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Contextualizing School Leadership in Türkiye: Stakeholder Perspectives on Effective Leadership Traits

Esra Töre ^{a,b} and Gülsu Yağcı ^c

^aDepartment of Educational Sciences, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, İstanbul, Türkiye; ^bDepartment of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA; ^cFaculty of Education, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, İstanbul, Türkiye

ABSTRACT



This study examines how key stakeholders in Türkiye construct, justify, and reinterpret effective school leadership traits through a cultural lens. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, data were collected from 16 participants across four stakeholder groups. Findings reveal that relational, ethical, and adaptive traits – such as communication, honesty, and flexibility – are prioritized over technical competencies. Traits like discipline and supervisory skills also emerged as culturally specific. While partially aligned with McEwan’s framework, Turkish perspectives emphasize moral authority and interpersonal trust, highlighting the contextual construction of leadership and the need for culturally responsive leadership development.

Introduction

The concept of schooling has become increasingly dynamic and unpredictable, with modern schools experiencing rapid shifts in leadership practices compared to previous decades (OECD, 2020; Parlar, 2020). These transformations are primarily driven by technological advancements, evolving student competencies, and shifting career landscapes (Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Consequently, school leaders and teachers must continuously adapt to emerging responsibilities to effectively prepare future generations (Leithwood et al., 2020).

In the face of increasingly complex and unpredictable conditions, educational institutions now require a more context-sensitive understanding of school leadership—one that responds to organizational, socio-cultural, and policy dynamics (Gurr, 2015). In such volatile settings, the ability of school leaders to manage crises has become a central component of effective leadership. Crisis leadership involves preparedness, rapid decision-making, clear communication, and emotional support in the face of unexpected disruptions such as pandemics, natural disasters, or school-based threats (Atillo et al., 2025; Griffard et al., 2025). As Alene et al. (2025) also highlight, school leaders are expected to ensure psychological safety, continuity of learning, and institutional trust during prolonged emergencies. Building on this foundational understanding of educational management, this study emphasizes the need for leadership models that support effective learning in diverse cultural contexts. Educational management is broadly defined as the process of organizing human and material resources to support effective learning (Hoy et al., 2015). However, the role of the school leader extends beyond administrative tasks to include strategic direction, capacity building, and the establishment of a productive school culture (Bush & Glover, 2014).

The concept of effectiveness was first introduced by Barnard (1938) as “the degree to which an organization achieves its goals.” Over time, it has evolved into a multidimensional construct involving both tangible and relational indicators. An effective school is now defined not merely by academic performance, but by its ability to create optimal learning environments that support cognitive, affective, and social development (Klopf, 1982). In the 21st century, schools must also offer personalized, flexible, and future-oriented learning experiences, preparing students to become autonomous learners and responsible

CONTACT Esra Töre  esra.tore@izu.edu.tr  Department of Educational Sciences, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Halkalı Cad. No: 281, Halkalı, Küçükçekmece, İstanbul 34303, Türkiye

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citizens (Aydın, 2023), although such outcomes may be prioritized and interpreted differently across educational cultures. These different interpretations are often rooted in a country's unique socio-political and economic context. For example, education systems shaped by neoliberal reforms tend to emphasize measurable academic outcomes, while others may prioritize civic engagement or moral development (Carstensen & Emmenegger, 2023; Silova et al., 2020). Additionally, historical legacies, such as colonialism or political transitions, play a vital role in shaping how success in education is defined and pursued (Shust et al., 2022; Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). These complex interdependencies highlight that what is considered “effective” or “valuable” in education is not universally agreed upon, but rather culturally mediated.

Within this shifting landscape, educational leadership is a key lever of change and innovation (Leithwood et al., 2020). Principals must be equipped to respond to new policy demands, societal expectations, and student needs while fostering a vision of continuous improvement. Yet, leadership effectiveness is increasingly viewed as culturally and socially situated rather than a fixed set of traits applicable across all contexts. As several scholars have noted, leadership is inherently contextual, culturally mediated, and socially constructed (Dimmock & Walker, 2000b; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

A growing body of comparative education literature emphasizes that leadership frameworks, particularly those developed in Anglo-American contexts, may not directly transfer to other cultures without adaptation (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). These frameworks often project Western assumptions about hierarchy, communication, and individual agency. For example, *Developing Comparative and International Educational Leadership and Management* highlights how leadership traits are influenced by national traditions, values, and systemic structures (Walker & Dimmock, 2005). Similarly, Hofstede's (2001) work on cultural dimensions suggests that attributes such as power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance significantly mediate how leadership is perceived and enacted.

Although Western leadership models have long shaped school leadership practices and policies globally, they are rarely subjected to critical scrutiny when applied in non-Western sociocultural settings. In contexts like Türkiye, where educational systems are influenced by hierarchical institutional structures, collectivist values, and centralized policy control, there is a pressing need to investigate how leadership is understood, valued, and enacted on the ground (Bellibaş & Kılınç, 2023; Bush & Glover, 2016; Oplatka & Arar, 2017). Reflecting this pattern, the hierarchical and collectivist nature of the Turkish education system is well documented in recent literature. This hierarchical and collectivist nature of the Turkish education system is well documented in recent literature. For instance, Erani and Baris (2022) emphasize the centralization of education governance and the bureaucratic inspection mechanisms that reinforce vertical control structures. As they note, “*In Turkey, the education system is shaped by central authority regulations, which reduce school-level autonomy and hinder the implementation of flexible, need-based decisions*” (Erani & Baris, 2022, p. 12). Similarly, Adiguzel (2021) highlights how educational aims in Türkiye have historically been shaped by sociopolitical transformations, reinforcing collectivist and state-centered educational ideals.

Instead of introducing a new theoretical model, this study critically interrogates McEwan's (2002) widely cited framework of effective school leadership to explore how its assumptions are received, reinterpreted, or challenged by key stakeholders in the Turkish context. Several scholars have argued that such universalist models often fail to reflect the moral, relational, and institutional dynamics of non-Western educational settings (Bellibaş & Kılınç, 2023; Bush & Glover, 2016; Oplatka & Arar, 2017; Tosyali, 2025). McEwan's model, which includes ten leadership domains – ranging from communicator and visionary to character builder and change expert – has been influential in many leadership development programs, especially within Anglo-American education systems. Yet, its applicability to culturally diverse and non-Western settings remain underexplored, necessitating grounded research that centers local voices and institutional dynamics.

