

Management of organizational change in educational institutions: A vignette-based qualitative study

Eğitim kurumlarında örgütsel değişimin yönetimi: Vinyet temelli nitel bir çalışma

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine how school administrators evaluate the process of organizational change in educational institutions through a vignette-based qualitative study. The study group consisted of 45 school administrators working in middle schools in the central districts of Siirt and Malatya. The data were collected through a vignette text on organizational change prepared by the researchers and a semi-structured interview form based on this text. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis. The findings showed that the school principal first analyzed the existing situation during the change process. It was determined that the principal planned the process, used communication channels, and attempted to ensure participation. In addition, organizing task distribution, supporting motivation, and managing resistance were among the prominent action steps. The participants stated that participation in decision-making processes increased ownership, motivation, and cooperation. However, it was also stated that if participation was not carried out in a planned manner, it could lead to confusion and conflict in the process. As a result, it was concluded that a planned, participatory, communicative, and supportive leadership approach is decisive in school-based change processes.

Keywords: Organizational change, change leadership, school management, resistance to change, participatory management

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, eğitim kurumlarında örgütsel değişim sürecinin okul yöneticileri tarafından nasıl değerlendirildiğini vinyet temelli nitel bir çalışma aracılığıyla incelemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, Siirt ve Malatya merkez ilçelerinde ortaokullarda görev yapan 45 okul yöneticisi oluşturmaktadır. Veriler, araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan örgütsel değişim konulu bir vinyet metni ve bu metne dayalı yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler içerik analizi tekniğiyle çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, okul müdürünün değişim sürecinde öncelikle mevcut durumu analiz ettiğini göstermiştir. Müdürün süreci planladığı, iletişim kanallarını kullandığı ve katılımı sağlamaya çalıştığı belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca görev paylaşımını düzenleme, motivasyonu destekleme ve direnci yönetme de öne çıkan eylem basamakları arasında yer almıştır. Katılımcılar, karar süreçlerine katılımın sahiplenme, motivasyon ve iş birliğini artırdığı belirtilmiştir. Bununla birlikte katılımın planlı yürütülmemesi durumunda süreçte karmaşa ve çatışma oluşabileceği ifade edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, okul temelli değişim süreçlerinde planlı, katılımcı, iletişime açık ve destekleyici liderlik anlayışının belirleyici olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu nedenle değişim, yalnızca yapısal değil, aynı zamanda ilişkisel bir süreç olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Örgütsel değişim, değişim liderliği, okul yönetimi, değişime direnç, katılımcı yönetim

Introduction

Today, change has become an inevitable reality for organizations, managers, and employees. Global competition, digitalization, demographic transformation, and geopolitical developments create pressure on organizations. These pressures require organizations to restructure themselves and adapt proactively to change. Change is no longer a linear process. It is continuous, complex, and dynamic (Burnes, 2004). Therefore, managing change effectively is important for organizational sustainability and competitive advantage.

Robbins (1996) defines change as significant transformations in organizational structure, processes, and human behavior. Toffler (1980) describes change as a broad transition process affecting social life. In organizations, change refers to the adoption of a new idea, practice, or behavior (Burnes, 2004; Daft, 2015). Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) also state that change is necessary for organizational survival. It transforms structure, culture, leadership, and employee behavior.

Organizational change is shaped by internal and external factors. External factors include technology, competition, legal regulations, economic changes, and socio-cultural transformations (Porter, 2008). Internal factors include low performance, lack of motivation, new leadership approaches, knowledge deficiencies, service innovations, and restructuring needs (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burnes, 2004). In this sense, organizational change is a multidimensional process. It supports adaptation to environmental conditions and increases internal effectiveness. It is also seen as a strategic capability for competitive advantage (Teece, 2007).

Resistance is a key issue in change processes. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) suggest education, communication, participation, support, trust-building, fair practices, and coercive methods when necessary. Robbins (1996) also emphasizes active participation, effective communication, reward systems, and planned action.

One of the classical theoretical models used to explain organizational change is Lewin's three-

stage model. According to this model, change occurs through the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. In the unfreezing stage, individuals become aware of the need for change and the existing habits, routines, and assumptions are questioned. In the changing stage, new behaviors, practices, and ways of working are introduced and implemented. In the refreezing stage, the new practices are stabilized and integrated into the organizational culture. In educational institutions, this model is particularly useful for understanding how school administrators prepare teachers for change, manage resistance during implementation, and sustain new practices within the school culture. Therefore, Lewin's model provides a theoretical basis for interpreting the principal's actions, the emergence of resistance, and the efforts to institutionalize change in the present study (Lewin, 1947).

In educational institutions, organizational change is not limited to structural arrangements. It is shaped by leadership, school culture, participation, collaboration, and resistance. Hallinger (2003) emphasizes the decisive role of school leadership in educational change. Aldridge and McLure (2024) show that educational change depends on in-school support mechanisms, organizational capacity, leadership, and contextual barriers. These findings indicate that school change is multidimensional and context-dependent.

