realistic and efficiency-based perspective in today's conditions, it is obvious that it is not possible to

allocate a staff member to each school library. Instead, a school library management mechanism consisting of vice principals, teachers, and students is thought to be more functional under current conditions.

According to the findings, all of the administrators stated that the school library is adequate in terms of noise pollution, easy accessibility, lighting, ventilation, and heating systems, and in terms of equipment category variables such as tools/equipment and number of books. However, as a result of the examination of the libraries in the schools where the participants worked by the researchers, it was found that the participant opinions and researcher observations did not overlap in terms of spatial competencies. In other words, although school administrators think that the spatial and equipment qualities of school libraries are adequate, it was determined during the researcher observations that they are far from international standards in this regard. The reason for this contradiction is thought to be the insufficient level of knowledge and awareness of school administrators on this issue. McAfee Hopkins (1995) emphasizes that school administrators' competence and awareness of school libraries are very important for the purposes and functions of the school and the school library.

The majority of administrators think that school libraries contribute to students' reading habits. Some of them also stated that school libraries provide students with positive social behaviors. In addition, school administrators also mentioned the contributions of school libraries such as research discipline, sense of responsibility, 21st century skills, homework responsibility, and supporting education programs. Compared to the results in the literature on the contribution of school libraries to students (Çakmakkaya, 2017; Douglas, 1961; Duran & Ertan Özen, 2018; Neilen & Bus, 2015; Önal, 2015), it is seen that the contributions highlighted in the research are quite limited. This can be explained by both the inadequate spatial and equipment of libraries and the fact that the phenomenon of libraries is associated only with reading books and studying, and the low level of awareness of their use in other possible educational and instructional activities.

In the findings related to the third research question, the only statement that stands out as the purpose of use of school libraries by students is the function of borrowing books. Of course, this should be the most important function of a library. However, as mentioned under the heading of contribution to students, it is not a correct approach to limit the use of school libraries only to borrowing books. It should be a structural component where individual and group work is done, research literacy and skills are developed, teachers and students engage in reading and writing activities together, and social and educational activities such as author-reader meetings, critical and deliberative reading activities are carried out. In a study conducted in the international literature on the purposes of students' use of libraries, it was concluded that libraries are mostly used by students for studying, researching and collaborative work, while borrowing and reading functions are very low (Loh et al. 2021).

The existence of classroom libraries and the inadequacy of libraries in terms of audio-visual and interactive equipment and content were emphasized as factors limiting library use.

As for the areas of improvement that school administrators consider important for making school libraries functional, effective and efficient, the necessity of assigning full-time library staff, the necessity of having independent study areas in the library that will allow individual and group work, and the necessity of using a barcode system for inventory tracking come to the fore. In addition to these, increasing teachers' professional competencies for the effective use of the school library and supporting the library equipment and content with digital, audio-visual and audiovisual materials were also mentioned as topics that need to be improved.

In the light of the results obtained within the scope of the research, standards with a legal basis regarding the structural characteristics and inventory of school libraries should be developed throughout our country. Raising awareness among school administrators and teachers about these standards to be developed is as essential as the establishment of standards. In addition to these suggestions for practitioners, it is recommended that future research studies be conducted on the relationship between school libraries and issues such as school climate, teaching quality, equality of opportunity in education, and students' life skills.

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