

Evaluation of the Assessment and Evaluation of the Primary School Program in Turkey: A Case Study

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Abstract: In the new primary school program applied in Turkey, assessment and evaluation have been handled to evaluate not only the production of learning but also its process. Different evaluation tools have been placed in the program so while students can evaluate their own learning, the teacher can evaluate the student learning. The aim of the research is to evaluate the assessment and evaluation process of the new primary school program in Turkey. Descriptive and qualitative research methodology is employed. The data is gathered through the semi-structured interviews. The research is carried out at 4 schools with 17 primary school teachers in Çanakkale in 2006-2007 Spring Semesters. Teachers stated that regarding assessment and evaluation, filling out observation sheets take too much time and the classes are overcrowded. Another problem is about using assessment and evaluation tools and methods properly and effectively. Moreover, they believe that evaluation forms should not be in the assessment and evaluation process. The most significant finding is teachers perceive incompetent in using alternative assessment and evaluation methods.

Key words: Primary School Program • Evaluation and Assessment • Primary School Teachers • Alternative Assessment and Evaluation Approaches

INTRODUCTION

Today, the word 'change' has been the most repeated word in Turkey and in many other countries. An important change was initiated in the Turkish Education System in 2004-2005 education period, which would be discussed over for years. The most criticised issue was the training of the teachers. Through the changes, it was discovered that a systematic study had not been done to get the teachers ready for the spirit of the change before and during this period. Actually, ignoring the teachers' training is the most fundamental reason underlying the failure faced in the practice of the reforms intended to accomplish in the education system lately. Moreover, teachers' adapting themselves to student-centered approach from teacher-centred one is another problematic issue [1-3]. Almost every country has been undergoing changes and renovations that could be called 'reforms' in order to keep up with a more competitive life and rapidly changing world as a result of reconstructions. These innovative approaches mostly focus on arrangements and changes in teaching programs, orienting the teaching strategies to researching and questioning, a much better

restructuring of the present courses, increasing the durations of the courses and education period and decreasing the population of the classes [4, 5].

When reforms in education programs are taken into consideration, it can be seen that contents of the programs are appropriate for the students and their educational environment. These factors are intended to develop the student's capacity of questioning in terms of evaluation focus on skills and competences rather than memorization.

Through these approaches greater importance has been attributed to the development of the students' skills to sort out problems and thinking critically in order to get them ready for the plights and opportunities in the new century [6]. Moreover, it was also aimed that students need to be conscious and active individuals in everyday life by relating the subjects with real life situations.

There might be many factors restricting the teachers, who have an important role in realizing the changes and practices in the new teaching programs, while putting these activities into practice. Fullan and Pomfret [7] state the understandability of the innovations and changes by the ones who will put them into practice, capability and

enthusiasm of the teachers to put these into affect, substructure of the schools for the practice and organizational structure of the schools as the most important factors affecting the feasibility so as to implement these innovations and changes.

Restructured primary school programs were implemented in 2005-2006 in the whole country and the ones responsible for the development and the practice of the program stated that they did a very important reform in Turkish history and the new generation who would be produced in that particular program would be successful individually, socially and internationally [8]. On the other hand, there were ones criticizing that restructured programs remove the new generation from the social values opposing to what it was claimed to be [9]. Some educators state and warn that it has some shortcomings because the program was structured in haste and it is an important and positive production in terms of psychological and philosophical aspects [10-13] "it is obligatory that the teachers who will realize the programs and the inspectors who will guide them be trained urgently before all else in order to implement the new primary school programs successfully. Otherwise, these programs prepared with great efforts and hopes would go on with a teacher-centred understanding and with the memorization of the information in the books and fail as the program of the year 1968 did."

