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Comparison of the school principal training and appointment processes in China, Singapore and Türkiye

Çin, Singapur ve Türkiye'de okul müdürü yetiştirme ve atama süreçlerinin karşılaştırılması

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Abstract

School principals play a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness and success of national education systems. The rapid transformations within the field of education have profoundly reshaped the roles and competencies expected of school leaders. In this regard, the preparation and appointment of qualified principals capable of addressing evolving educational demands are considered essential. This study aims to comparatively examine the training and appointment processes of school principals in China (Shanghai) and Singapore that they have consistently achieved high scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluate these practices in relation to the current situation in Türkiye. Employing a comparative survey model within the scope of qualitative research, the study utilized document analysis to examine relevant academic literature in the selected countries. The comparative analysis revealed that while China (Shanghai) and Singapore offer systematic and ongoing in-service training for schools, Türkiye lacks a consistent and structured approach in this area. Furthermore, the pre-service training and leadership development practices in China and Singapore emphasize practical experience, mentoring, and application-based learning. Based on these findings, the study offers recommendations to enhance the processes of selection, training, and appointment of school principals in Türkiye.

Keywords: PISA, Education, Management, School principal, Appointment

Öz

Okul müdürleri, ulusal eğitim sistemlerinin etkinliği ve başarısının sağlanmasında kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Eğitim alanında meydana gelen hızlı dönüşümler ise okul müdürlerinden beklenen bu rolleri ve yeterlilikleri temelden değiştirmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, değişen eğitim taleplerine yanıt verebilecek nitelikli okul müdürlerinin yetiştirilmesi ve atanması temel bir gereklilik olarak görülmektedir. Bu gerekliliği karşılamak üzere, uluslararası değerlendirmelerde yüksek başarı gösteren ülkelerin uygulamalarının incelenmesinin faydalı olacağı kabul edilmektedir. Bu çalışma, Uluslararası Öğrenci Değerlendirme Programı (PISA) sonuçlarında sürekli olarak yüksek puanlar alan Çin (Şanghay) ve Singapur'daki okul yöneticilerinin yetiştirilme ve atanma süreçlerini karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemeyi ve bu uygulamaları Türkiye'deki mevcut durumla değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel araştırma kapsamında karşılaştırmalı tarama modeli kullanılan çalışmada, ilgili akademik literatür doküman analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Karşılaştırmalı analiz sonucunda, Çin (Şanghay) ve Singapur'un okul yöneticilerine yönelik sistematik ve sürekli hizmet içi eğitim sunduğu, buna karşın Türkiye'de bu alanda tutarlı ve yapılandırılmış bir yaklaşımın bulunmadığı ortaya konmuştur. Ayrıca, Çin ve Singapur'daki hizmet öncesi eğitim ve liderlik geliştirme uygulamalarının, uygulamalı deneyim, mentorluk ve pratik temelli öğrenmeye dayandığı görülmüştür. Çalışmanın bulgularına dayanarak, Türkiye'deki okul yöneticilerinin seçimi, yetiştirilmesi ve atanmasına ilişkin süreçlerin geliştirilmesine yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: PISA, Eğitim, Yönetim, Okul müdürü, Atama

Introduction

A country's education system plays a fundamental role not only in shaping individuals but also in determining the future of society. Schools, which represent the most functional institutional structures where educational activities are carried out in a planned and systematic manner (Açıkalın, 1998), include three key elements that influence success: s, teachers, and students (Çelik, 2002; Yılmaz, 2007). Among these, school principals occupy a central position, as their role in managing the institution allows them to directly influence both the other two elements and the overall school environment.

The rapid transformations in the field of education have fundamentally changed the roles and competencies expected of school principals. Traditionally, the principalship was mainly defined by administrative tasks such as supervision, planning, and document management. Today, however, this role also encompasses more complex functions such as leadership, vision development, human resource management, and change management (Fullan, 2001). These changes have increased expectations for school leadership and necessitated a redefinition of the qualifications required for those appointed to the role. As societal structures evolve and digitalization progresses, the responsibilities of school principals have significantly expanded. Today, principals are expected not only to improve academic achievement (Day et al., 2001; Spillane, 2006), but also to transform schools into learning communities, promote continuous professional development among teachers, shape school culture, encourage stakeholder participation, and demonstrate resilience in managing crises.

