Theory-practice relations: the views of school administrators [1]

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Abstract

This study aims at determining the views of school administrators concerning theory- practice relations. This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological design. Ten participants were chosen through homogeneous sampling technique. A semi-structured interview form was used for collecting data. Descriptive and frequency techniques were used for data analyses. Results show that administrators try to benefit from theories in their daily practices despite all the disadvantages of a very centralized system in Turkey. Administrators mostly complain about frequent system changes generated by the political interferences and superiors' distance from theory due to their lack of knowledge. Main implications of this study include contribution of theoretical knowledge to the practice at both top and local administrative level and the clear need for bridging theory and practice in Turkish education system.

Keywords: school administrator; theory-practice relation; phenomenological design; qualitative research

Introduction

As a term, theory can be defined in various ways. According to Bursalıoğlu (2003), "theory is the most reliable tool that leads us to reality ... successful administrators act in accordance with the theory deliberately or not, and try to ben-

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efit from it" (Bursalıoğlu, 2003, p. 95). Bacharach (1989) defines theory as "a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints" (Bacharach, 1989, p. 496). Theory is seen by researchers as the bedrock of the scientific research used to answer relevant questions for the benefit of mankind (Schneberger, Pollard, and Watson, 2009). According to Hall and Lindzey (1957), "theories function to prevent people from being confused by the full-blown complexity of natural or concrete events" (as cited in Bacharach, 1989, p. 496). Schneberger et al. (2009) claim theories have a vital role in scientific research to answer practical questions. They consider some theories to be better suited for specific applications or situations due to differences in their general characteristics. Walker (1965) asserts that "the real distinction lies not between theory and practice, but between good theory and bad theory. Good theory … has potential for explaining and predicting events …" (Walker, 1965, p. 18).

According to Gunter (2004), "theory is metaphor and metaphor is theory" (Gunter, 2004, p.31). This viewpoint resembles Mullen, Greenlee, and Bruner's (2005) study where educational leadership students explored theory-practice relationship through Mullen's binocular/integration metaphor and Schön's architect/builder metaphor. In their study, some metaphors developed by students were clothes closet, ocean beach, prism, mountain climbing, and journey. Bush

(2010) views that theory and practice are separate aspects of leadership and management, that practitioners shun using theories because they view them as being remote from real school situations. Baldridge et al. (2004) tie academic quality and practical relevance to the question "Are managers from Mars and academicians from Venus?" and they conclude that the managers and academicians hold very different worldviews. On the other hand, Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2006) tend to reject this dichotomy stating that theorists and practitioners cannot be thought separately and that they are not homogenous even within themselves. Hoy and Miskel (1987) suggest that theory and practice are directly connected in three ways: first, theory provides a frame of reference for practitioners; second, theory usage offers a general mode of analysis for practical events; and third, theory ultimately provides the knowledge base for practical and rational decision making.

The literature shows an ongoing sense of concern regarding the gap between theory and application (Mays, 2009). Meyer (2003) points out the discussion in the literature that the field of educational administration has paid insufficient attention to the knowledge and skills required of leaders for their jobs. There is a fundamental gap between science and action in professional academic programs preparing people for organizational leadership positions and especially in the 1990s, the balance of theory and practice has tilted too much towards theory, espe-

cially towards the wrong kinds of theory (Meyer, 2003). Similarly, Duhamel (1982) points out school administrators' complaints that theory is an academic pursuit with little or no relevance for their daily activities while academics and theorists charge that practicing administrators mostly make no effort to understand and apply organizational theory.

The gap between theory and practice has been examined in three ways. One is a knowledge transfer problem, another is distinct kinds of knowledge that theory and practice represent, and the third is viewed a knowledge production problem (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). To deal with this challenge, Cummings (2007) proposes research-based knowledge to be relevant and useful for the success of management profession. This could be achieved when academics as the professional embodiment of the field are engaged with the real world. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006), too, propose "a method of engaged scholarship for addressing the knowledge production problem, arguing that engaged scholarship not only enhances the relevance of research for practice but also contributes significantly to advancing research knowledge in a given domain" (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006, p. 802). On the contrary, Perriton and Hodgson (2013) believe that "recent theoretical shifts in management learning have emphasized the relational, site and context specific conception of knowledge and practice and engaged with individuals, (whatever their role) in exploring how

they come to experience and develop new ways of being and acting in the world" (Perriton and Hodgson, 2013, p. 144).

