**ISSN:1306-3111**
e-Journal of New World Sciences Academy
2010, Volume: 5, Number: 1, Article Number: 1C0134

**EDUCATION SCIENCES**
Received: September 2009
Accepted: January 2010
Series : 1C
ISSN : 1308-7274


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# CHANGES TO THE CURRICULUM OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN TURKEY: THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to determine the effect of the changes in the curriculum of primary schools and the perceptions of the teachers regarding this program in Turkey. The new (2004) curriculum is explained at the beginning of the study. Thirty-three teachers participated in this study. Qualitative research method was used to analyze the data and semi-structured interviews were used. The components of this curriculum are: themes, learning outcomes, activities and explanations. Interviews with the teachers shed light on their perceptions regarding the concept of constructivism, the constructivist program, and the advantages and disadvantages of the curriculum.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, Constructivist Curriculum, Primary Schools, Curriculum Development, Teacher Education

# TÜRKİYE'DE İLKÖĞRETİM PROGRAMINDAKİ DEĞİŞİMLER: ÖĞRETMENLERİN ALGILAMALARI

**ÖZET**

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'de son yıllarda uygulanan ilköğretim programı ve bu program hakkında öğretmenlerin algılamalarını belirlemektir. Çalışmanın başında yeni (2004) programın özellikleri açıklanmıştır. Bu araştırmada 33 ilköğretim öğretmenin görüşleri nitel veri toplama tekniklerinden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla tespit edilmiştir. Programın ögeleri tema ya da öğrenme alanı, kazanımlar, etkinlikler ve açıklamalardan oluşmaktadır. Öğretmenlerle yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda öğretmenlerin yapılandırmacılık ve yapılandırmacı program kavramına bakışları, programın olumlu ve olumsuz yönleri belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yapılandırmacılık, Yapılandırmacı Program, İlköğretim Okulları, Program Geliştirme, Öğretmen Eğitimi

## 1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923. Since then, there have been many changes in the curricula of the Turkish education system. On 3 March 1924, the control of education was handed over to the Ministry of Education. In 1924, John Dewey, the educationist, went to Turkey to observe and analyze the educational system and offered restructuring recommendations. This study also aims to re-evaluate the significance of Dewey's visit to Turkey, his recommendations, and his report on the Turkish educational system (Turan, 2000). In the same (1924) year, John Dewey recommended the setting up of a Ministerial Board of National Education and coined the famous policy slogan "A school at each work place and a work place in each school." It sounded convincing, but there were neither many schools nor any such work places in the country at that time. Before taking action, Turkish educators pondered over this "work-school" idea for nearly 15 years (Güvenç, 2008). It can be argued that by inviting John Dewey to Turkey in 1923, Atatürk envisioned a progressive, constructivist, critical, pragmatic and democratic education to create a modern Turkey. Today, many Turkish educators and government officials are beginning to consider implementing the principles of constructivist and progressive philosophy to Turkish education, which Atatürk envisaged more than 80 years ago (Alptekin, 2006).

Previously, the curricula of the Turkish Educational System generally relied on teacher explanations, questions and answer techniques, and used textbook and maps to teach the lessons. Behaviorism dominated the educational landscape 20 years ago, but the foremost learning theory today is constructivism (Boghossian, 2006). While behaviorism views learning as an active process of acquiring knowledge, constructivism views learning as an active process of constructing knowledge (Bichelmeyer, Hsu 1999 in Boghossian, 2006). Constructivist learning activities provide student-centered instruction, whereby students assume a certain degree of responsibility for what is taught and how it is learned (Toh et al. 2004:196).

In the last 10 years, some efforts at development and improvement have been attempted in the education system. In 1997, the number of years of compulsory education was increased from 5 years to 8 years. There are 10,673,935 students receiving compulsory primary education with 389,859 teachers (MONE; 2006). In 2005, the number years of secondary school was extended from 3 years to 4 years. In 2002, a preschool curriculum for 36- to 72-month-old children was developed. On the other hand, even though there have been these continuous efforts to improve Turkey's education system, international benchmarking studies such as TIMSS-R (Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat), PIRLS (The progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) have shown that the performance of Turkish students has been below the international average (Berberoğlu at al. 2003; Bulut, 2007).