Therefore, in modern education systems, the processes of training and appointing school principals are not solely based on administrative competencies; leadership capacity, decision-making skills, and the ability to engage with the broader community have gained importance. This indicates that principalship has evolved into a multidimensional area of expertise that goes beyond technical knowledge and requires strong instructional leadership skills (Bush, 2008). However, it is emphasized that such leadership cannot emerge randomly; rather, the principalship role must be supported through systematically designed training programs and merit-based appointment mechanisms (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Hallinger, 2011). Since the core of school principalship is based on the management function, which is essentially a problem-solving process (Bedoyere, 1995), an effective school is expected to approach problems in a systematic and solution-oriented manner. However, in today's rapidly changing educational environments, relying solely on experience is no longer sufficient, and there is an increasing need for a research-based leadership approach. Since the principalship also includes the mission of guiding institutional development and creating environments that ensure the active participation of all stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), school principals must establish a meaningful network of interaction among teachers, students, and parents by creating a school culture aligned with the core values of education. It is essential for school principals to collaborate with teachers, support their professional development, guide curriculum implementation, and monitor instructional processes while providing feedback—functions that are critical to the operation and success of schools (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Bozkurt & Aslanargun, 2015; Sandıkçı & Kaçmaz, 2023). In today's context, school principals are expected not only to engage with internal stakeholders but also to build strong relationships with external stakeholders (Sergiovanni, 1992). This strengthens the school's social capital and supports its holistic development.

As a result of all these considerations, the importance of school principals within the education system can be explained through their leadership influence, which directly and indirectly affects the overall functioning of the school (Leithwood et al., 2004). Due to their significance in education, recent years have seen a growing body of literature focusing on international practices regarding the training and selection of school principals, along with

comparative research examining the outcomes of these practices (Ávalos & Assael, 2018; Özdemir & Sezgin, 2019; Güneş & Ulutaş, 2023).

One of the most widely used tools for the international comparison of education systems is PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). Developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this assessment not only measures the mathematics, science, and reading skills of 15-year-old students but also analyzes their ability to apply knowledge in real-life contexts (Baltacı, 2017). The aim of PISA is to promote standardization and improvement in educational methods by comparing student performance across participating countries (OECD, 2012).

Türkiye has been participating in PISA assessments since 2003. According to the 2022 results, Türkiye ranked 39th in mathematics, 34th in science, and 36th in reading among 81 countries. Among the 37 OECD member countries, Türkiye ranked 32nd. Although there have been some improvements compared to 2018, Türkiye still remains below the OECD average (pisa.meb.gov.tr). In contrast, countries such as China (Shanghai) and Singapore consistently rank among the top-performing nations in all subject areas. The success of these countries has increased interest in the training, appointment, and leadership processes of school s. Therefore, this study presents a comparative analysis of the training and appointment processes of school principals in China (Shanghai) and Singapore—two countries that rank highly in PISA results—and compares these practices with the current situation in Türkiye, aiming to identify areas for improvement.

Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to reveal the processes related to the training and appointment of school administrators in China (Shanghai) and Singapore, which are generally at the forefront of country-based rankings in PISA applications, together with the practices related to the training and appointment of school administrators in Türkiye; and to compare the processes related to the training and appointment of school administrators in China (Shanghai) and Singapore with Türkiye.

Problem Statement

In line with the purpose of this study, the central research problem has been identified as follows: "What are the similarities and differences between China (Shanghai), Singapore, and Türkiye in terms of school administrator training and appointment processes?"

This problem statement aims to explore how school administrators are selected and trained in countries that demonstrate strong performance in international educational assessments, and how these practices compare with those in Türkiye. Through a comparative approach, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform improvements in educational leadership practices.

To address this main research problem, the study is guided by the following sub-questions:

- i. What is the process of selection and training of school administrators in China (Shanghai)?
- ii. What is the process of selection and training of school administrators in Singapore?
- iii. What is the process of selection and training of school administrators in the Turkish education system?
- iv. What are the similarities and differences between China (Shanghai), Singapore, and Türkiye regarding school administrator training and appointment processes?

Importance of Research

When the related literature is examined, there are studies examining the achievements of Shanghai (Baltacı, 2017; Tanrısevdi & Kırıl, 2018; Tanrısevdi & Kırıl, 2018; Yenen, Kartal, & Bulut, 2018) and Singapore (Hatipoğlu & Ordu, 2018; Öztürk & Akkuş, 2020), which are generally ranked first in PISA, and comparing them with Türkiye. In addition, studies examining the selection of school administrators in Türkiye (Akın, 2012; Cemaloğlu, 2005; Receptoğlu & Kılınç, 2014) have also been conducted. However, there is no other study in the literature that compares the school administrator selection and appointment systems of China (Shanghai) and Singapore with Türkiye. In this study, the processes of selection and training of school administrators in these countries, which are at the forefront in PISA, and Türkiye were compared and explained, and the similarities and differences in the process of training and selection of school administrators were tried to be revealed. Thus, it is thought that the research will provide information about the school administrator training and placement process in these countries, which are attributed to be successful, and make inferences for education stakeholders in Türkiye, especially education policy makers and administrators.