Recent studies show that educational change is now addressed together with concepts such as digital transformation, organizational agility, adaptive leadership, readiness for change, and school improvement. Digital transformation in schools does not only mean the use of technological tools. It also requires strong leadership, teachers with sufficient competencies, institutional support, and a school culture that is open to innovation (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

In this process, it is important for school administrators to guide teachers, ensure the effective use of digital resources, support professional development, and manage the uncertainties that emerge during the change process. In addition, or-

ganizational agility is considered an important factor because schools need to adapt quickly and flexibly to changing social, technological, and pedagogical conditions (Teece, 2007; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Similarly, adaptive leadership has an important place in change processes. This leadership approach refers to involving stakeholders in the process, balancing emerging problems, and developing solutions that are appropriate to the conditions of the school, especially in situations marked by uncertainty (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

Another topic that has come to the fore in recent years is readiness for change. Readiness for change is related to the extent to which members of an organization believe that change is necessary, feasible, and beneficial (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Weiner, 2009). In schools, this level of readiness is closely associated with factors such as trust, communication, participation, professional competence, and perceived support. Therefore, according to the contemporary understanding of educational change, successful school improvement does not depend only on good planning and implementation. It also depends on the school's digital capacity, flexible structure, adaptive leadership approach, and stakeholders' readiness for change (Fullan, 2020; Aldridge & McLure, 2024).

The literature examines organizational change, school leadership, resistance, teacher participation, and collaboration from different perspectives. Oreg (2003) highlights the individual and psychological dimensions of resistance. Coch and French (1948) show that participation reduces resistance. Somech (2010) emphasizes the role of decision-making participation in school and teacher outcomes. Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996), Gajda and Koliba (2008), and Hulpia et al. (2009) associate professional community, collaboration, and distributed leadership with school development. However, studies examining the principal's practices, reasons for resistance, participation, leadership characteristics, breaking points of resistance, and group structuring within the same vignette context remain limited.

In this respect, the present study offers an original contribution. It examines school administrators' evaluations based on a common vignette text. This approach reveals different managerial perspectives on organizational change. It also allows all participants to evaluate the same change scenario. Thus, participants' views can be compared more clearly.

The main problem of this study is that the organizational change process in educational institutions has not been sufficiently clarified. In particular, it is important to understand how school administrators make sense of this process. It is also necessary to examine how elements such as leadership, participation, resistance management, and group structuring are evaluated. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to examine how school administrators evaluate the organizational change process in educational institutions. The study was designed as a vignette-based qualitative study. In line with this aim, answers were sought to the following research questions:

- What action steps does the school principal follow during the change process?
- What are the reasons put forward by teachers and administrators who resist change?
- What are the purpose, contributions, and possible risks of participation in the decision-making process?
- What elements come to the fore in change leadership?
- At which points is resistance to change broken?
- What is the purpose of forming teacher groups, and what elements should be considered in this process?

Methodology

This study was designed as a vignette-based qualitative study. Qualitative research allows researchers to examine participants' perceptions, interpretations, and meaning-making processes in depth within a specific context (Merriam, 2013; Creswell,

2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, the vignette technique was used as a data collection stimulus within the semi-structured interview process. Vignettes are short, structured, and context-specific scenarios presented to participants in order to reveal their evaluations, judgments, interpretations, suggestions, and justifications regarding a particular situation or problem (Finch, 1987; Barter & Renold, 1999; Hughes, 1998). The vignette technique was preferred because it enabled all participants to evaluate the same organizational change scenario and to express their views on leadership, participation, resistance to change, decision-making, and group structuring within a common context.

Although the study included a structured case scenario, it was not designed as a traditional case study. In case study research, a real-life bounded case is examined in depth within its own context through multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). In the present study, however, the data source was not a real school change process directly experienced by the participants, but their evaluations of a hypothetical vignette text developed by the researchers. Therefore, the study can be defined as a vignette-based qualitative study that aims to reveal how school administrators interpret and evaluate a sample organizational change scenario. The data obtained through vignette-based semi-structured interviews were analyzed using content analysis.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 45 school administrators working in middle schools in the central districts of Siirt and Malatya during the 2024–2025 academic year. In determining the study group, criterion sampling and convenience sampling, which are among purposeful sampling methods, were used together. Purposeful sampling enables the selection of participants who are expected to provide rich and relevant information about the research problem (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, the main criterion was that the participants were actively

working as school principals or assistant principals in middle schools and had professional experience that would enable them to evaluate school-based organizational change processes. School administrators were selected because they are directly responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating change processes in educational institutions. Middle schools were preferred because organizational change practices at this level require the coordination of teachers, students, administrators, and school-based activities. The central districts of Siirt and Malatya were included because they provided accessible and comparable school contexts for conducting the research. Although maximum variation sampling was not used as an independent sampling strategy, variation was considered in terms of gender, professional experience, position, and educational level. In this way, the study aimed to include school administrators with different professional backgrounds within the accessible participant group.

The number of participants was not determined through statistical representativeness, but in accordance with the logic of qualitative research. Data saturation was evaluated during the data collection and preliminary analysis process by monitoring whether new interviews produced new codes or themes. During the data collection process, interviews were continued until the participant responses began to repeat and no substantially new codes or themes emerged. In this respect, data saturation was taken into consideration in determining the adequacy of the study group (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Saunders et al., 2018). In addition, accessibility was considered in order to increase the feasibility of the research process. Therefore, the final number of 45 participants was determined through the combined consideration of criterion-based participant selection, accessibility, participant variation, and data saturation. In accordance with ethical principles, the identities of the participants were kept confidential, and the participants were coded as P1, P2, P3 ... P45. The personal information form did not include name-surname information that could directly re-

veal the identities of the participants. Instead, descriptive variables such as gender, professional experience, position, and educational level were used.

Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	20	44.4
	Male	25	55.6
Professional Experience	5–10 years	10	22.2
	11–15 years	12	26.7
	16–20 years	11	24.4
	21 years and above	12	26.7
Educational Level	Bachelor's degree	32	71.1
	Master's degree	10	22.2
	Doctorate	3	6.7
Position	School principal	20	44.4
	Assistant principal	25	55.6
School Level	Middle school	45	100.0
School Location	Central district	45	100.0

Data Collection Process

The research data were collected through individual interviews with a total of 45 school administrators working in middle schools in the central districts of Siirt and Malatya during the 2024–2025 academic year. During the data collection process, the participants were first informed about the purpose of the study. It was stated that participation was voluntary and that the data obtained would be used only for scientific purposes.

During the interviews, the participants were first presented with the case text. Then, semi-structured open-ended questions based on this text were asked. The interviews were conducted face to face. Each interview lasted approximately 20–25 minutes. The researcher adopted a non-directive attitude during the data collection process. Participants were allowed to express their views on the vignette text freely. During the interviews, evaluative, approving, or guiding statements that could influence the participants' responses were avoided.

Data Collection Tools

In the study, a personal information form, a vignette text on organizational change, and a vignette-based semi-structured interview form were used as data collection tools. The personal information form included descriptive information such as gender, professional experience, educational level, position, province of employment, and school location. No personal information that could directly reveal participants' identities, such as name, surname, school name, or contact information, was requested.

The main data collection tool was the vignette text addressing school-based organizational change. The vignette focused on a school principal who initiated a change process after encountering academic, organizational, and managerial problems in a newly assigned school. The scenario included key dimensions such as analyzing the existing situation, planning the change process, ensuring participation, clarifying roles and responsibilities, managing resistance, forming teacher groups, supporting motivation, and monitoring the process.

The vignette was developed by the researchers specifically for this study. In its development, the literature on organizational change, change leadership, resistance to change, participation in decision-making, and school improvement was taken into consideration (Lewin, 1947; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2003). The vignette was not directly adapted from a previous study; rather, it was prepared as a structured scenario based on theoretical and empirical literature.

Expert opinion was obtained to evaluate the vignette text and interview form in terms of scope, clarity, and content suitability. In this context, opinions were obtained from three faculty members: one professor and one associate professor working at the Faculty of Education at İnönü University, and one associate professor working at Siirt University. In line with the feedback received from the experts, some statements in the vignette text and interview questions were revised and made clearer.

In addition, pilot interviews were conducted with three school administrators to test the comprehensibility and functionality of the data collection tool. After the pilot application, expressions that were difficult to understand were simplified, and the vignette-based interview form was finalized.

After reading the vignette text, participants were asked semi-structured open-ended questions. These questions focused on the action steps followed in the change process, resistance to change, participation in decision-making, change leadership, the points at which resistance was broken, and the purpose of forming teacher groups. The full vignette text and interview questions presented to the participants are provided in Appendix 1.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis was preferred because it allows researchers to systematically identify, organize, and interpret meaning patterns in qualitative data (Weber, 1990; Krippendorff, 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf, 2017). The analysis process was carried out in several stages. First, the interview transcripts and researcher notes were organized according to participant codes. Second, all texts were read repeatedly to gain a holistic understanding of the data. Third, meaningful statements related to the research questions were identified and coded.

Both deductive and inductive coding approaches were used. The deductive dimension was guided by the theoretical literature on organizational change, change leadership, resistance to change, participation in decision-making, and school improvement (Lewin, 1947; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2003; Somech, 2010). The inductive dimension was shaped by participants' own statements. Similar codes were compared and grouped under themes. The themes were then organized according to the six research questions: action steps in the change

process, reasons for resistance, participation in decision-making, change leadership, breaking points of resistance, and group structuring.

At the end of the analysis, six main analytical dimensions and 34 themes were produced. These themes are presented in Tables 2–7. Frequencies were calculated according to the number of participants who expressed views related to each theme. Since participants could mention more than one theme, total frequencies may exceed the number of participants. Direct quotations were used to support the themes and to increase the transparency of the analysis.

To ensure coding reliability, the first coding was conducted by the researcher. Then, an expert in qualitative research independently reviewed the codes and themes. The two coding processes were compared, and intercoder agreement was calculated as 88% using Miles and Huberman's reliability formula. Disagreements were discussed and resolved through consensus. After this process, the final thematic structure was formed.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity and reliability in the study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which are commonly used in qualitative research, were taken into consideration.

To ensure credibility, the data collection tool was first submitted for expert review. The vignette text and interview questions were examined by field experts. In line with expert opinions, some statements in the interview form were simplified, and the alignment of the questions with the purpose of the study was strengthened. In addition, pilot interviews were conducted with three school administrators to test the applicability of the data collection tool.

