

# Role Ambiguity of School Principals\*

Erkan TABANCALI\*\*

Yasemin SU\*\*\*

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**Abstract:** The present study aimed to find out the school principals' opinions working in public primary and secondary schools concerning their role ambiguity. It is significant for the purpose of this study to set forth the perspectives regarding experiencing the role ambiguity, consider the main factors which lay ground to role ambiguity and prevent situations that may adversely affect the functions of educational organizations in advance. This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design. As participants, there were 10 school principals determined with maximum variation sampling. The data, collected with the semi-structured interview, were analyzed and interpreted using the content analysis. The findings obtained in this study revealed two main themes as follows: "role ambiguity" and "influence framework". "Role ambiguity" was divided into two subthemes as "role line" and "elements of ambiguity". "Influence framework"; was divided into four subthemes as "organizational ambiguity", "pressure groups", "ambiguity mirror", and "solution paths". The findings obtained in this study showed that school principals experience role ambiguity. It was determined that the role ambiguity of the school principals of this sample resulted from organizational ambiguity and concluded that the school principals determined their roles as per the situation. Within the framework of the results of this study, the factors causing the role ambiguity of school principals should be removed.

**Keywords:** Ambiguity, role ambiguity, school principals.

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\*\*  Yildiz Technical University, Turkey, tabanca@yildiz.edu.tr

\*\*\*  Correspondence: Fatih Sultan Mehmet University, Turkey, ysu@fsm.edu.tr

## Introduction

An essential part of the social structure, the schools are primary among the organizations that play a leading role in shaping society. Besides that, effective management of human and material resources are required to achieve the goals of schools, keeping and developing educational organizations in accordance with their objectives are also the tasks of the school management (Bursalioğlu, 2013). To achieve the schools' goals, school principals should be able to use their authorities in accordance with the expectations of education policies, relevant laws and modern education approaches (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2014). On the other hand, school principals who are responsible for school administration must have the knowledge and skills required to fulfill the duties and responsibilities assigned to them (Açıklalın & Özkan, 2015). To sustain the social order, people who have certain roles in society should perceive their roles accurately in accordance with their status and should fulfill the requirements of the roles expected from them.

A role is the legal and social rules expected to be fulfilled by someone (Güney, 2015). In other words, roles are the behaviors expected from the employed in an organization according to their status (Sabuncuoğlu, 2015). In a school's social system, the staff who works for the school also have roles due to the structural function of the school. In accordance with school principals' status, the roles and responsibilities expected from them are structured by social system patterns. As well as the school's formal requirements, there are also informal behavior requirements in compliance with the roles (Aypay, 2015). As the determinants of the social interaction quality, roles are also the essential driving force of the social structure. Hence, school principals should maintain their management duties in a qualified manner, have the awareness and sense of roles and reflect the necessary efforts to fulfill these roles. As formal organizations, schools have duties and responsibilities structured in accordance with bureaucratic expectations (Aypay, 2015). In one respect, people employed in formal organizations also constitute the informal organizational features with informal relationships (Eren, 2018). As responsible people for school management, school principals integrate their own role features with the responsibilities of other people in the system. In addition to the importance of the orientation of the organizational structure and the current situation put forward by the system with the responsibilities perceived by the school principals, adopting the administrative principles by school principals in compliance with the purposes of educational organizations is also important for the quality of school administration.

In compliance with the general purposes of Turkish National Education stated in the National Education Basic Law numbered 1739; the Turkish National Education and Training System is organized in a way to achieve the general objectives. Conducting and improving the education and training processes of the school are the

responsibilities of the school principal. The roles and responsibilities of school principals in the Turkish Education System have been determined in this way by the regulations published by the Ministry of National Education. The roles and responsibilities in the regulation of primary education institutions are as follows;

'ARTICLE 39 - (1) Pre-school education and primary education institutions are managed by the principal together with other employees in line with the provisions of the relevant legislation. The school principal, Manager ensures the fulfillment of the duties assigned by the ministry and provincial / district national education directorates and other duties specified in the job description as well as the school's students, all kinds of education and training, management, personnel, accrual, movable property, correspondence, educational and social activities, boarding, scholarship, mobile education, security, catering, maintenance, protection, cleaning services, order, duty, public relations '(Ministry of National Education, Pre-School Education and Primary Education Institutions Regulation, 2014).

The roles and responsibilities in the regulations of secondary education institutions are briefly as follows;

'ARTICLE 78- (1) The School Principal is the education and training leader primarily responsible for schools management and representation and shall be responsible for the effective and efficient use of all resources to achieve the goals of the school in accordance with the Constitution, law, regulation, regulation, directive, circular and other relevant legislation provisions in accordance with the general objectives and basic principles of Turkish National Education abiding by the team spirit. The principal manages the school in cooperation with the boards, commissions and teams within its body '(Ministry of National Education Regulation on Secondary Education Institutions, 2013).

Expectations define the role and the role expectations are revealed by the authorities and responsibilities brought by the requirements of the role (Bursalioğlu, 2013). Social expectations are exposed to the change of society in compliance with the characteristics of the time. There may be differences between the roles expected from school principals and the roles they experience. As stated in the relevant regulations, the ambiguities that prevent the fulfillment of the roles defined by these expectations can cause role ambiguity. Although the roles and responsibilities of school principals are officially stated by regulations, they may experience role ambiguities due to roles developed outside of the framework of their duties.

It is thought that the role ambiguities as experienced by school principals in perceiving and conducting their roles may cause some organizational and vocational problems. Role ambiguity can be defined as the lack of clear authority and responsibility boundaries for the job of the person, the uncertainty of behavior expected from this person in relation to his/her job, or the lack of perceiving of the person of his/her purpose in relation to his/her job, and beyond this, the inability to understand the organizational purpose and meaning of the job (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2000; Jones, 1993; Stordeur et al., 2001). In addition, role ambiguity may arise from that the individual does not have the necessary information to achieve the expected performance within the scope of the duties assigned to him in the institution where he/she works (Ceylan & Ulutürk, 2006). In one respect, employees of the organization may experience role

ambiguity when they are unaware of their work and cannot receive feedback. Multiple dimensions of role ambiguity, based on the perspective of the tasks are stated as target, expectation and responsibility ambiguity, process ambiguity, priority ambiguity and behavior ambiguity (Bauer & Simmons, 2000). People who experience role ambiguity may undergo some experiences, such as having difficulties in the work environment, dissatisfaction with their work, inefficient workforce, feeling worthless and being stressed. In addition, the presence of role ambiguity in organizations, in parallel with all other reflections, also brings role conflict. In research that studies the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict and job satisfaction and performance, the findings showed that there was a positive relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict. In fact, job satisfaction is adversely affected in this model, in which role ambiguity is included with role conflict (Ceylan & Ulutürk, 2006). Role conflict refers to the situation that arises in the presence of roles incompatible with the roles of the organization's employees, and these roles conflict or expected more than the current situation, and the resources required to perform these roles are insufficient (Tolay Sabuncuoğlu, 2008).