Limitations of the Research

Limitations of the research are as follows:

- i. The study is limited to the comparison of Shanghai and Singapore with Türkiye
- ii. The comparison in the study is limited to the school administrator training and selection processes of the countries.
- iii. The study is limited to the available documents in the literature on the subject.

Method

Research Model

The research was conducted in accordance with the holistic multiple case study design from the qualitative research method, which is defined as the process of examining perceptions and events in their natural environments in a holistic manner. In the holistic multiple case design, there is more than one situation that can be handled holistically on its own. Each case is analysed holistically within itself and then compared with each other (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The reason for choosing the holistic multiple case study design, which is one of the qualitative research designs in this study, is to examine the school selection and appointment systems of China (Shanghai), Singapore and Türkiye according to the criteria determined in line with the research problem and then to compare these situations. For this reason, comparative survey method was also used in the study. In comparative surveys, different variables are described in detail and compared in terms of their similarities and differences according to common criteria. Finally, the results obtained are interpreted and necessary suggestions are presented (Karasar, 2012: 86). Comparison, as a method of thinking and development, not only reveals differences but also helps determine what is more effective and efficient (Balcı, 2013). In this context, comparing the education systems of different countries can aid in identifying areas that require improvement (Öztürk & Akkuş, 2020). In this study, by utilising comparative surveys, the countries within the scope of the research were described in detail in terms of different variables, their similarities and differences were compared according to the common criteria determined and necessary recommendations were presented to educational.

Data Collection

Document analysis, one of the qualitative data collection methods, was used to obtain the research data. Document analysis involves the analysis of written materials containing

information about the phenomena and facts targeted to be researched (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Documents are a data source that can provide very realistic results when used alone or together with other complementary data sources in educational research (Baştürk, 2013). The face and construct validity of documents are stronger and more adequate than other types of validity, even if they can be verified with other documents that can be examined when necessary (Bailey, 1994). In line with the scope of the research, scientific works and documents in the relevant literature, Official Gazette, regulations on the appointment of educational s, Ministry of National Education documents and reports and databases, theses in Higher Education Council (YÖK) National Thesis Centre, articles in educational sciences and social sciences journals were used.

Analysing the Data

The data obtained in this research were analysed using the document analysis method. Document analysis involves examining written materials that contain information about the phenomena and events being investigated (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). For the purposes of this study, written sources from the literature that provide information on the school selection and appointment systems of China (Shanghai), Singapore, and Türkiye were reviewed and analysed. During the analysis process, the data from these countries were organised into tables and presented in a comparative format.

Findings

In this section, information about the selection, training and appointment processes of school principals in the countries selected for the study is given.

Selection and Training Process of School Principals in China (Shanghai)

The People's Republic of China, which has the world's most populous population in its vast territory, cannot be managed from the centre due to its regions with different levels of development, so local government units are encountered (Tunç & Kızıl, 2018). Shanghai, on the other hand, has the status of a province of China and has some differences in the education system of Shanghai compared to the central system. It is seen that China ranks high in international education evaluations. In fact, China entered PISA, one of these assessments, in 2009 and 2012 with only Shanghai province and ranked first in all fields. In 2018, China participated in the assessment with four provinces (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang) and regained the first place that it lost to Singapore in 2015 (Öztürk & Akkuş, 2020). Shanghai, which ranks at the top in all three areas of the PISA exam, is China's pilot region in educational research. So much so that many educational practices are tested in Shanghai before being spread throughout the country. For example, curriculum reform and the school principal career ladder system were first initiated in Shanghai before being adopted as a national policy. Again, Shanghai is the first province in China to introduce nine-year compulsory education (Karaman, 2016). Thus, it can be said that Shanghai is the education leader in the region. The basic idea shaping Shanghai's understanding of education is that there are not students who cannot be taught, but teachers who cannot teach well. This belief shapes teaching and administration in China, especially in Shanghai. Moreover, teachers and school principals are valued in China and Shanghai. So much so that it is a legal obligation for the whole society to respect teachers (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2016).

In Shanghai, with the implementation of curriculum reform and the shift from traditional exam-oriented education to a quality-focused model that emphasizes students' cultural development (Tan, 2013), the responsibilities of school principals have expanded significantly. This increased responsibility has prompted principals to form leadership teams within their schools. Each school in Shanghai typically has a leadership team composed of the principal and several principals responsible for areas such as logistics, student affairs, and teaching and

learning (Karaman, 2016). The school principal acts as the captain of this leadership team.