The aim of this study is to examine how key educational stakeholders in Türkiye – namely teachers, parents, administrators, and students – interpret and justify effective school leadership traits in light of McEwan's (2002) U.S.-based leadership framework. It seeks to uncover how these perspectives are shaped by Türkiye's unique socio-cultural and institutional contexts, and to what extent they align with or diverge from established leadership models. By contextualizing leadership within a non-Western setting, this study contributes to the growing call for culturally responsive leadership research and offers insights for

international scholars and policymakers aiming to adapt leadership frameworks across diverse education systems.

The paper proceeds by outlining the research methodology, followed by findings that compare Turkish stakeholder interpretations with McEwan's original framework, and concluding with a discussion of implications and limitations. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following overarching research question: *How do key educational stakeholders in Türkiye construct and justify the traits of an effective school leader, and in what ways do these culturally embedded perspectives reinterpret, adapt, or challenge McEwan's U.S.-based leadership framework?*

The Role and Characteristics of Effective School Leaders

Effective school leadership is foundational to institutional performance and student achievement. Early studies, such as those by Sammons et al. (1995), identify foundational elements of school effectiveness – such as clear goals, professional leadership, high expectations, and reinforcement of norms. These initial insights are reinforced by contemporary meta-analyses that confirm the indirect yet powerful influence of leadership on school climate, teacher efficacy, and student engagement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Karadağ & Sertel, 2025). While these insights have proven valuable, their grounding in Anglo-American contexts raises questions about their transferability to culturally distinct systems like Türkiye.

Leadership is multidimensional and situated within systemic and cultural contexts. While teachers mainly impact their own classrooms, principals influence the entire school ecology, shaping instructional vision, policy, and stakeholder expectations (Özdemir et al., 2025). This distinction is further supported by Hallinger and Heck's (2010) research on distributed leadership affirms that long-term school improvement is significantly associated with collaborative and context-aware leadership models.

Research has identified several common characteristics of successful school leaders. These include the ability to motivate stakeholders (Leithwood et al., 2020), articulate and communicate a shared vision (Hallinger, 2018), build trust (Bush & Glover, 2016), promote ethical behavior (Shaked et al., 2021), and sustain collaboration (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). These core traits have remained consistent, but how they are enacted can vary substantially across national contexts (Leithwood et al., 2020). While these core attributes are widely recognized, their interpretation and prioritization are likely to differ in non-Western contexts, especially where cultural norms shape administrative roles and power dynamics (Bellibaş & Kılınc, 2023).

For example, Wu and Shen (2022) empirically demonstrate that principal leadership has a moderate but consistent effect on student achievement. However, as Shaked et al. (2021) emphasize, leadership implementation is never neutral – it is shaped by national, socio-cultural, and policy contexts. Thus, effective leadership cannot be universally defined; rather, it must be studied through context-sensitive models (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018).

Building on this theoretical foundation, the literature has evolved to integrate cross-cultural comparative approaches. Dimmock and Walker (2000a, 2000b) advocate for leadership models that are sensitive to cultural and systemic variation. These models recognize that expectations for leadership traits, such as authority, empathy, or innovation, are culturally constructed (Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė & Jurgilė, 2025; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Thus, understanding leadership traits in different countries requires both emic (culture-specific) and etic (universal) analytical lenses, especially when existing models originate from distinct cultural frameworks.

Studies conducted in Türkiye highlight the culturally specific dimensions of school leadership, revealing how national context shapes stakeholder expectations. For example, Ulusoy et al. (2023) report that Turkish high school students place high importance on principals' communication abilities, empathy, and a consistent approach to discipline. In contrast, Çelik et al. (2023) emphasize that special education teachers prioritize leadership traits such as legal expertise, analytical thinking, and dependability – reflecting the unique professional demands of their roles. From an administrative perspective, Acar (2023) underscores the relevance of equity, adaptability, and staff development, suggesting a vision of leadership that is both inclusive and reform oriented. Echoing this perspective, Balcı (2022) advocates for leadership styles that are innovative and relational, capable of responding to the complexities of modern schooling. This contextual specificity reinforces the growing call for adaptive, learning-centered leadership models over traditional,

bureaucratic approaches (Bush & Glover, 2014; Bush et al., 2019). These findings collectively demonstrate that while certain leadership traits may appear universal, their interpretations and priorities are often culturally embedded. This underlines the necessity of contextualizing leadership research and recognizing that stakeholder expectations are shaped by local socio-political realities. For instance, in Türkiye, cultural norms such as high-power distance and institutional hierarchies limit distributed decision-making and reinforce centralized control in schools (Polatcan et al., 2025). Additionally, bureaucratic inspection systems and political appointments often constrain principals' autonomy, leading them to prioritize compliance over innovation (Bellibaş et al., 2024). These structural and cultural dynamics shape how leadership is enacted and perceived.”

Despite these culturally specific insights, many leadership frameworks used in training and evaluation – such as McEwan’s (2002) model – remain grounded in Western assumptions and may not fully align with non-Western stakeholder expectations. This study revisits that framework through contemporary and comparative lenses. McEwan’s model identifies ten leadership domains that are intended to help administrators achieve success with limited resources and maximize learning outcomes. These domains are as follows:

- Communication Expert – Listens actively, builds mutual trust, and promotes open dialogue.
- Educator – Leads instructionally with competence, adaptability, and pedagogical vision.
- Visionary – Communicates a shared mission and inspires motivation.
- Facilitator – Promotes collaboration, manages uncertainty, and generates solutions.
- Change Expert – Manages transformation and encourages institutional flexibility.
- Culture Builder – Cultivates shared values, inclusivity, and high expectations.
- Activator – Maintains high energy, organization, and emotional intelligence.
- Producer – Aligns institutional goals with community and policy expectations.
- Character Builder – Models ethics, authenticity, and integrity.
- Contributor – Operates as a servant leader, placing stakeholders’ growth first.