"Preparing thoughtful practitioners requires moving away from the apparent dichotomy of theory and practice and moving toward the synergistic combination of the two. Thoughtful practice is informed by the complements of theory and practice" (Mays, 2009, p. 1). Sherman suggests a partnership between universities and districts and equal attention to theory and practice to prepare a new generation of transformational school leaders (as cited in Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). Vanderlinde and Braak (2010) conducted a study with teachers, school leaders, researchers, intermediaries and educational research professors. They found that the gap between educational research and practice should be approached as a complex and differentiated phenomenon and all participants perceive the need for more cooperation between researchers and practitioners. Bush (2009) suggests that the development of effective leaders in education not be left to chance and be a deliberate process designed to produce the best possible leadership for both schools and colleges. This requires preparation of leaders not only through theoretical but also practical education. This could be achieved, as stated by Bush et al., by bridging the work situation and learning situation required for the most successful learning experiences (as cited in Bush, 2009).

In this context, different approaches

and suggestions for bridging theory-practice are found in the literature. For instance, Mays' (2009) research highlights significant theory-application relationships of undergraduate management education. In order to prepare students for the world outside school, Mays suggests providing a link, building a bridge, or making a connection. Lesser and Cooper (2006) developed a model with five components -the practice class as laboratory, the integrative journal, clinical supervision, the clinical agenda, and faculty field advisement- to help graduate students master the skill of integrating theory and practice. They found that the model was versatile in its application and relevant to a variety of social work curricula at not only graduate but also undergraduate level. In Australia, many universities prioritize the incorporation of work-based, experiential learning opportunities into undergraduate programs. The University of Newcastle initiated a study integrating business curriculum and business world through a course designed to bridge the theory-practice gap (Yap, 2012). Similarly, a scenario-based project with criminal justice students conducted by Bulen (2010) brought out that participants perceived the project to be of great help to bridge the gap between the theory learned in the classroom and the simulation of the real situation. Stating there are attempts to bridge the theory and practice in Singapore, Hean and Tin (2008) indicate the need for competent senior faculty staff in conceptualization and implementation to

develop school leadership programs. Furthermore, Bevins and Price (2014) see collaboration a realistic opportunity for reducing the gap between theory and practice, in the form of either joint research or continuing professional development.

Turkish Context

The Turkish educational system has a centralized governance structure. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for education system. MoNE is represented in eighty-one provinces of Turkey all of which have their own district level directorates in order to support the implementation of education policy. Turkey's highly centralized system and bureaucratic structure limit the capacity of schools to address their challenges (OECD, 2013).

School administrators in general are thought to have limited theoretical background in Turkey. According to Şimşek (1997), universities do not assume responsibility of training and educating administrators because national education organization has a tradition of "training administrators through apprenticeship". For this reason, theory and practice in education remain two fully separated domains (Şimşek, 1997). However, most universities offer graduate programs in the field of educational administration. Courses in this field focus more on theoretical knowledge rather than actual school practices. As Şimşek (1997) states, a large majority of academics working in the field of education develop only theoretical suggestions which are far from the real school problems because, in most cases, academics lack the knowledge of

practices at schools. As a result of this, MoNE makes its own decisions without seeking any academic perspective.

MoNE does not require a graduate degree in the field of educational administration from candidates before they are assigned to an administrative position. All candidates regardless of the educational degree or experience are evaluated through an oral examination. A committee assigned by the provincial directorate of national education from among local administrators conducts the oral examination. Current administrators before reassignment are also subjected to a set of criteria determined by MoNE. An assessment sheet is filled by ten people representing administrators, teachers, parents, and students. According to the related regulations, the evaluation sheet lists criteria which could be objectively measured. Some examples include personal traits and management roles such as "the ability to make urgent decisions by taking initiative in problem-solving", "having research publications in the field of educational administration and supervision", and "announcing evaluation and performance criteria, procedures and rules to all staff". However, majority of the criteria is difficult to measure objectively such as "awareness, understanding and respecting of others' differences and preferences", supporting and modeling students to develop national and universal values", "acting fairly in administrative issues and increasing employee's morale", "using and encouraging an administrative approach which is both participative and open to criticism, creating an emotional impact based on trust at school", and "identifying and guiding when the em-

ployees do not perform effectively, taking measures and initiating necessary procedures". It is clear in these sample statements that some items include more than one criterion. This might make the measurement difficult and confusing.