It is necessary to define the role in organizations and perceive the role accurately for properly maintaining the management task. Hence, in this situation, it may be required to raise questions to find out what are the most important definitions and interpretations to sustain the school administration in a qualified manner. It is considered important in terms of knowing the results by considering the factors that cause and may cause role ambiguity for school principals who undertake management duties in educational organizations. It is also necessary to know the current situation of school principals regarding the role ambiguities to prevent personal and vocational problems that may adversely affect the management of educational organizations.

In this research, we aimed to find out the current situation concerning the role ambiguity of the school principals working in the public primary and secondary education levels and offer solutions for role ambiguity. In this context, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the general views of school principals about the concept of "role ambiguity"?
2. What are the views of the school principals about whether they experience role ambiguity or not, what are their opinions about the problems and solutions in case they do?

## Method

### Research Designe

The reason to determine the qualitative research method as an appropriate method for this research is considering the examination of the individual experience and perceptions of role ambiguity of school principals, who were the subject of the research significant by determining the conceptual framework and scope of this research. The structuring of the inquiry process in qualitative terms has been handled with an interpretative (social) paradigm. The reason to prefer phenomenology research design, which focuses on human experiences of social reality in this research is the assumption that is presenting and in-depth analyzing the different data and the facts which are related to the research subject, such as orientation, experience, perception, coding, situation or events specific to the phenomenon, could be achieved by different perspectives.

In one respect, phenomenology is the description of experiences as they are reflected (Merleau-Ponty, 2016). This study aimed to provide the school principals with a possibility to present a detailed explanation about the role ambiguity and to reflect participants' perceptions on the phenomenon by collecting data using face-to-face interviews with school principals.

### Study Group

In the selection of phenomenological research samples, those participating in the research should have experience in the context of the subject of the research (Creswell, 2017). In qualitative research, samples as the focus of phenomenological design are the individuals who have been experiencing and those who continue the experiencing processes (Baş & Akturan, 2017). In this study, maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. The main purpose of using maximum diversity sampling is to reveal common facts in situations that vary among the obtained data and to express the different dimensions of the current problem according to its variety (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). It is essential that the participant school principals' expressions are satisfied with maximum diversity sampling in accordance with the research phenomenon and aims. As the research sample, ten school principals from public primary and secondary education institutions were included. School principals group which satisfy maximum diversity voluntarily participated in this study. To present the factors regarding school principals in this study, the relevant details were shown in the form of code as follows.

**Table 1.**

*Demography of the School Principals Who Constituted the Research Sample*

School Principal	Age	Sex	Major	School Type	Education Status
SP1	47	Man	Social Studies	Anatolian High School	Master Degree in Education Administration
SP2	43	Man	Computer Technologies	Secondary School	Master Degree in Education Administration
SP3	53	Man	Physical Education	Special Education High School	Undergraduate Degree
SP4	50	Woman	Catering	Anatolian Vocational and Technical High School	Master Degree in Education Administration
SP5	39	Man	Class Teacher	Primary School	Master Degree in Education Administration
SP6	40	Woman	Class Teacher	Primary School	Master Degree in Education Administration
SP7	38	Woman	English Teacher	Secondary School	Undergraduate Degree
SP8	54	Man	Class Teacher	Primary School	Undergraduate Degree
SP9	45	Woman	Turkish Teacher	Secondary School	Undergraduate Degree

(SP1, W2, M2) SP1: The number of school principals, W2: Woman M2: Man

## Data Collection

To reveal and interpret the participants' experiences regarding the research phenomenon in multiple ways, qualified face-to-face interviews are required (Ersoy, 2017). The purpose of the interview is to examine the research participant's inner world and understand his/her perspective (Patton, 1987, cite in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this research, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants to examine the essence related to the experiences. Conducting the research in a phenomenological design provides an opportunity to obtain detailed data for the preparation of questions that allow the case to be revealed (Ersoy, 2017). Therefore, during the research preparation process, open-ended questions were prepared and developed through pilot practices in accordance with the flexible principles of qualitative research. Although the research questions were two basic questions, there were eighteen questions, including the sub-questions.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability elements of the research are expressed as internal validity or credibility, reliability or consistency, external validity or transferability. External audit, long-term interaction, peer review and expert opinion strategies were implemented to ensure internal validity or credibility in the research (Cresswell, 2018). To ensure an in-depth examination of the views of school principals on role ambiguity, detailed examinations were conducted through interviews and additional notes were taken throughout the interview. The purpose of the long-term interaction strategy, which is another strategy used to ensure internal validity or credibility, is to increase the credibility of the collected data by maintaining the interaction with the data sources obtained as a result of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). To ensure the diversity of the place of duty, the participants were interviewed at their schools and the places were introduced and distinguished more clearly. The participants were prepared to feel ready and comfortable before the research by increasing the time spent with the participants before the interview through interactions, such as telephone calls, correspondence and appointments. Before determining the face-to-face interview questions of this research through pre-interviews, the feedback was considered given by the educators who had experience within the context of the research phenomenon or participated in different research and draft questions were prepared as a result of the literature review. To determine the face to face interview questions, the opinions of experts in education administration and human resources management were consulted. Turkish proofreading of the interview questions was conducted and the final form of the interview questions was determined by an educator specialized in the Turkish Language. In the research, "detailed description and purposeful sampling" (Erlandson et al., 1993, Akt; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016) methods were used to provide external validity or transferability. An in-depth examination of all the additional notes and documents taken by the researcher in addition to the participants' opinions supported the detailed description. By directly reflecting the participants' expressions on all data obtained as a result of face-to-face interviews, the results were presented in detail. Different sample data were also included. In the consistency analysis of this research, whether all stages in the research process were appropriate and consistent according to qualitative research principles was repeatedly examined.

## **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was used for the analysis of the data. Content analysis is referred to obtaining systematic and unbiased results from certain participants by scanning interview texts (Stone et al., 1966, 213, cited in Koçak & Arun, 2006). The purpose of content analysis is to reach explicable concepts and relationships with the data obtained as a result of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, 242). The process followed in data analysis is defined as collecting data, finding themes, organizing codes and themes, defining and interpreting findings. The purpose and conceptual framework of the research were questioned perpetually as being the core of

questioning the research questions made on the data. The code list defined on the data was examined by an independent expert from the research, and the codings were finalized with the necessary feedback. In the process of finding the themes of this research, the code list on the data was examined by reviewing the literature with the inductive method, common aspects were brought together, and themes that form meaningful wholes were created from the named codes. The data analysis obtained through face-to-face interviews was re-evaluated, and the relationships on themes were revealed. The data organized under the research questions, along with two main themes, sub-themes and categories, are given in detail under the heading of the findings of this research.

## Results

According to the content analysis results performed in line with the research data in this study, two main themes were reached as "role ambiguity" and "influence framework". The themes were presented with respect to the order of research questions as follows Figure 1.