Rather than assuming their relevance, this study uses them as a heuristic to explore local reinterpretations, omissions, or additions based on culturally situated perceptions of leadership. While McEwan’s model offers a structured overview of leadership traits, its application across culturally diverse contexts necessitates careful reinterpretation to ensure contextual relevance. However, several scholars have raised concerns that McEwan’s model – while comprehensive – may reflect a normative Western orientation that emphasizes individual traits over contextual adaptability. For instance, Burkett and Hayes (2023) critique trait-based leadership models like McEwan’s for overlooking the dynamic and relational demands of leadership in diverse school environments. They argue that effective leadership is co-constructed through stakeholder interaction and cannot be reduced to static attributes. Similarly, Papa and Baxter (2008) caution that models developed within Anglo-American policy cultures may not transfer easily to school systems shaped by different institutional logics. Despite these limitations, McEwan’s framework has been used as a comparative reference in culturally distinct settings. For example, Ulusoy et al. (2023) applied McEwan’s domains in Turkish high schools to examine student perceptions of leadership, while Acar (2023) adapted the model to analyze equity-oriented practices among school administrators. These studies show that while McEwan’s model provides a useful starting point, its practical relevance must be reinterpreted through localized norms and values. As Heck and Hallinger (2014) and Hallinger and Heck (2011) emphasize, these traits must be embedded within leadership-for-learning paradigms, where instructional impact and systemic coherence are prioritized. By incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives, this study does not merely validate McEwan’s domains but also interrogates their cultural fit, seeking to understand how leadership is locally constructed and practiced.

Rationale and Contextual Framing

Over the past two decades, understandings of effective school leadership have been increasingly questioned for their universal applicability, especially outside Anglo-American contexts. Recent comparative research also shows that leadership frameworks developed in Anglo-American contexts often overlook critical

cultural and systemic dimensions unique to non-Western countries like Türkiye (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Çoğaltay & Boz, 2023; Eryilmaz & Sandoval-Hernandez, 2023). These include the effects of centralized governance, hierarchical school cultures, collectivist social expectations, and the moral authority often expected from school leaders in Türkiye (Bellibaş & Kılınc, 2023; Karakuş & Akçakanat, 2024; Tosyali, 2025). The focus has shifted from leadership as a fixed, trait-based set of skills to a context-sensitive process, influenced by cultural norms, institutional practices, and socio-political environments (Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger, 2018; Özdemir et al., 2025). McEwan's (2002) influential framework – developed within the specific context of early 2000s U.S. educational policy – outlined ten key traits believed to enhance school effectiveness. While the model has provided valuable structure for leadership evaluation, its relevance across distinct cultural and organizational landscapes remains open to inquiry. Brauckmann et al. (2023) argue that educational leadership perceptions vary widely across national contexts, emphasizing the need for local reinterpretation of global models rather than direct application. For instance, Çoğaltay and Boz (2023) contend that standardized leadership models may not align with countries exhibiting strong hierarchical norms or collective values. Similarly, Eryilmaz and Sandoval Hernandez (2024) emphasize the necessity of culturally responsive frameworks that address national policy priorities and stakeholder expectations.

Rather than adopting McEwan's model as a universal benchmark, this study frames it as a heuristic device to explore the reinterpretation of leadership ideals within localized institutional and cultural logics – a point of departure for exploring how leadership ideals are interpreted, reshaped, or contested within specific national contexts. Drawing on a cross-section of stakeholder perspectives in Türkiye – school administrators, teachers, students, and parents – the research investigates the locally situated meanings assigned to effective leadership and how these meanings reflect underlying values, institutional norms, and cultural expectations.

Consistent with comparative leadership research (Dimmock & Walker, 2000a; Walker & Dimmock, 2000), this study assumes that leadership is socially constructed and embedded within cultural-cognitive and organizational structures. The use of the McEwan framework is thus not for direct benchmarking against the U.S., but rather to enable contextual interpretation. For example, while traits like “visionary” or “change expert” may be recognized across cultures, the way they are operationalized – and the extent to which they are prioritized – may vary significantly depending on policy expectations, hierarchical structures, and cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance (Özdemir et al., 2025).

In this sense, the U.S. serves as a contrasting reference context, rather than a normative benchmark. This contrast enables a more grounded understanding of how stakeholder views emerge in response to local conditions. The purpose is not to compare or rank educational systems, but to explore how culturally distinct ecosystems construct the concept of an “effective school leader” in response to their own institutional histories, social norms, and policy demands. This interpretive and context-responsive orientation aligns with contemporary perspectives in comparative education and international leadership studies (Bush et al., 2019; Dimmock & Walker, 2000b).

Research Method

This section details the methodological approach employed in the study, including the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and the strategies adopted to ensure validity and reliability across both qualitative and quantitative strands.

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel design, a widely recognized mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). This design was especially suited to the study's objective, as it enabled the exploration of how McEwan's (2002) leadership traits are interpreted, expanded, or contested within Türkiye's socio-cultural and institutional context. Similar studies across culturally diverse contexts have also employed convergent mixed methods designs to understand leadership from both quantitative generalizability and qualitative depth. For example, Takahashi et al. (2012) demonstrated the effectiveness of combining

meta-analytic reviews, quantitative surveys, and in-depth interviews to capture culturally specific leadership dynamics in Japan. Likewise, Stentz et al. (2012) utilized a mixed methods approach to investigate leadership development across multinational organizations, underscoring how cultural and contextual factors influence both perceptions and practices of leadership. These examples support the relevance of a convergent design for the present study, which seeks to triangulate stakeholder perspectives across Türkiye's complex educational environment.

The study framework was informed by a trait-based leadership model originally proposed by McEwan (2002), which categorizes 37 key characteristics of effective school leadership. This framework has been widely applied in educational contexts and served as a baseline for cross-cultural comparison (Toraman, 2021). Recent scholarship has also engaged with McEwan's model in critical ways. For example, Burkett and Hayes (2023) critique trait-based frameworks like McEwan's for failing to capture the fluid, relational, and co-constructed nature of leadership in diverse educational contexts. Similarly, Papa and Baxter (2008) caution that leadership models developed in U.S.-centric policy cultures may require adaptation when applied to organizational systems outside Anglo-American traditions. Mixed-method research was chosen to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by drawing upon diverse data sources and cross-verifying insights, allowing for a culturally grounded interpretation of leadership traits.

In this design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed simultaneously, allowing the findings to complement and reinforce one another (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023; Morse, 2016). This parallel integration enabled a more nuanced understanding of leadership expectations across stakeholder groups while also facilitating statistical comparison between participants in Türkiye and previously published data from the United States. The overall research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Quantitative Phase: Data Collection and Data Analysis

The quantitative phase employed the Q-Sort Method, a well-established technique in psychological and cognitive research that reveals participants' mental models and trait prioritization strategies (Jahrami et al., 2009). In this study, the sorting process was structured around McEwan's (2002), 37-item framework, allowing participants to interact with a standardized list of leadership traits. Each participant selected the ten traits they deemed most essential for effective school leadership and ranked them in order of importance. This interactive technique facilitated participant reflection and was suitable for diverse stakeholder profiles due to its clarity and adaptability (Coxen & Dobbyn, 2004).

