

# Investigation Regarding the Pre-Service Trainings of Primary and Middle School Principals in the United States: The Case of the State of Michigan\*

Emine Gumus<sup>a</sup>

Mevlana (Rumi) University

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the requirements of being a school principal and investigate the pre-service trainings of primary and middle school principals in the United States. In accordance with this aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 primary and middle school principals from the state of Michigan. In this research, the NVivo 8 software program was used for qualitative analysis, while the data from the interviews were analyzed through induction analysis. The results indicated that all of the school principals identified two fundamental requirements of being a principal: (1) a master's degree in educational administration and (2) administration certification. Furthermore, it was emphasized that if any principal candidates possessed master's degrees in disciplines other than educational administration, then they were required to participate in the "+18" program (provided by various educational administration programs at state universities) and acquire all 18 credits that consist of fundamental courses in this field of study. In terms of pre-service education, the school principals stated that the most important pre-service trainings in the process of their professional development included internships and courses taken during their graduate study.

**Keywords:** Primary school principals • Secondary school principals • Pre-service principal trainings • Internships • United States

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## a Correspondence

Emine Gumus, Department of Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning and Economy, Faculty of Education, Mevlana University, Konya, Turkey

Research areas: Leadership, organizational behavior, modern approaches in educational administration, learning organizations

Email: [egumus@mevlana.edu.tr](mailto:egumus@mevlana.edu.tr)

Since the 1960s, recognizing educational administration as a scientific discipline, accepting school principalship as a profession, and requiring both pre-service and in-service trainings of school principals have been discussed in Turkey (Taymaz, 2003, p. 90). Despite such discussions, it is impossible to state that the desired situation has been reached over the years. The United States (U.S.), on the other hand, was the first country to conduct studies on educational administration; hence, as a result, this field has been accepted as an independent discipline in educational science (Pehlivan-Aydın, 2002). Furthermore, the U.S. is one of the countries in which principalship training is the most advanced (Kaya, 1999). Şimşek (2004) stated that the decentralized form of organization in the U.S. has played an important role in the emergence of modern management approaches and management science. With this role in the field of management, the U.S. has not only achieved the acceptance of school principalship as a profession, but it has pioneered the training process of school principals.

Since the 1980s, several reports have been published as a result of the “Excellence in Education” movement in the U.S.; among these reports, the most important has been “The Nation At Risk.” In this report, it was stated that American schools were in danger (despite numerous remediation efforts) and that effective instructional leadership skills were essential for school principals (Crisci, 1986). In addition, the research identified school principals as key players in the process of creating high-quality schools. As a result of such studies, school reform initiatives gained momentum and special focus has been placed on the roles and qualities of school principals. In this context, the training process of school principals has become an important topic (Anderson, 1991).

Although pre-service trainings of school principals has been one of the centerpieces of educational discussions in the last several decades, such training has had a long history in the U.S. While the first university programs related to school management were established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first formal education programs for principal candidates were launched in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Brundrett, 2001). In general, it can be stated that the American education system is based on the notion that principals must be chosen among teachers. However, teachers who desire to become principals should complete special trainings before their assignments as school principals.

Unlike the practices in the U.S., providing comprehensive pre-service trainings for ambitious and competent teachers who are willing to become school principals has been neglected in Turkey (Balci, 2002; Cemaloğlu, 2005; Kaya, 1989; Korkmaz, 2005; Memduhoğlu, 2007). Moreover, being a teacher has been recognized as the only profession in the educational sector and thus, principalship has not been accepted as a profession (Baloğlu, 1995). In the existing literature, there are numerous studies about the pre-service training processes of school principals (Ada & Gümüş, 2012; Balci, 1999; Balci, Memduhoğlu, İlğan, Erdem, & Taşdan, 2013; Can & Çelikten, 2000; Cemaloğlu, 2005; Celep, Ay, & Gögüş, 2010; Işık, 2003; Karip & Köksal, 1999; Korkmaz, 2005; Pehlivan-Aydın, 2002; Turan & Şişman, 2000) and the majority of these studies have indicated that professional pre-service trainings are generally ignored since school principalship is not recognized as a profession. The majority of related studies have made recommendations and even developed models for Turkey by providing a broad conceptual framework regarding principal training systems in the U.S. and Europe. However, the information presented in most of these studies did not go beyond literature review and therefore, current training systems, practices, challenges, and experiences of school principals in these countries have not been entirely revealed.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate the pre-service trainings of school principals in the U.S. state of Michigan based on their views regarding the contexts of the implemented programs and their effects. This research is expected to provide informed suggestions for educational policy makers in the process of developing effective training programs for school principals. In accordance with this general objective, answers are sought to the following research questions:

1. What are the prerequisites of being a school principal in the state of Michigan?
2. What are the pre-service trainings offered to school principals in the state of Michigan?
3. What are the effects of these trainings on problem solving during the initial years of principalship?