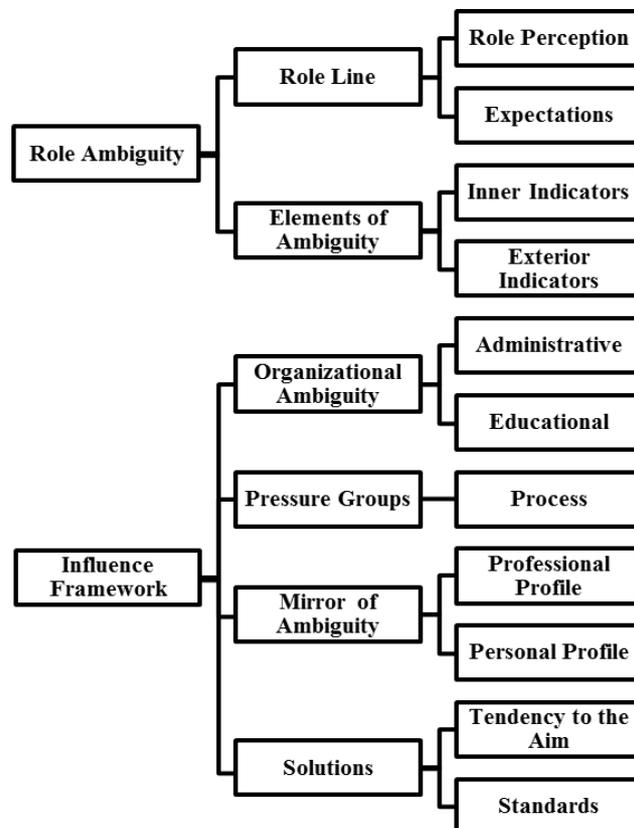
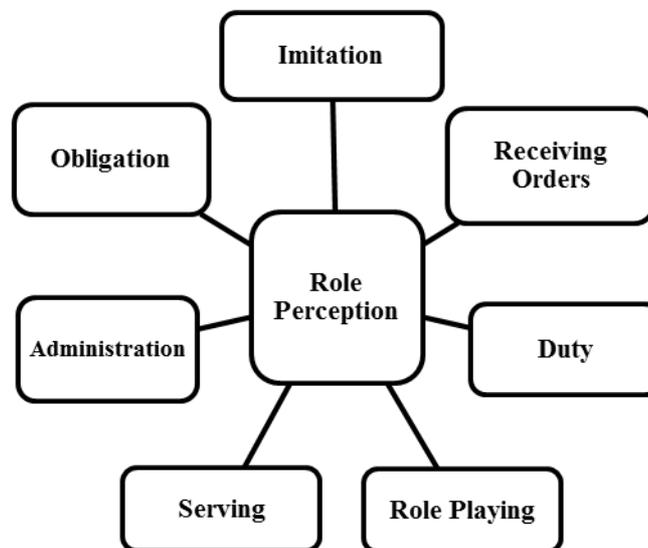


Figure 1. The themes of the research, subthemes and categories

## Theme 1: Role Ambiguity

In the theme of role ambiguity, there are explanatory opinions and descriptions of school principals' interpretations of role ambiguity which were reflective of the participants' perceptions. The theme of role ambiguity consisted of the sub-themes as the role line and elements of ambiguity. Role line sub-theme was explained by the role perception and expectations categories. The figure below reflects the views on the role perception category, which is under the role line sub-theme and the role ambiguity theme;



**Figure 2.** Role perception theme, role perception category codes of the role line sub-theme

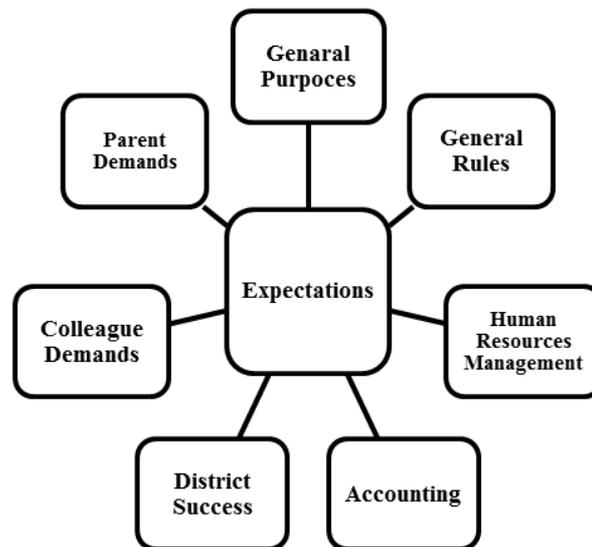
The codes of role perception category of the role line, a sub-theme of the role ambiguity theme were determined as imitation, obligation, receiving orders, duty, administration, serving, role-playing and duty. Examples of participant school principals' opinions are as follows;

*(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): In addition to roles, such as managing the school, managing staff and guiding students and parents, we can even have momentary political roles. To summarize, we are the personnel who work in schools to get that desired thing done right. We just pretend it, we just pretend to obey their rules, but we just play and we do what we know.*

*(SP<sup>5</sup>, M): It is all of the behaviors expected from us and that we have to play. Sometimes, it is what we have to do because of the tasks assigned to us. It is the play of roles tailored by superiors.*

*(SP<sup>6</sup>, W): It is the imitation of the desired role by person. It is to serve the institution to which she is affiliated.*

Figure 3 below reflects the views gathered on the expectations category of the role line sub-theme of the role ambiguity theme;



**Figure 3.** Role perception theme, expectations category of the role line sub-theme and codes

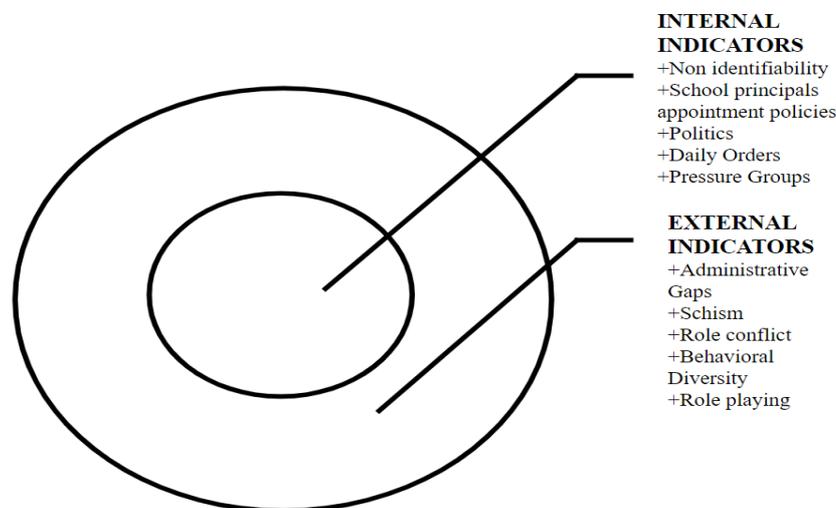
The expectations category and codes of the role line sub-theme of role ambiguity theme were determined as general rules, human resources management, accounting, district success, colleague demands, parent demands and practicality. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>8</sup>, M): It is expected from us to manage money, people management is also expected, human relations are expected to be good, the school should be well organized. I am expected to be successful in many commissions in the district; there are expectations from any side.