Due to the decentralization of educational responsibilities to local schools in Shanghai, principals are granted significant authority, including decision-making power, control over school budgets, supervision of teaching activities, and the ability to reward, discipline, dismiss, or hire school staff (Tian & Virtanen, 2020). While principals are still accountable to the central administration via the regional education office, they play a critical role in ensuring that centrally assigned tasks are fulfilled. Although school principals are not directly involved in day-to-day teaching activities, they frequently observe classroom instruction (Karabatak, 2015). While less active than teachers in direct instruction, principals take an active role in organizing professional development opportunities that align with the needs of their schools. For instance, it is common for principals to encourage and facilitate opportunities for teachers to study abroad (Tan, 2013).

In order to be appointed as a school principal in Shanghai, it is necessary to fulfil the conditions determined by the State. Although the conditions for becoming a school principal in the Chinese education system vary by province or region, these conditions are generally as follows having at least ten years of teaching experience, being a Chinese citizen residing within the borders of the country (Karabatak, 2015), having the ability of ideological, political and moral education (Taipale, 2012, pp.17-20), participating in the school leadership programme and obtaining a professional certificate (Karabatak, 2015). In the selection of candidates, the candidate's party membership and expertise are also important. In order to be a qualified candidate, a professional certificate 'school principal suitability certificate' is needed. The conditions for obtaining this certificate are a written exam, academic qualification certificate, and length of service as a teacher and . In addition to these conditions, the candidate must also have received an invitation to apply for the vacancy. Principal candidates who fulfil the conditions are evaluated by the Local Education Commission, which is composed of local party members who are not involved in school management. Candidates who successfully pass the evaluation process based on seniority and merit are appointed to the schools in need (Baltacı, 2017). In Shanghai, school principals face certain difficulties in the first year of their new positions. For this reason, the 'New School Principals' Training Plan' was put into effect in Shanghai in 2013, and the Shanghai State Education Commission (SMEC) and Shanghai University collaborated to develop a one-year programme. In this scheme, the school principal receives leadership training within six months of his/her appointment. These trainings are provided by universities and experts in education, management and psychology and consist of six topics within the framework of professional standards for principals. These topics are school planning, internal management, school culture, instructional development, teacher training and adaptation to the external environment. The programme, which consists of group training, individual research projects, field visits and mentoring of new principals by experienced principals, is implemented once a week (Liang, Kidwai & Zhang, 2016).

School principals are expected to have some personal characteristics during their selection, appointment, in-service training and professional processes. Tan (2013) states the personal characteristics expected from school principals in Shanghai as follows; open-minded, innovative, open to learning, able to utilise opportunities, able to manage crises, good in human relations and hardworking. School principals who are visionary and dynamic are also emotional and humorous. So much so that school principals have a poetic sense of humour. In addition, school principals ensure that success spreads to other schools through solidarity and co-operation with each other. The principals and teachers of high performing schools work with low performing schools on the quality of teaching, school culture and management. Thanks to this communication and interaction between schools, achievement differences between schools and students are minimised (Stewart, 2015). In short, a successful school principal in Shanghai is not only responsible for the success of his/her own school but also for the success of other schools.

Selection and Training Process of School Principals in Singapore

Since the education system in Singapore is generally organised centrally, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the development and implementation of education policies. The Ministry of Education oversees the administration of public and government-aided schools, while it is responsible for the supervision of private schools (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2011). The processes related to the selection and training of school principals are carried out centrally by the Singapore Ministry of Education. The Ministry aims to help students discover their talents, realize their potential, do their best, and develop habits of lifelong learning. Therefore, schools strive to equip students with the skills needed to lead Singapore into the future and offer opportunities to develop their character. In this context, the vision of the Singapore Ministry of Education is expressed as "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" (MOE, 2016). In Singapore, teachers who educate students are given importance along with students. School principals are selected from among successful teachers, and administration is considered a continuation of the teaching career (Schleicher, 2012: 25).

In Singapore, teachers' leadership skills and potentials are assessed in their first years of service (Öztürk & Akkuş, 2020). The reason for this practice is to ensure the self-awareness of the teacher who may become a school principal in the future. Teachers who want to become principals choose the leadership path in the third year of their career under the guidance of their school principals. Teachers who choose the leadership path are given managerial experience by being assigned as department managers and assistant principals in schools before becoming school principals. Thus, it is thought that school principals will be more qualified (Boon, 2018). Deputy principals who are likely to be appointed as school principals participate in a two-day practice in which their managerial capacities are assessed through a real-life scenario (NCEE, 2019). After being evaluated through interviews with school principals and teachers and leadership skills practices, selected school candidates are admitted to the 'School Management and Leadership Programme' at the National Institute of Education (Schleicher, 2012: 25). In the six-month in-depth executive leadership training programme, topics such as 'design and management of learning organisations' and 'development of human and intellectual capacity' are studied in the field of educational management in terms of theory and practice (NCEE, 2019). Within the scope of leadership training, prospective principals are subjected to an intensive programme that includes practices such as foreign trips and school development projects (OECD, 2012: 122).