The capacity of the teacher is a factor directly affecting the quality of the education. Teaching is an occupation entailing knowledge and skills of field of expertise, general culture and pedagogy. Another one is the quality of a teacher is being adequate in knowledge and skill of assessment and evaluation [15-18]. Kubiszyn ve Borich [19] listed the titles of assessment and evaluation about which a teacher should be knowledgeable enough as follows; which test type is appropriate for assessments planned for different purposes, ability to determine correctly what the objectives to be evaluated are, knowledge and skill of how to develop written type of tests, how to assure the validity and the reliability of the tests, knowledge of basic test statistics, how to make use of tests' marks and knowledge of how to inform the parents about the situations and the marks of the students effectively and beneficially by using an effective communication technique.

The primary school program having been used since 2005-2006 in Turkey was formed in terms of constructive aspects as its assessment and evaluation was. In constructive evaluation even if the evaluation is over,

learning goes on. Instead of traditional learning materials, the application of formerly learned things to the new situations is evaluated. Then, not the memorized but the assimilated input is important [20]. Importance is given to the process not to the output in the constructive evaluation. Evaluation techniques, such as authentic, performance and universal evaluation are used. Constructive evaluation provides opportunities for the students to share what they know and to learn more instead of comparing one student with another.

In the new programs, students are given an active role, such as asking questions, forming and solving problems, endeavouring to form out and make use of the needed information just like a scientist, shaping his own cognitive makeup through activities instead of a role such as listening, practicing and answering the questions. Active and constructive role of the student is underlined in the programs. A student is an individual knowing how to reach the information, restructuring it in the mind and at the end, being able to form new information. In the programs assessment and evaluation are considered to evaluate not just the outcome of learning but also its process. Different evaluation tools have been placed in the program so that both the student can evaluate himself and the teacher can evaluate the student. From that point of view, when it is considered that only traditional assessment and evaluation methods are available in the former programs, it can be said that the types of evaluation have increased.

A great majority of the studies done before showed that teachers' knowledge and skills of in-class assessment and evaluation were below the acceptable level [21,15,22]. Various studies have been carried out in Turkey and abroad to determine the teachers' in-class knowledge and skills of assessment and evaluation. In the study they carried out over 95 primary and secondary school teachers, Daniel ve King [15] determined that they were inadequate in knowledge of assessment and evaluation. It was determined that these teachers did not have basic statistics knowledge used in assessment and evaluation. It was found out that there was no significant difference between the teachers at the primary and secondary schools regarding the knowledge and skills of assessment and evaluation. In the study, results supporting the findings of Cizek, Fitzgerald and Rachor [23] were obtained. According to these results, when teachers were examined in terms of their length of service and the classes' levels they teach, there found no significant knowledge difference between them. It was observed that teachers had the same knowledge and skill level of

assessment and evaluation regardless of whether they were experienced or not and which class they taught. In another study, they carried out over 297 primary and secondary school teachers, Zhang and Burry-Stock [18] examined how effective they feel in assessment and evaluation and what sort of assessment and evaluation techniques they use. It was found that teachers used objective tests (eg. written tests, multiple-choice and short answered tests) as the grades go up. 77% of 120 teachers expressed that they felt competent enough in assessment and evaluation and they had enough knowledge and skills in that field. Furthermore, it was determined that the most used item was multiple-choice tests. The teachers stated that they prefer absolute evaluation, take into account the importance level of the subjects during the preparation of the questions, ask question evaluating also the comprehension level, use an answer key to avoid marking errors, inform the students and sometimes the parents about the test results and let the students review their sheets to see their mistakes. It was determined in the study that 76% of the teachers need in-service training so as to complete their inadequacy, develop their present knowledge and become aware of the new developments. This result supports some other studies [24, 25].

Another study was carried out by Temel [24] over teachers working for secondary schools. The teachers stated that they evaluate the students objectively. However, the teachers expressed, as determined in the study of Yanpar [25] and Güven [22], they lack in the knowledge of assessment and evaluation. Similarly, Mertler researched into the test techniques of 625 primary and secondary school teachers and into the frequency of use. In the study, it was found that high school teachers use multiple choice tests more frequently than those at primary and secondary schools. Comparably, it was determined that primary and high school teachers use multiple choice tests more frequently than secondary school teachers. It was also found out that primary school teachers make use of observation. Results of the research were akin to those of Zhang and Burry-Stock [18]. It was also found that there were similarities among primary, secondary and high school teachers who benefit from fill-in-the-blanks tests, short-answered tests and written tests. These three groups stated that they prepare half of the questions by using fill-in-the-blanks tests, short-answered tests and written tests.