(SP<sup>9</sup>, W): My role is that I will stay at school and realize the general goals of national education. I will prepare my students for the future.

(SP<sup>10</sup>, W): This is the way that I can explain it. To summarize it, the first thing is what my colleagues expect, what parents expect, and what the minister of national education expects. What my colleagues expect is more comfortable and ergonomic classes and fewer students in classrooms. Technologically better-equipped classrooms, concerning cleanliness. Besides that, I am also expected to solve my colleagues' personal problems if they may have.

The elements of ambiguity sub-theme are explained in internal indicators and external indicators categories. The figure below reflects the participating school principals' views, gathered on the internal indicators and external indicators categories of the the subtheme of uncertainty elements of theme of role ambiguity.



**Figure 4.** The internal indicators and external indicators category and codes of the role line sub-theme of role perception theme

The internal indicators category and codes of the elements of ambiguity sub-theme of role ambiguity theme were determined as non-identifiability, school principal appointment policies, politics, daily orders and pressure groups. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>1</sup>, M): *Not being able to define what you are doing in your job. As an example, it is one of the biggest problems of school principals. Today, I am a teacher; tomorrow, I will be the administrator. Today, I am the administrator; tomorrow, I will be a teacher. In this dilemma, am I a teacher or an administrator? To say it, every principal is a teacher, but let's verify the opposite then. What will you do in case every teacher means that they are also principals.*

(SP<sup>2</sup>, M): *There are unwritten definitions of school principals. We happen to have to do a lot of tasks that are not clearly stated. A thief sneaks into the school in the middle of the night. You have to be there. An unfavourable situation happens, you have to take care of it, and there is no defined time and no limit for it. There are assistant managers appointed to work with you but take a company into consideration, even while managing the company, the accounting part is run by the expert. In our situation, only those who have experience in teaching try to do it by learning in time. They are not experts; we try to make them experts in time. This really makes us tired and instead of dealing with education at school, you cannot find time to take care of education work instead of dealing with administrators.*

(SP<sup>7</sup>, W): *Unions are on us, but there are also policies produced by the government. The current situation is not an education policy; it's a government's policy. There has never been a state policy. This creates an ambiguity. The new governments that take office take different decisions over and over again and leave us with different situations. Even the same government can change the same regulation three times in a year.*

The external indicators category and codes of the elements of ambiguity sub-theme of the role ambiguity theme were determined as administrative gaps, schism, role conflict,

behavioral diversity and role playing. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(OM<sup>4</sup>, W): *In case he/she who could not internalize the role or exert dominance well, he/she will definitely reflect it with his/her behaviors. There will be positive or negative repercussions. I think negative reflections will be more than positive ones. Teachers can exploit this ambiguity towards principals and use this gap.*

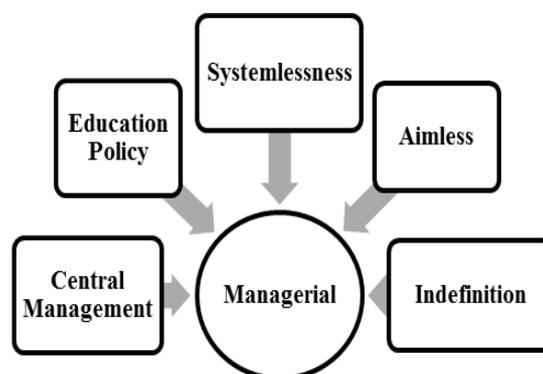
(OM<sup>3</sup>, M): *By forming groups through the unions, it gets more concrete. So it feels like something that doesn't go from top to lower levels. That's why there are conflicts about roles sometimes.*

(OM<sup>8</sup>, M): *There is a schism in schools as you know. Those are again the groups formed by unions or people who have a command of the regulations. I think foundations and associations might be very effective. Also, I think media and social media, communication tools are very effective.*

(OM<sup>6</sup>, W): *There happens chaos, a mess; as you can see our phones don't go silent. Where there is chaos, mess, there can't be discipline and order. The roles need to be determined thoroughly. Everyone has expectations from the school principal. People never mention how they can help. They care about how they can benefit from schools and school principals. They are being pragmatic when they approach us. I perform in a superhuman way. I experience conflicts between my administrative roles and my personal roles. I try to balance all the roles.*

## Tema 2: Influence Framework

In the influence framework theme, there were expressions that explained the interpretations and the reflective definitions of the participant school principals about the influence framework. The influence framework theme consisted of organizational ambiguity, pressure groups, ambiguity mirror and solutions. Organizational ambiguity subtheme was explained by managerial and educational categories. Figure 5 below reflects the views of the participating school principals gathered on the managerial category of the organizational uncertainty subtheme of the impact influence framework;



**Figure 5.** The managerial category and codes of the organizational ambiguity subtheme of the influence framework theme

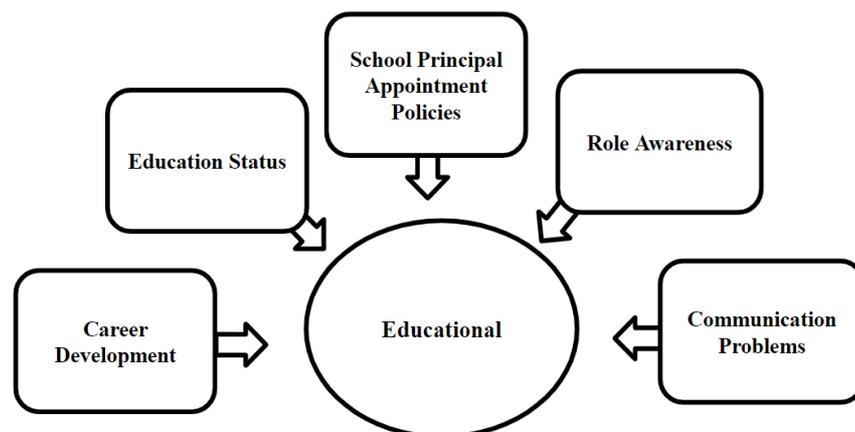
The managerial category and codes of the organizational ambiguity sub-theme of the influence framework theme were determined as systemlessness, educational policy, aimlessness, indefinision, and central government. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): *Why are these roles dictated to us by seniors? The roles of a middle school principal and my situation in a mentally disabled school are not the same. My roles should not be the same. Even while we are teaching to students, we design an individual education program for each student. The roles of all school principals should be specific and individual. Everyone's school is different; their neighborhood is different; their economic situation is different. A project is coming out from above; they say you will buy a tent, something up-to-date. He doesn't ask if you have money. There is a festival; it will be held. It costs 1000 TL, he doesn't ask if you have money. But it will be done.*