During the data collection process, the same vignette text was presented to all participants. Thus, participants were enabled to express their views based on a common context. During the interviews, probing questions were used when necessary. Par-

ticipants' statements were elaborated, and an effort was made to go beyond superficial responses. The inclusion of direct quotations in the findings section also supported the credibility of the study.

To ensure transferability, the study group, data collection tool, data collection process, and analysis stages were explained in detail. The demographic characteristics of the participants were presented in a table. In addition, the context in which the study was conducted, the participants involved, and the data collection tool used were clearly stated.

To ensure dependability, the analysis process was conducted systematically. The stages of coding, theme formation, and interpretation were carried out in a specific order. Codes and themes were continuously reviewed in line with the research questions. In addition, intercoder agreement was calculated through expert review, and an agreement rate of 88% was achieved.

To ensure confirmability, records related to the data collection and analysis processes were kept regularly. The codes, themes, and direct quotations obtained during the coding process were linked to the research data. While interpreting the findings, the researcher avoided personal judgments and adopted an evaluation based on participant statements and thematic structures.

Findings

Findings on the Action Steps Followed by the School Principal in the Change Process and the Alternative Approaches Suggested by the Participants

The participants evaluated that the school principal in the case text carried out the change process in a planned, gradual, and practice-oriented manner. The findings were addressed in line with two dimensions of the first research question. The first dimension includes the action steps followed by the school principal during the change process. The second dimension includes the alternative approaches that the participants would suggest if they were administrators in the same process.

Table 2. Findings on the Action Steps Followed by the School Principal in the Change Process

Theme	1A. Action steps used by the principal in the change process	1B. Path that participants would follow in the same process	f	%
Diagnosing and planning the situation	Observing the existing situation, identifying the deficiencies of the school, examining the level of academic achievement	Analyzing the physical, academic, and organizational condition of the school in detail before initiating change	19	42.2
Planned and gradual progress	Distributing tasks, determining strategic steps, using resources, setting concrete goals	Initiating change not suddenly, but as a gradual process spread over time	15	33.3
Initiating the implementation process and supporting motivation	Planning activities, involving students in the process, creating experiences of success	Conducting the process with an implementation-oriented approach rather than leaving it only at the decision-making level, and supporting teacher motivation	15	33.3
Strengthening communication, participation, and consensus	Conducting individual interviews, organizing meetings, receiving feedback, exchanging ideas	Establishing more intensive communication with teachers and administrators, and developing common understanding and cooperation	13	28.9
Clarifying responsibilities	Determining job descriptions, clarifying expectations, creating roles related to the process	Defining duties and responsibilities in a clear, applicable, and fair manner	10	22.2
Monitoring, reinforcement, and producing visible outcomes	Encouraging staff, supporting students, creating a positive school climate	Regularly monitoring the process, making positive outcomes visible, and reinforcing achievements	9	20.0
Dealing with resistance and recognizing resistance early	Recognizing difficulties experienced in the process, emphasizing the need for change, sustaining the process	Identifying sources of resistance in advance and initiating persuasion and guidance processes early	8	17.8
Strategic leadership	Creating a vision for the school, setting direction, developing future-oriented goals	Managing change not as a short-term practice, but in line with long-term school development goals	6	13.3

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the participants most frequently emphasized the dimension of diagnosing and planning the situation in the school principal's change process (f = 19). This was followed by planned and gradual progress (f = 15), initiating implementation and supporting motivation (f = 15), strengthening communication, participation, and consensus (f = 13), and clarifying responsibilities (f = 10). The less frequently emphasized themes were monitoring, reinforcement, and

producing visible outcomes ($f = 9$), dealing with resistance and recognizing resistance early ($f = 8$), and strategic leadership ($f = 6$).

The participants stated that the principal began the change process by observing the existing situation and identifying deficiencies. **P1** stated, "The principal evaluated the existing situation and identified the deficiencies by observing the school to which he/she was appointed." This indicates that diagnosis and planning are regarded as a fundamental initial stage in the change process. Similarly, communication and participation were also considered important. **P24** stated that the principal "received teachers' opinions by organizing individual interviews and meetings." This statement shows that teachers were seen not only as implementers but also as stakeholders in the process.

Participant views also reveal that the principal supported change through concrete activities. **P17** stated, "The principal asked teachers to form groups and plan activities." This shows that the implementation dimension is important in terms of making change visible and increasing motivation. In addition, **P2** emphasized strategic leadership with the statement, "The principal created a vision in the school and managed the change process in line with this vision." The results obtained indicate that the change process should be supported by the stages of analysis, planning, communication, task distribution, implementation, resistance management, and vision development.

Findings on the Reasons Put Forward by Teachers and Administrators Who Resisted Change and the Background of Resistance

The participants evaluated resistance to change not merely as a superficial reaction to innovation, but as a situation based on more psychological, cultural, and organizational reasons.

When Table 3 is examined, protecting the comfort zone was the most emphasized reason for resistance ($f = 20$). This was followed by perception of duty and workload ($f = 17$), low expectations regarding student potential ($f = 15$), fear of change ($f = 12$), and anxiety about the disruption of routines (f

$= 10$). These results show that resistance was shaped by the desire to maintain the existing order, concerns about increased workload, uncertainty, and low expectations about students.