As for the oral exam, this includes to evaluate candidate's knowledge on legislation, capacity for representation and level of qualification, capacity of reasoning and level of comprehension, communication skills, self-confidence and ability of persuasion. Oral examination committee consists of five local administrators determined by the provincial director of national education. Both methods of selecting future administrators are seriously criticized by teacher unions and academicians for being open to subjectivity and favoritism.

Starting with the selection and assignment of administrators, there seems a lack of theoretical approach in Turkish educational system at both central and local level practices. This situation leaded the researchers to get in-depth understanding of administrators with knowledge of theory. The underlying belief was that they could be able to view the organizational policies and implementations in school administration in Turkey from the window of theory.

This study aims at determining school administrators' views on theory-practice relations. In the light of this aim, the research problem is determined as "How do educational administrators see the relations between theory and practice?"

Method

This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological design. In phenomenological research methods, according to Moustakas (1994), "the researcher describes the structure of the experience based on reflection and interpretation of the research participant's story. The aim is to determine what the experience means for the people who have had the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 1). Creswell (2003) defines phenomenological research as "the researcher identifies the 'essence' of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 17). Interviews, discussions and participant observation are used to gather in-depth information and perceptions in human studies (Lester, 1999). This research aimed at gathering views, perceptions and experiences of school administrators on theory-practice relations through individual interviews.

Sampling

Homogeneous sampling, a technique in purposive sampling method, was used based on the criteria that all the participants had administrative experiences and had either completed or had been attending a graduate program in the field of educational administration and supervision. Creswell (2012) suggests that the researcher might select samples purposefully within certain sites or people possessing similar traits or characteristics in homogeneous sampling.

Except one participant who worked in a non-formal education centre, nine participants worked in different types and levels of schools in Antalya, Turkey. Participants consist of four females and six males. Half of them specialize in classroom teaching while the rest are subject teachers. They have experience on average for 6.5 years in administrative position and for 14.5 years in teaching career. They have worked either as principal/director or vice principals.

Ethical Procedures

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study prior to the interviews. All participants were informed that the study would be conducted on a voluntary basis and their names would be kept confidential by using codes P1 through P10. A written permission form was signed by the participants for recording their voices and publishing the results.

Data Collection and Analyses

A semi-structured interview form was developed to collect the data. Interview form consists of ten following questions: (1) What is your definition of theory? (2) To what extend can theory be applied? (3) What experiences did you have during master's education? (4) Which theories do you use more often in practice? (5) How does theoretical knowledge affect your practice? (6) What is the relationship between theory and practice? (7) Which problems do you encounter in administrative process while using theory? (8) What solutions do you develop for the problems you encounter? (9) What differences does graduate education make in an administrator's behavior? (10) How

can the theory-practice bridge be built? Interviews were conducted in April and May 2013. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were recorded via computer. After transcribing of interviews had been completed, the data were subjected to descriptive and frequency analyses. Based on ten interview questions, codes and sub-themes were identified under ten themes.

Validity and Reliability Procedures

Participants were interviewed at their work places when possible. Researchers had a chance to observe the participants in their actual environments as suggested by Kirk and Miller (as cited in Şimşek, 2013). Participants were asked to confirm the transcripts after the completion of decoding. Later, two researchers separately coded data and checked the codes together. Thus, analyst triangulation was applied as suggested by Patton (1999) for verification and validation of qualitative analysis. Lastly, two Ph.D. students in the field of educational administration were asked independently to match the codes defined by the researchers with the related response segment within the transcribed text of one interviewee. Cohen's kappa coefficient (.886; $p\square.001$) was calculated after pairing procedures. This kappa value is accepted as almost perfect agreement by Landis and Koch and as excellent by Fleiss (Cohen's kappa, n.d.).

Results

Findings obtained from this study were organized and presented within ten themes. Findings from eight themes were presented in tables with frequencies and percent-

ages. The numbers in frequencies exceed the number of participants because some participants stated more than one opinion in the same topic. The other two themes were given in text with direct quotations.

