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## Examining Educational Administrators' Responses to Whistleblowing Cases in Schools in Türkiye

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**Abstract.** This study examines the procedures and practices implemented by educational administrators in provincial and district national education directorates in response to whistleblowing cases reported by schools in Türkiye. Employing a qualitative research design based on a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 34 educational administrators selected using snowball sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis techniques with the support of MAXQDA 2020 software. The findings reveal that educational administrators evaluate whistleblowing cases through a multidimensional lens, considering the context of the incident, its specific elements, and relevant legal frameworks. It was determined that educational administrators collaborate with school administrations, internal departments, and other public institutions to develop effective solutions. The results suggest that most reported issues are perceived to stem from communication breakdowns; therefore, efforts are made to foster constructive dialogue between parties, with special attention paid to confidentiality. Depending on the nature of the issue, formal and legal processes are carried out by appointing investigators or inspectors. Additionally, psychosocial support is provided to students and staff, and protective measures- such as reassignment- are implemented when necessary. The study concludes that educational administrators exhibit a sensitive, proactive, and responsible attitude toward ethical and legal challenges, adopting a systematic, multi-actor, and solution-oriented approach in whistleblowing.

**Keywords.** Whistleblowing, Educational administrators, Response to whistleblowing

### 1. Introduction

Instances of practices in schools that violate ethical principles and legal regulations are occasionally brought to public attention through newspapers, social media platforms, and websites. According to Çetin and Demirkasımoğlu (2015), teachers and school administrators are most frequently featured in the print media concerning allegations of harassment, followed by reports of violence, corruption, neglect of duty, and discrimination. Unethical behaviors such as violence, psychological harassment (mobbing), favoritism, biased attitudes, and sexual harassment have been observed within schools (Akyürek, 2020; Katip, 2019; Kubilay, 2022). Moreover, school administrators' failure to treat teachers equally and fairly, the tendency to highlight colleagues' mistakes in a way that fosters competition, or efforts to promote oneself

are also considered unethical practices (Çimen & Karadağ, 2019). Teachers frequently face politically motivated discrimination in educational institutions. This includes restrictions on exercising professional rights, obstruction of extracurricular initiatives, and disproportionate workloads. Such discriminatory attitudes and behaviors often result in intense negative emotions among teachers, including resentment, anger, and unhappiness (Keskinçilic Kara, 2016). According to Özdemir, Özan, and Yirci (2013), 27.62% of teachers who encountered an ethical issue reported feeling angry, while 25.60% felt ashamed.

When individuals within an organization are confronted with situations they believe to be unlawful, unethical, or in violation of legal norms—yet feel powerless to intervene—they are often forced to make difficult decisions (Miceli & Near, 2002). In such circumstances, teachers may at times choose to oppose the organization (Özdemir, 2010), or they may respond in different ways, such as reporting the issue to the relevant authorities or remaining silent (Toker Gökçe & Alataş, 2015).

Whistleblowing, a form of action that exposes unethical or illegal organizational behaviors and practices, is considered a matter of conscience and moral responsibility (Cemaloğlu & Akyürek, 2017). The central focus of this concept is the disclosure of actions that violate ethical principles and legal regulations (Baltacı, 2017). Near and Miceli (1985) define whistleblowing as current or former organizational members reporting their employers' illegal, unethical, or illegitimate practices to individuals or institutions with the authority to take corrective action. This definition encompasses all acts occurring within an organization that may cause harm to the organization itself, its members, or, more broadly, to society (Rehg, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008). Hersh (2001) similarly defined whistleblowing as the deliberate disclosure of information concerning non-trivial activities believed to be dangerous, illegal, unethical, discriminatory, or otherwise abusive. Jubb (1999) argues that whistleblowing should not be viewed merely as a process of information sharing, but rather as a proactive effort to expose misconduct and promote institutional accountability. In this context, it can be stated that whistleblowing has four main characteristics (Scaturro, 2018):

- Whistleblowing mostly involves misconduct related to the workplace.
- The relevant misconduct may include violations of laws, unethical behavior, corruption, breaches of health and safety regulations, and poor governance.
- Such violations can be reported through internal or external mechanisms.
- Unlike individual complaints, whistleblowing generally aims to serve the public interest.

A striking illustration of whistleblowing in practice is the case of three women - Sherron Watkins, Coleen Rowley, and Cynthia Cooper- who were named Time magazine's Persons of the Year in 2002. Despite the considerable personal and professional risks, these individuals exposed unethical and unlawful conduct within their respective organizations. Rather than yielding to institutional pressure, they demonstrated a profound commitment to ethical responsibility, ultimately playing a pivotal role in uncovering significant corporate misconduct (Aydın, 2003).

Whistleblowing is a behavior that contributes to an organization's efficiency and development (Aydan, 2018; Cemaloğlu & Akyürek, 2017). Despite its vital role in organizational functioning, whistleblowing is not a commonly observed behavior among teachers (Özdemir, 2010). One of the factors contributing to the rarity of whistleblowing behavior is that, in Turkish culture, such behavior is often associated with negative connotations such as "snitching" or being an "informer" (Demirtaş, 2014). Additionally, potential whistleblowers often refrain from reporting due to a range of concerns, including not being

taken seriously, fear of damaging social relationships, lack of sufficient evidence, skepticism about whether the misconduct will be corrected, fear of retaliation, and anxiety over their identity being exposed (Akyürek, 2020; Ergun Özler, Dil Şahin, & Giderler Atalay, 2010; Toker Gökçe, 2014). In smaller organizations, firm adherence to group norms and fear of harming personal relationships further discourage whistleblowing behavior (Miceli & Near, 1985; Near, Dworkin, & Miceli, 1993).