In addition to the theoretical knowledge on management, leadership and curriculum management, a four-week school practice is carried out as a deputy principal. The principals of the schools selected for implementation mentor the candidate principals (Korkmaz, 2005). Thus, it is expected that the adaptation to the school management position will be easier and quicker. School principals also receive mentoring support from experienced principals during the two-year period following their appointment. When a school principal completes at least six years of service, he/she is entitled to a one-year paid leave of absence to carry out international study visits, conduct research, write a book or continue postgraduate education (NCEE, 2019). Therefore, the salaries of school principals are paid to cover the entire education process, including the long-term training programmes they attend (Yang-Keo, 2016). With the effect of these rights, it is seen that most of the school principals in Singapore have master's degrees (MOE, 2015: 14). After completing six to eight years of service, principals are rotated by changing their positions (Levent & Yazıcı, 2014). The evaluation of school principals is also carried out periodically through feedback programmes. In short, it is seen that mentoring and practice studies are emphasised along with theory in the training and development of school principals in Singapore.

Selection and Training Process of School Principals in Türkiye

The examination system, in which all teachers with the desired conditions can participate equally, was started to be applied for the first time in 1998 with the Regulation on the Appointment and Relocation of the Principals of Educational Institutions Affiliated to the Ministry of Education. This regulation is the first regulation in the history of Turkish education that provides for the education of educational managers in the field of pre-service management (Günay, 2004; Helvacı, 2007). With this regulation, it is aimed to evaluate, select and upgrade managers according to more reliable and valid criteria by introducing “Evaluation Exam” and “Selection Exam” to manager candidates (Kayıkçı, 2001). In line with the stated purpose, the necessary infrastructure has been created together with the regulation to ensure compliance with the job definition, career, merit, registration, in-service training and seniority in appointments, promotions and relocations in the education system, to provide the opportunity to make a career in management, to give importance to executive education (Özden, 2002). It is seen that executive education in Türkiye is structured in three basic orientations. The first of these is the “Apprenticeship Model”, which has been valid for a long time in the field of executive education, the second is the “Educational Sciences Model”, which emerged in the 1970s and was accepted by academic circles, and the requirement of in-service training, which was implemented by the Ministry of National Education in October 1999, and the introduction of some additional qualifications as a reason for preference in appointments.

In the Turkish school system, which has been kneaded with a centralist idea in the Apprenticeship Model, school principals are in the position of an officer of the central authority, a reflection and representative of the school. This model is an extension of the centralized management approach. In the Educational Sciences model, management is considered as a scientific field of study. In this model, manager candidates should have academic knowledge in basic areas such as organization, managerial relations, leadership. In accordance with this model, various educational management and supervision programs have been opened at the undergraduate level in the faculties of education, and the appointment of candidates graduating from these programs as school principals by the Ministry of Education has often been on the agenda, but this expectation has not been realized, graduates have been appointed and served as teachers in their fields. ‘Educational Sciences Model’ was prepared in 1993 at the 14th. It has been accepted as one of the effective ways to train managers in the Preparatory Document of the National Education Council. The third model With the Regulation on Appointment of Principals of the Ministry of Education and Science published in 1999, the Ministry has started to use some additional criteria for appointing school s. Oct. It has been found among the reasons of preference to do a master's degree and to have a work in fields such as education, training, management, business administration Dec. Obtaining at least 70 from the Executive Selection Exam has been accepted as a prerequisite (Şimşek, 2004:14).

Written and oral exams and evaluation practices are continuing in the appointment of school principals in Türkiye. Written exams are organized by the central organization of the Ministry of National Education, while oral exams and evaluations are conducted within the provincial directorates of national education. Appointment to management for the first time is made according to the written exam and oral exam results; reassignment to management is made according to the evaluation result (Ministry of National Education, 2021). School principals are appointed for four years, and they cannot serve as principals in the same educational institution with the same title for more than eight years. From managers who have completed a four-year term of office in the same title at the educational institution where they are located, to the same or different educational institutions, and from managers who have completed an eight-year term of office in the same title at the educational institution where they are located, those who want to be reassigned to different educational institutions with the same titles are evaluated by the

evaluation commission. Additional points are given in the evaluations to those who want to continue their Oct in the same educational institution. In the evaluation, postgraduate education, rewards and punishments, service periods and types in various tasks are taken into account. In case of equality of assessment scores in reassignments, postgraduate education in the field of management is the primary reason for preference (MEB, 2021).