It was also emphasized in the research that the assessment and evaluation courses taught in Education Faculties should be revised and improved to live up to the

expectation of the teachers in practice. Teachers' practising assessment and evaluation techniques in which they are not competent causes undesirable results. But the studies show that teachers are using assessment and evaluation techniques that they are incompetent in [26-29]. This is causing assorted undesired situations. A useful technique might cause damage when used under wrong circumstances or when used at the right time but wrongly. This damage may manifest itself as primarily the one to the students and as wrong or inadequate decisions about the education atmosphere. The activities of the teachers should be supervised regularly and precautions should be taken to sort out the defects detected in order to improve the quality of the education and to help the teachers develop themselves. It is hoped that the study will be beneficial in that way.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

In this paper descriptive and qualitative method is employed. Semi-structured interview has been used to collect the data. This method is used to discover the experiences of the participants [30]. Open-ended questions are used to explore participants' experiences and assumptions. Semi-structured interview provides the researcher more systematic and comparable data since it is carried out in parallel with the interview protocols [30].

Research Group: The research was carried out over 17 primary school teachers from 4 primary schools in Çanakkale in 2006-2007. 5 teachers were interviewed at each school in voluntary basis. The teachers comprising the research group are given in terms of their gender, the school they graduated from, length of service and the class they teach in Table 1.

Table 1 illustrates the details of the participants. 8/17 teachers are female and 9/17 are male. 6 teachers are graduated from educational institutes, 3 from colleges and 8 from faculties. There are 3 teachers with a service length of 16-20 years and 14 with 21 years and over. There are 4 teachers teaching 1st grades, 3 teaching 2nd grades, 4 teaching 3rd grades, 2 teaching 4th grades and 4 teaching 5th grades.

Collection of the Data: Data were collected through semi-structured interview technique. Standardized open-ended interview questions were preferred because they minimize the bias and it is effective when the interview is performed with more than one interviewee [30]. 17 teachers were interviewed and recorded in voluntary basis. Recordings

Table 1: Details of the Teachers Included in the Research

		Number of the Teachers
Gender	Female	8
	Male	9
Graduation	Education	6
	Institute	3
	College	8
	Faculty	
Length of Service	1-5 years	-
	6-10 years	-
	11-15 years	-
	16-20 years	3
	21 years and over	14
Grades	1 st Grade	4
	2 nd Grade	3
	3 rd Grade	4
	4 th Grade	2
	5 th Grade	4
Total		17

took approximately 40 minutes for each teacher. Interviews were done in March 2007 by the researcher. 5 questions were asked to the teachers to collect the data about the subject. The questions are as follows;

- What are the similarities and differences between the new and the former assessment and evaluation protocols used in the primary school programs? Please explain briefly.
- Can you use properly and effectively various instruments and methods of evaluation (self-evaluation, observation, production files, performans evaluation and so on) in the program you have been teaching in? Please write briefly.
- Can you use alternative approaches of assessment and evaluation? (mind mapping, structured grids, word connotations, projects, posters, group and peer correction and so on). Please write briefly.
- Please write the instructions that should not be present in the assessment and evaluation section of the primary school program that you have been teaching.
- How can the assessment and evaluation section be more effective and applicable in the program that you have been teaching? Please write briefly.

Data Analysis: Descriptive analysis was used for the analysis of the data obtained from the research. Long quotations were taken from the interviews and field notes were transcribed to find out the answers for the “why and

how” questions. Inductive analysis technique was used in that phase [30]. Thus, focal points were determined by decoding the interviews. Later on, these data were arranged by coding in parallel with these focal points.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings obtained from the interviews with the primary school teachers on assessment and evaluation dimension of the new primary school program were as given below. Findings obtained were put forth as a result of the 5 questions presented above. The numbers placed after the original utterances represent the grade the teacher teach.