### 1.1. Primary Education Programs In Turkey (Türkiye'de İlköğretim Programları)

Several changes have been enforced on the primary education instruction programs in our country recently. Innovations were made in the teaching of the life sciences, Turkish language, mathematics, science, technology and social studies, which takes place in the first five years of primary education. Studies were carried out in the academic year 2004-2005, in 120 schools that were part of a pilot program. Based on the results of this program, the new curriculum was

revised and the program covered all of Turkey in the academic year 2005–2006. Learner-centered education is the focal point of all the programs. Constructivism is adopted as a learning approach. Constructivism is the result of an important point of view: it is learner- and activity-centered, giving importance to skills, including alternative methods of measurement and assessment, involving the collaboration of the main disciplines. While there are common skills for each branch, there are also some skills that are particular to each of these branches.

The components of the program are centered around themes or learning fields, learning outcomes, activities and explanations. Learning outcomes are the result of students' attaining the planned knowledge, emotion, skills and values through planned activities by themselves. Activities include all the actions that help the student to be an active participant and help him in his attainments. Explanations are formed of various statements particular to the discipline, the attainments include showing skills and values, understanding the relationship with the other main disciplines, warnings, out-of class and in-class activities. While preparing a plan in the program, the most important activity should center around improvement. Activities should be included to act as a guide for the teachers and learners. In the earlier program, while terms like "objective and behavior" had been used, in this program, the term "learning outcomes" has been used. Also the learning-teaching process is activity-weighted. In measurement-asessment, alternative evaluations are given weight and are emphasized along with the written exams and tests. These alternative evaluations are learner projects, assessing the student's performance and include self-evaluation, creating a portfolio, observation, interview, assessment on an attitude scale and so on.

In short, the objectives are set by the institutions in this curriculum. The goals of the learners are often apparent beforehand. The teacher may construct new goals and objectives with the learners. The content can be constructed by the learners under the circumstances, and have to be coherent with the the objectives and main lines of the content. The teacher is a guide and co-learner. The activities are done by the learners. Evaluation is performance-based and includes different kinds of assessments along the traditional written tests. These different kinds of assessments let the learners evaluate themselves or each other and lets the teacher assess his learners. A model of the new program is given below:

Figure 1. The Program development model (Mone, 2004)
(Şekil 1. Program geliştirme modeli (Mone, 2004))