Table 3. Findings on the Reasons Put Forward by Teachers and Administrators Who Resisted Change

Theme	2A. Elements emphasized by teachers and administrators who resisted change	2B. Views thought to underlie resistance	f	%
Protecting the comfort zone	Maintaining the existing order, avoiding uncertainty	Not wanting the current comfort zone to be disrupted, not wanting to adapt to a new order	20	44.4
Perception of duty and workload	Detailed job descriptions, additional responsibilities, avoidance of new duties	Thinking that workload would increase, supervision would become more frequent, and responsibilities would become heavier	17	37.8
Low expectations regarding student potential	The belief that students would not be able to adapt to change	Believing that the effort made would not produce results and that students would not achieve the expected success	15	33.3
Fear of change	Concern that new practices would fail	Fear of failure, criticism, or appearing inadequate	12	26.7
Anxiety about the disruption of routines	Changes in daily workflow, giving up habits	Thinking that the familiar order is safer and easier to maintain	10	22.2

Participant views also support this finding. **P8** stated, "Those who resist change may be accustomed to the existing order and may feel insecure because of the uncertainty that change will bring," indicating that issues of trust and uncertainty lie behind resistance. **P12** emphasized the perception of workload by stating, "They argued that the job descriptions were too detailed and demanding." **P21** stated, "They approached the process with distance because they thought that students would not be able to participate in these activities," showing that low expectations regarding student potential were influential in resistance. Based on these views, it can be said that resistance to change has both organizational and psychological dimensions.

Findings on the Purpose, Contributions, and Possible Risks of Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Table 4. Findings on the Effects of Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Theme	3A. Elements aimed by the principal through participation in the decision-making process	3B. Participants' evaluations of their own approaches	3C. Possible risks of participation in the decision-making process	f	%
Participation and ownership	Involving teachers and administrators in the process, ensuring adoption of decisions, strengthening the sense of belonging	Most participants think that it would be useful to involve stakeholders in the process if they were in the same position	Prolongation of the process, slow decision-making	24	53.3
Increased motivation	Receiving opinions, considering feedback, ensuring willing participation in the process	Participation in decision-making is considered to turn staff into subjects of the process rather than merely implementers	Decreased motivation if expectations are not met	20	44.4
Communication and cooperation	Open dialogue, making mutual expectations visible, acting together	Participants imply that they would prefer to carry out a communication-based and cooperative process if they were in the same position	Differences of opinion and intra-group conflicts	18	40.0
Reducing resistance	Discussing the reasons for change, enabling individuals involved in the process to adapt to decisions more easily	Participation is thought to reduce objections to change	Weakening of authority if participation is uncontrolled	16	35.6
Developing different perspectives	Evaluating various opinions, developing creative and applicable solutions	Participants see the involvement of different stakeholders in the process as a factor that increases the quality of decisions	Decision confusion and loss of focus	14	31.1
Possible risks	Disorganization in the process if participation is not conducted in a planned manner	Participation is considered to need a structured rather than unlimited process	Prolongation of the process, decision confusion, weakening of authority, intra-group conflict	9	20.0

The participants largely evaluated participation in decision-making processes as a positive factor. However, they also emphasized that this process may lead to certain risks if it is not managed properly. Therefore, participation is considered not

as an unlimited and ambiguous practice, but as a process that should be planned, purposeful, and well structured.

When Table 4 is examined, participation and ownership was the most emphasized theme ($f = 24$). This was followed by increased motivation ($f = 20$), communication and cooperation ($f = 18$), reducing resistance ($f = 16$), and developing different perspectives ($f = 14$). These results show that participation in decision-making was seen not only as a democratic practice but also as a factor that supports the adoption and implementation of change

Participant views support these findings. **P18** emphasized ownership by stating, "Involving all teachers in the process ensures that the decisions taken are adopted more strongly." **P1** highlighted motivation with the statement, "When participation is ensured, teachers' motivation increases and they work more willingly." **P33** emphasized communication and cooperation by stating, "Decisions are made in a healthier way in environments where open communication is established." **P5** pointed to the resistance-reducing role of participation with the statement, "When we are included in the process, we show less resistance to change." These views show that participation facilitates the acceptance of change. However, it should be planned, purposeful, and well structured.

Findings on the Elements Emphasized by the Principal in Change Leadership, the Characteristics Required of a Leader Leading Change, and the Conditions That Could Cause the Principal to Step Back

In this section, the elements emphasized by the school principal in change leadership were examined. The findings showed that leadership was shaped around the dimensions of creating a vision, participatory management, communication, structuring tasks, and providing motivation. The participants stated that the principal carried out the process not merely with a managerial approach, but with a leadership approach that mobilized stakeholders, managed resistance, and organized change.