Before beginning, participants were informed about the study's aims and gave consent in accordance with GDPR and ethical research protocols. They received either physical or digital access to the full list of 37 traits, which they reviewed and sorted individually. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics – frequencies and percentages – to reveal patterns of trait selection. Cross-cultural comparison was achieved by aligning the Turkish results with existing U.S.-based data. While this phase focused on pre-established traits, additional trait suggestions provided by participants were examined in the qualitative

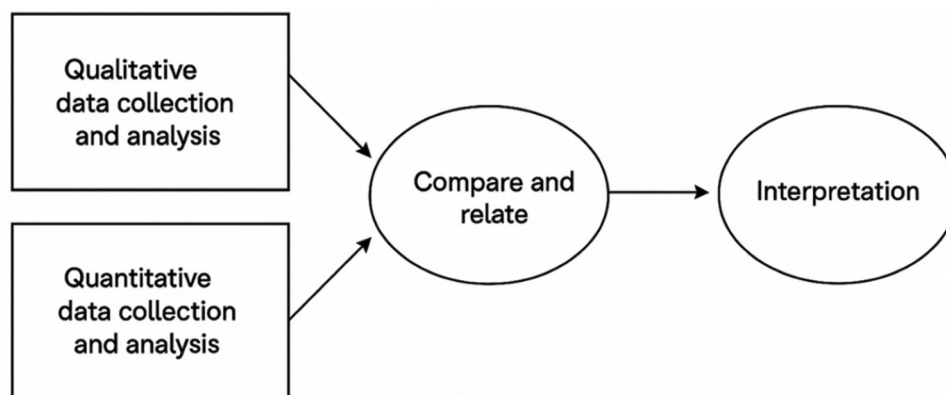


Figure 1. Research framework. Note. This figure was created by the author for the purposes of this study.

phase. These insights directly contributed to the overarching research question regarding how stakeholders in Türkiye culturally interpret and adapt school leadership traits.

Qualitative Phase: Data Collection and Data Analysis

The qualitative component utilized semi-structured interviews, a commonly used method in educational research that allows for flexible and in-depth exploration of lived experience (Patton, 2023). Administrators, teachers, parents, and students were interviewed to better understand how they conceptualize effective leadership and explain their preferences. This method is particularly effective in contexts where leadership is shaped by cultural and institutional norms (Miles & Huberman, 2019).

Participants were asked two open-ended questions: (1) their reasons for selecting their top five traits from McEwan's list, and (2) whether they believed any traits were missing that should be included. These responses served to deepen understanding of how leadership traits are locally constructed and valued. These questions were designed to explore how stakeholders in Türkiye interpret, prioritize, and potentially expand predefined leadership traits in light of their cultural, institutional, and historical experiences. The qualitative responses offered insights into the extent to which McEwan's model is locally adapted, as well as which traits emerge as culturally salient but absent in the original framework.

All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted using a two-stage coding process. In the open coding stage, responses were broken down into smaller meaning units and assigned initial codes. Axial coding followed, in which these codes were grouped into broader categories based on their conceptual relationships. This process helped uncover both commonalities and divergences in stakeholder views and clarified how leadership expectations are rooted in Türkiye's cultural and institutional context.

This qualitative phase was essential for addressing the overarching research question. It enabled a nuanced understanding of how leadership traits are culturally interpreted and revealed traits not present in the original McEwan model. Additionally, it illuminated how different stakeholder groups prioritize and define leadership traits in ways that reflect their unique social roles and experiences within the Turkish education system.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

While validity and reliability are conceptualized differently in qualitative research compared to quantitative studies, several strategies were employed to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Shenton, 2004).

To enhance credibility (internal validity), data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with long-term engagement, allowing participants to articulate their views freely. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of interview data with participants to confirm accuracy and alignment with their intended meanings (Morse, 2016). Investigator triangulation was employed through the involvement of two independent coders in the data analysis process. These coders collaboratively developed a coding framework and resolved discrepancies through discussion. Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were held with qualitative research experts, who reviewed the coding scheme and thematic interpretations, thereby contributing to analytic rigor (Shenton, 2004).

To support transferability (external validity), purposive and maximum variation sampling techniques were used to ensure a diverse and information-rich participant pool. Detailed descriptions of the study's context, setting, and participant demographics were provided to allow future researchers to determine applicability in similar contexts (Patton, 2023). The inclusion of verbatim quotes further enhanced the transparency and authenticity of findings.

For dependability (reliability), two researchers independently conducted open coding. A shared coding protocol was used, and inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, which resulted in a coefficient of 0.83—indicating strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Throughout the research process, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained to document all key decisions, including methodological adjustments, coding revisions, and data interpretation stages. This transparent documentation ensured

Table 1. Participant demographics.

| Participant | Gender | Age | Educational Level |
|-----------------|--------|-----|--------------------|
| Teacher 1 | Female | 47 | Bachelor's |
| Teacher 2 | Female | 42 | Bachelor's |
| Teacher 3 | Female | 55 | Bachelor's |
| Teacher 4 | Female | 42 | Bachelor's |
| Administrator 1 | Female | 33 | Bachelor's |
| Administrator 2 | Female | 42 | Bachelor's |
| Administrator 3 | Female | 45 | Master's |
| Administrator 4 | Male | 64 | Bachelor's |
| Student 1 | Female | 18 | High school senior |
| Student 2 | Female | 23 | University senior |
| Student 3 | Female | 18 | High school senior |
| Student 4 | Female | 18 | High school senior |
| Parent 1 | Female | 36 | Bachelor's |
| Parent 2 | Female | 42 | Master's |
| Parent 3 | Female | 44 | Master's |
| Parent 4 | Female | 33 | Master's |

confirmability and minimized researcher bias. Reflexivity was also incorporated through the researchers' critical reflection on their role, assumptions, and influence during data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Participants

The study included 16 participants from public and private schools in Istanbul during the 2022–2023 academic year. The participants were evenly distributed across four categories: four teachers, four administrators, four parents, and four students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a method that identifies individuals most likely to provide relevant and insightful information aligned with the study's objectives. Although Türkiye's education system is predominantly centralized and governed by uniform national policies, the study also included participants from private schools due to their accessibility and logistical feasibility during data collection. These participants were not selected for comparative purposes, but rather to reflect stakeholder perspectives that were practically reachable within the constraints of the study's fieldwork. Demographic information about the participants is provided in Table 1, which details their gender, age, and educational level.