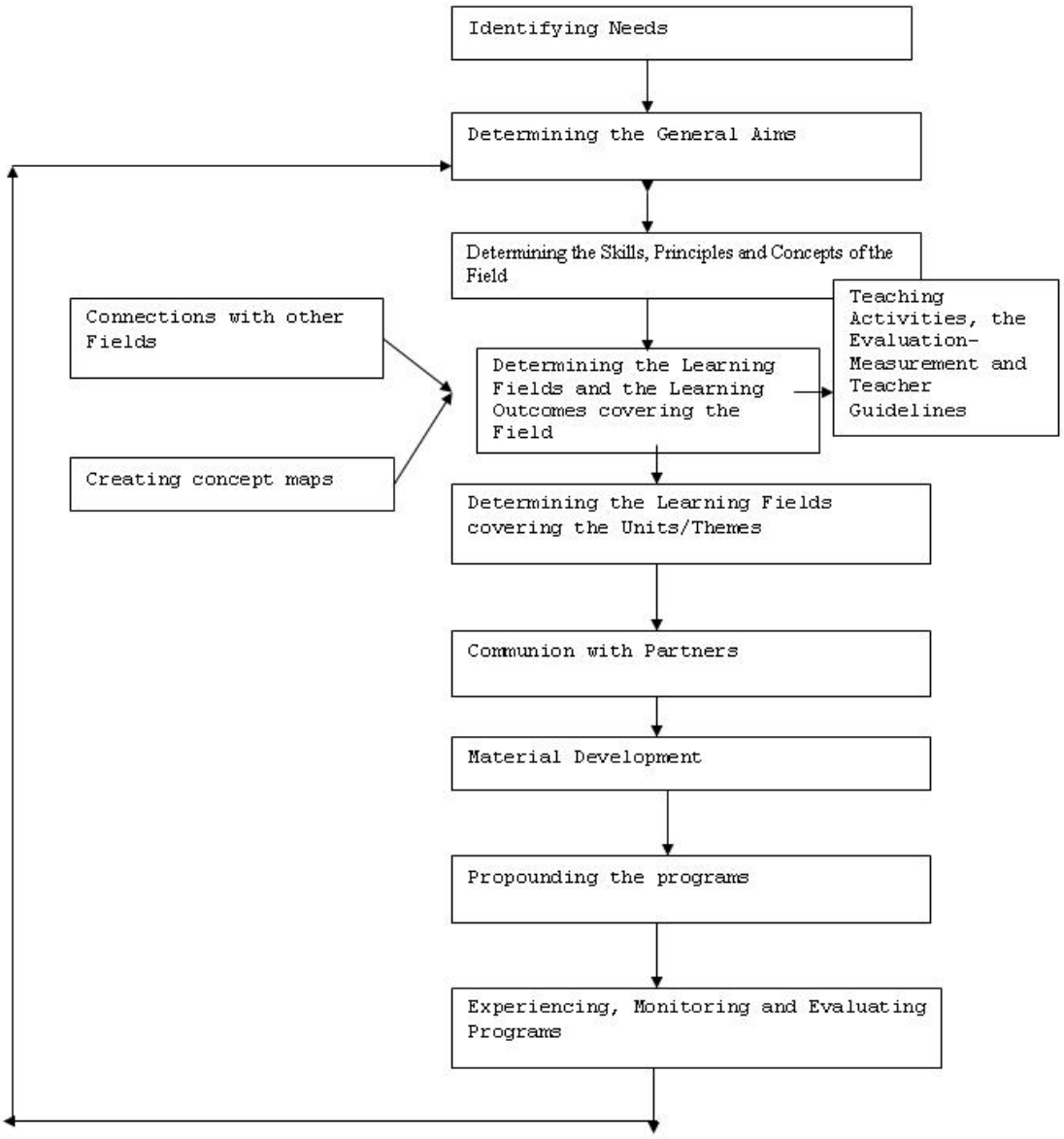

Table 1. Primary education: an example (Fourth grade social studies program) learning field: individual and identity (Mone, 2004)
(Tablo 1. Öğrenme alanı: birey ve kimlik (ilköğretim: 4. sınıf sosyal bilgiler) örneği (Mone, 2004)

| UNIT | ATTAINMENTS | ACTIVITY EXAMPLES | EXPLANATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Everybody has an identity. | By the end of this unit the learners:<br><br>**1.** Recognize and accept individual differences.<br><br>**2.** Realize the relationship between feelings and ideas.<br><br>**3.** Express feelings and ideas belonging to different situations.<br><br>**4.** Show respect for others' feelings and ideas.<br><br>**5.** Put the important incidents in their lives in chronological order.<br><br>**6.** Draw inferences about personal identity by analyzing the information on an ID card. | * "Slight Differences" (The differences between people are shown by using personal goods.) (1st attainment)<br>* "Different and Private" (The differences of people are shown as a richness by examples) (1st attainment).<br><br>* "My feelings and ideas go hand in hand" (It is realized that feelings and ideas can change from person to person, shown by creating example mediums (2, 3, 4th attainments).<br><br>* "Keep a diary" (Diaries are kept to express ideas and feelings.) (2, 3, 4th attainments)<br>* "My Feelings and ideas" (Learners are helped to realize the differences between their feelings and ideas by using photographs) (2nd attainment).<br><br>* "Stories of tolerance from Mevlana" (The texts about Mevlana's tolerance and understanding are studied.) (4th attainment)<br><br>* "The main points in my life" (A time scale is constructed of the important incidents belonging to the student's life.) (5th attainment)<br><br>* "Atatürk's ID Card" (An ID document is prepared from the information in the text in which Atatürk's life is narrated) (1, 6th attainments).<br>* "This is my ID Card." (The main components of the ID cards are identified by examining the information on the ID card, school card, sport-club card etc. (6th attainment).<br>* "My Family Tree" (A simple family tree is drawn) (6th attainment). | -Cooperation should be encouraged to express feelings and ideas and to realize personal differences with the guidance service.<br>-For the 3rd and 5th attainments; "speaking" learning field (20th attainment) in Turkish lesson should be studied for the student to express himself orally.<br>- For the 5th attainment; "Measuring time," the learning field (3rd attainment) should be studied to draw a time scale.<br>-Initiative (1-1)<br>-Improving career consciousness (1-2)<br>-Guidance and Psychological Counseling (1-1); (4-4)<br>-Health Culture (1-11)<br>-Direct skill: recognizing evidence and using it.<br>-Direct value: Showing respect and tolerance to the ideas and feelings<br>-In this unit, an evaluation can be done by using observation, self-evaluation form, open-ended questions. |

