

The Ideas of the Teachers and Administrators in the First Level of Primary School Education about Constructive Learning Approach

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Abstract: The sample of the study consists of 18 people. In this research, eight administrators and 10 primary school teachers who are assigned randomly and work in 10 schools of seven different regions of the country are asked about the implementation process of constructivist learning approach. From the qualitative data obtained as a result of the interviews, the curriculum could not be executed efficiently and effectively because of the problems happened during the implementation process. The problems stated are classified into two group, one of which is input and content based problems in the curriculum such as the lack of infrastructure, teachers and parents' educational problems, the outnumber of the class, being not be able to overcome the financial burden of constructivist approach based curriculum put on the school and the parents, the problem related with stationery and criteria during the evaluation process, the limit of the knowledge suitable for each grade, unsuitability of the textbooks and the activities' being too much dependent on the technique of drama. In order to eliminate the problems faced during the implementation process of the curriculum constructivism based, it is required that a scientific analysis of the problem should be carried out throughout the country and the component of constructivist learning approach (the philosophy of the curriculum, basic features, types of it, learning environments, the roles of the teachers and learners, the ways of learning and evaluations of the curriculum) should be comprehended as a whole through the qualified in-service trainings conducted by the educators.

Key words: Constructivist learning approach • The problems of implementation process • First level of primary school education • Primary school teachers • School administrators

INTRODUCTION

There has been a big breakthrough in the education system of Turkey with the introduction of the renewed curriculum. Since 2005-2006 Educational Year of Ministry of Education, this breakthrough has been carried out with the application of the curriculum which has been developed depending on constructive learning approach in all of the primary school over the country.

According to the statements in the action plan [1] of the sub-group working in The Ministry of Education who check Constructive Approach in the application of the curriculum, it is reported that the success of the curriculum in practice depends on the efforts and willingness of the ones who are going to put the

curriculum into practice. It is also stated that the volunteer teachers, enterprising school administrators, guiding inspectors and the parents who are in cooperation with the school administrators will help the students to be successful.

In order to make the curriculum effective, it is seen that there are detailed responsibilities in "The Responsibilities, Authority and Assignments of School Administrator" included into 60th item of the regulations of Primary School institutions. In the 64th item of the same regulation, the importance of primary school teachers in the effectiveness of the curriculum is explained as follows: "*For the success of the curriculum teachers are indisputable factors. The fact "They are the most important factor in development of a student the while*

s/he is growing up by making use of his/her available knowledge for the students to come up with new ideas” is emphasized.

It is clear from the legal requirements listed above that primary school teacher and administrators have great effects on the success of the curriculum. Therefore, it is thought that their ideas about whether the constructive learning approach is conducted efficiently and effectively under the circumstances of the country have great importance for the development of the curriculum with the help of the responsibility spiral mentioned above. It is not possible to imagine socio-cultural, scientific and technological developments as different from the qualities individuals are required to have because of the fact that the target of the curriculum is society-individual or individual- society. “The curriculums” which are recommended as a results of the continuous researches aiming at national development and which are also a kind of tool necessary for reaching aims [2] includes all of the activities conducted by the educational institutions and social environment in order to arrange and enrich individuals lives.

It should be noted that the components of curriculum; aims, content, teaching progress and evaluation have a dynamic relationship in themselves and it should bear in mind that any change in a component of the system will affect the whole system [3]. Thus, when the operators of the system who are administrators and teachers make a total evaluation about all of the component of the curriculum to some extent, it can be derived that in this research an evaluation is made regarding the whole of the curriculum.

The Aim of the Research: The research has been conducted in order to understand whether the curriculum in practice depending on the constructive learning approach is being conducted efficiently and effectively and to determine the reasons if there is a problem in the curriculum in practice. For this reason, the opinions of the school administrators and primary school teachers who are the operator of the curriculum are asked. So, failing aspects of the curriculum are tried to be understood by making a total evaluation with the data acquired concerning the curriculum.