An examination of Table 1 reveals that the majority of the participants were female, with only one male participant among the group. The educational levels of the participants ranged from high school to graduate degrees, ensuring diverse perspectives across different educational backgrounds.

Results

Stakeholder Constructions of Effective School Leadership in Türkiye

To explore how Turkish stakeholders conceptualize effective school leadership, participants were asked to identify the ten most important leadership traits from McEwan's (2002) original list of 37 characteristics. Table 2 summarizes the frequency and percentage distribution of the most frequently selected traits,

Table 2. Most frequently selected traits (top 10).

| Trait | % of Participants |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Communication skills | 75% |
| Honesty | 62.5% |
| Ability to cope with change/uncertainty | 62.5% |
| Energetic and sociable | 56.2% |
| Reliable | 50% |
| Loves students | 50% |
| Sense of purpose and mission | 43.7% |
| Role model for students and teachers | 43.7% |
| High moral character | 43.7% |
| Knowledgeable about teaching and learning | 37.5% |

providing insight into how educational stakeholders in Türkiye construct and prioritize effective leadership characteristics.

According to Table 2, these results illustrate a clear stakeholder preference for relational, moral, and adaptive leadership traits. Characteristics such as communication skills, honesty, and coping with uncertainty were rated as essential by a significant majority of participants. Conversely, traits more closely associated with managerial or performance-driven leadership – such as being organized or setting high expectations – received comparatively lower emphasis. These findings represent the first layer of how McEwan’s predefined traits are reinterpreted through culturally embedded stakeholder preferences.

This pattern suggests a cultural inclination toward human-centered and trust-based leadership, where empathy, personal integrity, and the ability to navigate complex and uncertain environments are prioritized. While instructional competence was acknowledged (e.g., “knowledgeable about teaching and learning”), it was not seen as central. Taken together, these findings reflect how effective school leadership in Türkiye is largely defined through socio-cultural and organizational values rather than through universal or technical criteria – supporting the idea that educational leadership is both culturally constructed and contextually enacted.

Cultural Adaptations of McEwan’s Framework: Türkiye and the U.S

Following these considerations, a comparative lens was applied to examine how Turkish stakeholder responses diverge from or align with McEwan’s original U.S.-based leadership framework. To explore how culturally embedded expectations reinterpret McEwan’s original framework, the responses of Turkish participants in this study were compared with McEwan’s (2002) original U.S.-based findings. While both Turkish and American stakeholders prioritized traits such as communication skills and a sense of purpose and mission, significant differences emerged in the relative importance assigned to other leadership characteristics.

Table 3 summarizes ten key traits, contrasting their perceived importance across the two cultural contexts. The data reveal that Turkish participants emphasized ethical and relational traits – such as honesty, transparency, and visionary leadership – more strongly. In contrast, American participants showed a greater preference for attributes related to instructional leadership, performance, and organizational management.

In contrast, U.S. participants leaned more heavily toward instructional competence, structured organization, and accountability-based leadership (Table 3).

Cultural Justifications Across Stakeholder Groups

To explore variation in cultural justifications for leadership traits among stakeholder groups participants were asked to rank the top five most essential leadership traits of an effective school principal. The results revealed in Table 4 both convergence and divergence in trait prioritization among four stakeholder groups: administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Table 3. Comparative prioritization of leadership traits in Türkiye and the USA.

| Leadership Trait | Türkiye (% of participants) | USA (% of participants) | Cultural Notes |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Communication skills | 75% | 68% | Shared priority across both groups |
| Honesty | 62.5% | 14.7% | Emphasized much more in Türkiye |
| Instructional leadership | 18.7% | 65.3% | Highly valued in the USA, less emphasized in Türkiye |
| Knowledgeable about teaching & learning | 37.5% | 55.2% | Prioritized more by American participants |
| Transparency | 31.2% | 0% | Distinctively Turkish emphasis |
| Sets high expectations | 0% | 38.6% | Stronger in performance-driven U.S. context |
| Loves students | 50% | 24.8% | Türkiye shows stronger relational orientation |
| High moral character | 43.7% | 23% | Ethical grounding prioritized more by Turkish respondents |
| Organized | 0% | 36.8% | Reflects U.S. focus on managerial effectiveness |
| Visionary leadership | 37.5% | 10.1% | More prevalent among Turkish definitions |

Table 4. Summary of top-ranked traits by stakeholder group.

| Rank | Administrators | Teachers | Students | Parents |
|------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Interpersonal skills | High moral character | Communication skills | Honesty |
| 2 | Communication skills | Role model for students & teachers | Trustworthy | High moral character |
| 3 | Coping with change & uncertainty | Visionary leadership | Loves students | Communication skills |
| 4 | Lifelong learner | Accountability to community | Empathy | Role model for students & teachers |
| 5 | High moral character | Makes others feel special | Sense of purpose & mission | Accountability to parents & community |

Table 4 reveals a nuanced constellation of expectations across stakeholder groups, yet a cohesive pattern emerges around the importance of relational, ethical, and communicative leadership. Traits like communication skills, high moral character, and trustworthiness surfaced as core attributes of effective school administrators, signaling a shared value base rooted in interpersonal integrity and moral responsibility.

Beyond this consensus, the rankings also reflect how stakeholders' daily experiences and institutional interactions shape their leadership ideals. Emotional connection and personal care – for instance, valuing empathy or love for students – appear more prominently in constituencies with direct and affective contact with school life. Meanwhile, expectations such as accountability to the community, visionary thinking, or coping with change reflect broader structural or professional concerns tied to system-level dynamics.

Contextual Rationales for Prioritized Traits

Participants provided qualitative justifications for the traits they prioritized, shedding light on how contextual realities influence their leadership expectations. Across stakeholder groups, ethical, relational, and adaptive traits emerged as especially valued – reflecting a context in which trust, emotional intelligence, and responsiveness to change are seen as central to effective school leadership. These views, rooted in daily educational experiences, illustrate how Turkish stakeholders reinterpret and reweight leadership traits in response to evolving school realities and cultural expectations. These rationales illustrate how stakeholders draw upon lived experiences and institutional norms to justify and embed leadership ideals within their cultural context.