Table 5. Findings on the Elements Emphasized by the Principal in Change Leadership

Theme	4A. Elements emphasized by the principal in change leadership	4B. Characteristics that a leader leading change should have	4C. Possible conditions that could cause the principal to step back	f	%
Vision and goal setting	Setting a clear direction for the school, long-term planning, setting strategic goals	Being visionary, anticipating the future, creating unity of purpose	The process becoming completely purposeless, goals remaining unfulfilled	24	53.3
Participatory management and cooperation	Establishing joint decision-making mechanisms, ensuring stakeholder support	Being participatory, inclusive, and open to cooperation	The process leading to serious conflict and disengagement	22	48.9
Communication and feedback	Establishing open and transparent communication, receiving continuous feedback	Having strong communication skills, listening, being explanatory	Communication channels becoming blocked, complete loss of support	20	44.4
Job descriptions and structuring	Defining clear responsibilities, carrying out the process in a planned manner, monitoring the process	Being order-establishing, planned, systematic, and capable of managing the process	The implementation becoming unsustainable, role confusion	18	40.0
Motivation and encouragement	Rewarding, producing visible success, keeping the process active	Being supportive, motivating, and encouraging	Complete loss of motivation, failure to obtain positive results	16	35.6

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the participants most frequently emphasized vision and goal setting ($f = 24$), participatory management and cooperation ($f = 22$), communication and feedback ($f = 20$), job descriptions and structuring ($f = 18$), and motivation and encouragement ($f = 16$) in relation to the principal's change leadership. This finding shows that the participants evaluated effective change leadership not merely as an authority that makes decisions, but as a multidimensional leadership approach that sets direction, involves stakeholders in the process, manages communication, establishes structural order, and supports motivation. However, since the dimension of "conditions that could cause the principal to step back" was not addressed as a sufficiently distinct theme in the existing text, this part can be interpreted in a more limited way.

The participants emphasized that the principal set a clear direction, involved stakeholders, established open communication, clarified duties, and

supported motivation. They stated that an effective change leader should be visionary, participatory, communicative, planned, and motivating. **P19** emphasized vision by stating, "Setting a clear vision for the school and proceeding in line with this vision increases the success of the process." **P12** highlighted participatory management with the statement, "Including teachers in the process ensures that the decisions taken are implemented more easily." **P35** drew attention to feedback by stating, "Receiving feedback at every stage of the process ensures that the process progresses in a healthy way." In addition, **P5**'s statement, "Clearly defining the duties ensures that the process proceeds in a more organized way," and **P22**'s statement, "Encouraging practices enable teachers to participate in the process more willingly," support structuring and motivation. These views show that change leadership is shaped by vision, communication, cooperation, structuring, and motivation.

Findings on the Points at Which Resistance to Change Was Broken and the Reasons for This

When the participant views were examined, it was seen that resistance did not disappear suddenly or through a single intervention. On the contrary, it gradually weakened throughout the process through persuasion and justification, structuring of the process, encouragement and process monitoring, the visibility of positive outcomes, and the transformation of perceptions toward students.

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the participants most frequently emphasized the transformation of perceptions toward students ($f = 20$), persuasion and justification ($f = 18$), the visibility of positive outcomes ($f = 17$), structuring the process ($f = 15$), and encouragement and process monitoring ($f = 14$) in relation to the breaking of resistance to change. This finding shows that resistance did not disappear suddenly; rather, it gradually weakened as the process was made meaningful, concretized, supported, and its positive outcomes became visible. The strongest breaking point was seeing that students could achieve success during the process.

Table 6. Findings on the Points at Which Resistance to Change Was Broken and the Reasons for This

Theme	5A. Points at which teachers' and administrators' resistance to change was broken	5B. Reasons for the breaking of resistance	f	%
Persuasion and justification	The principal clearly explained why the process was necessary	Explaining the benefits of change, emphasizing expected gains for students, highlighting positive views	18	40.0
Structuring the process	Duties and implementation steps became concrete	Formation of groups, clarification of duties, planned implementation, expectation of concrete products, making the process traceable	15	33.3
Encouragement and process monitoring	Continued support during the process	Providing support through guidance counselors and administrators, maintaining motivation, ensuring that teachers were not left alone	14	31.1
Visibility of positive outcomes	Successful implementation of practices	Carrying out activities, receiving positive feedback, students enjoying the activities, the school receiving appreciation from outside	17	37.8
Transformation of perceptions toward students	Seeing that students could succeed	Weakening of low expectations, change in teacher views, emergence of new activity requests	20	44.4

The participants stated that resistance to change first began to weaken when the principal explained why the process was necessary. Subsequently, the clarification of duties, the planned implementation of practices, and the visible monitoring of the process contributed to reducing resistance. According to the participants' evaluations, the stage at which resistance was broken most clearly was the emergence of positive outcomes and, in particular, the change in perceptions regarding students' ability to succeed.

The participants stated that resistance first weakened when the principal explained why the process was necessary. Clarifying duties, planning practices, and monitoring the process also reduced resistance. The clearest breaking point was the visibility of positive outcomes and the change in perceptions about students' ability to succeed.

P9 emphasized persuasion and justification by stating, "The principal's explanation of why the change process was necessary enabled teachers to approach the process more positively." **P34** highlighted structuring with the statement,

"Clearly defining the duties and carrying out the process in a planned manner reduced the hesitations toward change." **P3** emphasized encouragement and monitoring by stating, "Supporting and encouraging teachers during the process increased participation in change." The evaluations of **P21** and **P25** also show that seeing students succeed changed teachers' initial negative perceptions. These findings indicate that resistance weakens through structured practices, teacher support, and visible positive outcomes.