Along with this regulation, the requirement to have an education management certificate to be issued by the ministry to school principals has also been introduced. The Educational Management Certificate Program prepared by the General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development in the field of educational management is applied within the scope of distance education and/or face-to-face education. Those who meet the specified requirements from teachers who want to be appointed as an educational institution manager must successfully complete the Educational Management Certificate Program. This certificate is valid for a period of eight years from the year following the date of receipt (MONE, 2021). So much so that this certificate is also required from those who have graduate education in management. Although there is no pre-service education practice for school principals in Türkiye, various programs are organized by the central organization and provincial directorates of national education within the service (Karip & Köksal, 1999). As the reason for this situation, it can be suggested that school administration in Türkiye is an additional task within the scope of teaching. Oct. one of the most important changes that attracts attention in the regulation dated 05.02.2021 is that it is stated that the appointment of out-of-area principals in private educational institutions has been stopped. In order to become a manager in science and art centers, a requirement to work as a teacher in science and art, a requirement to become a guidance counselor to become a manager in guidance research centers, and a requirement to become a special education teacher to become a manager in special education schools have been introduced. These special conditions are specified in section 6 of the relevant regulation. It is located in the article (Official Gazette Number : 31386 www.resmigazete.gov.tr).

Comparison of Selection and Training Process of School Principals in China (Shanghai), Singapore and Türkiye

In the study, the processes of education and appointment of school principals in China, Singapore and Türkiye were compared in terms of certain basic characteristics. The results obtained are presented below in a tabular form (Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 1, at least ten years of teaching experience are required to be appointed as a school principal in Shanghai, and three years of teaching experience are required to become an assistant principal in Singapore. In Türkiye, on the other hand, two years of teaching are required to become an assistant director. For the positions of director, founding director, deputy principal, and assistant director, candidates must have served either separately or cumulatively for at least one year as an authorized teacher. In Shanghai, for those pursuing school leadership roles, there is a requirement to have completed teacher training at primary, secondary, and high school levels—either at teachers' colleges or normal universities—or to hold a master's degree. In fact, some high schools explicitly require a master's degree to serve in a leadership role (Liang, Kidwai, & Zhang, 2016). In Türkiye, however, a graduate degree is not required for appointment as a school.

Table 1. Comparison of the Processes of Training and Appointment of School Principals in China (Shanghai), Singapore and Türkiye

Category	China(Shanghai)	Singapore	Türkiye
The minimum teaching experience required	For school principal: 10 years	For vice principalship: 3 years	For vice principalship: 2 years
A postgraduate education requirement	Is required	Is not required	Is not required
Selection and assignment	Local	Central	Central
Exam condition/Type exam	Exam+document	Applied assessment	Certificate + Written+oral exam
Pre-service training requirement	Is required	Is required	Is required
Education requirement (in the field of management)	Is required	Is required	Is required
In-service training	Is required	Is required	Is not required
Duty station change period	Limitless	6-8 years	8 years

Source: Öztürk ve Akkuş, 2020:75; Karabatak, 2015.

In Shanghai, school principals are required to successfully complete a qualification program, which is offered in conjunction with a mentoring service (Bush & Jackson, 2002). Another country that places importance on the selection, experience, and mentoring of school principals is Singapore. Compared to the educational administration in Türkiye, the most notable feature of the Shanghai system is its more localized nature (UNESCO, 2006). In Türkiye, the Ministry of Education is the central authority responsible for the education system, and decisions are implemented hierarchically from the top down. Similarly, Singapore's education system is centrally organized, with the Ministry of Education responsible for the development and implementation of educational policies. Therefore, it can be said that Singapore and Türkiye are similar in terms of the processes for selecting and appointing school principals (Yenen, Kartal & Bulut, 2018). To be eligible for the management selection exam in Shanghai, candidates must obtain a certificate of conformity indicating their suitability for a leadership role. To receive this certificate, they are also required to pass a written examination (Ilğan, 2021).