In the new programs assessment and evaluation do not only evaluate the production of learning but also its process. Different evaluation equipments have been placed in the program so that both the student can evaluate himself and the teacher can evaluate the student. From that point of view, when it is considered that only traditional assessment and evaluation methods are available in the former programs, it can be said that the types of evaluation have increased. Questions about the similarities and the differences between the assessment and evaluation dimension of the new and former Primary School Program are given below in the table.

In the Table 2 similar and different ways of the new program and the former one are presented. Projects are regarded as a positive aspect by the teachers. Besides, it has been stated that it is difficult to check and evaluate the projects as the time is scarce and the population in classes is high. Accordingly, abundance of the forms is another different aspect of the new program. The principle that the new program takes the evaluation of the learning process as the center point is a new aspect, too.

Another problem about the assessment and evaluation that might appear is to train teachers to use that much various evaluation instruments and methods properly. Moreover, even if the appropriate training is given, teachers will be overloaded due to overcrowded classes and combined classes. The answers of the teachers to the question whether they properly and effectively use the instruments and methods of evaluation (self-evaluation, observation, student production files, performance evaluation) in the primary school programs they teach is given below in the table.

Above the instruments and methods used by the teachers are given. Scarcity of time, overcrowded classes, abundance of forms and difficulty in filing the student products are the issues always emphasized. Moreover, Intervention of the parents and students not

Table 2: The similarities and the differences between the assessment and evaluation dimension of the new and former Primary School Program

Similarities	Differences
Evaluation by marking	Projects and interventions of the parents into projects
Written questions are still available	Favoring the knowledge, skills, attempt to research, taking turns
Multiple choice questions are still available	Performance evaluation
Question-answer drills and repetition	Assessing and evaluating the learning by experiencing
	Giving opportunities to the student to evaluate himself
	Abundance of evaluation forms
	Projects
	Abolishing the oral exams
	Group and peer correction
	Task-based evaluation
	Evaluation of the observation forms

Table 3: Effective use of instruments and methods of evaluation

Instruments and Methods	Ineffective and Impractical Ways
Student Production Files	Self-evaluation Forms
Self-evaluation Forms	Filing and Storing
Project Evaluation	Failure to be objective
Poster and Mind Mapping	Abundance of the forms
	Peer correction
	Parents intervention

being objective while answering the questions are other problems.

It has been aimed in the new program that alternative assessment and evaluation approaches based on constructive learning theory will be used. Therefore, it has been advised that traditional assessment and evaluation techniques can be used besides alternative ones, such as performance evaluation, mind mapping, structured grid, word connotation, posters, projects and group and peer correction. The answers of teachers to the question whether primary school teachers use alternative assessment and evaluation techniques or not (performance evaluation, mind mapping, structured grid, word connotation, posters, projects and group and peer correction) are given above.

Alternative assessment and evaluation techniques are given by teachers in Table 4. It is seen that the teachers mostly use text studies to form sentences, projects, oral presentations, word connotations, mind

Table 4: Use of alternative assessment and evaluation techniques

Instruments and Methods Used	Instruments and Methods Not Used
Text studies to form sentences	Mind mapping
Projects	Structured grid
Oral presentations	Peer correction
Word connotation	Self-evaluation
Mind mapping	
Posters	
Group work	
Group correction	

Table 5: The aspects that shouldn't be present in the assessment and evaluation section

Unnecessary aspects
The number of forms
The presence of forms
Very detailed evaluation scales
The same or similar questions
Scarcity of question types
Waste of paper
Difficulty in filing and storing
Self-evaluation forms
Observation forms
Peer correction

mapping, group work and group correction. On the other hand, they do not use mind mapping, structured grid, peer correction and self-evaluation as assessment method.