### **The Pre-Service Trainings of School Principals in the U.S.**

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various educational leadership unions and state committees

in the U.S. established professional standards for principals' training, certification, and performance determination (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Hessel & Holloway, 2002; Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1998). The crucial role of leadership in school effectiveness has led to the identification of national leadership standards for principal training (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). These standards, known as the "Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium" (ISLLC), have been adopted by the majority of the states in the U.S. for the purpose of creating the basis for principal training programs (Toye, Blank, Sanders, & Williams, 2007).

The ISLLC are built around six performance standards each of which begins with the same phrase: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ..." These standards are stated as follows (Day, Jacobson, & Johansson, 2011):

*Standard 1:* Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

*Standard 2:* Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

*Standard 3:* Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

*Standard 4:* Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

*Standard 5:* Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

*Standard 6:* Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

These standards focus on the following issues:

- Leadership standards that will determine training programs, put the preparation steps in order, and provide consistency between them.
- An intensive internship experience that will allow the development of leadership skills under the supervision of successful school principals and faculty members.
- Program evaluations regarding the development of candidates and program quality.

- Producing successful and high-quality faculty members.

The majority of principal training programs provided in the universities are based on the ISLLC standards since these standards have been accepted to a large extent by the U.S. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) the requirements of being a school principal are defined as follows:

- Have a master's degree in educational administration. If any principal candidate possesses a master's degree in a discipline other than educational administration, then they were required to participate in the "+18" program (provided by various educational administration programs at state universities) and complete the 18 credits that consist of fundamental courses in this field of study.
- Have teaching experience of 1-3 years.
- Have administration certification.

Increasing demand for accountability and measurable results in student achievement have drawn attention to school principals and placed significant responsibilities on them (Anderson, 1991; Day et al., 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Herrington & Wills, 2005; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Southern Regional Education Board, 2002). Moreover, with increased importance given to school principalship, there have been discussions regarding the recruitment and training process of quality school leaders in the national context (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005). In accordance with these discussions, many states have made changes in the requirements to become a principal and certification programs have become an important component in the process (McCarthy, 2002). Within this context, there are considerable similarities among states in terms of the requirements. For example, all states require that school principals meet the certification requirements (Watkins, 2004), and that principal candidates either (1) be eligible for a teaching certificate, (2) currently hold a valid teaching certificate, or (3) had held one in the past (LeTendre & Roberts, 2005). In addition to these, approximately 90% of the states require a state-approved preparation program in order to receive a certificate (McCarthy, 2002). According to LeTendre and Roberts (2005), some of the similarities between the states in terms of the requirements of having administration certification are as follows:

- More than 75% (43/50 states, plus the District of Columbia) require a master's degree or its equivalent. Of those that require school principals

to hold a master’s degree, a little more than half (51%) require a master’s degree in educational administration or a similar management field, while 14% require that the master’s degree be in an educational field. The remaining states accept a master’s degree in any field.

- More than 80% of the states require school principals to have work experience in schools. The majority of the states (28/50) require at least three years of experience, generally as teachers.
- More than 90% of the states provide a continuing certification that must be renewed periodically. Only four states (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia) issue permanent certificates to school principals.
- Approximately 70% (34/50) of the states charge a fee to issue a certification. The fees range from \$10 to \$300, with an average of \$50.

**Method**

**Research Model**

This research is a qualitative study that investigates the training processes of primary and middle school principals in the U.S. In accordance with this aim, a qualitative research model and a semi-structured interview technique was used in order to gather in-depth knowledge about school principals’ professional development opportunities during their pre-service education process, who provided such opportunities, and how school principals benefited from them. The collected data was then reviewed and analyzed using the content analysis method.