(SP<sup>6</sup>, W): *Out of the blue, an urgent article is sent to us and says it needs to be answered in a short time, or for example, when the superiors are making a decision, they just give orders without creating any infrastructure. It is said that you will do this. Are the teachers available? These decisions are made before the conditions are met, and we are asked to implement that decision without an infrastructure. This, of course, causes us to fall into administrative ambiguity.*

(SP<sup>5</sup>, M): *You can check it; we don't have a job description. It is not clear that what we do and what we don't do. It is not clear that what we are responsible for and what we are not. Now if a child falls down the stairs, I will go to court. If the toilet is dirty in schools, I will be dealing with CIMER again. But since there is no job description, because there are no such clear lines, so I have to answer you by mumbling.*

Figure 6 below reflects the views of the participating school principals gathered on the educational category of the organizational ambiguity sub-theme of the influence framework theme;



**Figure 6.** The educational category and codes of the organizational ambiguity sub-theme of the influence framework

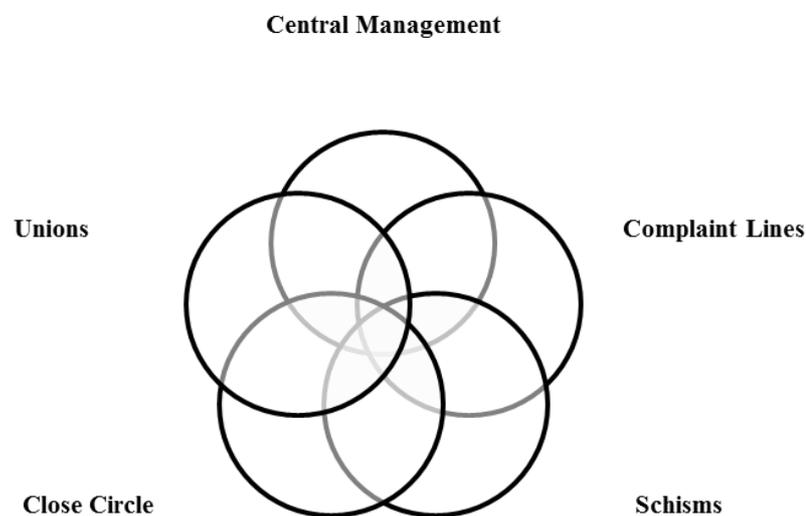
The educational category and codes of the organizational ambiguity sub-theme of the influence framework were determined as the school principal appointment policies, the educational status, career development, role awareness and communication problems. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

*(SP<sup>4</sup>, W): We learn the job while doing it. None of us graduated from the principal school. In the later years of my profession, I got a master's degree in education management and supervision. I wish I had done this at the beginning of my management career. My management experience could be different. There was a difference between the two. I worked without knowing the job.*

*(SP<sup>8</sup>, M): You have to work with a little margin of error. There should be no margin of error. You have to be strong in every move and you cannot act after your heart. It affects my role. I cannot stand strong behind what I say. If I stand behind them, they will use those legal rights.*

*(SP<sup>9</sup>, W): As you may know, we are all assigned to these duties not permanently. In fact, teachers become principals or vice principals for four years. Actually, none of their positions are permanent, we all get appointed back to be a teacher with a sheet of A4 paper. That's why I have a role conflict.*

The pressure groups sub-theme is explained by the process category. Figure 7 below reflects the views of the participating school principals gathered on the process category of the pressure groups sub-theme of the influence framework;



**Figure 7.** The process category and codes of the pressure groups sub-theme of the influence framework

The process category and codes of the pressure groups sub-theme of the influence framework were determined as central administration, complaint lines, schism, close circle and unions. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>4</sup>, W): Supervisors, supreme authorities are important for us to take this role and play, and their influence is much more to play this role. This is because of our superiors' expectations from us are in this direction. It has its drawbacks. What you want to do can not reach its purpose. It can't be effective and efficient. This situation can cause insecurity and a management vacuum. There may be a lack of respect for you. There may be deficiencies in obedience.

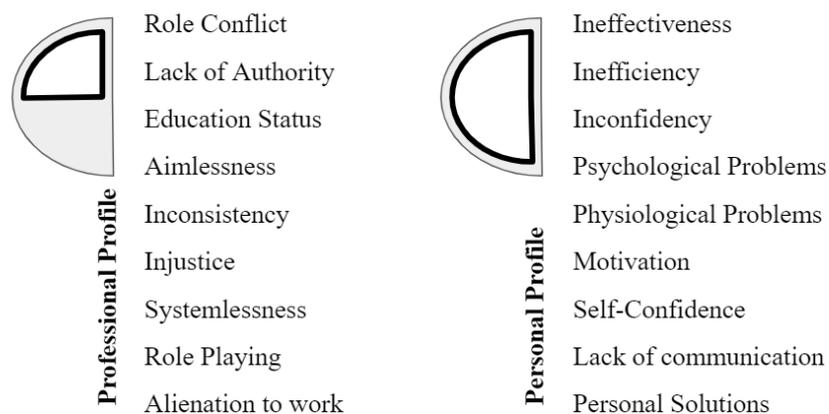
(SP<sup>6</sup>, W): You need to have a strong solid team while managing. Problems with superiors are not unsolvable; for example, let's assume that you receive an article and there is always an ambiguity when you want to do something. You have to write on them. We are in a time shortage. These give us role ambiguity.

(SP<sup>2</sup>, M): There are complaint lines, for example, in schools. Parent satisfaction is important, but this system is very wrong. Of course, the family is a stakeholder here. But, this is something different, but it was not pleasant to bring the parent ahead of the student and the school. So what did we do? We spoiled the climate of the schools, and we regressed education.

(SP<sup>5</sup>, M): The pressure groups are not in sight, but they want things from us to be done. I am not saying that I am a very decent man for myself. For example, pressure groups want us to do something. Foundations or associations are doing some work within themselves. For example, my teachers come and ask me, "What would happen if we don't attend to those works?". But the friends at the top (district -city officials) say; he says "we expect at least 160 attendance". Whether the situation is appropriate or not. Normally we have a conflict of roles. Pressure groups make us feel ambiguous.

(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): For example, our roles are changing as the political situation of the unions' changes. It causes ambiguity, it can even change according to the current situation.

The figure below reflects the views of the participating school principals gathered on the professional and personal categories of the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the influence framework theme;



**Figure 8.** The professional profile categories and codes of the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the influence framework theme

The professional profile categories and codes of the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the influence framework theme were determined as role conflict, lack of authority,

educational status, aimlessness, inconsistency, injustice, systemlessness, role playing and alienation to work. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>4</sup>, W): We do not have any authority. We have responsibilities and risks. We are walking on the sharp side of the sword. There is no situation we can guarantee. We are responsible for any negativity at school. If your student, administrator, staff or teacher makes a mistake, you are the person to be held accountable. Therefore, we are in a really difficult time. We have limitations in our authorities, and we have a lack of effectiveness [...] I wouldn't say role restriction here, but I believe that my effectiveness and competence are not enough.