Findings on the Purpose of Forming Teacher Groups in the Change Process and the Elements to Be Considered in This Process

In this section, the purposes of the school principal's grouping of teachers and administrators were examined. The findings showed that this structuring served the purposes of strengthening cooperation, supporting task sharing, increasing motivation, developing different perspectives, and creating a positive team climate.

Table 7. Findings on the Purpose of Forming Teacher Groups in the Change Process

Theme	6A. Purpose of forming and planning teacher groups	6B. Elements to be considered in this process	f	%
Group dynamics and cooperation	Strengthening teamwork, creating a supportive environment	Ensuring harmony among group members, a structure open to cooperation, and balanced interaction	20	44.4
Task sharing and responsibility	Fair distribution of work, sharing responsibilities, making the process traceable	Distributing duties clearly and fairly, determining everyone's responsibilities	18	40.0
Increased motivation and participation	Enabling teachers to participate more actively in the process, preventing isolation	Conducting the process in a supportive manner, making individuals feel visible and valued	15	33.3
Different perspectives and innovative solutions	Bringing together various ideas and experiences, producing creative solutions	Selecting group members with complementary characteristics, using different views in a balanced way	12	26.7
Positive team climate	Creating a sense of solidarity, trust, and collective achievement	Maintaining a positive team spirit, sustaining communication and leadership support	10	22.2

When Table 7 is examined, group dynamics and cooperation was the most emphasized theme (f =

20). This was followed by task sharing and responsibility ($f = 18$), increased motivation and participation ($f = 15$), different perspectives and innovative solutions ($f = 12$), and positive team climate ($f = 10$). These results show that group structuring was seen not only as division of labor but also as a way to support shared change and a positive school climate. Effective group structuring requires fair task distribution, open communication, leadership support, and process monitoring.

The participants stated that grouping teachers and administrators aimed to create a strong cooperative environment. They also emphasized task sharing, motivation, different perspectives, and a positive team climate. Fair task distribution, complementary group members, open communication, and leadership support were considered necessary.

P12 highlighted cooperation by stating, "Working as a team enables the process to progress more quickly and effectively." **P5** emphasized task sharing with the statement, "Fair distribution of duties makes the process more efficient." **P3** pointed to motivation by stating, "Working together increases motivation and enables greater participation in the process." **P14** supported innovative solutions with the statement, "Bringing different views together produces more effective solutions." In addition, **P22's** statement, "Working in a supportive environment makes the process easier," shows that a positive team climate facilitates the process.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined how organizational change is carried out in educational institutions. The analysis was based on school administrators' views on the vignette. The findings showed that change is not limited to managerial decisions. It requires diagnosis, planning, participation, resistance management, and motivation. Accurate evaluation of the existing situation emerged as the first step. Planning the process and involving stakeholders were also central. This result is consistent with studies emphasizing that organizational change should be

managed in a planned and conscious way (Burnes, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2003).

The participants viewed the school principal as a democratic and participatory leader. They stated that involving teachers and administrators made decisions easier to adopt. Participation also increased motivation. This finding is consistent with studies showing the positive effect of teacher participation on organizational commitment and motivation (Zhao et al., 2023). It is also parallel to the view that distributed leadership supports teacher autonomy and helps institutionalize innovative practices (Hallinger, 2010). Therefore, leadership in school-based change should be built on participation.

However, the findings of the present study also reveal a more critical and unexpected dimension of participation in decision-making processes. Although participation is generally discussed in the literature as a factor that reduces resistance, increases commitment, strengthens ownership, and supports the achievement of change goals (Coch & French, 1948; Lines, 2004; Somech, 2010), the participants in this study emphasized that participation may also create certain risks if it is not planned and structured effectively. In particular, prolonged decision-making, decision confusion, weakening of authority, and intra-group conflict were identified as possible negative outcomes of participation. This finding is consistent with the view that participative decision-making is not a single-dimensional practice and that its outcomes may vary depending on the degree, structure, scope, and management of participation (Black & Gregersen, 1997; Sagie & Aycan, 2003). In this respect, the finding partially questions the assumption that participation is always beneficial in change management. It shows that participation may become dysfunctional when roles are unclear, expectations are not managed, or the decision-making process is not guided by clear leadership. Therefore, participation in school-based change processes should not be understood as the unlimited involvement of all stakeholders in every decision. Participation should be carried out with clear goals, clear duties, and good communi-

cation. This finding shows that participatory management can both facilitate and complicate the change process.

The participants also perceived the principal as visionary and strategic. They stated that the principal did not only notice existing problems. They also saw the principal as a leader who set direction for the future of the school. This result is consistent with studies showing that vision building and strategic orientation are important for sustainable change (Bush & Glover, 2016; Gurr, 2023). In this context, school administrators should not focus only on daily problems. They should also develop long-term goals.

Communication was another important factor in the change process. The participants positively evaluated the principal's individual meetings with teachers. They also emphasized feedback mechanisms and open communication. These practices helped create a trust-based school climate. This finding is supported by studies showing that strong communication connects leadership practices with school climate (Tichnor-Wagner, 2020; Ehren & Baxter, 2021). Thus, effective change leadership depends not only on decision-making. It also depends on communication.