**Study Group**

The study group consisted of 16 public primary and middle school principals in the state of Michigan. In this study, the criterion sampling method was employed in order to analyze all of the situations consistent with the criterions defined by the researcher (Maxwell, 2005). The criteria set for the principals in this study were as follows: (1) currently serving as a principal in a public primary or middle school; and (2) having at least three years of principalship experience. The demographic characteristics of the school principals in this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Principals in this Study*

Code	Gender	Age	Highest Educational Degree	Professional Experience	
				Principal	Assistant Principal
P1	M	53	Master's-Educational Leadership	17	-
P2	W	56	Bachelor's-Elementary Education	3	2
P3	M	43	Master's-Educational Leadership	5	-
P4	W	51	Master's (In progress) - Educational Administration	7	-
P5	W	50	Master's-Educational Administration	11	-
P6	M	57	Master's-Educational Leadership	30	-
P7	W	35	PhD (in progress)-Educational Administration	3	3
P8	M	39	Master's-Educational Leadership	9	3
P9	W	49	Master's (In progress)-Educational Administration	3	-
P10	W	50	Education Specialist - Educational Administration	17	1
P11	W	52	Education Specialist - Educational Administration	10	-
P12	M	57	Master's-Educational Administration	19	3
P13	W	49	Master's-Educational Administration	20	2
P14	W	38	Master's-Educational Administration	3	1
P15	M	33	PhD (in progress)-Educational Administration	7	-
P16	M	40	PhD (in progress)-Educational Administration	11	1

As seen in Table 1, five principals were between 30 and 40 years of age, five were between 41 and 50 years of age, and the remaining six were aged 51 and higher. In terms of gender, seven were male and nine were female. When examining the highest degree attained among the principals, one had a bachelor’s degree in elementary education, 13 had a master’s degree (three of them were continuing their PhD education), and two were continuing their master’s education.

### Data Collection Tool

In this study, the semi-structured interview technique was used. Seidman (1998) defined the purpose of the interview technique as revealing individuals' experiences and giving meaning to these experiences rather than testing or evaluating the hypotheses. Thus, the interviews were carried out with the goal of obtaining detailed information regarding the experiences and visions of the participants without any prior hypotheses. In accordance with this goal, primary literature was first reviewed and then the interview questions were formed based on the results of the review. In order to obtain personal information about the school principals in the study, a demographic information form was also prepared.

During the first round of interviews, the principals were asked close-ended questions about gender, age, highest educational degree, and type of school. Immediately after gathering the demographic information, the principals were asked some open-ended questions regarding pre-service trainings and the contribution of these trainings to their professional development.

### Data Analysis

After obtaining permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The data was then encoded with the help of the NVivo 8 software program, which is one of the qualitative analysis programs that are widely used in managing and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2003). The analysis of the data was carried out concurrently with the data collection process. By using the content analysis method, researchers can identify categories before starting the analysis after which these categories are shaped by the retrieved information and experiences (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2011, pp. 269-270). In the present study, with the help of this method, similar data were collected around specific themes and interpreted by the researcher. All of the questions from the interview forms were individually scanned and the answers were recorded as "nodes." During the first stage of data coding, a conceptual framework was created and a code list was prepared after which the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the data were generated and common features of the codes were arranged as themes.

After the content analysis, another researcher was asked to determine the distribution of the school

principals' views regarding the generated codes and themes as well as control their compliance with themes. In order to determine the reliability of the study, the following reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied:

$$\text{Reliability} = [\text{Consensus}/(\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement})] \times 100$$

According to Büyüköztürk et al. (2011), providing a consensus of 80% between the researcher's and another researcher's content analysis of the same data reveals the reliability of the coding process. In the present study, the appropriateness of coding proposed by the researcher was agreed upon at a rate of 95.8 %. Since this rate was more than 90% (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64) as well as greater than 80% (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011), the coding was deemed reliable.

### Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, the most important expectations that a researcher must meet is validity, which means taking the necessary cautions to obtain correct information and reliability. The studies conducted in order to ensure the reliability and validity of this research are as follows:

**Internal Validity:** In order to ensure internal validity, the interview protocol was developed based on the conceptual framework about the research. Moreover, through the content analysis, an attempt was made so that the themes were large enough to encompass related concepts and narrow enough to exclude unrelated concepts.

**External Validity:** The research process was explained in detail in order to ensure external validity. In accordance with this context, the research model, study group, data collection tool, data collection process, data analysis, and interpretation of the data were clearly identified.

**Internal Reliability:** All of the findings were presented objectively without any comments in order to ensure internal reliability. Subsequently, both the researcher and an experienced faculty member in qualitative research individually coded the data obtained from the interviews. The codes were then compared for consistency.