Definition of Theory

Ten participants defined "theory" in their own words (translated by the researchers). Their definitions are given below:

An abstract knowledge formed scientifically and methodologically and through observations to explain a phenomenon or a situation (P1-male)

Something that is criticized and debated in terms of its applicability (P2-male)
Set of intertwined concepts (P3-male)
Ideas and concepts put forward as result of scientific research (P4-female)
A viewpoint including reliance, communication and frankness in order to make people work (P5-female)

Facts that are put forward by scientists as result of experiments (P6-male)

All the tools used in organizational management (P7-female)

A tool for generalizing current practices to the related field after scientific research are conducted (P8-male)

A way demonstrating how to behave as administrators (P9-female)
A concept that is not sufficient by itself since it is limited to a particular point of view (P10-male)

As seen in the definitions, participants understanding of theory differed. Four participants (P1, P4, P6, and P8) focused on the scientific side of theory emphasizing terms such as methodology, research, generalizing, and experiment. Other four participants (P2, P5, P7, and P9) viewed theory as the base for practice in management process. P3 approached theory in terms of connectedness in a set of concepts while P10 referred to the term's insufficiency in embracing all kinds of viewpoints.

Applicability of Theories

Participants' views on applicability of theories are divided into two sub-themes:

Table 1. Participants' views on applicability of theories

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
Applicable	Theories can be applied if they are selected in accordance with the situation and the person	7	
	Administrators are able to benefit from theories to solve problems	4	
	Some administrators act in accordance with theories without knowing	3	
	Application of a theory depends on cohesive team members in the organization	1	
	Classical theories are more prevalent in practice	1	
	A theory can be applied only when an administrator has internalized it	1	
	Social exchange theory works well	1	
	Sub-total	*18*	*72 %*
Inapplicable	Administrators' attempts to use theories are limited due to the lack of autonomy and centralized structure of the system	3	
	Theory do not correspond with the practice in real environment	2	
	Theories are inadequate to identify administrator's behavior	1	
	Since the administrators have limited knowledge of theories, they cannot use them in problem solving	1	
	Sub-total	*7*	*28 %*
	Total	***25***	***100 %***

Source: own research

applicable and inapplicable. Table 1 illustrates the codes and their frequencies in parentheses under each sub-theme. Administrators mostly (72%) agree that theories are applicable. The highest fre-

quencies in the sub-theme "applicable" were obtained from the codes stating the compatibility of theory with the situation and the person followed by the views on theory being beneficial for solving prob-

Table 2. Experiences in graduate education process

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
Positive	Transferring knowledge into practice	5	
	Approaching situations and people with an administrative perspective	5	
	Inclination towards having an administrative position	1	
	Self-contentment as an educated administrator	1	
	Meeting social needs of the staff at school	1	
	More sensitivity to private lives	1	
	Taking pride of high expectations by superiors	1	
	Realizing the resemblance between theory and administrator's behavior	1	
	Sub-total	*16*	*67 %*
Negative	Being disturbed when an administrator reprimands subordinates	1	
	Witnessing teachers' exploitation of the administrator's humanistic approach	1	
	Witnessing teachers' disapproval of decisions dictated by the administrators	1	
	Regretting previous mistakes as an administrator with no theoretical knowledge	1	
	Reacting to differences between theoretical knowledge and the practice at school	1	
	Witnessing that school quality management team's efforts are disregarded	1	
	Being aware of the principal's professional inadequacy	1	
	Criticizing the school administration unjustly	1	
	Sub-total	*8*	*33 %*
	Total	*24*	*100 %*

Source: own research

lems. Participants also stated that some administrators act in accordance with theories without knowing they do so. On the other hand, three participants view theories inapplicable, something that can be attributed to lack of autonomy and centralized structure of system. Two participants consider that theories are incapable of meeting the needs of real environment.

Experiences in Graduate Education Process

Participants' experiences differed based on their position during graduate education. At the time they attended the graduate program, eight participants were full-time teachers, one participant was principal, and one was vice-principal. Participants' experiences were discussed under two sub-themes: positive and negative. Table 2 illustrates the codes and their frequencies in parentheses under each sub-theme. Administrators' experiences were mostly positive during

their master's education. Regarding positive experiences, the codes "transferring knowledge into practice" and "approaching situations and people with an administrative perspective" each have five frequencies. Each of the remaining codes of either positive or negative experiences has one frequency.