The activity example in the new curriculum is given as follows (MONE 2004):

- **Name of the Activity: The Main Points In My Life (Primary Education)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Course | Social Studies |
| Grade | 4 |
| Duration | 1 week |
| Learning Field | Individual and identity |
| Unit | Everybody has an identity. |
| Basic Skills | Deciding, critical thinking, perceiving time and chronology, perceiving change and continuity |
| Learning Outcomes | The student puts the fundamental incidents belonging to his life in a chronological order. |
| Materials | Picture, photo, toy, cloth, card, ruler, scissors, painting material, pencils, paper |
| Source | |

**Activity Process:**

- Make the learners list the incidents that have affected them since their birthday (The birthday will be accepted as a starting point) (The learners may get help from their parents).
- Make learners bring pictures, photos, toys, clothes, cards etc. as proof of these incidents (Learners may draw pictures relating to the incidents).
- The time scale can be given to the learners who may copy it down. If the teacher does not have the opportunity to do so, he may make the students draw a simple time scale.
- Make the learners place the incidents in chronological order.
- Make the learners demonstrate the incidents on the time scale accurately, from past to the present.
- Make the learners stick proof relating to the occurence of these incidents, on the time scale.

**Assessment of Activity:**

The time scale can be evaluated by a rating scale.

| **Years** | **My Life** |
|---|---|
| 1995 | I was born in 04.01.1995 in Bursa. |
| 1996 | I began to walk. |
| 1997 | My family moved to Istanbul. |
| 1998 | I began to ride my three-wheeled bike. |
| 1999 | I started attending nursery school with my friends. |
| 2000 | I started attending kindergarden. |
| 2001 | I began to read in the first grade. |
| 2002 | I learned to swim in the second grade. |
| 2003 | I studied very hard for the math lesson in the third grade. |
| 2004 | I got into the school basketball team in the fourth grade. |

As can be seen from the activity example, there are learning fields, units, skills, learning outcomes, materials, etc. in the introduction. Then follow the teaching process and assessment. Students are generally active in this program. This program is based on constructivism. Constructivism and constructivist curricula are discussed below.

### 1.2. Constructivism and Constructivist Curriculum (Yapılandırmacılık ve Yapılandırmacı Program)

In the late 1980s, emerged an education reform movement known as constructivism (Fosnot 1989, Brooks and Brooks 1993 in Jhonson 2003). In constructivism, the knowledge, which is constructed actively by the learners, is the essential knowledge and it is like an umbrella between the perceptions of the group and its learning and the learners' construction of that knowledge (Haris and Alexander, 1998; Tynjala, 1999; Birenbaum, 2003. found in the source: Gibjels et al, 2006:214). Scientists have different point of views about what is constructivism and where it comes from. While some accept it as a theory of knowledge, others accept it as a form of knowledge or philosophy (Matthews, 1994; Philips, 1995; Von Glasersfeld, 1995: cited in Furbish, 2005:9; Jadallah 2000).

Many of the discussions about constructivism and its many facets were centered around the ideas of Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, Von Glasersfeld, and Dewey. Different perspectives of constructivism emphasize either individual cognitive processes—such as cognitive constructivism which is concerned with knowledge construction of the individual—or social co-constructions of knowledge, such as social constructivism which stresses the colloborative processes in knowledge building (Windschitl, 2002 cited in Gijbels at al. 2006: 214).