**External Reliability:** The researcher described the research process in detail in order to increase external reliability. Furthermore, the data obtained from the interviews as well as the codes, audio recordings, and researcher's notes were stored by the researcher and opened to other researchers' examinations.

### Findings

The school principals were asked whether they had received any specific pre-service trainings that prepared them for their jobs and if so, what types of trainings were offered and what were the effects of these trainings on problem solving during their initial years of principalship. According to the responses of the principals, their opinions were categorized into the following three groups:

1. The prerequisites of being a school principal in the state of Michigan.
2. The pre-service trainings received by school principals in the state of Michigan.
3. The effects of these trainings on problem solving during their initial years of principalship.

#### The Prerequisites of Being a School Principal in the State of Michigan

The school principals in this research were asked about the prerequisites of being a school principal in their state. All of the principals reached a consensus and defined the prerequisites as follows: (1) having a master's degree in educational administration; and (2) having administration certification. One participant (P15) expressed his opinion as follows:

"In my district, a master's degree in educational administration is required to become a principal. Also, within the last few years, they added an administration certification requirement. Both of these are really necessary. To receive administration certification, you must have a master's degree in educational administration. Then, you pay 50 dollars to receive your certification."

According to the responses of P4, P12, and P15, the prerequisites consist of having a master's degree in educational administration and paying an amount of money in order to receive administration certification. The school principal candidates who meet these requirements are then provided with certification.

Some of the school principals who began their professions before 2006 (P1, P3, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P16) stated that they had no administration certification since it was not necessary at that time. However, they emphasized that it was necessary after 2006. P13 shared her experiences regarding this process as follows:

"When I became a principal, the state law said that you had to have a master's degree in an educational field, but not administrative

certification nor an administrative degree. They have since changed the law in the state. So, in order to become a principal, you have to have both an administrative degree and administrative certification."

In addition, P12 described the changes in the process of becoming a principal as follows:

"You currently need to hold an administrative certificate. This changed over the years since I began my career. At first, when I became an administrator, you had to have an administration certificate from the state. You could get this simply because you completed an educational administration degree like a master's degree. Then there was a time in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the state did not require an administration certificate. Now, you have to have some type of educational degree or administrative degree and administration certification. You also have to take classes in a master's degree program. When you get the degree, you can apply for the certificate from the state."

Furthermore, two school principals emphasized that five years of teaching experience was another prerequisite of becoming a principal. P13, P14, P15, and P16 also defined what principal candidates with master's degrees in disciplines other than educational administration should do as follows:

"In our district, we ask for principal candidates to have administrative credentials. This does not necessarily mean having a master's degree, especially a master's degree in educational administration, but they should have completed certain related courses in a graduate degree. I think that they should complete at least 18 credits in the discipline to become a principal." (P14)

"If you have a master's degree from another field, then you take the +18 program in order to receive your certificate." (P15)

Based on these aforementioned responses, principal candidates should have a master's degree in educational administration, administration certification, and at least five years of teaching experience in order to become a school principal. If a candidate has a master's degree in another discipline, then he/she should complete the +18 program from the appropriate educational administration department. Besides all of these prerequisites, the initiatives of the decision-making process is placed on individual education districts and school boards. This fact reveals the decentralization of the American educational system.

### The Pre-service Trainings Received by School Principals in the State of Michigan

The school principals in this research were asked whether they received any pre-service training that prepared them for their profession and made them aware of different methods, techniques, and implementations before they started to work as a principal. All of the principals stated that the training provided them with detailed information. Their responses were categorized into the following five groups:

1. Courses taken during undergraduate education (1).
2. Courses taken during graduate education (12).
3. Internships (7).
4. Being an assistant principal (3).
5. Pre-service trainings taken as an assistant principal (1).

#### Courses Taken During Undergraduate Education:

One of the participants (P6) stated that the courses he had taken during his undergraduate education provided important contributions to his career development as a school principal. Although he had four years of teaching experience and had not worked as an assistant principal before he was assigned as a principal, he stressed that he owed his 30 years of administrative success to the experience, knowledge, and skills that he obtained from these courses. He explained the details of these courses as follows:

“I received significant training in college. Especially the hands-on training that I received as part of the class projects where we had to solve problems. For me, whenever I completed a project, it helped me a lot in whatever job I was doing. I also had a lot of training in finance and educational leadership. Finance helped me tremendously in my career. I currently have a \$14 million budget and when you are dealing with 150 staff members and more than 300 students, the training that I had in regard to proper budgeting was the best. Also, I learned about being a leader not only in my facility, but in the state. Overall, it was a really great experience.”