Theories Used at Work

Table 3 illustrates which theories participants use in their administrative practices. As seen in the table, eight out of ten prefer contingency theory while only one participant makes a mention of motivation theories.

Effect of theoretical knowledge on practice

The effect of theories on administrative behavior of participants is discussed within four sub-themes: self-actualization, communication, conflict manage-

Table 3. Participants' preferences of theories used

Theories	P1-Male	P2-Male	P3-Male	P4-Female	P5-Female	P6-Male	P7-Female	P8-Male	P9-Female	P10-Male	f
Contingency	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	8
Bureaucracy			x					x			2
Theory X and Y			x							x	2
Social Exchange								x	x		2
Human Relations		x								x	2
Motivation	x										1

Source: own research

ment, and decision making. As shown in Table 4, administrators express that their administrative behaviors are mostly affected in the areas of self-actualization and communication. They consider the effect of theories on their behavior as quite positive in all four sub-themes.

Relationship between Theory and Practice

The relationship between theory and practice was analyzed within five sub-themes. As illustrated in Table 5, the sub-themes "MoNE's unscientific approach to decision-making process" and "administrators' lack of theoretical knowledge" have the highest frequencies. The next

Table 4. The effect of theories on administrative behavior

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
Self-actualization	More leadership less administration	2	
	Justice and equality in administrative processes	2	
	Greater perspective	1	
	More positive and constructive behavior	1	
	Internalized theoretical knowledge	1	
	Motivating teachers	1	
	Sub-total	*8*	*42 %*
Communication	Using "I language"	1	
	Eye contact	1	
	Empathy	1	
	Calm and rational act	1	
	Positive approach in human relations	1	
	Exchange of knowledge and experience with veteran administrators	1	
	Sub-total	*6*	*32 %*
Conflict management	Utilizing theoretical knowledge in problem solving	2	
	Building a successful team	1	
	Sub-total	*3*	*16 %*
Decision making	Ensuring teacher involvement	2	10%
	Total	*19*	*100 %*

Source: own research

sub-theme with high frequency reads as "lack of autonomy due to centralized system". Other sub-themes are the following: "use of metaphoric expressions and "political influences and pressures". Among all the codes, "no scientific standpoint in decisions" and "using theory unconsciously and to the extent of their

Table 5. The relationship between theory and practice

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
MoNE's unscientific approach to decision-making process	No scientific standpoint in decisions	4	
	Changes not based on research results	2	
	Ignoring to benefit from both theory and practice in decision-making	1	
	Sub-total	7	*28 %*
Administrators' lack of theoretical knowledge	Using theory unconsciously and to the extent of their knowledge	3	
	Falling behind recent developments in the field	2	
	Using peers' suggestions and regulations rather than theory when faced with problems	1	
	Refusing and ignoring the use of theory	1	
	Sub-total	7	*28 %*
Lack of autonomy due to centralized system	Limiting school administrators' theory usage by regulations	2	
	Viewing principals those who follow only MoNE's orders with limited leadership roles	2	
	Practitioners' limited participation in decision-making process	1	
	The gap between local needs and theoretical knowledge	1	
	Sub-total	6	*24 %*
Use of metaphoric expressions	Seeing the world through two lenses- theory and practice- of a binocular	2	
	Seeing theory as basis for practice as constitution is basis for regulations	1	
	Sub-total	3	*12 %*
Political influences and pressures	Obstacles created by politics for practitioners	*1*	
	Top administration's unreal expectations on school strategic plans	*1*	
	Sub-total	2	*8 %*
	Total	*25*	*100 %*