Employees who observe unethical or unlawful practices within their organization often initiate whistleblowing through internal channels, typically by informing their direct supervisors. However, when internal mechanisms are perceived as ineffective or when there is a threat of organizational retaliation, individuals may be compelled to engage in external whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 1994; Near & Miceli, 2016). The likelihood of turning to external channels also increases when employees lose confidence in the organization's willingness or ability to address the reported issue (Paul & Townsend, 1996). While internal whistleblowing is more prevalent in organizations characterized by transparency and strong ethical norms, external whistleblowing may emerge as a form of resistance, particularly in contexts where senior management is viewed as passive or complicit in the misconduct (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999).

A review of studies on whistleblowing in schools reveals that teachers generally prefer to report problems through internal channels, often directing their concerns to higher levels of administration (Baltacı, 2016; Doğan, 2022; Güvercin, 2016; Toker Gökçe, 2014). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the majority of research in this area has been conducted using data obtained from individuals who have either engaged in whistleblowing or are considered likely to do so, such as teachers, administrators, and inspectors (Aksu, Yılmaz & Orçan, 2016; Baltacı, 2016; Celep & Konaklı, 2012; Doğan, 2022; Ertürk, 2016; Ertürk & Dönmez, 2016; Güvercin, 2016; Kılınç, 2020; Toker Gökçe, 2014;). Near and Miceli (1985) conceptualize whistleblowing as a process consisting of four key elements: the whistleblower, the act of reporting, the target of the report, and the organization in which the wrongdoing occurs. In this context, it is believed that a study focusing on the perspectives of the recipients of whistleblowing—namely, the provincial/district directorates of national education to which internal reports from schools are directed—could make a significant contribution to the literature.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the administrative processes and practices carried out by educational administrators in provincial and district directorates of national education in response to whistleblowing reports originating from schools in Türkiye.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employed the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research collects data through observation, interviews, and document analysis. During this process, perceptions and events are examined in their natural settings to present them realistically and holistically (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 41). As a qualitative research method, the phenomenological approach aims to understand individuals' experiences of a particular phenomenon in a multidimensional way, based on their emotions, thoughts, and perspectives (Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020). Any situation or event acknowledged yet not fully

understood, that has been experienced, and whose effects persist, can be the subject of phenomenological research (Tutar, 2023).

The central focus of this study is the phenomenon of whistleblowing. Specifically, it aims to explore how educational administrators working in provincial and district directorates of national education interpret the tasks and procedures they carry out following a whistleblowing incident, based on their experiences throughout the process.

### 3.2. Study Group

This study was conducted within the Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education and the district directorates of national education in Altındağ, Çankaya, Etimesgut, Keçiören, Mamak, Sincan, Yenimahalle, and Pursaklar. The study group was determined using the snowball sampling method, one of the purposive sampling techniques, and 34 educational administrators participated.

**Table 1.** Demographic Data of Participants Included in the Study Group

Variable	Category	Number of Participants
Gender	Female	5
	Male	29
Position	Branch Manager	30
	Deputy Director of Provincial Directorate of National Education	4
Institution	Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education	7
	Altındağ District Directorate of National Education	6
	Çankaya District Directorate of National Education	3
	Etimesgut District Directorate of National Education	2
	Keçiören District Directorate of National Education	4
	Mamak District Directorate of National Education	3
	Sincan District Directorate of National Education	3
	Yenimahalle District Directorate of National Education	3
Pursaklar District Directorate of National Education	4	

### 3.3. Data Collection

Interviews are among the most commonly used data collection methods in phenomenological research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 71). Accordingly, the interview method, one of the qualitative data collection techniques, was employed in this study. A semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers and used to gather data in line with the research questions.

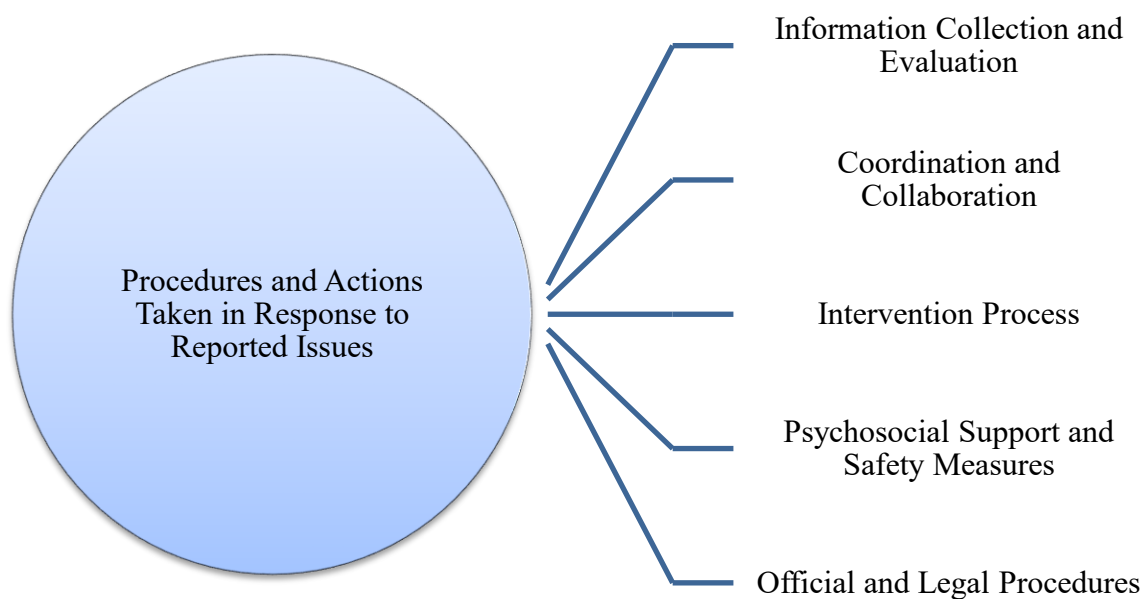
### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis methods with the assistance of MAXQDA 2020 software. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and interpreting data based on themes identified in advance by the researcher. Participants' statements are presented through direct quotations within this framework, ensuring

that the findings are described systematically and transparently. The described data are then further interpreted to derive meaningful conclusions. In contrast, content analysis focuses on grouping similar data under specific concepts and themes, making them more comprehensible to the reader. Furthermore, this method allows for the identification of previously unrecognized themes, offering more profound insight into the dataset (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, pp. 239–242). While analyzing the participants' views, the participants were coded as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), and so on.