(SP<sup>6</sup>, W): We do not have authority; we have obligations and responsibilities. For example, only project schools can choose teachers, but why can't we choose them. For example, I have many teachers that I don't want to work with. Because our future will be shaped by our children.

(SP<sup>10</sup>, M): The decisions are instantaneous. You have to apply them because the decisions taken are instantaneous, and directives come to you every hour. So, things are coming from the top. We cannot take one more step ahead as long as the logic of "pretending" is the basis of our education. We cannot get into the essence of the matter; we are concerned with its external structure [...] When there is ambiguity at the top, the ambiguity goes down.

(SP<sup>1</sup>, M): This is the reason for our biggest criticism of today's system. The principal does not take the initiative; the principal does not lead; the principal does not lead. In other words, He/she does not improve the situation. He just waits as the days are passing by. At the point of giving direction and activating the stable situation, if you do not act and only manage the current situation, you will be an "administrator". You remain the administrator and you do not deserve the role.

(SP<sup>8</sup>, M): Not being able to define what you do in the job. Let me give an example; it is one of the biggest problems of school principals. Today, I am a teacher; tomorrow, I am the administrator. Today, I am the administrator, and tomorrow, I am a teacher. In this dilemma. It is useful to say this. It is the absence of a systematic solution approach. So today I am a teacher, tomorrow I am the administrator. Thus, today here and tomorrow, there is the ambiguity of the situation.

The personal categories and codes of the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the influence framework theme were determined as ineffectiveness, inefficiency, inconfidency, psychological problems, physiological problems, motivation, self-confidence, lack of communication and personal solutions. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>2</sup>, M): We are trying to fulfill all our responsibilities. This can make us sad, tired; in other words, we experience discomfort [...] The teachers change, the schools change, the education system changes. When everything changes, you also change with them [...] The roles you have to follow the change. With what you can do and what you cannot do.

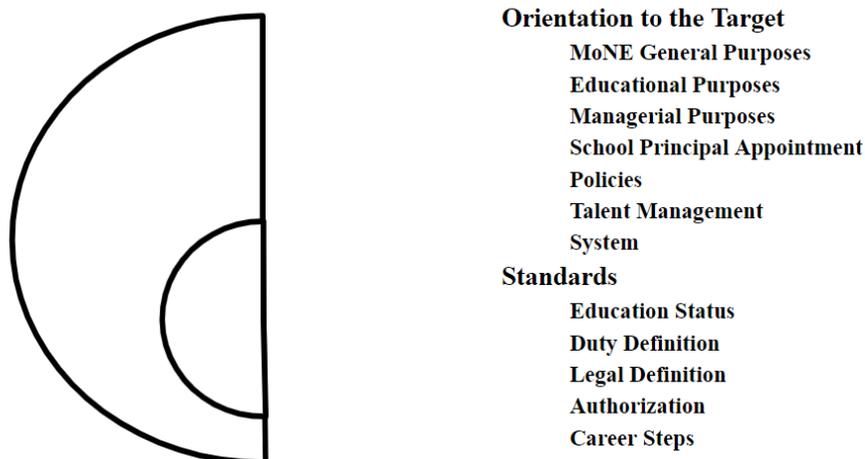
(SP<sup>5</sup>, M): Normally, there are also things that show that you are affiliated with an organization. You feel that you are loved; you feel accepted. You think that "I am very precious here," a job appears and they call you. If you have a question, they will listen to you first. You have hope that it can be resolved. So you have a discussion with someone and why would they go and complain about you unfairly. Unfairly, but you feel that they will try to do something about you behind your back. I'm not standing behind you if you go along well with me and when we do something against the law; You know that it will be solved because you go along well, not because of a problem that normally needs to be solved. If you can't feel this, you can't do that role properly; you can't trust it.

(SP<sup>7</sup>, W): We are not motivated enough, my colleagues as well. My only concern is the children. My aim is to raise good citizens and good people. Let them learn the roles of being a good citizen. Let's get a society in which there are no conflicts between strata. So that's my goal. Let them have humanist values, learn to live together.

(SP<sup>9</sup>, W): There are problems at the definition point. Your roles are clearly defined in a transparent way. In other words, each principal assigns a role for himself [ ...] The same things about the principal, there is a given title of being an administrator in a vicious circle that has not been defined and whose boundaries are not clearly defined, with the concern that this is mostly temporary. It is one of the reasons that lead me to the most uncertainty in taking the initiative.

(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): If you experience ambiguity, if you live in a conflict. The individuals you raise will also become indeterminate individuals. You reflect the chaos in your own situation as you experience. It's like I reflect right now. For example, very important phones have been coming since the morning, sometimes I forget the issue, I get confused, I wonder what the problem was[...] Not being self-confident is the reason to demotivate the other person. Actually, every ambiguity of us gives a distrust to our teachers. The teacher wants a principal standing firmly behind him. A principal who fulfils his authority, who fits his role, who guides him/her, who can stand behind him/her.

The views of the participant school principals gathered on the orientation to the target and standards categories of the solution paths sub-theme of the influence framework theme were explained. The figure below reflects the views of the participating school principals gathered on the goal orientation and standards categories of the solution paths sub-theme of the influence framework theme;



**Figure 9.** The orientation to the target and standards categories of the solution paths sub-theme of the influence framework theme

The orientation to the target category and codes of the solution paths sub-theme of the influence framework theme were determined as the general goals, educational goals, managerial goals, school principal appointment policies, talent management and system. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): School principals are actually something concrete; we are educators and we should be given jobs related to education. Let them take staff jobs from us, accounting jobs, etc. Let's do our own job, our own work. I think it would be more beneficial to do our work on education [...] I try to answer ten or fifteen papers coming from the system nearly every day. Something new comes out in the school every day. We do nothing but perform for unions [...] The basic law of education is what should be expected from us, that is our role. As I said, we never continue on this line, and we should not go beyond this line.

(SP<sup>10</sup>, M): There were pressure groups in the past too. We had not been rewarded when we had done what the pressure groups had said, but now they are rewarded. Maybe, it was increasing his own inner motivation, but now we are given material and spiritual reward for doing the work of a pressure group. If you meet the goals of a popular foundation, maybe, you can move to a seaside school.

(SP<sup>4</sup>, W): There are all goals in terms of students, teachers and administration. For example, my goal for students is to train good people here. We aim to raise a good Turkish citizen who does not lie, knows his responsibilities. What is the school for anyway? Basically, it should be like this.

(SP<sup>8</sup>, M): The lack of real permanent positions in the school management causes us to play every role given to us [...]. For example, we could choose our vice principals, but we can't choose them right now. School management is teamwork. I want to choose my own team.