Source: own research

Table 6. Problems encountered when using theory

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
Political interference in education	Frequent system changes in MoNE invalidate strategic plans	6	
	Whenever a new minister is appointed, implementations at schools also change	1	
	Political interventions might prevent the use of theory	1	
	Sub-total	*8*	*33 %*
Problems arising from superiors	Traditional superiors tend to interfere with decisions at the teachers' committees	2	
	Superiors value experience more than theoretical knowledge	2	
	Superiors fall short of motivating their subordinates	2	
	Superiors' negative attitudes demoralize employees	1	
	Traditional superiors view those with master's degree to have unrealistic perspectives	1	
	Sub-total	*8*	*33 %*
Problems arising from employees	Teachers tend to see duties imposed by changes and out of class activities as burden	2	
	Employees unaware of theories cannot empathize with knowledgeable administrators	1	
	Knowledgeable administrators encounter with resistance from teachers	1	
	Employees tend to exploit administrator's humanistic approach	1	
	Sub-total	*5*	*21 %*
Problem arising from parents	Parents do not want frequent changes since they feel uncomfortable with new roles expected of them	1	4 %
Problem arising from practices	Theories' promises might be incompatible to solve problems of education system	1	4 %
Problem arising from system	Neither regulations nor theories are able to be fully implemented because the system lacks consistency	1	4 %
	Total	*24*	*100 %*

Source: own research

knowledge" were the two most repeated codes.

Problems Encountered When Using Theory

Problems encountered when using theory was analyzed within six sub-themes. As illustrated in Table 6, the sub-themes "political interference in education" and "problems arising from superiors" have the highest frequencies. The next frequency is obtained from the sub-theme "problems arising from the employees". Other three sub-themes are related to problems arising from parents, practices, and system each with one frequency. The highest frequency was obtained from the code stated as "Frequent system changes

in MoNE invalidate strategic plans".

Solutions for the Problems Encountered When Theory is Used

Solutions offered by the participants for the problems they encounter when theory is used are listed based on the gender. Table 7 illustrates the codes obtained from males and females separately. Female administrators talked mostly about motivation, leadership, and empathy while their male counterparts mentioned communication, confidence, theory usage, and support. One male and one female administrator's choice was discouraging such as quitting the administrative position or withdrawing from conflict.

Table 7. Solutions for the problems encountered when theory is used

Male	Female
1. Trying to come to an agreement with staff through knowledge	1. Motivating employees through creating an award-winning team
2. Trying to be more patient and energetic when encountered problems	2. Improving employee's success through leadership and sharing knowledge
3. Providing the necessary conditions for the implementation of theory	3. Motivating sub-ordinates through supporting their efforts
4. Gaining people's confidence by acting properly with respect to attributes of employee and the work environment	4. Empathizing with employees when discussing issues
5. Taking advantage of theory to behave differently with different people when a compromise is needed	5. Withdrawing from conflict with superiors despite the fact that she herself is right
6. Ensuring the support of both superiors and subordinates through good communication	
7. Supporting and guiding continuous development efforts of employees	
8. Quitting the administrative position fed up with the issues of system changes	

Source: own research

Differences Graduate Education Makes in Administrator's Behavior

As indicated earlier, all the participants of this study have a master's degree in the field of educational administration and supervision. Eight participants indicated the difference between traditional administrators and themselves. Some examples of the statements in their own words (translated by the researchers) in regards to the differences are presented below:

Yes, there is difference. I think they realize that I made a difference with my educational background. (P2-male)

Certainly, there is difference. Things are getting done with no scientific data. First, our perspectives are quite different. Then, master's education helped me figure out where I could use the theories and look at things more professionally. I always say to my staff. I learned this in graduate courses. I mean, the team spirit, motivating people to work. (P3-male)

We have more up to date knowledge. Our administrative approach is more scientific and more professional. I detected this difference during our meetings and conversations with others. However, there are colleagues who improved themselves over the years. There are exceptional people who indeed investigate and read publications in the field and try to materialize innovations. We cannot ignore this. (P4-female)

The difference is unbelievable. You can look at things with eagle eye and see things differently. You are able to comprehend what people are really saying. My colleague who also has a master's degree shares a parallel viewpoint. (P5-female)

There is certainly a difference. You are able to communicate better with people with graduate education. I decided to be principal one day while I was working with this principal who was the best example of motivation breaker. (P6-male)

I am different in a way that I can identify which behavior is a reflection of which theory. I mean, I can make sense of what I observe. Others act instinctively based on their background and experiences. (P8-male)

Yes, there is difference. I trust people's ideas, actions, and their ability to make decisions. I care about my staff. I mean, I value people working with me but others do not feel the same way, unfortunately. (P9-female)