#### 4. Findings

Within the scope of the study, participants were asked about the procedures they implemented and the interventions they carried out in response to the problems teachers and school administrators communicated to them. Data analysis revealed a theme titled “Procedures and Actions Taken in Response to Reported Issues” (f=190). This overarching theme comprises five distinct categories: Information Collection and Evaluation (f=27), Coordination and Collaboration (f=43), Intervention Process (f=36), Psychosocial Support and Safety Measures (f=14), and Official and Legal Procedures (f=70). These categories are illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Categories under the theme of Procedures and Actions Taken in Response to Reported Issues

##### 4.1. Findings Related to the “Information Collection and Evaluation” Category

The category Information Collection and Evaluation, part of the broader theme Procedures and Actions Taken in Response to Reported Issues, highlights that educational administrators begin by gathering and assessing information concerning the problems reported to them. Within this scope, three key codes were identified.

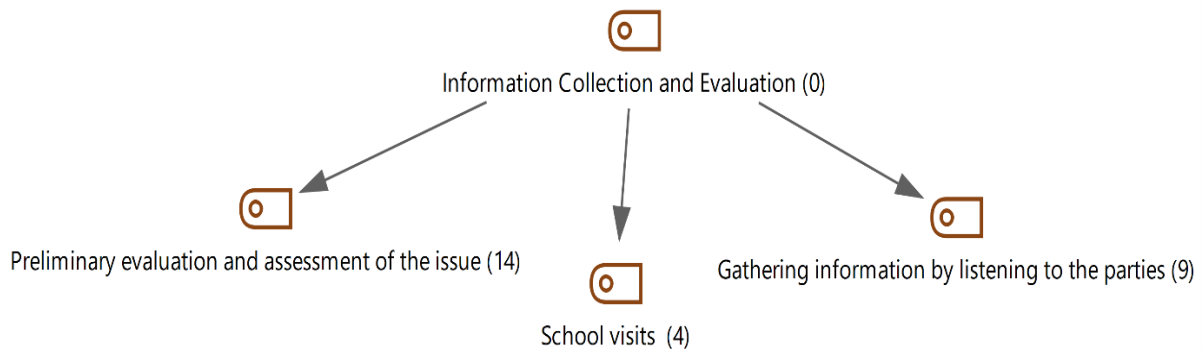


Figure 2. Codes under the category of Information Collection and Evaluation

When teachers or school administrators report problems to provincial or district directorates of national education, educational administrators within these directorates investigate the issue and attempt to verify its accuracy. Participant statements reveal that reported issues are not directly subjected to formal investigation processes; instead, a preliminary assessment is conducted to analyze the seriousness of the matter. Based on these statements, the code “**preliminary evaluation and assessment of the issue**” was developed.

Sample participant comments under this code are as follows:

“First, as I mentioned, we have an investigation unit for this. Complaints are initially evaluated. Not every complaint results in an investigation. Is it significant or not? Is there any concrete evidence? Is there a clear side to the matter?” (P7)

“Of course, not everything is directly subject to investigation. What we call a preliminary inquiry is conducted—either via phone or through an on-site visit to confirm whether the issue exists.” (P12)

During the information collection process following the notification, participants emphasized the importance of listening to all parties involved in the incident. The following statements were coded under “**gathering information by listening to the parties**”.

“We first listen to the issue brought to us. If it is face-to-face, we meet in person. If the report comes via phone, we collect information that way. We ask for a written statement if the person cannot be reached or met in person.” (P13)

“If someone comes here and especially enters the principal’s office to make a complaint, we listen carefully. Then, we talk to the school administrator if the complaint is about them, which is often the case. We collect a verbal statement from the school administration. We first try to determine whether the situation happened, to prevent any unfairness.” (P34)

Participant 27 stated that the information collection and evaluation process is addressed more comprehensively. The process is not limited to verbal statements; instead, direct observation is carried out through **school visits** to analyze the issue on-site. This was expressed as follows:

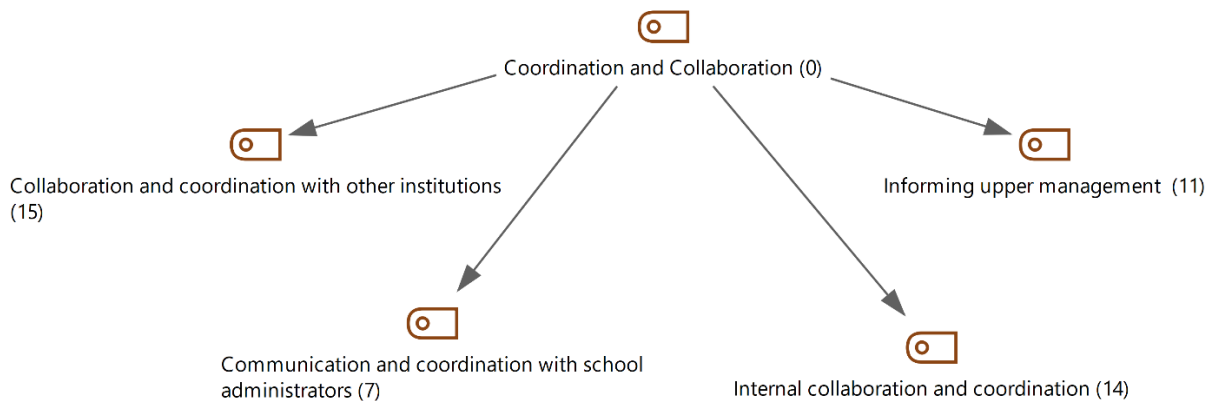
“When a problem is reported to us, our priority is to understand the individual—what are they trying to achieve? Once we understand this, the best approach is to listen to the other side of the complaint. We go directly to where the event occurred and conduct interviews with the complainant and the individual being complained about. We assess what the issue is and what it entails. If it turns out to be a serious matter as described, we will move forward with an investigation.”