In the interview process of the research, the participants are asked open-ended question: 1.What is your ideas about the new curriculum?

*What can you tell about this subject given your experiences?

METHOD

In the research, “qualitative method” which enables to collect in depth data by making face to face and group interviews being in the same environment with the primary school teachers is used.

Collection and Analysis of the Data: This research has been conducted during a study which was executed all over Turkey in the fall term of 2006-2007 Educational Year.

The method “interview” which is used frequently in qualitative research in order to obtain research data is utilized. Descriptive analysis is applied to the data acquired from this study considering the questions used during the interview. With the help of this analysis method, the data obtained are interpreted after organized and direct quotations are used frequently in order to transfer the opinions of the teacher in a striking way [4].

Sample: The sample of the research is composed of 8 administrators and 10 primary school teachers who are chosen at random from the seven different regions and assigned randomly to different cities of the country such as Ankara, Aydın, Adana, Van, Samsun, Bolu ve Bursa and who work in 10 different schools. Totally 18 people are interviewed; 2 primary school teachers and 1 school administrator from 2 different schools in Ankara; 1 school administrator and 1 teacher from the other cities. The experiences of the participants vary from 10 to 20 years.

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

At the end of the analysis, it is found that the new curriculum is not executed effectively. The reasons of that situation are classified under 2 group:

- The problem of input of the curriculum
- The problem of content of the lessons

The Problem of Input of the Curriculum: It is clear from common ideas of the school administrators and primary school teachers who explain their opinions about the operation of the new curriculum that the curriculum could not be conducted effectively because of the problem of awareness education related to the new curriculum and the lack of physical equipment.

One of the school administrators who explain his ideas says: “It cannot be told that the curriculums executed effectively because the infrastructure is not suitable. Also, students parents’ awareness and

availability of computer and library are required for the curriculum which lead students to make research”.

Another administrator who claim that teachers and school administrators are not trained for awareness about the constructive learning approach before the implementation of the curriculum and because of the problem caused by the lack of that education and the lack of physical equipment, the curriculum is not being conducted in a qualified way explain his ideas as follows:

Our teachers are not ready when the new curriculum was introduced. They were not trained about the new curriculum and rarely organized in-service trainings were not enough because the instructor were not expert in that area. Moreover, these in-service trainings were very theoretical. Physical equipment is indispensable for the curriculum especially for binary education; for example, an activity or topic of the students who come to school in the mornings may not be related with the ones' who come to the school in the afternoon.

The problems one of the teachers explains that they have the same problems can be summarized as follows:

The problems related with the infrastructure make it impossible for the realization of the curriculum. Library, laboratory and workshop are not suitable for binary education. There is the problem of displaying the activities of the students coming to school in the morning and in the afternoon. Because of the limited time for students to rest, they become tired and the process of teaching cannot be effective. There is neither time nor necessary equipments for creative drama activities. According to the requirements of the curriculum, the classroom should include 18-24 students. But we have 50 students in the classroom. All of the activities depend on the photocopy and a school with 60 teachers has only one photocopy machine and now you can imagine the situation. We think that the new curriculum is good and effective; however, it is not suitable for the conditions we have now. Parents complain about the fact that there is no lesson conducted in the school. They cannot think the activities as a lesson itself. The environment of the school is not convenient for the curriculum. The school-parents-teacher triangle has always problems.

It is clear from the statements above that they think that the new curriculum is more effective on the development of an individual but it is understood that the

curriculum cannot be implemented as it should be because of the lack of infrastructure and physical equipments. Especially in the school who has binary education, because the activities of the students who use the classroom in the morning are displayed, the students who use the same classroom in the afternoon cannot display their activities as there is not empty place to put. So, it is clear that the lessons cannot be conducted in an effective way. It is also mentioned that there are some problems such as not being able to overcome the cost of photocopy both from the point of parents and the school, parents finding the activities meaningless and unnecessary because of the lack of parents' readiness...etc. Due to the binary education (in the morning and in the afternoon) the break time between two lessons is very short and it is apparent that students' starting new activities without resting adequately cause tiredness and lack of motivation for students.