It would have been a lot easier, if I wasn't a knowledgeable and educated administrator." (P10-male)

Two participants stated that it is also possible to meet administrators with no graduate education reading a lot and developing themselves on their own. Their statements are as follows:

It is very important to improve himself personally even for those with education. We automatically take a scientific way in solving problems without naming it similar to driving a car. Graduate education is not necessary. The success of a princi-

Table 8. Suggestions to build a bridge between theory and practice

Sub-themes	Codes	f	P
Suggestions to MoNE	Those with a master's degree in educational administration should be preferred for administrative positions	8	
	Master's degree in the field of educational administration should be a criterion for administrative positions	7	
	Continuous professional development of teachers and administrators should be provided	2	
	Top administrators in MoNE should have knowledge and experience in the field of education	1	
	Administrative assignments should be independent of political interventions.	1	
	Administrative positions should be rewarding for those with a master's degree	1	
	Educational institutions should be given more autonomy.	1	
	Sub-total	*21*	*42 %*
Suggestions for partnership between MoNE and universities	Cooperation and collaboration between MoNE and universities should be developed	10	
	Graduate education should facilitate face to face interaction and integration with practice	2	
	Doctoral programs for practicing administrators should also be provided	2	
	Academicians should leave their ivory towers and be visible in schools	2	
	Academicians and practitioners should work in cooperation to in research projects	1	
	Sub-total	*17*	*34 %*
Suggestions for local administrations	Academic and professional development of administrators and teachers should be supported.	8	
	Those who have theoretical knowledge should be encouraged to share their knowledge with colleagues.	2	
	Newly appointed administrators should observe the current situation before making any changes.	1	
	Administrators should try to involve all stakeholders in decision-making.	1	
	Sub-total	*12*	*24 %*
	Total	**50**	**100 %**

Source: own research

pal could be determined by the training of his/her staff and the environment. (P1-male)

There is a difference. When we get together with colleagues who have master's degree, I notice that we engage in in-depth conversations with broader perspective. However, some colleagues without a graduate degree are still able to renew and update their knowledge. They follow up the developments in education closely. We cannot just sit around without doing anything. We need to attend to the problems. (P7-female)

How to Build Theory-Practice Bridge?

Participants' suggestions to build a bridge between theory and practice were analyzed within three sub-themes. As illustrated in Table 8, participants mostly made suggestions to MoNE, followed by suggestions for partnership between MoNE and universities. Thirdly, they made suggestions for local administrations. Among all the codes, the highest frequency was obtained from "Cooperation and collaboration between MoNE and universities should be developed". The next high frequency codes are related to preferring those with master's degree and setting the master's degree as a criterion for administrative positions. Support for academic and professional development of administrators and teachers was suggested by eight participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, participants' definitions of theory seem to differ based on their experiences. Four participants emphasized scientific methods in the definition of theory while other four view the theory as the base for practice in management process. These views are consistent with the statement of Schneberger, et al. (2009) who emphasized both scientific and practical aspect of a theory. Two participants criticized theories in terms of non-applicability and insufficiency for being limited to a particular point of view. Bacharach (1989), in the same way, pointed out that many organizational behavior theories fail to accomplish the purpose of parsimoniously organizing and clearly communicating concepts.

Regarding applicability of theories, administrators had mostly positive views. Similarly, their experiences at work tended to be more positive in general. These results might be linked to their having a master's degree in the field of educational administration and having conscious knowledge about theories. Because all the participants were working at schools as they attended a graduate study, they had the opportunity to transfer knowledge into their daily practices. Moreover, they were able to approach situations and people with an administrative perspective. However, some believed that theories fail to provide answers for practitioners to handle real life situations and identify administrator's behavior.

Although all participants have learned about various theories as classified under three categories in the literature-classical theories, neoclassical theories and the latest theories- they only mentioned six neoclassical theories. Research participants seem to use the contingency theory to a

great degree. Considering the fact that new generation of administrators is relatively younger and more educated, it is striking to see them disregarding the latest and the newest theories and approaches. This might be attributed to the lack of authority they have in a heavily centralized system as well as their superiors' lack of theoretical knowledge. Further, the low number of well-educated young administrators might feel lonely among others, under-appreciated by their colleagues and superiors, and unsupported for their efforts.