Tenenbaum at al. (2001) emphasized seven key factors of the constructivist learning environment: (1) arguments, discussions, debates; (2) conceptual conflicts and dilemmas; (3) sharing ideas with others; (4) materials and measures targeted toward solutions; (5) reflection and investigation of concepts; (6) meeting student needs; (7) making sense by being based on real-life examples. Constructivist learning is based on active participation of the students in problem solving and critical thinking, regarding a learning activity which they find relevant and engaging. They are "constructing" their own knowledge by testing ideas and approaches based on their prior knowledge and experience; students apply these to a new situation, and integrate the new knowledge gained with pre-existing intellectual constructs (Gagnon and Collay, 1996). Students should participate in experience that accommodates these ways of learning such as problem-based learning, inquiry activities, dialogue with peers and teachers, exposure to multiple sources of information, and opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding in diverse ways (Windschitl, 1999). The teacher cannot participate directly in student self-correction; she can only try to provoke it, channel it, and evaluate it (Gregory, 2003: 407). Also, the assessment of constructivism in education is based on process rather than product. With authentic assessment procedures, teachers strive to make an evaluation which is realistic, relevant, and reliable. Authentic assessment depends on evidence of students' accomplishments. Students provide proof of this through their products, portfolios, and performance assessments (Morris 2001). Evaluation in the constructivist culture is rigorous and multidimensional. It is focused on the quality of the learner's understanding, its depth, and its flexible application to related contexts (Lindschitl, 1999:189-197).

Constructivist instructional approaches in general are being criticized mainly for three reasons: (1) they cost too much to develop (because of lack of efficiency), (2) they require technology to implement (for different activities and materials); and (3) they are very difficult to evaluate (Tam, 2000).

## 2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMI)

The new curriculum of Turkey is based on the constructivist approach. The practitioners of the Primary Education program are teachers. When implementing the program teachers are faced with both positive and negative situations. By obtaining the opinions of the teachers ways in which the program was lacking would be identified and solutions developed. In this sense this study was carried out in order to establish the current situation of the primary education programme.

The purpose of the present research is to examine new programs on primary education and to determine the reactions of the class teachers who have been constructing lessons to expose the class to different activities based on a constructivist approach, in the lessons taught at primary schools.

## 3. METHODS (YÖNTEM)

The sample for the study consisted of 33 volunteer teachers who had used the new curriculum in primary schools in Mersin, Turkey during the academic year 2006–2007. The group was made up of: 7 1st grade, 6 2nd grade, 7 3rd grade, 6 4th grade and 7 5th grade class teachers. Research was carried out in 6 schools. Of these schools two were of a high social-economic level, two of a medium social-economic level and two of a low social-economic level and were selected at random. The programme is implemented in all schools.

A qualitative research methodology was used and six open-ended questions were asked to determine teacher perceptions. The teachers received in-house training during the summer of 2005-2006 regarding the new program. During this period, practical and theoretic training was received on the subjects of constructivism and constructive curriculum building. The basis of the new programme is a constructivist approach. For this reason this research looks at what teachers understand by the terms constructivism and constructivist curriculum as well as what they find to be positive or negative and the difference between the old and new programmes. Questions asked where based on these criteria. These questions were reviewed by two curriculum developers, who have a Phd, and five teachers, who have a Master's degree in primary school education, to ensure content validity. The contents of the latest version of the questions were developed based upon their suggestions.

The six open-ended questions are given below:

- What is constructivism?
- What constitutes a constructivist program?
- What are your perceptions on the new curriculum? And the new MONE Program?
- What are the advantages of the new MONE Program?
- What are the disadvantages of the new MONE Program?
- What are the distinguishing features of the new program?

A semi-structured interview method was used for data collection. This method consists of asking open-ended questions. Interviews conducted for research were carried at the teachers' schools and took place in the principal's office. During the research each teacher interview was conducted individually face –to-face. A written report was kept. Teachers were informed that their names would be kept confidential. In order to maintain a relaxed atmosphere teachers were also informed that any data would be used solely for the purposes of this research.

As stated by Patton (1987), using qualitative methods provides insight, understanding and in-depth information about the issue under

investigation. Inductive coding techniques (described by Strauss and Corbin, 1990) were used for the analyses (Miles and Huberman 1994). The responses were recorded and encoded and then reviewed line by line, typically within a paragraph. Beside or below the paragraph, categories or labels are reviewed and, typically, a slighly more abstract category is attributed to several incidents or observations. The incidents can then be assigned a qualitative data category. Starting with a working set of codes that describe the phenomena in the transcribed field notes, we then move to a second level that is more general and explanatory.

The research process is thus to:

- Underline key terms in the teachers' responses for the six open-ended questions,
- Restate key phrases,
- Coding key terms in the teachers' responses for questions,
- Pattern coding,
- Construct themes,
- Summaries for themes,
- Integrating theories in an explanatory framework.