Administrators' Perspectives

Administrators consistently emphasized communication and interpersonal skills as critical leadership traits. All four administrators (A1, A2, A3, A4) consistently emphasized communication and interpersonal skills as critical leadership traits. For instance, A1 noted:

Our work involves people, and for us to communicate and ensure that tasks are carried out, an administrator must possess interpersonal skills. If communication is established correctly, mutual understanding will be much healthier.

Additionally, the need for continuous learning and adaptability was underscored by A3:

We live in an era where everything constantly changes. An administrator should be a lifelong learner. If the administrator is like this, they will set an example for others.

Teachers' Perspective

For teachers, “high moral character” was a dominant theme. Three out of four teachers (T1, T2, T3) highlighted “high moral character” as the most essential trait. T1 elaborated on the significance of moral integrity:

I believe that people with high morals are more just, act more carefully, and ensure fairness in all matters. This is the trait most lacking in today's world.

Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of school leaders serving as role models (T3):

A good role model administrator creates a positive mental image and sets an example for teachers, students, and all staff around them.

Students' Perspective

Students prioritized communication, trust, and student-centered leadership. Two out of four students (S1, S3) emphasized the importance of both communication and emotional connection. S1 emphasized:

The person managing me needs to have communication skills and strong communication so that they can persuade me and express themselves to me in the right way.

S3 highlighted the importance of genuine care for students:

It must be hard to work in a school without loving students. Someone who loves students will be more dedicated.

Parents' Perspective

Parents placed a strong emphasis on honesty, trust, and student welfare. All four parents (P1–P4) emphasized honesty, trust, and student welfare. P4 stressed the significance of trustworthiness in school leadership:

If I notice a difference between what was said the first time and the second time, I definitely will not stay there and will take my child out of that school.

P3 linked honesty and transparency, stating:

Trustworthiness is linked to honesty. Broken promises or inconsistent actions erode trust.

Stakeholder-Initiated Adaptations to McEwan's Model

Participants proposed leadership traits not originally included in McEwan's model, many of which reflected culturally specific values such as fairness, discipline, compassion, and supervision. These additions reveal how Turkish stakeholders extend and adapt leadership frameworks in light of their educational realities. Among these, "discipline" emerged as the most frequently mentioned addition, cited by six participants. Rather than connoting authoritarian control, participants viewed discipline as consistent rule enforcement and organizational clarity. As one teacher (T2) explained, "Discipline can be added, but not in the sense of strict rules. . . attention should be paid to monitoring the agreed-upon rules and ensuring consistency." A student (S1) reinforced this view, stating, "Everything starts with being disciplined."

A second cluster of additions involved traits related to oversight and fairness, such as being supervisory, just/fair, and tolerant. The "supervisory" trait was highlighted by three participants, but again in a supportive rather than punitive sense. One parent (P3) remarked, "I would add disciplined and supervisory (in the positive sense, someone who knows their students well) to these traits."

Finally, a series of single-mention suggestions reflected a broader vision of leadership that emphasizes emotional and social intelligence. These included traits like positive, cheerful, compassionate, sincere, accessible, kindhearted, generous, and possessing high emotional intelligence. While mentioned less frequently, these traits demonstrate an aspirational orientation toward humane and relational leadership, resonating with the affective expectations held by some stakeholders.

Collectively, these additions illustrate how Turkish stakeholders supplement McEwan's list with context-sensitive values that emphasize structured empathy, relational closeness, and moral consistency, suggesting a desire for school leaders who are both principled and approachable within their institutional cultures. Taken together, these findings respond directly to the research question by demonstrating that Turkish stakeholders do not merely adopt McEwan's framework, but actively reinterpret, justify, and expand it through a culturally embedded lens – revealing the dynamic interplay between global models and local values in school leadership.

Discussion

Turkish stakeholders construct effective leadership through interpersonal, ethical, and adaptive traits – such as communication, honesty, and flexibility – rather than primarily technical or managerial competencies. This aligns with McEwan's (2002) *Facilitator* domain, which highlights trust-building and collaboration. Similarly, Gomez (2022) found that effective communication significantly predicts teacher motivation,

organizational commitment, and school-wide improvement. Emphasis on honesty, moral integrity, and ethical role modeling further reflects McEwan's *Character Builder* and *Contributor* roles, underscoring servant leadership and ethical conduct. Turkish parents and teachers especially value trustworthiness and fairness as essential for institutional cohesion. This prioritization of trust and fairness among parents and teachers reflects deeper institutional and cultural dynamics in Türkiye. In a highly centralized education system where school autonomy is limited and top-down accountability mechanisms dominate, interpersonal trust becomes a vital substitute for institutional trust (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Polatcan et al., 2025). Teachers and parents often rely on the moral integrity of school leaders as a safeguard against unpredictable policy shifts and bureaucratic rigidity. Furthermore, Türkiye's collectivist culture places high importance on group harmony, fairness, and relational justice, which reinforces the expectation that leaders should act not only as administrators but also as moral exemplars (Bellibaş & Kılınç, 2023; Tosyali, 2025). In such a context, trust and fairness are not peripheral values, but core leadership competencies that enable social cohesion and legitimacy within educational communities. Supporting this, Doğan and Koçak (2014) found that communication competence enhances teacher satisfaction and collegiality, positioning communication as a trust-building mechanism within Türkiye's relational school culture.