These findings indicate that the information collection and evaluation process is not one-dimensional. Instead, a multi-faceted approach is adopted depending on the nature and context

of the reported issue and the quality of the information received. This includes practices such as school visits and reviewing the issue from a legal/regulatory perspective.

#### 4.2. Findings Related to the “Coordination and Collaboration” Category

Several practices carried out by provincial and district directorates of national education administrators in response to reported problems were grouped under the category “*Coordination and Collaboration*”. Within this framework, four distinct codes emerged. A visual representation of these codes is provided in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Codes under the category of Coordination and Cooperation

Within this category, the code of “**collaboration and coordination with other institutions**” reflects participants’ views on cooperation and coordination with external official or private organizations—such as municipalities, judicial authorities, law enforcement, health institutions, and non-governmental organizations—when problems are reported to provincial or district directorates of national education.

Participant 10 emphasized a preventive and collaborative approach by stating:

*“We take all necessary precautions before the cup is broken, not after. In other words, we work with all our school stakeholders—administratively, legally, and judicially.”*

P12 highlighted the necessity of multi-stakeholder intervention, especially in severe cases, such as child sexual abuse and other critical incidents, saying:

*“Intervention in major problems is significant. Especially consider child sexual abuse and other incidents. These are serious issues. Reporting and intervening in such cases is mandatory. Because these issues involve us, law enforcement, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, nobody can unilaterally sweep these under the rug.”*

Participant 23 stated that when an incident has a judicial dimension, it is not merely handled internally but is referred to the judicial system:

*“As I said, if the matter is judicial, and the investigator’s examination results in a case that concerns the judiciary, it is reported to the court.”*

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that both the institution and educational administrators are aware of their legal responsibilities.

Another code under this category, **internal collaboration and coordination**, was used to reflect views regarding cooperation among different units and departments within provincial and district directorates of national education. This code encompasses communication, task sharing, information flow, and joint working processes among units after a problem has been reported.

Participant 34 described an organizational culture in which the district administration collaborates as a team in response to reported issues:

*“We have a solution-oriented mindset. There is teamwork here. Within the team, issues are resolved quickly. We approach problems with a problem-solving attitude. Our school principals are aware of this, too. They know what can be resolved here, and they come quickly. When they demonstrate this behavior, we respond positively. Whatever we can solve, wherever it needs to be reached within the district, we go quickly, do it, and handle it. As I said at the beginning, we are there if there is an actual incident. We support both our school administrators and our teachers. There is a culture of behavior like this.”*

Participant 22 emphasized the escalation process within the district by stating:

*“When an official complaint is made via petition, verbally, or in writing, the relevant unit tries to resolve the issue. If the relevant unit cannot solve the problem, it is reported to the senior supervisor, the district director of national education. The district director usually solves the problem. If it cannot be resolved and requires investigation, it is referred to the investigation unit.”*

This indicates that unresolved issues at the district level are escalated and shared with the provincial national education directorate.

Within the Coordination and Cooperation category framework, participants’ responses under the code informing upper management indicate that when serious incidents occur within the institution, information is conveyed to higher authorities systematically following a specific hierarchical order. In this context, Participant 10 stated the following regarding the types of incidents reported:

*“Topics include workplace accidents, harassment, or detainment related to teachers. All incidents of significant severity that reach the police station are reported to us. Practically anything that needs a quick resolution and that higher institutions need to be aware of comes directly to us. After a briefing note about the incident is prepared, it is sent to the District Directorate of National Education, the District Governor, the Provincial Directorate of National Education, and the Ministry. This is how the process works.”*

Similarly, Participant 12 emphasized that hierarchical reporting is followed when adverse events occur in schools, stating:

*“Complaints from school principals under our jurisdiction are conveyed face-to-face or reported through briefing notes. These notes are then passed along the chain of command — from us to the province and the Ministry. If a major incident appears in the media, this is how it gets reported.”*

Participant 19 noted that if an issue reported could not be resolved within their authority, it was escalated to upper management:

*“If we cannot find a solution, we report it to upper management. We try to resolve the matter in coordination with the Provincial Directorate of National Education or the District Governorate.”*

Participant 31 highlighted the importance of informing relevant authorities:

*“If something happens at school, we are immediately informed — whether it is the teachers or the school administration. A briefing note has been prepared, which we will send to the district governor. We also inform the governor and the Ministry’s media and public relations office because they must know it before it appears in the press. These updates are carried out quickly and automatically.”*

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that educational administrators at district and provincial national education directorates prioritize informing upper management about critical

incidents before they are reflected in public discourse. This reflects a concern for protecting institutional reputation and ensuring accurate information dissemination.

When an issue is reported from schools to the district or provincial national education directorates, educational administrators ensure **communication and coordination with school administrators**. In this context, P12 stated:

*"A preliminary investigation is conducted. For instance, if there are repeated complaints about a particular school submitted via petitions, BÍMER or CÍMER, this becomes a matter that requires investigation. However, if it is a one-off complaint about a teacher in a certain school, it is asked merely for information: 'Did such an incident happen at your school? What is the background of the event?' Information is requested from the school principal."*

When all findings are considered together, it becomes clear that upon receiving a report from schools, educational administrators make efforts to resolve the matter through collaboration and coordination, not only with school administrators but also with other departments and public institutions. Furthermore, district-level administrators inform their upper management hierarchically, aiming to ensure their contribution to the resolution process.

#### 4.3. Findings Related to the "Intervention Process" Category

Some actions and procedures when schools report issues to the provincial/district national education directorates have been addressed under the *Intervention Process* category. Figure 4 presents the codes under this category.