In Shanghai, school principals are required to successfully complete a qualification program, which is offered in conjunction with a mentoring service (Bush & Jackson, 2002). Another country that places importance on the selection, experience, and mentoring of school principals is Singapore. Teachers aspiring to become school principals in Singapore are first appointed to positions such as department head or assistant manager in schools, allowing them to gain managerial experience. Additionally, they participate in evaluations where their leadership capacities are assessed based on real-life scenarios (NCEE, 2019). Although experience is emphasized in the training of school principals in both Singapore and Shanghai, this emphasis appears to be lacking in practice in Türkiye. Regarding position changes, school principals in Singapore and Türkiye are subject to rotation after specific time periods. In contrast, in Shanghai, school principals may remain indefinitely at the school to which they have been appointed, with no set term requirement.

When the processes of training and appointing school principals in China (Shanghai), Singapore, and Türkiye are evaluated as a whole, several patterns emerge. In all three countries, school principals generally have teaching experience. In China (Shanghai), a postgraduate degree is required to become a school principal. The selection and appointment process is localized, and appointments are typically open-ended. In contrast, in Singapore and Türkiye, a postgraduate degree is not required for school leadership positions. The selection and appointment processes are centrally controlled, and appointments are for fixed terms. Furthermore, while regular and structured in-service training opportunities are provided in China (Shanghai) and Singapore, such training is not consistently offered in Türkiye. Pre-service and leadership development practices in Shanghai and Singapore also emphasize mentoring and practical experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it is observed that China (Shanghai), Singapore, and Türkiye have both similarities and differences in terms of the training and appointment processes of school principals. Teaching experience is a common requirement in all three countries. Specifically, ten years of teaching experience are required in China (Shanghai), three years in Singapore, and two years in Türkiye. While postgraduate education is mandatory for school principals in Shanghai, it is not required in Singapore or Türkiye. In Türkiye, possessing a master's or doctoral degree in educational administration is only considered an advantage when candidates have equal scores. Notably, with the regulation on the selection and appointment of principals in educational

institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, issued on February 5, 2021, a requirement to graduate from higher education and to obtain an educational management certificate issued by the Ministry was introduced (Official Gazette, Issue: 31386). According to this regulation, candidates who have completed a master's or doctoral degree—thesis or non-thesis—in educational management must also complete the certificate program (Dilbaz & Atış, 2021). However, it can be argued that a graduate degree in educational management is more comprehensive than the management certificate. Despite the emphasis on postgraduate education in the Ministry's 2023 Vision Document, this emphasis is not reflected in the current regulation. In contrast to Türkiye, graduate education remains a prerequisite in Shanghai, which performs strongly in international assessments. School principals in Türkiye who wish to pursue graduate studies do so voluntarily, based on their interests (Kaya, 1999; Şişman & Turan, 2004). Carson et al., (2023) suggests that postgraduate education is necessary for those who intend to work long-term as educational, while Işık (2003) and Korkmaz (2005) argue that university programs in Türkiye designed to train school leaders are insufficient in content. Similarly, Balcı (1988) found that thesis-based master's programs are not suitable for training effective principals, and that non-thesis programs are more effective in this respect. Doctoral programs, on the other hand, primarily aim to train academics rather than school leaders.

Regarding the centralization of administrative processes, practices in Singapore and Türkiye are centralized, whereas Shanghai's system is more localized (UNESCO, 2006). In Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) serves as the central authority, and decisions are implemented hierarchically. According to W. Edwards Deming, a pioneer of Total Quality Management (TQM), 85% of organizational problems stem from management failures (Şimşek, 2004). In this context, since the Ministry dominates educational governance in Türkiye, it is responsible for creating and sustaining an effective system. MoNE regulations give school leaders significant responsibility but limited authority, resulting in operational challenges in schools. Similarly, in Singapore, the Ministry of Education centrally governs education policy. Therefore, Türkiye and Singapore resemble one another in school leadership selection and appointment (Yenen, Kartal & Bulut, 2018).

On the other hand, when comparing countries that succeed in education to those that underperform in PISA, it is observed that autonomy in school leadership is linked to academic success. Schools should have the freedom to act based on their unique needs. Given that not all schools in Türkiye share the same conditions, a one-size-fits-all management and supervision model is ineffective (Hatipoğlu & Ordu, 2019). Şimşek (2004) also emphasized the benefits of localization and argued for decentralization, claiming, "educational leaders cannot be trained under the current centralized model in Türkiye."

Regarding selection and appointment, Shanghai and Singapore use more practice-based evaluations compared to Türkiye. In both countries, school principals must complete a qualification program that includes mentoring. Özmen (2002) and Çelik (2002) recommended mentoring in leadership training, and Aktepe (2014) emphasized the importance of internships and observations under experienced principals for candidates in Türkiye (Dilbaz & Atış, 2021).