The information provided by P6 is extremely important. The positive influence of having taken a course such as “Educational Leadership” as a part of his undergraduate education cannot be disregarded. P6 also emphasized that school principal candidates should take some type of principal training beginning at the undergraduate education level.

**Courses Taken During Graduate Education:** As stated earlier, almost all of the participants have a master’s degree while three of the school principals (P7, P15, and P16) are continuing their PhD education in educational administration. A total of 12 participants (P1, P3, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, and P16) stated that the courses taken during their graduate education prepared them for their profession. P1, P3, P5, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, and P16 had positive opinions about the courses, whereas P8 and P12 had negative opinions regarding their education. The principals who had positive opinions emphasized that these courses helped them gain a theoretical background about leadership and administration. Some of these opinions are as follows:

“The courses that I took during my graduate education gave me the foundation that I needed. Actually seeing something in a textbook and doing it is totally different. The greatest benefit was realizing how big the job was based on actual practice. Also, three things helped me a lot during the program. First, there was public speaking. I think that public speaking was a big part of what I needed in order to develop both as a person and as a professional. The second was networking with other educators and feeling that I belonged to part of that group. Finally, there was reading the related literature. When I started to read the educational content, I had a better understanding of what principals and administrators face on a daily basis in their schools.” (P15)

“I have a master’s degree in educational administration. Some of the courses were really valuable, but probably the most valuable one was “Instructional Leadership.” For educational administration, things change so much from one year to another, especially in regard to relations, policies, procedures, etc. So, sometimes you read about certain aspects, but it does not related to your current position. In this case, the “Instructional Leadership” course was all about current on-the-job practices. Honestly, this information is what I use the most in my position.” (P11)

Conversely, P12 stated that the courses he had taken during his graduate education were only theoretical, and they did not provide sufficient information regarding how to implement these theories in practice. He detailed his opinion as follows:

“The coursework in my master’s degree was really theory based, which was not practical. You can learn how to be an effective principal

from a book, but there is a difference between reading about leadership skills, and actually becoming a leader. It is much better to be in the building and walk the hallways on a daily basis. Otherwise, it is impossible to determine whether you have the leadership qualities to become a great principal. Besides, if you learn more about your organization, the people, and the students, then you will become more knowledgeable as an administrator. It is very rare nowadays to simply place an individual in a building and tell them, "You are an administrator, go be a great one." It just does not work that way. You have to actually learn by being in the office and the hallways as well as conducting evaluations of the staff and the students' performances. In other words, you do not learn about being a principal by reading a book. You learn by living it."

**Internships:** Six participants (P6, P7, P11, P13, P14, and P15) stated that the most important training that they received before becoming a principal was through internships. The principals identified the most beneficial aspect of internships as receiving the opportunity to work with experienced and successful principals. P15 described his experiences he gained during his internship as part of master education below as follows:

"My internship really helped me continue toward my career as a principal. I think it was a 130-hour internship. I worked with a principal, who is currently my classmate in the doctorate program. She is one of the most influential principals that I have ever known. I watched her hands-on management style and gained valuable information based on her experiences. I think that the internship was extremely helpful for me in regard to how I saw myself as a future principal."

P13 indicated that her internship was an important stage of professional development in becoming a school principal. She explained the characteristics of this program as follows:

"As part of an administrative internship program, we regularly met with a mentor who was an experienced administrator. So, we were able to ask questions, talk about different things, and he gave us articles and information to access. I definitely think that such meetings were helpful. They certainly gave us a place to ask questions, especially concerning things that we might have been embarrassed to ask another administrator since he/she might have passed judgment on our lack of knowledge. He also gave us an opportunity to brainstorm together and

ask questions. This experience made me stronger as an administrator."

P7, who is working toward her PhD in educational administration, shared her ideas about the contributions of her internship as follows:

"The internship was the best training and preparation that I could have had while preparing to become an administrator. It helped me a lot in three areas: (1) reading leadership literature; (2) shadowing an experienced principal; and (3) having a cohort of teachers who were also in the process. We met on a monthly basis and were able to share our experiences, problems, and feelings."