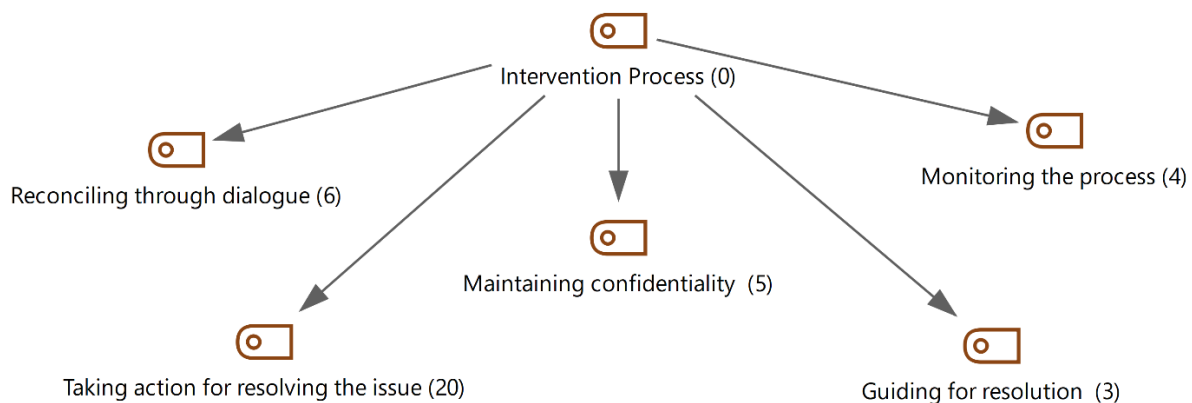


Figure 4. Codes under the category of Intervention Process

Within the scope of the intervention process, educational administrators generally perceive that the problems reported from schools stem from a lack of communication and therefore seeks to **reconcile** the involved parties **through dialogue**. Participant 33 emphasized that efforts are made to resolve issues through reconciliation before launching formal investigations, stating:

*"We do not initiate legal investigations or inquiries for every report or notification. First, we try to pursue the path of agreement, mediation, and reconciliation."*

Another form of intervention employed by educational administrators in response to reported problems is **taking action to resolve the issue**. Within this context, they typically begin by requesting information from school administrators regarding the matter and subsequently provide directives for its resolution. For example, Participant 4 stated:

*"If it is a case of injustice, and if it falls within the authority of the district directorate of national education, we request the correction of the situation from the relevant parties without sharing anything — no personal information is disclosed."*

Similarly, Participant 32 explained the approach taken depending on the nature of the issue:

*"First, we decide whether the school can handle it on its own or whether external intervention is required. If the school can manage it, we will talk with the principal and relevant teachers to resolve the matter. Alternatively, we directly instruct the school principal. If we determine that the issue is beyond the school's capacity, we request an investigation by a branch manager or, if necessary, by inspectors from the provincial directorate."*

These statements highlight that when resolution at the school level proves unsuccessful, interventions at the district or provincial level are initiated—potentially involving the assignment of inspectors if deemed necessary.

According to the research data, when problems are reported from schools to the provincial/district directorates of national education, it is evident that educational administrators place significant importance on **maintaining confidentiality** throughout the intervention process. Participant 30 emphasized the need for confidentiality, particularly in cases involving students and legal proceedings:

*"I am specifically referring to positions that require legal procedures, especially about students involved in incidents. This information must be fully protected. It should not be accessible to anyone and must be handled confidentially. Moreover, we handle it that way — we conduct the legal process discreetly and perform any related health procedures because sometimes a medical report is required. Disciplinary procedures are also conducted confidentially."*

Similarly, Participant 4 underscored the importance of maintaining confidentiality during investigations:

*"When people involved in the matter come to the District Director of National Education, confidentiality is specifically emphasized. If the matter proceeds to an investigation, it is handled according to confidentiality principles."*

Other actions under this category include **guiding for resolution** and actively **monitoring the process**. Participants reported that they approach the process not passively but in a solution-oriented and directive manner. For instance, Participant 2 summarized his approach as follows:

*"Whatever needs to be done to resolve the issue, I guide them accordingly. If it is a matter that can be resolved verbally, I refer it to the appropriate person. If a written report is necessary, I instruct the person who reported the issue to submit it in writing. This is our job — we handle it urgently and work toward resolution."*

Participant 4 highlighted that in addressing reported problems, they follow a solution-focused approach while keeping personal information confidential, and verify the resolution upon closure of the case:

*"If it is a case of injustice and falls under the district directorate's jurisdiction, we request correction from the relevant parties without sharing personal information. We also confirm with the reporting person whether the issue has been resolved."*

These findings indicate that educational administrators adopt a proactive and solution-oriented stance in addressing whistleblowing cases, emphasizing guidance, confidentiality, and follow-up to ensure that issues are resolved effectively.

#### **4.4. Findings Related to the “Official and Legal Procedures” Category**

The research findings indicate that when a problem is reported from schools to the provincial/district national education directorates, some official and legal procedures are carried out within the institution. The actions and processes considered to fall under this official and legal framework have been coded under five distinct codes, as shown in Figure 5.