Although experience is valued in Singapore and Shanghai, this is not effectively reflected in Türkiye's practices. Şimşek (2004) proposed incorporating simulations and case studies into pre- and in-service training for school leaders. In Türkiye, teachers in combined classrooms often perform both teaching and administrative duties, as outlined in Article 30 of the regulation published in the Official Gazette dated 06.10.2015 and numbered 29494 (Andak, 2024). However, no school management training practice accompanies these duties, except for temporary principal assignments.

In Shanghai and Singapore, principals receive both pre-service and in-service training,

whereas in Türkiye, candidates are expected to complete an educational management certificate as pre-service training. Additional in-service training courses or seminars are organized based on need. Those who wish to receive comprehensive training in school leadership pursue postgraduate studies on their own (Tan, 2013). In contrast, countries like Shanghai and Singapore actively develop school principals to enhance school effectiveness (Özmen, 2002). In these systems, principals acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes through applied training. In Türkiye, however, there is no mandatory internship for school leadership due to the fact that the profession is not officially recognized as a distinct field (Turhan & Karabatak, 2015; Yolcu & Kavalcılar, 2005). Yet, as Demirtaş (2008) argues, school leadership is not a role just anyone can fulfill—it requires professionalism. Recepoğlu and Kılınç (2014) noted that school leaders in Türkiye operate with little in-service preparation, relying mostly on teaching experience, which points to a clear gap in the system. Thus, it can be concluded that in Türkiye, school leadership is not yet accepted as a professional occupation, and applied leadership training is insufficient (Balyer & Gündüz, 2011).

The higher average age of school principals in Shanghai may be attributed to merit- and seniority-based selection (Baltacı, 2017). In contrast, studies by Demirtaş & Özer (2014) and Özmen & Kömürlü (2010) highlight the lack of merit-based appointments in Türkiye, often citing political and personal biases. These studies argue that evaluation exams focus solely on cognitive ability. Turhan and Karabatak (2015) emphasize that candidates should be selected based on a merit-based evaluation process.

Regarding rotation, school principals in Singapore and Türkiye are subject to periodic reassignment, while in Shanghai, school leaders can remain indefinitely in the same position. Kerman (2004) points out that while rotation can offer benefits—such as breaking routine, exposing individuals to new situations, and encouraging collaboration—it can also cause stress and reduce motivation for those resistant to change. Nural and Çıtak (2012) found that long-term service at the same institution can lead to stagnation. Similarly, Güleç (2009) argues that rotation improves motivation, job flexibility, and work energy. Lortz (1985) supports this view, noting that rotation enhances leadership skills and fosters innovative problem-solving. However, Kaya and Göçen (2012) found that rotation may also cause negative effects, such as difficulty adapting or unmet expectations. Therefore, based on the literature, it is clear that while rotation has benefits, it can also lead to challenges.

Recommendations

In light of the findings obtained, the following recommendations are proposed regarding the training and appointment processes of school principals in Türkiye:

- **Maintaining the Requirement of Teaching Experience:** The practice of selecting school principals from among candidates with prior teaching experience should be sustained. Teachers possess first-hand classroom management experience and a grounded understanding of educational environments, which contributes to informed and practical school leadership. Moreover, as individuals who interact closely with current s, teachers often develop insights into effective school management practices.
- **Promoting Administrative Autonomy:** A more autonomous system should be adopted in the selection and appointment of school s. Authority should be shared with or delegated to local institutions and schools. In countries with high-performing education systems, decentralization of authority is a common practice, as it allows each school—whose needs and structures may differ—to operate more effectively and responsively.
- **Implementing Theoretical and Practical Training Programs:** Comprehensive training programs that include both theoretical knowledge and practical experience should be

introduced for schools. Following the 2022 reform in Türkiye, obtaining a certificate of managerial competence has become mandatory. Similarly, in countries that perform well in PISA assessments, it is common for experienced principals to mentor new candidates or engage in practical leadership training.

- **Ensuring Pre- and In-Service Training in Key Competency Areas:** School principals should receive systematic training in areas such as management, leadership, and communication during both the pre-service and in-service stages. A review of international best practices reveals that countries with successful education systems provide continuous professional development in school leadership.
- **Enhancing the Objectivity of Assessment Processes:** The objectivity of written and oral examinations for school selection must be guaranteed. These evaluations should be conducted by independent and impartial boards to ensure fairness and merit-based appointments. In the countries examined, a transparent and merit-driven selection process is a common feature.
- **Preserving the Oral Examination Component:** In addition to written assessments, the oral examination should remain part of the selection process. This allows for the evaluation of candidates' communication skills, personal attributes, and their ability to articulate knowledge—factors that are essential for effective school leadership.

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