Although instructional leadership traits such as subject knowledge were acknowledged, they were not central to stakeholders' definitions of effective leadership. This tendency reflects a deeper sociocultural orientation within Türkiye, where moral and symbolic leadership holds greater value than technical authority. In collectivist and high power-distance cultures, such as Türkiye's, school leaders are expected to function not only as instructional supervisors but also as moral guides and protectors of communal harmony (Bellibaş & Kılınç, 2023; Hofstede, 2001). Göçen (2021) found that teachers in Türkiye tend to perceive ethical behavior, empathy, and fairness as more critical than subject matter expertise when evaluating principals' effectiveness. Similarly, Kökden and Tınmaz (2024) report that school administrators who demonstrate relational sensitivity and moral leadership gain higher levels of trust and cooperation from both teachers and parents. In this context, subject knowledge alone does not suffice to generate legitimacy; instead, leaders are judged by their ability to foster relational trust and reflect shared social values. Therefore, symbolic and moral dimensions of leadership emerge as stronger predictors of perceived effectiveness than purely instructional competencies. This stands in contrast to U.S.-based models that emphasize formal instructional authority, and instead reflects Türkiye's cultural preference for moral guidance, relational proximity, and adaptive responsiveness (Hallinger, 2018; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). The prioritization of coping with uncertainty also points to how leadership expectations are shaped by broader socio-economic transformations. As Rahimi and Oh (2024) observe, school leaders today operate in volatile environments shaped by globalization and technological disruption. Turkish stakeholders thus interpret adaptability not as bureaucratic flexibility but as a culturally grounded, human-centered trait essential to school functioning. In support of this, Atış and Dilbaz (2022) showed that effective school leaders are expected to demonstrate not only humanistic traits like empathy and fairness but also technical proficiencies such as instructional leadership, legal literacy, and technological adaptability – suggesting a multi-dimensional leadership model shaped by both context and evolving expectations. These culturally justified interpretations of traits like adaptability and moral character demonstrate how stakeholders embed leadership expectations in Türkiye's social and institutional norms.

These perspectives reflect how Turkish stakeholders adapt McEwan's (2002) framework by re-weighting its domains in line with local cultural, moral, and institutional expectations. In Türkiye's context of high-power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), attributes like honesty, empathy, and moral authority are re-centered as core leadership traits. As Bush and Glover (2016) suggest, in societies where institutional trust is uneven, leadership legitimacy derives more from moral uprightness and relational trust than formal accountability. This insight is reinforced by Bellei et al. (2020), who demonstrated that educational effectiveness is not a fixed status but a fragile condition, continuously shaped by internal school practices and external pressures like shifting demographics and policy climates. Sustaining effectiveness, therefore, requires ongoing, context-sensitive leadership engagement. In this sense, stakeholder perspectives from Türkiye expand – not reject – McEwan's framework, illustrating how imported models are reshaped through local meaning systems.

This localized interpretation of McEwan's *Character Builder* and *Facilitator* roles aligns with Shaked et al.'s (2021) findings that non-Western leadership scripts prioritize moral modeling over procedural

efficiency. Likewise, Oplatka and Arar (2017) argue that Western models often overlook the emotional and ethical complexities embedded in Middle Eastern educational cultures. In Türkiye, global leadership models are not passively adopted – they are reinterpreted through local values, expectations, and institutional experiences.

The diminished emphasis on instructional monitoring is consistent with Leithwood et al. (2020) critique that a narrow focus on instruction neglects the human and moral dimensions of school life. As Walker and Dimmock (2000) note, instructional leadership must be embedded in culturally relevant pedagogical relationships, not imposed as external benchmarks. This approach aligns with Türkiye's education system, where school leaders operate under centralized bureaucracies, limited autonomy, and diffuse accountability (Aydın, 2023). In such environments, administrative influence arises less from formal evaluation systems and more from moral authority and negotiation skills (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Moreover, the value placed on visionary thinking and emotional presence by Turkish stakeholders reflects what Hallinger (2005) calls “leadership for learning in resource-constrained contexts,” in which leaders fulfill symbolic and motivational roles where structural supports are weak. This perspective is echoed by Bush et al. (2019), who advocate for values-based and human-centered leadership in transitional education systems. In such settings, culturally responsive leadership is not a peripheral concern but central to ensuring functional legitimacy (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). As Heck and Hallinger (2014) argue, leadership must be evaluated within the social and institutional systems that sustain it. While McEwan's framework retains analytical utility, it must be recalibrated to reflect localized moral codes and leadership imaginaries.

Turkish stakeholders' interpretations should be viewed as a contextual adaptation of McEwan's model – one that illustrates the interplay between global leadership concepts and locally constructed expectations (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė & Jurgilė, 2025). Stakeholder insights from administrators, teachers, students, and parents collectively illustrate a leadership identity that integrates shared ethical foundations with role-specific expectations – an embedded model also supported by Hallinger (2018) and Shaked et al. (2021).

Within this distributed landscape, school administrators emphasize interpersonal competence, flexibility, and lifelong learning – aligning with the global discourse on adaptive and transformational leadership (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020). Teachers prioritize moral integrity and fairness, reinforcing the need for value-driven leadership in environments of fragile institutional trust (Bush & Glover, 2014). Similarly, Kilag et al. (2024) found that teachers value communication, emotional intelligence, visionary planning, and a passion for education – indicating that ethical and emotionally intelligent leadership is universally recognized as a cornerstone of school effectiveness. This emphasis on emotional presence and visionary thinking aligns with culturally specific expectations of school leaders in Türkiye. As Polatcan et al. (2025) highlight, stakeholders perceive emotional leadership as essential for navigating the institutional complexities of a highly centralized and rigid education system. Emotional intelligence is not merely a personal trait but a social competency tied to maintaining relational harmony and trust. Supporting this, Argon and Uylas (2020) validated the Social-Emotional Educational Leadership Scale in the Turkish context, confirming that traits like empathy, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making are central to how Turkish educators define effective leadership. Students highlight empathy, care, and open communication, echoing the ethic of care approach by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), especially relevant in collectivist contexts like Türkiye (Hofstede, 2001). Similarly, Konaş et al. (2023) found that Generation Z students primarily expect school leaders to demonstrate effective communication, technological fluency, and balanced discipline – suggesting that younger generations associate leadership not only with emotional resonance but also with digital competence and fairness. Parents emphasize honesty and transparency, which are critical for sustaining institutional trust under conditions of policy fluctuation and centralized control (Aydın, 2023).

Taken together, these stakeholder constructions reveal a culturally embedded leadership identity grounded in ethical presence, emotional resonance, and relational trust. While these traits reflect cultural specificity, they also resonate with globally recognized leadership qualities such as integrity, empathy, and the ability to inspire others (Zen et al., 2023). This stands in contrast to traditional Western frameworks like McEwan's (2002, which emphasize instructional control and performance metrics. In contrast, the Turkish

focus on trust, compassion, and ethical conduct aligns with a global shift toward culturally responsive leadership practices (Dimmock & Walker, 2000b; Walker & Hallinger, 2015).