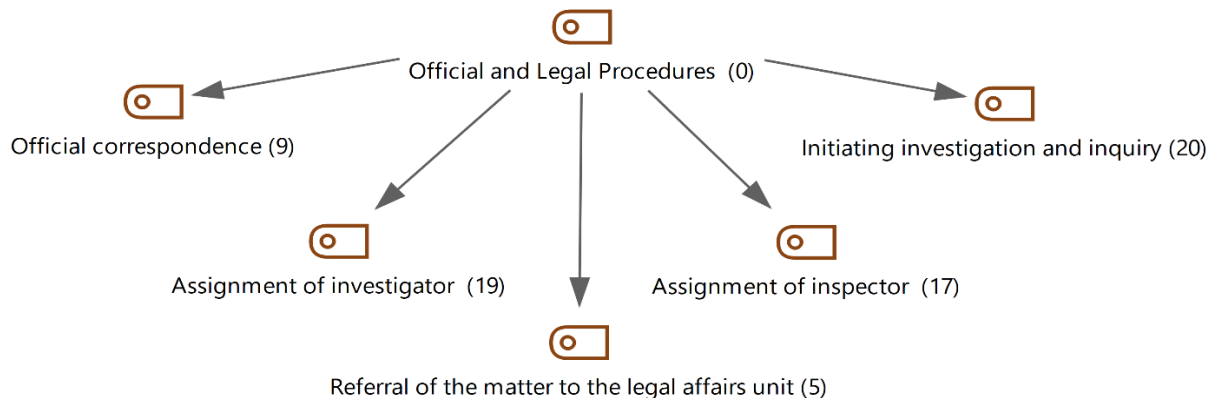


Figure 5. Codes under the Official and Legal Procedures

When a problem is reported from schools to the provincial or district directorates of national education, it is understood that official correspondence is frequently utilized throughout the process of addressing and intervening in the issue. Participant statements coded under **official correspondence** illustrate this clearly. For example, Participant 20 noted:

*“Of course, there is an official aspect. We carry out official correspondence with the institutions where it is required.”*

This highlights formal communication with relevant departments or institutions to formalize and legitimize the process. Participant 13 also emphasized the significance of written documentation for ensuring legal and administrative validity:

*“If something is problematic, we receive and process a written petition. Alternatively, we instruct the school principal to send the prepared information note via EBYS (Electronic Document Management System). After that, we write to initiate an investigation. Complaints or petitions we find valid are forwarded to the investigation unit.”*

Similarly, Participant 25 stated:

*“After receiving the complaint petition, we wrote to the Board of Inspection about the matter. Then the investigation begins.”*

This suggests that official correspondence often marks the starting point of formal investigation processes. From these findings, it can be inferred that official documentation and correspondence are essential for ensuring the procedures' seriousness, traceability, and accountability.

Another key process initiated upon receiving a problem report is the referral of the matter to the legal affairs unit, which may lead to initiating an investigation or inquiry. Such procedures reflect the institutional responsibility and responsiveness of the directorates. Participant 13 stated:

*“We forward the complaints or petitions that we find valid to the investigation unit.”*

Similarly, Participant 23 added:

*“When it reaches us, we have an investigation unit. We directly write the matter to them.”*

Under the code **initiating investigation and inquiry**, Participant 9 noted:

*“In significant and sensitive cases, especially if there are unethical or unlawful matters, we proceed with an investigation or inquiry.”*

Participant 28 further elaborated:

*“For certain issues, we initiate an investigation immediately, sometimes without questioning further. What are these cases? If there is abuse or violence, then according to the law, it is not our duty to verify the accuracy. We consider it directly within the scope of investigation and start the process.”*

These statements demonstrate that serious legal and ethical violations reported to the directorates of national education prompt immediate formal investigations. Additionally, Participant 33 stated:

*“If reconciliation or mediation does not work, legal procedures are initiated. These are informal processes at first. We try to resolve the issue by bringing the parties together and talking. If that does not work, then an administrative procedure is initiated. Investigators, inspectors, and similar officials are assigned.”*

This indicates that before launching a formal inquiry, an attempt is made to resolve the issue through dialogue; however, if no resolution is achieved, administrative and legal mechanisms are activated.

In the implementation of inquiry and investigation processes, two primary methods are employed: **the assignment of an investigator (*muhakkik*)** and **the assignment of a formal inspector**. Research findings indicate that for relatively minor or straightforward issues, a *muhakkik* is appointed, typically from among school administrators. In contrast, requests are made to the Provincial Directorate of National Education to assign inspectors with relevant expertise in more complex or technically demanding cases.

Participant 13 clearly described this distinction:

*We forward valid complaints or petitions to the investigation unit. For relatively simple cases—well, not necessarily simple, but issues that are manageable and not too deep—we appoint school principals or vice principals as investigators (*muhakkik*). We request an inspector for more complex cases that require technical knowledge or are regulated by legislation. This is how we resolve such matters.”*

Participant 28 emphasized the expertise of inspectors in legal and procedural matters, while also noting the shortage of available inspectors, which sometimes necessitates assigning internal investigators:

*“Of course, we first write to the educational inspectors, experts in this field, assigned at the provincial level. They conduct better investigations and determine which act corresponds to which duty, responsibility, or prohibition, and what action should be taken accordingly. They make the most appropriate decisions. However, when insufficient inspectors are available, the matter is redirected to us. Then we appoint a *muhakkik* and proceed with the investigation ourselves.”*

Similarly, Participant 23 described the formal workflow for assigning investigators and inspectors:

*“When an issue comes to us, we refer it to our investigation unit. From there, we request the assignment of an inspector—usually via a written request to the provincial authority, as the appointment of inspectors falls under the governor's authority. However, if inspectors are too busy, the province instructs the district to assign a *muhakkik*. At that point, the District Directorate of National Education assigns one or two school principals or branch managers to the case. The appointed investigator then carries out the necessary investigation.”*

Participant 31 further elaborated on the procedural hierarchy involved in assigning investigators:

*“If there are legal concerns, we will proceed with the appointment of an investigator. We consult with the District Governor. If the case involves a school principal, we assign two other principals. We write to the governor's office to request an inspector if it is a serious incident. For teachers, we appoint vice principals. The appointed investigator must be hierarchically senior to the person being investigated. That is our principle when initiating the procedure.”*

These findings demonstrate that educational administrators implement structured and hierarchical approaches in conducting inquiries. The intervention method is determined based on the complexity and severity of the case, while due attention is paid to the legal and administrative standing of the individuals involved.

#### 4.5. Findings Related to “Psychosocial Support and Safety Measures” Category

The research findings indicate that when schools report a problem to the provincial or district national education directorates, psychosocial support services are provided to students and other staff members at the affected school, and specific safety measures are implemented. In this context, the participants’ views were analyzed under the Psychosocial Support and Safety Measures category.