(SP<sup>7</sup>, W): Here, as an example, there are project schools. They can choose their teachers. They can ask for changes at least every four years, or if it is a school outside of the province, it may be possible to bring a teacher from a different location. We, let alone finding permanent teachers, may have difficulties even when finding contractual teachers. The team is important.

The standards categories and codes of the solution paths sub-theme of the influence framework theme were determined as education status, duty definition, legal definition, authorization and career steps. Sample views of participating school principals are as follows;

(SP<sup>1</sup>, M): There should be a law of profession. Just as we want a law of profession for teachers, administrators should also be defined. The principal will manage the leadership direction, the direction of using authority. So these should be tailored to a title. It should not remain as a temporary title so that the person there makes sacrifices. There has to be a level. There should be career steps. This is perhaps one of the biggest problems of our education system. When you leave it stable, we can see that even the teacher is not doing his best. He can't do his part anyway, he says, I was born as a teacher, as a teacher, I will die. So he/she is not aware of his/her role. Because he/she is not aware of his/her role, he loses his status over time in his/her own eyes, in the eyes of society. He/she loses his/her status in the eyes of society. He/she cannot get the value he/she deserves from society. Because the stable role turns into an unconscious role.

(SP<sup>10</sup>, M): It is seen as one of the career steps, but there is not a certain point in our laws for principal or vice principal. This should be seriously defined and principal should be a career step. Must have a title.

(SP<sup>4</sup>, W): First of all, responsibilities and obligations should be very well defined; it should be clear at the beginning of your job. If you know your responsibilities well, you will act accordingly. You play your role according to that, act accordingly and reflect it to the other parties accordingly. Job descriptions need to be clear. It must be legally certain. It must be reported to us within the framework of the regulations. Moreover, there should be orientation and practice at the beginning of the job[...] I did this job without knowing it. I should be transparent in educational

*administration and supervision; I should be empathetic with teachers; I should lead culturally, I should be democratic. I learned so much. I have always learned these under educational administration and supervision. In the past, for example, I was a manager with my door closed, but I learned that my door should be open for the management and supervision of education. As the school principal, I reflected everything to my vice principals.*

*(SP<sup>3</sup>, M): We go beyond the role assigned to us [...] We are unauthorized authorities. We have no authority. We do not have the authority to supervise the teacher; we do not have the authority to punish the student, we do not have the authority to award the teacher, we are not authorized to give a reward to the students. We must have authority. I think my authority is affecting my role. Adhering to the educational program and bringing children to a better level of awareness are entirely the result of personal efforts.*

## Conclusion and Discussions

In this study, which aims to reveal the current situation and come up with solution suggestions by examining the experiences of school principals regarding role ambiguity, participating school principals expressed the phenomenon of role ambiguity in the context of role perception and expectations categories gathered in the role line sub-theme. School principals have an understanding of their roles as imitating the role they have, the duties they fulfill out of necessity, the orders they receive, administrations, serving and role playing. On the other hand, they justified that these projections were caused by various tasks expected of them. This may be an indication that school principals experience role conflict as a result of role ambiguity. In fact, that the person taking more than one position within the framework of the role increases the possibility of role ambiguity and role conflict (Sabuncuoğlu 2008; Rizzo et al., 1970). School principals state that as well as the general objectives of National Education and general rules; there are also expectations from them in terms of diversity of roles, such as human resources management, accounting affairs, district success requests of superiors, demands of teachers and parents, and practicality in the task. Thus, they argued that inconvenient and untimely, situational and instantaneous roles are effective in their actions to achieve organizational goals. The effect of situational and instantaneous roles in school management processes includes behavioral ambiguity of role ambiguity. Behavior ambiguity explains how to behave in various situations and the situation of meeting the expected results of the decision to be made (Bauer & Simmons, 2000). The fact that school principals are confident of their decisions when they determine their roles situationally can be discussed at this point. In parallel with this result, in a study conducted on the problems faced by school principals in school management, it was revealed that school principals produce formal and informal solutions to the problems encountered in schools (Aslanargun & Bozkurt, 2012). Role diversity or role changes in the duty environment for various reasons can enable situational decisions to be made in the assigned tasks. In a sense, it can be said that the effectiveness of the school and the consistent maintenance of the school culture can be hindered due to the fact that school principals, who undertake the role of the management of the school, make situational interpretation of their

duties and instant solutions to the problems they encounter in their duties. On the other hand, with the change in the meanings of what kind of situations constitute organizational effectiveness in schools, how school administrators should reflect school effectiveness is another problem (Aypay, 2015).

School administrators should be effective against the team working with the technical work that needs to be done in the schools. At the same time, they should be well equipped by having knowledge of the laws and regulations, the content of the curriculum and should be sufficient for the evaluation and development of the curriculum to implement the administrative processes well (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2014). In a sense, school principals have important driving roles in the development and maintenance of school effectiveness. Given that the school is a social system, it requires the school principal to be a social engineer in establishing individual and organizational balance (Bursalioglu, 2013). Along with the changing, transforming and developing age characteristics, educational organizations as a dynamic environment affected by this change cause changes in social expectations towards the school. Despite the necessity of making use of rational decision processes, school administrators, since the aims of schools are generally based on values, decision-making bodies, and administrators cannot make or find rational choices (Bursalioglu, 2012). Similarly, school principals, who reflect their role ambiguity in the interpretation of the phenomenon of this research, also express the problem of competence. In a sense, the semantic reflection styles of school principals also revealed the situations in which they associate the phenomenon of role ambiguity at the level of competence.

The acceleration of the training of school principals, considered within the scope of the 2023 education vision, is a positive and important development. It is deemed important for the title of the school principal to become a profession and to train school principals in this direction. In accordance with the modern understanding of education and the characteristics of the information age, schools that have great importance in shaping society should not be managed by the momentary decisions of the school administrators. In the past, many practices have been implemented by taking good perspectives to develop managerial competencies of the school principal and managers. However, obsolete practices no longer meet the requirements of the modern age. Thus, new applications should be able to meet the requirements of contemporary management understanding in a versatile way and explain the behavioral focus of the people who will undertake management tasks. Such that knowledge and social action are maintained interactively (Burr, 2012).

Schools, which are organizations affecting and influenced by society, should have experts and competent people in their management. Every step to be taken in this direction is critical in terms of increasing the quality of managerial and educational processes. When school principals in charge of school administration are trained as a versatile principal, their interaction with the experts in the organization will become more qualified (Bursalioglu, 2013). Therefore, international standards should be determined and selected and placed in school principal appointments (Balyer, 2012)

because "all the things that society has created for itself are brought to each individual through school" (Dewey, 1899, trans. 2010).

In line with the standards of the age, school principals should have awareness of the educational system, the roles of school management and the environmental factors affecting their roles (Gümüşeli, 2001). In a sense, school principals should have the necessary competencies to achieve the goals of the school and act with a sense of role in taking on and maintaining the role.