Motivation and encouragement were also important. The participants stated that the principal's supportive approach increased teachers' willingness to participate. Making achievements visible was considered valuable. Recognizing effort and supporting teachers psychologically were also important. This result is consistent with studies explaining the effect of supportive and rewarding leadership on teacher behavior and job satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Therefore, motivation is not only an individual process. It is also shaped by leadership practices.

The study also showed that resistance to change is a natural part of the process. The participants explained resistance through several factors. These included the desire to protect the comfort zone, workload anxiety, fear of uncertainty, and low expectations regarding students' potential. These findings are parallel to studies empha-

sizing psychological safety and supportive leadership in change processes (Schein, 1996; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005; Fullan, 2007). The participants stated that resistance weakened through open communication, individual support, short-term goals, and visible positive results. This shows that resistance cannot be reduced only through authority. It can also be reduced through meaning-making and trust building.

Group structuring was another important finding. The participants saw teacher grouping as a practice that strengthened cooperation. Fair task sharing, increased motivation, different perspectives, and a positive team climate were also emphasized. This result is consistent with studies showing the relationship between teamwork and innovation (West, 2002; Somech, 2006). Therefore, group structuring should not be seen only as division of labor. It also supports shared responsibility and collective learning.

The findings also showed that the principal was not perceived only as the person who started the process. The principal was also seen as someone who monitored and evaluated the process. The participants stated that regular feedback contributed to teacher development. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of evaluation culture in educational leadership (Earl & Katz, 2002; Timperley, 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Therefore, sustainable school-based change requires more than implementation. It also requires regular monitoring and revision when needed.

Future studies may compare different school types and levels. This may help reveal the contextual effects of change processes. In addition, teachers who resist change should be examined through in-depth qualitative studies. This can help clarify the sources of resistance. Quantitative or mixed-method studies with larger samples may also test the findings of this study. Finally, parent participation and leadership styles may be examined as important factors in school change processes.

This study has some limitations. Since the data were collected through a vignette-based design,

the findings reflect participants' evaluations of a hypothetical scenario rather than their direct experiences in a real change process. The study was limited to school administrators working in middle schools in the central districts of Siirt and Malatya, which limits the transferability of the findings to different regions, school levels, and educational contexts. In addition, since the participants consisted only of school principals and assistant principals, the views of teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders were not included in the study.

Declarations

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Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study (teachers).

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix 1.

Vignette Text and Interview Questions Presented to the Participants

Vignette Text Presented to the Participants

A school principal has recently been appointed to a middle school. After starting work at the school, the principal observes that there are various academic, organizational, and managerial problems. Student achievement is below the expected level. Teachers generally continue their existing routines and are reluctant to take responsibility for new practices. In addition, the distribution of duties among administrators and teachers is not clear. Communication among school staff is limited, and the culture of cooperation in the school is not sufficiently developed.

Before initiating any change process, the principal observes the school environment, examines student achievement data, identifies the physical and organizational deficiencies of the school, and holds individual meetings with teachers and administrators. After this initial evaluation, the principal decides that a planned change process is necessary in the school. In this process, the principal aims to increase academic achievement, strengthen cooperation among teachers, increase students' participation in school activities, and create a more active and productive school climate.

The principal then organizes meetings with teachers and administrators and asks for their opinions about the problems of the school and possible solutions. Some teachers and administrators support this process and state that change is necessary. However, some teachers and administrators resist the process. These individuals argue that the existing order should not be changed, that the proposed practices will increase their workload, that students will not be able to adapt to these activities, and that the new job descriptions are too detailed and demanding.

Despite this resistance, the principal continues the process by explaining the reasons for change, clarifying duties and responsibilities, encouraging teachers, and involving administrators and guidance counselors in the process. The principal forms teacher groups to plan social, cultural, and academic activities

for students. Each group is expected to prepare activities, share responsibilities, and contribute to the development of the school. Over time, some positive outcomes begin to emerge. Students participate in the activities more actively, teachers observe that students can succeed when they are supported, and the school receives positive feedback from its environment.

During this process, the principal continued to support teachers, monitor the implementation, and provide feedback. In the later stages of the process, differences emerged in teachers' levels of participation and attitudes toward change. Based on this scenario, please answer the following questions.

- 1 A) What action steps did the principal who managed the change process at the school use?
B) If you were in this process, what kind of path would you follow?
- 2 A) What did the teachers and administrators who resisted change emphasize?
B) In your opinion, what were the teachers who resisted change thinking in the background?
- 3 A) What did the principal aim to achieve by involving teachers and administrators in the decision-making process? Where did he/she want to reach through this?
B) If you were in this situation, would you involve teachers and administrators in the decision-making process?
C) Are there any risks in involving teachers and administrators in the decision-making process?
- 4 A) What elements did the principal emphasize in his/her change leadership?
B) In your opinion, what characteristics should a leader who leads change have?
C) Under what circumstances could the principal step back?
- 5 A) At what point was the resistance of teachers and administrators to change broken?
B) Why?
- 6 A) What was the purpose of forming teacher groups and planning this process?
B) What should be considered in this process?