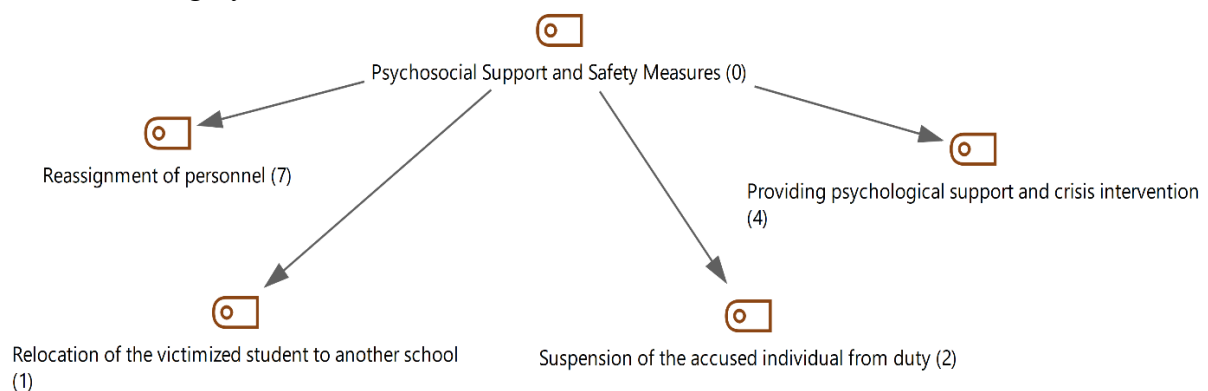


Figure 6. Codes under the category of Psychosocial Support and Safety Measures

Under this category, the code **providing psychological support and crisis intervention** highlights participants’ views and actions on psychological support and crisis response in schools, before, during, and after reporting a problem. Participant 9 emphasized the role of school guidance and psychological counseling services in dealing with sensitive matters, stating:

*"They need to apply to certain authorities. At the same time, they also need to make notifications about some issues, especially in sensitive matters. Also, some internal services need to be activated, such as the guidance service."*

The same participant continued:

*"For example, in cases of sexual abuse, of course, after informing the district authority or institution, the guidance service must be activated. And then, if necessary, the police station should also be informed. Reporting is crucial because if no notification is made, several crises may arise. In order to take action before a crisis, it is essential to inform and respond accordingly."*

Based on this finding, it can be concluded that in cases of severe and ethically problematic incidents within schools, internal institutional notification matters, and informing law enforcement authorities play a critical role in effective crisis intervention.

Participant 30 also referred to the psychological counseling and guidance services available in schools, in addition to a crisis intervention team established within the district directorate of national education:

*"We have a direct crisis intervention team. Every district has one. In our case, we formed it under the leadership of the Guidance and Research Center. This team immediately goes to the school where the incident occurred. We instruct them. They conduct the necessary interviews; first, they need to understand the situation, then determine what can be done for treatment,*

resolution, and psychological support. For instance, when a student experiences a problem related to sexual harassment, sometimes the school's guidance service is insufficient. We immediately direct our crisis intervention team to the school in such cases. They intervene."

One of the most commonly implemented measures when ethical and legal problems arise in schools and are reported to the national education's provincial or district directorates is the **reassignment of personnel**. Participant 21 emphasized that this measure may be applied both as an immediate administrative response and based on the recommendation of an investigator or inspector during the investigation process. P21 stated:

*"There are certain situations that require immediate intervention. There may be cases where the two individuals involved should never reencounter each other. In such cases, what can we do as a district office? If there is a need elsewhere, we can consult with the district governor and reassign the person. We can reassign in emergencies. Alternatively, if the investigator or inspector recommends a reassignment during the investigation, we ask the provincial office to implement it immediately."*

Participant 34 further noted that a change of workplace may be carried out for the benefit of the victimized staff member, explaining:

*"If the victim is a teacher or an administrator—especially if it is a teacher—we proceed with reassignment. We never keep them in that environment, not for psychological reasons nor safety."*

Based on these findings, it can be inferred that workplace reassignment is a frequently utilized measure in cases involving ethical violations or legal disputes in schools. This practice serves multiple purposes, including preventing further confrontation between involved parties, protecting the psychological well-being and safety of the victim, and ensuring the integrity of the investigation process.

Among the administrative safety measures taken in response to school incidents are the **relocation of the victimized student to another school** and the **suspension of the accused individual from duty**. Participant 11 emphasized the importance of protecting the victim, stating:

*"For example, a teacher or administrator reports having been harassed. I know of cases where, upon such a report, the other person—the accused—was immediately suspended. So, in district directorates and administrative offices, if a situation poses a threat to personal safety—beyond issues such as class schedules or routines—steps are taken directly to protect the complainant, the victim."*

Similarly, Participant 6 confirmed that suspension is a standard measure taken during the investigation process, noting:

*"While the investigation is ongoing, the person accused of harassment is suspended from duty."*

P6 also highlighted that administrative action could involve transferring the student to another school, stating:

*"For the well-being and psychological health of the child, a request can be made for the child to change schools. Such a recommendation can be offered, and the administration may decide accordingly."*

These findings indicate that in school-based incidents involving allegations of harassment or similar threats, precautionary administrative measures such as the temporary removal of the accused from duty and the relocation of the student are employed to ensure the safety and psychological welfare of those affected.

The findings indicate that educational administrations implement a diverse range of administrative and psychological intervention mechanisms to address ethical and legal issues

arising within schools. In crises, various measures are implemented to protect the victim, such as activating school counseling services, deploying crisis intervention teams, suspending the alleged perpetrator from duty, and transferring the affected student to another school. Moreover, in severe cases, it is emphasized that internal reporting alone is insufficient and that law enforcement authorities must also be notified. These practices are critical for preventing the escalation of crises, safeguarding the victim's psychological well-being, and ensuring that the legal process proceeds appropriately and effectively.