In addition, some interview results were given directly. The inter-rater reliability method was used to ensure reliability of results. The data were coded by two experts; one of them was an expert on curriculum development and had a PhD degree and the other was an expert on primary school education and had a Master's degree and a PhD in educational sciences. Codes and themes were created by these two experts, who were inspired by the similarity of output resulting from the interviews.

## 4. RESULTS (BULGULAR)

In this study, teachers who used the new curriculum, consisting of constructivist activities, were interviewed. The themes were constructed according to the codes. The results are as follows:

Table 2. The perceptions of the teachers on "What is constructivism? (N: 33)
(Tablo 2. "Yapılandırmacılık nedir?" üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları)

| Codes of answer the questions of the teachers | | f | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of Themes | | |
| • Knowledge learning | 4 | 9 | *1.Constructing the knowledge* |
| • Active learner | 2 | 15 | |
| • Using prior knowledge | 3 | 18 | |
| • Constructing knowledge | 1 | 15 | *2.Active learner* |
| • Learning theory | 4 | 12 | |
| • Learning approach | 4 | 9 | |
| • Prior knowledge + new knowledge | 1 | 21 | *3.Using the prior knowledge* |
| • Guidance counsellor/teacher | | 6 | |
| • The process of constructing the knowledge | 1 | 18 | |
| • Student's Activities | 2 | 6 | |
| • Social interaction | 2 | 4 | *4.Learning theory* |
| • Learning how to learn | 4 | 7 | |

Table 2 shows that the concept of constructivism is familiar to the teachers. Active learners, constructing knowledge, using prior knowledge and learning theory can be the themes of this concept. Some of the teachers' comments were:

- "Constructivism is a learning approach based on the learner's active participation, creating a medium to develop the individual's cognitive skills and swapping prelearned items with new ones; and the social interaction of the individual with his environment to develop knowledge."
- "In my opinion, the constructivist approach is a student-centered one. These are completely the learner's own products and give the learning outcomes to the learners."

According to Table 3, the themes can be "constructing knowledge, learner-centered program, higher-order thinking and life skills, and product and process evaluation."

Table 3. The perceptions of the teachers on "What is a constructivist program?
(Tablo 3. "Yapılandırmacı program nedir?" üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları)

| Codes of answers to the questions of the teachers | | f | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of Themes | | |
| • Constructing knowledge | 1 | 23 | *1.Consructing the knowledge* |
| • Prior knowledge | 1 | 15 | |
| • Learner/student centered | 2 | 18 | *2.Learner-centered program* |
| • Guidance counsellor | 2 | 9 | |
| • Problem solving | 3 | 9 | |
| • Cognitive approach | 1 | 6 | |
| • Skills (using information technology, entrepreneurship, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, using the Turkish language correctly) | 3 | 14 | *3.Higher order thinking and life skills* |
| • Product and process evaluation | 4 | 7 | |
| • Affective characteristics | 2 | 3 | |
| • Self-organization | 2 | 3 | *4.Product and process evaluation* |
| • Social interaction | 2 | 6 | |
| • Richness in methods and techniques | 2 | 6 | |
| • Research | 3 | 5 | |

Some of the views of teachers are given below:

- "I consider the constructivist approach as an approach which is leading the learners to thinking, searching, dreaming, doing work and observing."
- "We can describe the constructivist approach as learners' adding new information to their existing knowledge. The learner has the knowledge, but is adding new information to this knowledge with the help of the teacher, the book or his/her own searching. If an example should be given, the learner searches for the information, the teacher leads this, I mean the teacher is the leader. The learner combines this information with his/her existing knowledge".

Table 4. The perceptions of the teachers on "What are your perceptions on the new curriculum?
(Tablo 4. "Yeni programlar üzerine algılarınız nelerdir?" üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları)

| Codes of answer the questions of the teachers | | F | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of Themes | | |
| • Learner/student centered | 1 | 18 | *1.Learner-centered curriculum* |
| • Teach how to learn | 3 | 15 | |
| • Being democratic | 1 | 3 | |
| • Producing projects within a group | 2 | 6 | *2.Activity centered* |
| • Asking questions | 2 | 6 | |
| • Activity-centered | 2 | 21 | |
| • Evaluation of the process | 5 | 18 | *3.Skill-based learning* |
| • The participation of the family | 4 | 12 | |
| • Using information technologies | 3 | 9 | |
| • Taking notice of individual differences | 1 | 18 | *4.The participation of the family* |
| • Alternative evaluation | 5 | 15 | |
| • The production of knowledge | 3 | 6 | |
| • Developing intellectual skills | 3 | 7 | *5.Alternative assessment* |
| • Life and thinking skills | 3 | 15 | |
| • Thematic approach | 6 | 6 | |
| • Communication skills | 3 | 3 | *6.Learning outcome* |
| • Learning outcome | 6 | 21 | |
| • Real life subjects | 6 | 2 | |