In this study, school principals stated that various tasks expected from them caused them to experience role ambiguity. There is ambiguity between the roles played by the school principals and the roles they should have (Reilly, 1984). School principals defined their interpretations, which would reveal the research phenomenon, with their views gathered around the elements of ambiguity sub-theme. They stated that if they experience role ambiguity, there are some indicators that cause this. School principals explained elements of ambiguity as non-identifiability, school principal appointment policies, politics, daily orders and pressure groups. They stated that they see the elements of ambiguity as the situations that affect the system more than the others and they are basically an indicator of role ambiguity. In parallel with this result, it was revealed that the reflections that explain the role ambiguity phenomenon and the problems that caused them to experience role ambiguity were found to be related to the organizational ambiguity of the influence framework theme and the pressure groups sub-theme.

School principals have reflected that the elements of uncertainty they expressed as external indicators are administrative gaps, the schism within the school, role conflicts, behavioral diversity and role playing. The external indicators category reflecting the interpretation of role ambiguity revealed that it is related to the expressions in the professional profile category of the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the influence framework theme. Based on the opinions of school principals on role ambiguity in the schools, it has been understood that role ambiguity caused them to experience administrative changes and this has effects on the educational process and hence it causes social change.

It can be said that the relationships that emerged under different categories in the first theme of the study affect each other and affect the perceptions of the school principals in their experiencing processes. Although they experience being the school principal through different experiences, it has been frequently stated that they do not know their roles exactly and they experience role ambiguity in different contexts. In addition, job descriptions of school principals do not correspond to the duties and descriptions required from them. We can say that this situation also negatively affects quality assurance in school management. Quality assurance in education explains the guarantee that the systematic management process will be accepted by the institution and assurance will be provided to individuals (Bakioğlu & Baltacı, 2017).

The second theme of the research, the influence framework, explains the factors affecting the role ambiguity of school principals as organizational ambiguity, pressure groups and ambiguity mirror. In addition to the influence framework theme, the solution paths sub-theme also explains the strategies that can be established against role ambiguity. In the organizational ambiguity sub-theme, which affects role ambiguity, school principals reflected the reasons for ambiguity in administrative processes as central administration, bureaucratic processes, educational policies, politics, systemlessness, indefiniteness and pressure groups. In the opinions at this point, it was revealed that the ambiguities affecting the administrative processes of school principals coincided with the category expressed as the elements of ambiguity in the first theme. On the other hand, in their interpretation of the phenomenon of role ambiguity, we can say that school principals are aware of the relationship with administrative processes due to their roles with internal indicators. In a sense, although school principals experience role ambiguity, they are able to monitor and identify the elements that will provide role awareness. School principals stated about educational processes that affect role ambiguity as school principal appointment policies, educational status of school principals, deficiencies in the professional development of school principals, communication problems and lack of awareness of role. School principals emphasized the necessity of questioning the quality of teacher training in undergraduate education and reflected the category of educational status affecting role ambiguity starting from the profession/job decision. In a sense, it is deemed necessary by participating school principals to have qualified teacher training processes and to create a sense of role.

School principals stated that pressure groups affect school management and education processes. In this context, pressure groups that affect school processes increase the ambiguity of the roles of school principals and also negatively affect their motivation. School principals refer to pressure groups as schism groups against management, complaint lines, charity organizations and unions. In their evaluations concerning school processes, they justified the effects of the administrative change that could lead to educational transformation and qualitative change in society.

In the professional and personal profile expressions reflected in the ambiguity mirror sub-theme of the role ambiguity influence framework theme, the situations where the school principals position themselves against their experience of role ambiguity are explained. In a sense, school principals hold a mirror to themselves during the research process and face the realities in the reflection they see. In their opinions expressed in their professional profile, they make explanations about the role conflict, being a person who responds to daily roles, being an administrator, being unauthorized, diversity of educational background, aimlessness, inconsistent behaviors, unfair behaviors, not being able to establish a system, and role-playing behaviors. In this context, it can be said that school principals are approaching the processes of alienation to work. It is known that in case a situation of alienation to work within the organization; dissatisfaction with the work, low motivation, decreased

organizational commitment, negative feelings and unwillingness about the work and organization take place (Demirez & Tosunoğlu, 2017). In personal profile, school principals reflected ineffectiveness, inefficiency, inconfidence, psychological problems, physiological problems, low motivation, lack of self-confidence, insincerity, inability to take the initiative, lack of communication and confusion. The concept of exhaustion, which emerges as a negative result of role ambiguity, also explains these results. Exhaustion is explained as a psychological reaction to factors that may cause stress in the work environment (Tolay Sabuncuoğlu, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). It was revealed that the study was related to the opinions explaining the reflections in ambiguity mirror as well as the expectations that cause the school principals to experience role perception and role ambiguity. The fact that the expressions discussed in the research phenomenon overlap with the professional and personal profile evaluations reveal the consistency between both themes. In a sense, the meanings of role ambiguity of school principals can explain their profiles in a holistic way.

The views that school principals express solutions to role ambiguity are explained by orientation to the target and standards categories. In this context, for solutions to role ambiguity, they expressed strategies to pave the way to the target, such as the necessity of general objectives of the Ministry of Education objectives, vision and mission studies, strategic plan applications, particular objectives of the school, educational purposes, administrative purposes, educational roles, trust in school principals, right to delegate authority, talent management practices, systematic approaches and being informed in administrative processes. The fact that orientation to target occurs in the direction of determining and defining standards has revealed the view that clarifying the standards will provide equal conditions. In this context, the necessary standards expressed by school principals are aligned with the conditions, such as the educational status in accordance with the professional point of view of the school management, clarity of the job descriptions, the clarity of the legal definitions, objective criteria for the appointment of the school principals and a career step for being the school principal. On the other hand, the abstraction of legal definitions is explained as one of the natural and necessary features of this field. The reason why the statements are abstract in legal terms is that reality develops in its own way. For this reason, from a legal perspective, it can be said that school principals should be in a position to take the initiative at necessary points. On the other hand, when the semantic foundations of the relationship and overlap between research themes are examined, lack of supervision is also effective in school principals' experience of role ambiguity. For this reason, it can be said that contemporary control and management processes should be carried out in a trust-oriented manner to get rid of all kinds of internal and external negative effects in schools for the purposes of MoNE. As a result, the school principal duty should be transformed into a professional job.

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**Authors**

Erkan TABANCALI, Associate Professor in Department of Educational Sciences, Education Management

Yasemin SU, Lecturer in Child Development Program

**Contact**

Yıldız Technical University, Education Faculty, Department of Educational Sciences, Education Management Davutpaşa Campus, Esenler, Istanbul, Turkey tabancali@ytu.edu.tr

Fatih Sultan Mehmet University, Vocational School, Child Development, Halic Campus, Beyoglu, Istanbul, Turkey ysu@fsm.edu.tr