### **5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study reveal that educational administrators largely approach whistleblowing behavior coming from schools with seriousness and implement a comprehensive, multi-dimensional evaluation process. Depending on the nature of the reported issue, senior management employs methods such as conducting on-site observations, evaluating the matter within the framework of relevant regulations, and making decisions after hearing the parties involved. In this respect, it is observed that the processes are addressed not only procedurally but also in a comprehensive manner that includes context-specific ethical and managerial evaluations. Blenkinsopp and Snowden (2016) suggest that if senior management ignores employee whistleblowing or punishes individuals for such behavior, a culture of silence may emerge within the organization. They also emphasize that senior managers can convey strong messages to employees regarding organizational values and expectations by promoting open communication, being willing to listen and receive feedback, and demonstrating a leadership style that accepts mistakes.

The results of this study support these claims, indicating that educational administrators manage whistleblowing processes actively and with a solution-oriented approach. This approach contributes to establishing a safe organizational climate that encourages employees to engage in internal whistleblowing. Başol and Karatuna (2015) also found that when employees trust internal mechanisms, their tendency to report internally increases, while their inclination to resort to external authorities decreases. The study further shows that institutions intervene actively in reported incidents and, when necessary, appoint investigators or inspectors. This can be seen as a factor strengthening confidence in internal whistleblowing systems. On the other hand, Paul and Townsend (1996) emphasize that senior management may perceive whistleblowing behavior as an attempt to damage the organization's reputation or threaten its stability, often blaming the whistleblower. In contrast, Near and Miceli (2016) highlight that employees are more encouraged to report issues within an organizational culture that supports whistleblowing. In this context, an organization's solution-oriented and supportive approach to problems enhances employees' trust in internal reporting mechanisms, thereby strengthening a culture of transparency and accountability within the organization.

Another significant result of the study is the effort of educational administrators to establish effective collaboration and coordination with schools, other internal units, and external institutions following whistleblowing incidents. Furthermore, district-level administrators hierarchically inform their superiors to ensure their involvement and contribution to the process. This reflects Başol and Karatuna's (2015) assertion that open and effective vertical communication facilitates employees' ability to voice concerns and enables senior management to engage actively in the resolution process. Additionally, the results reveal that administrators approach problems with a solution-oriented mindset and strive to manage the process through communication among staff members. Such approaches are particularly valuable in encouraging whistleblowing, as emphasized by Aktan (2015), by transforming employees from

passive bystanders into active participants in addressing unethical or illegal situations rather than remaining silent.

As Bather and Kelly (2005) noted, whistleblowing often involves disclosing information that other members within the organization prefer to keep confidential, which can place considerable pressure on the whistleblower. Indeed, the results of this study indicate that educational administrators emphasize maintaining confidentiality throughout the intervention process. It has been observed that when individuals who engage in whistleblowing fear psychological pressure, threats, or close monitoring by the organization, their tendency to refrain from internal reporting and instead appeal to external authorities increases (Başol & Karatuna, 2015). In this context, conducting the process with strict confidentiality is crucial to alleviate employees' concerns about psychological pressure after reporting and to foster a safe and trustworthy whistleblowing culture.

Another significant result of this study is that the official and legal procedures related to reported issues are handled within a defined systematic framework. The escalation of specific incidents reported to senior management into formal and legal processes (such as the appointment of investigators or inspectors) reflects the institutional response to such matters. This research demonstrates that senior management does not remain passive in the face of reported problems; instead, they manage the process confidentially, with a solution-oriented and directive approach. Near and Miceli (1985) emphasized that the cost of organizational silence in response to reported issues is higher and argued that organizations should produce a response regardless of the accuracy of the reported information. The initiation of official procedures, personnel reassignment, psychosocial support provision, and other measures in response to reported incidents in this study indicate that the organization does not remain indifferent to such matters. Doğan (2022) found that individuals who had previously reported similar incidents without any resulting action were more likely to remain silent when faced with comparable situations again. This finding suggests that organizational inaction in the face of negative experiences may foster feelings of learned helplessness and hopelessness among employees. Therefore, the formal intervention mechanisms highlighted in the present study may serve to strengthen employees' belief that their voices can be heard and that problems can be effectively addressed.

In conclusion, this study reveals that educational administrators manage whistleblowing processes diligently and through a multidimensional approach. Elements such as confidentiality, effective communication, and internal collaboration are critical to protecting victims and ensuring the proper functioning of legal procedures. Moreover, the systematic implementation of formal and legal procedures demonstrates that provincial and district directorates of national education adopt a sensitive, proactive, and responsible stance toward unethical and illegal issues. These results largely align with the fundamental principles emphasized by Boyle (1990) regarding the internal whistleblowing process within organizations. According to Boyle, it is essential to establish an effective system that encourages internal reporting of issues within the organization. The primary and most critical element of this system is maintaining the confidentiality of the reporting employee's identity and ensuring that the individual does not face any punitive sanctions. Boyle further asserts that complaints must be investigated promptly by an authorized person. The multidimensional approach presented in the current study demonstrates not only the protection of confidentiality but also the implementation of procedures aimed at effectively addressing complaints. This study supports Boyle's theoretical framework by highlighting that the foundation of an effective

whistleblowing mechanism rests upon principles of confidentiality, security, and timely intervention.

In light of these results, and to reinforce the proactive and systematic approach demonstrated by the directorates of national education, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A clear and transparent procedure should be established within directorates of national education for evaluating complaints received from schools, and feedback regarding the process should be communicated in a way that fosters trust among employees.
- In-service training programs should be designed regularly for educational administrators at the provincial and district levels, focusing on ethical decision-making, open communication, and the provision of psychosocial support.
- The study revealed that reported issues are addressed within a systematic framework. It is therefore recommended that these procedures be standardized across Türkiye. This includes clarifying the criteria for appointing investigators or inspectors and ensuring consistent implementation across all provinces.
- In order to reduce employees' fear of pressure following whistleblowing, directorates of national education should adopt a "zero tolerance for retaliation" policy and clearly communicate it to all staff.

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