Turkish stakeholders' emphasis on traits like sincerity, compassion, discipline, and supervision offers further insight into the sociocultural grounding of leadership expectations. In Türkiye, cultural and institutional dynamics significantly shape the conceptualization of effective school leadership. Leadership is expected to embody moral integrity, trustworthiness, and compassionate engagement, reflecting the country's collectivist values and hierarchical cultural norms (Hofstede, 2001; Karakuş & Akçakanat, 2024). Ethical leadership has been shown to enhance teacher commitment, organizational trust, and a sense of professional belonging (Göçen, 2021; Tosyali, 2025). Kökden and Tınmaz (2024) found that principals' ethical behaviors – particularly in decision-making, communication, and fairness – strongly predict teachers' organizational identification. These findings demonstrate how ethical traits are not only moral ideals but also functional components of leadership in Türkiye's educational context. As such, trust and compassion should not be seen as peripheral traits, but core competencies that enable school cohesion and effectiveness in centralized, low-autonomy systems. These culturally grounded expectations extend McEwan's (2002) model by embedding ethical and relational dimensions into the framework of effective leadership. In contrast to McEwan's (2002) managerial orientation, these traits prioritize social harmony and moral stewardship, echoing the culturally contingent frameworks proposed by Walker and Dimmock (2005) and Hofstede (2001). While such traits may be undervalued in technocratic models, they serve as crucial enablers of legitimacy in communal societies (Bush & Glover, 2016; Oplatka & Arar, 2017). References to discipline and supervision reflect Türkiye's ongoing balance between traditional authority and democratic school culture, supporting Shaked et al.'s (2021) emphasis on integrating professionalism with local ethics. Similarly, Atış and Dilbaz (2022) identified discipline, fairness, and communication as essential humanistic skills within effective school leadership. Their findings underscore that discipline functions not merely as control but as a relational, value-driven mechanism aligned with Turkish socio-cultural expectations.

The growing emphasis on traits like technological literacy and accessibility also underscores the expanding role expectations in transitional systems. Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that digital competence and stakeholder engagement are now indispensable in leadership – especially in contexts balancing innovation with cultural integrity. Ultimately, Turkish stakeholders' input does not reject McEwan's framework but extends it through a culturally grounded lens. As Hallinger (2018) and Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017) contend, leadership is most effective when it merges global competencies with local meaning systems. The lived realities of school communities confirm that leadership is not merely a set of universal traits but a dynamic, context-responsive practice that is continually constructed by stakeholders, justified through cultural norms, and adapted to reflect evolving institutional realities.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides valuable insights into stakeholder perceptions of effective school leadership in Türkiye; however, it is not without limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small and geographically limited sample—16 participants from Istanbul – reducing the generalizability of the findings to the broader Turkish educational context. Leadership expectations may vary considerably across regions, school types, and socio-cultural environments. Future studies would benefit from broader sampling strategies that include participants from diverse geographical locations and institutional backgrounds to reflect the full heterogeneity of Türkiye's educational landscape.

Additionally, while McEwan's (2002) U.S.-based framework provided a helpful reference point for comparative analysis, it was not designed to capture how stakeholders in non-Western settings construct and justify leadership traits within their cultural and institutional realities. Future research should incorporate culturally grounded models that reflect regional values and contextual realities. Methodologically, although the convergent parallel mixed-methods design enabled both quantitative and qualitative data collection, the qualitative component did not allow for in-depth exploration of participants' deeper motivations, especially regarding trait

prioritization. Social desirability bias may have influenced some responses particularly those favoring ethical and interpersonal characteristics.

While this study emphasized individual-level leadership traits, future research should also explore how systemic factors – such as governance models, educational ideologies, and accountability structures – shape the cultural justification of leadership expectations. Investigating how governance models, political reforms, and school cultures interact with leadership expectations could significantly enrich our understanding of leadership in context. Including these voices in future research would contribute to a more comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of educational leadership expectations across the Turkish education system.

Conclusion and Implications

This study contributes to a growing body of literature emphasizing the cultural embeddedness of educational leadership. Turkish stakeholders across different groups consistently valued relational, ethical, and adaptive traits – such as communication, honesty, empathy, and flexibility – over strictly technical competencies. These findings demonstrate how Turkish stakeholders construct the idea of effective school leadership through their own cultural, institutional, and emotional reference points, rather than adopting externally defined models. The comparison with McEwan’s framework illustrates how global models can be adapted, expanded, or selectively reframed to align with local norms of moral leadership, trust, and relational accountability. Particularly in contexts like Türkiye, where centralized governance and collectivist traditions intersect, effective leadership is grounded in moral authority and relational competence rather than performance monitoring or managerial control.

For policymakers and practitioners, these insights underscore the importance of designing leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, and ethical conduct. Embedding stakeholder-informed competencies into professional standards and training curricula will ensure that school leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary education in a culturally attuned manner. In Türkiye’s bureaucratic and centralized system, where school leaders operate within tight administrative constraints, practical reform must begin by expanding the discretionary space of principals. While full autonomy may not be immediately feasible, small-scale flexibility can be enabled through adaptive policy interpretation, participatory decision-making structures within schools, and localized needs assessments. Leadership training should therefore include modules on navigating hierarchical structures, building relational trust with supervisory authorities, and exercising moral judgment within institutional limitations (Karakuş & Akçakanat, 2024; Polatcan et al., 2025). Additionally, improving intra-school collaboration and trust can compensate for the lack of structural flexibility – highlighting the strategic value of relational leadership in rigid systems.

For the Ministry of National Education, revisiting inspection mechanisms to include qualitative, trust-based indicators alongside formal performance metrics may foster a more balanced leadership environment. Empowering school leaders to serve as relational anchors – rather than just rule enforcers – could enhance morale, increase stakeholder engagement, and reduce the alienation often felt under vertical bureaucracies (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Tosyali, 2025). These practices may offer a viable pathway for improving leadership quality without requiring major structural overhaul.

Recognizing and integrating these complexities is vital for building inclusive, effective, and contextually responsive schools. In Türkiye, educational leadership is constructed by stakeholders through culturally embedded meanings, justified by shared moral and relational values, and adapted through selective reinterpretation of global frameworks – highlighting that effective leadership is context-responsive, stakeholder-driven, and culturally shaped (Bellibaş & Kılınç, 2023).

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ORCID

Esra Töre  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9133-6578>

Gülsu Yağcı  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9249-9173>

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to the nature of the interviews and ethical considerations, full transcripts are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality.

Ethics Approval Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. All procedures performed in this study adhered to the ethical standards of the institution and the Declaration of Helsinki.

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