**Being an Assistant Principal:** Three (P10, P12, and P16) out of the eight school principals (P2, P7, P8, P10, P12, P13, P14, and P16) who had served as an assistant principal indicated that having this experience prepared them for the profession of principalship. According to P12:

"Assistant principals usually deal with attendance and behavior problems. So, much of your day is spent with these students as well as their parents so that both parties can move forward in a healthy manner. These are really valuable experiences since you can learn how to treat students who generally do not have a great home life. In addition, you get to hone your communicative and leadership skills when dealing with these students. You learn how to communicate with students and parents and how to employ effective problem-solving techniques so that you can help the students and parents move forward. That is the name of the game. So, it is really important to be an assistant principal so that you can learn how to act and how to solve problems, which will eventually help you become a more effective principal. When you are an assistant principal, you deal with students; however, when you become a principal, the approach shifts from student oriented to adult oriented."

P16, who is working toward his PhD in educational administration, underlined the fact that serving as an assistant principal for a short period of time (such as a year) had greatly contributed to his current position and his overall management style. P16 also stated that he appreciated the guidance from the principal he worked together when he was an assistant principal and emphasized her leadership and help in his words as follows:

"I had the opportunity to be an assistant principal and thus, the principal was my mentor. We basically did everything together and in



this way, I was able to understand all of her job responsibilities. She brought me to all of the principal meetings and professional development sessions. She also showed me how to deal with various problems and learn how to solve them. She was always around to ask questions and she helped me a lot in the overall learning process.”

#### **Pre-Service Trainings Taken as an Assistant**

**Principal:** Only one of the principals (P16) mentioned pre-service trainings taken as an assistant principal as follows:

“My school district kind of provided a mentorship program as well as other professional development opportunities. As an assistant principal, there were always conferences that the central office (and the principal) wanted me to attend based on my interests. One example was the MEMPSPA in which I am still involved due to its many networking opportunities. I also made an attempt to attend state conferences.”

This low number of school principals who mentioned pre-service trainings taken as an assistant principal is not a surprising result. In the state of Michigan, there is no requirement of serving as an assistant principal in order to become a principal. In fact, only eight out of the 16 principals (P2, P7, P8, P10, P12, P13, P14, and P16) stated that they served as assistant principals, and the time length of such positions ranged from six months to three years.

#### **The Contributions of Pre-service Trainings toward Problem Solving during the Initial Years of Principalship**

The school principals were asked to state the contributions of the pre-service trainings toward problem solving during their initial years of principalship. Among the group, eight school principals (P4, P7, P8, P10, P11, P13, P14, and P15) shared their thoughts about the contributions of such trainings to their professional career development. Three of these principals (P11, P14, and P15) indicated that various courses taken during their graduate education had a significant influence on their careers and they expressed their opinions as follows:

“In my pre-service training, I realized that effective dialogue with people is a big part of being a principal. I did take a course called, “Labor and Industrial Relations, Mediation, and Negotiation.” It was not required as a part of the educational

administration degree, but it was greatly valuable. I think that such skills should be a part of an administrator’s training since it is important to know how to mediate between different parties. Furthermore, you need to know how to sell programs and their related aspects as well as know how to be a good listener. Such skills should be taught as a part of pre-service training.” (P11)

“For any principal who is new to his building and has to make major/minor decisions about the school, it is important to first understand the culture. In other words, one needs to understand how and why things are working. The things that I learned from my university professors were really great. The most important thing was learning how to watch and observe.” (P14)

“I took 30 credits for my master’s degree. A couple of courses that I truly appreciated were about teacher evaluations, secondary curriculums, and school law. I was also greatly interested in learning about the history and development of schools, especially those of American schools.” (P15)

Two school principals (P8 and P13) emphasized that the superintendents in their education districts have positive influences on their professional development, which they described as follows:

“I cannot say that the district provided anything in particular, but the way that they designed the administration is awesome. There is always somebody that we can go to for questions and concerns. The superintendents in my district really support me and they are approachable. It has been different throughout my years here, but there is always somebody that we can go to when we have concerns. We can talk to superintendents; you can see the issues and results that way. We always have somebody to approach at the next level if we feel frustrated. Our superintendents help us resolve our problems. I think it would be very difficult to say that any professional development resolve all our issues. The problems change very quickly.” (P13)

“Close interactions with my superintendent has been the greatest asset for me.” (P8)

Finally, besides these opinions, two school principals (P8 and P10) indicated that the professional development programs provided by the Michigan Primary and Secondary School Principals Association (MEMPSPA) allowed them to meet with school principals from different regions of the state and share their experiences regarding problem solving and other related issues.