When taken into consideration that the teacher teaching in the first 5 grades undertakes the responsibility for all the lessons, it would be proper to handle the evaluation system as a whole instead of preparing separate evaluation instructions for each class. Thus, it is beneficial to handle assessment and evaluation approaches thoroughly, extensively and systematically. The aspects that should not be in the assessment and evaluation section of primary school programs that the teachers have been teaching are given below.

In Table 5 instruments of assessment and evaluation that are unnecessary are given. Insufficient time, the number of students and abundance of forms, difficulty in filling the productions are the aspects emphasized. It was also stated that the students do not take these forms seriously and they are not objective. It can be also said that this is waste of time and paper.

The population of the classes need to be decreased in order to practise the new primary school programs. Studies should be carried out to determine how in-class activities will be done and teachers should be trained about this issue. How these programs will be used at the

Table 6: Perfection and Applicability of the assessment and evaluation sections

Necessary aspects	Unnecessary aspects
Including information	Intervention of the parents into the project evaluation
Decreasing the number of the instruments and methods of evaluation	
Training of the teachers about this issue	
Introduction of the program	
Asking the opinions of ones practising it.	
Carrying out questionnaires	
Classes with 20-25 students as stated in the evaluation forms	
Restoring the physical outfit of the schools	
Semester assignments, written and oral exams	
Summarizing, questions with short answers, filling in the blanks as right or wrong, multiple choice questions	
Clashes between the OKS and in-class evaluation	
Technological equipments of the schools	
Necessity that assessment and evaluation question of a unit be at the end of the unit	
Local and regional evaluation scales	
Preparation of the evaluation forms focusing on the whole class rather than the individual	
Sparing time for assessment and evaluation in the lesson programs	

schools with overcrowded classes is another question to be answered. The answers of the teachers to the question how the assessment and evaluation section can be perfect and applicable in the program that you have been teaching are given below.

In Table 6, necessary and unnecessary aspects are given by the teachers. Insufficient time, number of students and abundance of forms, difficulty in filling the productions are the aspects emphasized. Teachers emphasize that they should be consulted because they are the ones who practise the programs, technological equipments must be provided and the new program should be introduced to the teachers.

Teachers said that they faced with new questions as a result of the interviews carried out to evaluate the practices of assessment and evaluation in primary school programs.

Concluding from the interviews; teachers think that filling in the forms of assessment and evaluation in the new program takes too much time. Moreover, when they

compared the new program with the former one, they found out the similarities and the differences. Accordingly, they claim that they evaluate the student more individually. It is also criticized in the foreign publications that assessment and evaluation take time in the student-centered practices [31]. In the interviews some teachers expressed that nothing is different from the former one.

“... There are no significant differences between the new and the former program. It seems as if some changes were done just to create an impression that some things were done. Evaluation of the student’s projects and productions has been already done. Now just the name has been changed and become project performance assignment. Just the names have been changed and consequently it has become the new program...” (3).

The other problem that could be faced is whether teachers will be able to make use of that instruments and methods of assessment and evaluation properly and the answers given to the question related to this issue are quite interesting. Still, It was determined that teachers could evaluate the performance of the students, do the self-evaluations, update the production files systematically. As an answer to this question, most of the teachers expressed that their classes were not suitable for assessment and evaluation due to overcrowded classes.

“...I can’t elicit the desired results, for the classes are overcrowded.. We include the performance evaluation into the class. We store the productions in files...”(1).

Moreover, the teachers stated that assessment and evaluation sections in the new program loaded a great burden over them.

“... There is a great load over the teacher in this new program. There are files of sheets. Occasionally proper evaluation cannot be done because every course has its own evaluation. It is impossible to finish in a day...” (2).

“...There are 23 evaluation forms for Turkish courses, 35 for science of social science, 11 for mathematics. Think that there are 70 sheets and 30 students, the result is 2100 forms. However effectively and properly these are used, it is futile...” (3).

“...I make use of evaluation methods. But I have difficulty in preparing production files and evaluating performance assignments because the class is overpopulated. It can’t be objective because of the parents’ interventions into the homework. I believe that this system will be understood and practised better...” (5).