Another teacher who talks about the problems aroused from the expectations of the parents during the realization of the curriculum says: “unawareness of the parents creates another problem in the implementation of the curriculum because they have expectations concerning the former system. For them the former system was both economical and easy from the point of time. Hence, parents use their choice for the former one.”

Other teacher who point the reason why problems related to input quality of the curriculum from the point of physical and human power make it ineffective explain their opinions as follows: “necessary infrastructure for the curriculum is not available. The classroom normally should have 25 students but we have 50 students in a classroom. The curriculum requires too much stationery. This is very expensive both for student and the teacher and requires a lot of time. Another teacher adds: “The curriculum was not successful in classrooms with 30 students during the pilot implementations. How can we achieve this with classrooms with 50 students? The classroom should have 20 students at most.” Another teacher states: “Ministry of education should have prepared his students, parents and teacher 4 years before the curriculum he wanted to change put into effect. This curriculum is very expensive from the point of the students. Social lessons mostly require presentations.”

It is obvious from the statements above that because of the reasons such as over crowdedness of the classrooms and over cost of the activities, the lessons could not be conducted as it should be. Other points which are highlighted is the importance of the awareness

trainings which should be organized in time about the curriculum depending on constructivism and the importance of the teacher-parent-student triangle.

The Problem of Content of the Lessons: Another topic which all educators whose ideas are asked support and call as a problem is that they cannot be loyal to the new curriculum because the amount of academic knowledge in the new curriculum is very little compared to the former curriculum which depends on behaviorism. They explain the reasons of that as follows:

The knowledge we introduce to our students is very limited. There is nothing to teach especially to 5th grad students. The curriculum asks us to investigate. However, there is not any specific information. What can we look for? The students are not made gain basic knowledge. There are not 100 problems totally to teach 5th grade students throughout the whole year. The students have already known the operation between the number 1 and 20 when they are in the preschool. These children become bored when they are in the 1th grade. Hence, we could not hang on the program and we just go on as the same way.

From the explanation above, it is apparent that there is a vicious circle due to the problems concerning academic knowledge. Nevertheless, the same administrator and the teacher listed some advantageous aspects of the new curriculum in addition to the deficient ones as follows; “.....it is okay that the students are talking more and their self confidence become sounder with this curriculum. It cannot be denied that it is efficient in that the students are guided to make research. In the 1th grade, there are more activities to enrich the vocabulary. But it was little in the system in which we use cards for words. Claiming all these statements, they explain good sides of the new curriculum comparing to the former one.

Another teacher and administrator who complain about the problems during the evaluation process of the new curriculum explained their ideas as follows:

The criteria used during evaluation process are not cut and clear. It requires too much time and stationery. For example, in the process of evaluation of a lesson in the 4th grade, 150 students needs 12000 pages (parent evaluation, students’ self-evaluation, teachers’ evaluation of the students...etc.) in one unit. What happens to that number when it becomes 13 million? Who deal with this troublesome evaluation? Anyway, it won’t be effective.

In another city, another opinion similar to the ones explained above is “The most difficult part is evaluation process because at least 20 behaviors should be evaluated after each lesson. This requires computer use. All of the students don’t have a computer in their house. So, they make their homework do someone else. From these statements it can be concluded that the evaluation process doesn’t occur as it should be and students put academic responsibility on someone else because of the lack of technological equipments.

Experiences of a teacher who talk about the reasons which cause lesson evaluation in effective and who has a suggestion for this matter can be given as follows:

We observe that student cannot evaluate himself in an objective way. Stationery for evaluation form which belongs to just one lesson is too much. 18 pages are used for a lesson. Think it. How many pages are necessary for 50 students? In addition to this, parent evaluations are not effective and generally neglected. There are not abstract conclusions after the evaluations and the question “What do you think about what happens? should be asked. In fact, we will not have difficulty if the guidelines include the conclusions which should be found in verbal lessons.