## Discussion

The school principals in this research reached a consensus regarding the fundamental requirements for being a school principal in the U.S. state of Michigan. According to their responses, the requirements are as follows: (1) having a master's degree in educational administration programs; and (2) having administration certification. Furthermore, some of the principals indicated that at least five years of teaching experience was necessary to become a principal in addition to the requirements of their respective education districts. At the same time, it was emphasized that, if any principal candidates had master's degrees in disciplines other than educational administration, then they were required to participate in the "+18" program and complete the 18 credits that consist of fundamental courses in this field of study.

The school principals in this research were also asked whether they received any pre-service trainings that prepared them for their professions as principals and made them aware of different methods, techniques, and implementations before they started to work as a principal. In addition to this question, they were asked to explain the contributions of these trainings on their professional development and problem solving during their initial years of principalship. The principals identified these trainings as courses taken during undergraduate and graduate education, internships, being an assistant principal, and trainings taken as an assistant principal. Internships and courses taken during graduate education were expressed as the most important training opportunities for their professional development. However, a few principals stated that serving as an assistant principal effectively prepared them for the profession. Thus, it can be concluded that serving as an assistant principal is not an important step in the process of principal training in the U.S., at least in the state of Michigan. Moreover, according to the findings of this research, it can be stated that assistant principalship may not be taken seriously since it is not defined as a criterion in the process of selecting principals in the state of Michigan. However, internships and courses taken during graduate education programs are accepted as important pre-service trainings for principal candidates.

Consistent with the findings of this study, Busch, MacNeil, and Baraniuk (2010) indicated that many assistant principals do not feel well prepared for being school principals in U.S., and they also

underlined the fact that assistant principals have a lack of opportunities to participate in professional development activities, which are crucial to becoming a principal. In addition, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) stated that simply being an assistant principal is not enough to prepare one for school principalship. In addition, there is not a universal definition of these roles in the existing literature, and the responsibilities of most assistant principals are basically defined by their respective principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). As a result, not being accepted as professionals, and the lack of defined duties and responsibilities may have an adverse effect on assistant principals, which would eventually decrease their overall performance (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012).

The majority of the principals in this study had positive opinions about the courses that they took during their graduate education and stated that these courses helped them gain theoretical knowledge about administration and leadership. Furthermore, the principals emphasized the importance of internship programs in which they had the opportunity to work with successful and experienced school principals. They also stated that they owed their current administrative skills and knowledge to such internships. Similar to the findings of this study, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007) suggested that both the nature of internships and its connection to coursework are critically important in terms of helping principals learn to implement sophisticated practices. This was based on the findings of their study in which they examined effective examples of pre-service and in-service trainings for school principals provided by different universities. Moreover, they indicated that good internship programs were generally one year in length and they depended on effective teamwork under the supervision of an experienced school principal. Barnett et al. (2012) stated that internships provided opportunities for obtaining information about reflective thinking, interpersonal communication, problem solving skills, time management, etc. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that a master's degree with an enriched internship program (under the supervision of an experienced principal) can play an important role in the process of principal training.

In Turkey, school principalship has not been accepted as a profession and this situation has been viewed as an obstacle to principals' effective training and

development. Thus, the findings of the present study can be an important step toward recognizing school principalship as a profession. It can also help develop effective policies regarding pre-service trainings of school principals and the prerequisite of having a master's degree in educational administration/ leadership. In this way, principal candidates can be encouraged to obtain graduate education, which can provide them with the knowledge, skills, and experience to become an effective leader. In addition, educational administration master's degree programs should be redesigned in order to provide practical solutions to the current problems in today's schools, rather than theories.

Besides all of these aspects, providing effective pre-service professional development programs for principal candidates has emerged as an important requirement. It would be appropriate to develop strong collaborations with universities in the process of determining and providing training programs for

future principals. Moreover, internship programs, which have played an important role in pre-service trainings of school principals in the U.S., can also be implemented in Turkey. Through this approach, principal candidates can have the opportunity to gain significant experience under the supervision of successful school principals before they are assigned as principals.

Finally, in order to increase the generalizability of this research, this subject should be studied by researchers using school principals selected from other states in the U.S. School principals' opinions about pre-service training and administrators' competencies should also be identified by future research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, similar research can be conducted in other developed countries and the results can be utilized to develop effective principal training models in Turkey.

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