The main reason determined for the problems with evaluation and misconceptions about the instruments and methods of assessment and evaluation is that teachers do not have adequate knowledge and skills about the new

program and the Ministry of Education has failed to enlighten teachers sufficiently.

The most important of the answers to the question whether they use alternative assessment and evaluation approaches in the programs they have been teaching is that they still feel insufficient in that way. Nevertheless, sometimes they use alternative assessment and evaluation techniques. Additionally, it can be said that the students are more successful in realizing themselves and in coming up with more stunning productions. There are teachers who express that social and cultural location of the school is important to use alternative assessment and evaluation techniques.

“...I believe that the program was prepared regardless of social and cultural location of schools. I use project and word connotations. At minimum level (because of the grade I teach)... (1).

“...Evaluation scales should be suitable to the local and regional environment of the students who come from different social classes...”(5).

There are also ones who suggest that use of alternative assessment and evaluation techniques develop student’s creativity.

“...I benefit from these because there are a particular number of forms for each class. The students can express themselves better in free learning atmospheres...”(3).

Alternative assessment and evaluation approaches are of great importance to realize the benefits of the program. Thus, besides alternative approaches of assessment and evaluation, such as mind mapping, structured grids, word connotations, projects, posters, group and peer correction, traditional assessment and evaluation methods should also be used. Accordingly, it is important that not only the production but also the learning process should be evaluated.

Concluding from the interviews; teachers believe that the evaluation forms are the first not to be present in the assessment and evaluation dimension of the primary school program. It was determined that multiple choice tests but not open-ended questions are frequently used in the section of evaluating the process. They are of the opinion that evaluations such as activities, projects, performance evaluation cause waste of paper.

“...Every theme, every subject, every phase of a project, evaluation scales such as speaking and listening are not that much required. I am a teacher of primary school and I am with 1st grades all day;thus, I believe that such details are not necessary...” (1)

“...Handling the lessons with increased evaluation techniques such as activities, project and performance evaluation causes waste of paper. We have difficulty filing and storing them...”(2).

They state that since assessment and evaluation forms used in almost every lesson are too detailed, these are unnecessary tasks. They are of the opinion that choosing the best production of a student should be suitable to the level of the student.

The answer to the question how the assessment and evaluation section can be more effective and applicable in the program is that the program should be open to the changes and able to sort out problems for a better future, have clear and simple instructions and activities. In addition, it would be suitable that up-to-date technological equipments, materials and documents should be arranged according to the population of the class.

“...Equipping the school with instruments and materials, documents, shelves and up-to-date technological devices; setting up a computer network; reducing the classroom populations to 30 members; sorting out the differences in understanding the issue; sorting out the problems in finding instruments and materials of assessment and evaluation; students supporting such aspects...”(4)

About that issue, Lee and Burkam [32] and Burkam, Lee and Smerden [33] stated that task-based activities could be realized through equipping the class population and the program with adequate materials and equipments.

The teachers expressed that they need in-service training to render the program perfect and applicable and they should be asked for some advice about the changes.

“...There is an impasse about the assessment and evaluation. Teachers should be trained about this matter. This must be a serious one trainers of which should know what to do. This is a problem arising out of a defective introduction of the program. They should ask the teachers who practise it for some advice about the necessity of the evaluation forms. Questionnaires should be delivered...”(1).

“...They should not only ask for the opinions of the people or groups in the Ministry of Education but also those of the ones putting them into practice ...”(3).

Suggestions below could be obtained as a result of the findings;

- Teachers should be trained through in-service trainings in particular periods and in these trainings

information on assessment and evaluation in particular areas should be given and practices should be done.

- The population of the classes should be reduced. In overcrowded classes project should be able to be done as group projects.
- Parents should be trained about the assessment and evaluation and the principles of the new program. Thus, students can do their homework on their own and self-evaluation could be done objectively.
- While making changes in programs, the opinions of teachers should be asked for. Therefore, teachers will assimilate the program in which they will find their own opinions and put it into practice more easily.
- Socioeconomic and cultural profiles of schools should be examined and needs analysis should be carried out.

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