Administrators believe that theories affected their behavior in positive ways. From studying theories, participants in this study emphasized several personal and professional gains as self-actualization, positive communication, conflict management and decision making. Pointing at practitioners facing problems on a daily base, Schneberger et al. (2009) suggested they broaden their perspective through such activities as reading books and articles, attending conferences, and taking classes. Because all participants in this study had graduate degree, it is considered that they might have purposefully utilized theoretical knowledge to cope with daily problems as reflected in their behaviors.

As for the relationship between theory and practice, administrators pointed out that, in most situations, practice is negatively affected by top management's lack of theoretical knowledge, disregarding scientific findings, lack of autonomy at local level, and political influences and pressures. Stating theory-practice relation in England as satisfactory, Gunter (2003) concluded that the reason behind

this is a very close partnership between academic environment and practitioners. Contrary to the situation in England, the gap between theory and practice continues in Turkish system. Politics are known to play an extremely interfering role in Turkish educational system generally and in administrators' behaviors specifically. When trying to work with theories as knowledgeable administrators, they mostly face problems with their superiors who might have been assigned through political preferences.

Majority of the participants believed that graduate degree makes a great deal of difference for successful school administrators. Two participants, on the other hand, indicated that having a graduate degree is not critical all the time if people keep learning and continually develop themselves. An intriguing come out from some of the participants was that as knowledgeable administrators they even experienced discouraging situations when they faced with certain problems. As one participant stated, education did not help to deal with issues and he ended up quitting his principalship position. Another one chose to withdraw from conflict situations with her superiors even when she thought she was completely right.

One crucial purpose of this study was to explore the ways to build a bridge between theory and practice from the knowledgeable and young administrators' viewpoint. It is evidenced in the views of study participants that closing the gap between theory and practice is the mutual responsibility of MoNE and universities as well as local authorities. In a similar way, Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2006) pointed out that more extensive

and effective communication between policy makers/practitioners and theorists/researchers are vital to make policy-practice and theory-research relevant.

Raelin (2007) concluded that there is a need to synthesize theory and practice in order to prepare thoughtful practitioners. More formal, collaborative, and long-term relationships between universities and school districts were suggested by Cunningham and Sherman (2008) to develop future leaders' capacity for continuous educational improvement. This kind of cooperation between research and practice was also recommended by Vanderlinde and Braak (2010) through establishing 'professional learning communities' or promoting a 'design-based research' model. Cummings (2007) offered "a closer partnership between researchers and practitioners to produce knowledge that is both scientifically valid and practical" (Cummings, 2007, p. 355). Cummings also considered forging closer links between research and practice is a key part of mission and values. Schneberger et al. (2009) suggested practitioners be proactive in understanding the scientific inquiry cycle by getting involved in academic courses, conferences, and publications. Findings of this study have parallels with the above-mentioned suggestions.

According to Schneberger et al. (2009) "practitioners may not call their presumptions about their environment 'theories', they serve the same purpose and resemblance to academic theories" (Schneberger, 2009, p. 59). Along these lines, Meyer (2003) claimed that vision, commitment, sense of identity, tolerance for ambiguity, and trust in problem solving skills were such traits which could not be necessarily acquired by academic knowledge. One participant in this study similarly indicated that some administrators with no graduate degree could still possess those traits despite the big difference education makes.

This study might pose some valuable implications for policy makers, academics, practicing and future educational administrators. One implication is that theoretical knowledge has a potential to contribute a great deal to an administrators' approach to both educational policies at top and daily practices at the local level. This is evident in the study participants' comments of how they benefitted from theory and how they had experiences of conflicts and dilemmas with their superiors or peers unaware of knowledge of theory. Another one signals a clear need for bridging theory and practice in Turkish system. This could be done through partnership between MoNE and universities in the form of either graduate/certification programs or intensive in-service training with academic credit.

This study has such limitations as the low number of participants, purposefully chosen administrators with graduate education, using only face to face interviews with the determined set of questions, and the views and experiences of participating administrators. Notwithstanding the limitations, it can be concluded that top-down administrators in Turkey can make rewarding differences in educational system through theoretical knowledge. Future researchers could be interested in conducting studies with a focus on policy makers, district administrators, traditional school administrators without theoret-

ical knowledge, and academics of education faculties.

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