In constructive approach, evaluation’s being not free from the process, for teacher to enable students to research making them think and enable them to solve the problems as a result of this; to guide students to answer their own questions [5] requires too much time and stationery. However, the evaluation process is expected to be effective in relation the number of the students which should be less. By this way, with small number of student enabling individual education it will be easier for the teacher to make an evaluation of the students and parents in a more objective way.

Given textbooks which are one of the most important visual tools enabling students to reach the qualification determined are the first available source of information for students and teachers, the problems which are talked about by the teachers related to that tool is seen to be very attractive.

The findings of the primary school teachers about the textbook which are prepared for the new curriculum are seen as follows:

There are some text which include foreign names and nicknames such as “melo teyze”, “seyfo”, “mimi”...etc in third grade students’ Turkish textbook. These are in the 42th page of the book. Also, the letter size of textbooks is

very small for students in this grade. There are too many grammar mistakes. Furthermore, the texts for second grade students are very long. So, we have to deal with a text for one week. As a result, students have difficulties in understanding the text. Moreover the students see the activities in the new curriculum as a play. In addition to all these, we have difficulties in finishing the subjects because the activities depend on drama too much.

The observations of the administrator and teachers in another city regarding textbooks which block the effectiveness of the curriculum are given as follows:

The subjects are very long. In the texts which are designed for third grade students includes sentences with 14-15 words, nicknames, inverted sentences and mispronunciation, which cause reading disorder, texts' being not understood and not comprehended as a whole and as a result it leads to forget the information immediately. In the east part of Anatolia, nicknames are used too much, anyway. However, we try to not to use these words. Unfortunately, in the third grade Turkish textbooks, there are nicknames such as "melo, selo..."

Another point explained by the educators is as follows: "Turkish texts and the subject of the lesson "Life Knowledge" are not interrelated. 3-4 weeks are assigned for nonfunctional mathematic subjects." This situation hinders the conduction of the basic lessons' content. Nevertheless, they did not ignore the contributions of the new curriculum to the student saying: "The only advantageous thing is students' workbooks besides disadvantageous sides of that subject. The subjects are consolidated with repetitions and practice. Moreover, it provides opportunity for group-works."

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrator and primary school teachers whose opinions are asked and who are from different cities of Turkey tells that the new curriculum is not being conducted effectively due to the similar problems. The teacher who is one of the reasons and who is input of the curriculum from the point of human power was not ready for the process because of students and parents' unawareness about the curriculum. The other reasons are stated as follows:

- Not being able to conduct the lessons as they should be because of the lack of physical and technological opportunity
- Uncertainty of the criteria for evaluation of each lesson in itself
- The burden of cost and stationery in the process
- The lack of parallelism between the lesson topics
- The problems concerning textbooks' content

So, it is seen that problems occurring in the classrooms are generally stated. Hence, it is essential to make the physical and psychological conditions of the classrooms suitable for the students to comprehend the information in an efficient and effective way.

Though the schools of the educators whose ideas are asked are from different regions of Turkey and they vary from the point of infrastructures, economic conditions..etc, it is striking that the teachers and administrators talked about similar points as problem.

The features of all the inputs which is an important component of the open system and which determine the qualifications of outputs are the determiners of the quality of the education. for this reason, all the variables' control should be established pre and after radical changes in the process of education. Otherwise, it is inevitable to face with the spiral of problem mentioned above. Every change has the quality of precondition for development. Given the fact that resisting against changes is also a spontaneous behavior, it is well known that every change will come with a set of problems. However, it should be noted that the solutions to problems will work in relation to the time when the problems are described and tried to be solved finding scientific solutions without losing time.

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