Table 4 indicates that the new curriculum is "learner-centered, activity-centered, skill-based learning, involving alternative forms of assessment, with a learning outcome, involving the participation of the family."

Some of the teacher's views are given below:

- "Socializing, cooperative learning and communal apprenticeship principles are the determinants of the new program."
- "To me, the constructivist approach is like the pieces of a puzzle. I consider it as an approach in which parts of the lessons are connected with the whole lesson; by completing one after the other, like a spiral, it gives the students much more permanent knowledge."
- "When we look at the subjects in the Constructivist Approach, the subjects have all been taken from real life. The problems which the learner deals with in his/her daily life are chosen as subjects. I consider this approach useful for courses."

Table 5. The perceptions of the teachers on "What are the advantages of the New MONE Program
(Tablo 5. "Yeni milli eğitim programının avantajları nelerdir? üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları)

| Codes of answer the questions of the teachers | | f | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of Themes | | |
| • Learner-centered | 1 | 21 | *1.Learner-centered* |
| • Teacher guidelines | 6 | 6 | |
| • Many activities | 3 | 12 | |
| • Available for different learning types | 1 | 6 | *2.Skill-based learner* |
| • Self-evaluation | 2 | 9 | |
| • Self confidence | 2 | 15 | |
| • Evaluation of the process | 7 | 18 | *3.Active learning* |
| • Skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, search, communication) | 2 | 24 | *4.Thematich approach* |
| • Active learning approaches (cooperative learning, multiple intelligence) | 3 | 15 | |
| • Concrete materials, tools | 8 | 12 | *5.Group Works* |
| • Group work | 5 | 18 | |
| • Richness in methods and techniques | 3 | 7 | *6.Guidance counsellor teacher* |
| • Retention learning | 3 | 14 | |
| • Guidance counsellor/teacher | 6 | 19 | |
| • Project and performance tasks | 7 | 22 | |
| • Teacher–parents cooperation | 5 | 11 | *7.Process assessment* |
| • The development of social skills | 2 | 9 | |
| • Spiral program (It broadens gradually year by year) | 10 | 13 | *8. Materials* |
| • Not learning by rote, producing knowledge | 3 | 10 | *9. Education of values* |
| • The interaction between thematic approaches and disciplines | 4 | 21 | |
| • Entertaining program | 3 | 11 | *10.Spiral programme* |
| • Cross-courses relation | 4 | 18 | |
| • Taking note of educational values | 9 | 12 | |

Some teacher explanations are given below:

- "While prior curriculum consists of the content and is based on rectilinear programming, new curriculum focused on the content and is based on curled programming."
- "The participation of the parents in educational activities supports teacher–parents cooperation. Projects and performance tasks have led up to this cooperation."
- "In the process of lecturing, the guidelines given to the teachers support the learner-centered frame of the new program."
- "The students attended the lesson in an active way. They found by searching on their own. Since the students can get in touch with real life, the subjects became much more permanent. It aroused a feeling of wonder in the students. Their problem-solving and initative improved. Their self-confidence increased."

According to Table 6, there are some disadvantages of the New MONE Program:Disadvantages can be summarized as "inadequacy of the teachers, activities take a long time, the absence of materials, the

inadequacy of parents, crowded classrooms, teacher-centered classes, inadequacy in terms of a technological base."

Table 6. The perceptions of the teachers on "What are the disadvantages of the New MONE Program?
((Tablo 6. "Yeni milli eğitim programının dezavantajları nelerdir?" üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları)

| Codes of answer to the questions of the teachers | | f | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of themes | | |
| • Inadequacy of the teachers in the implementation of the program | 1 | 18 | 1.Inadequacy of the teachers |
| • The need of in-service training for the teachers | 1 | 18 | 2.Evaluation taking long time |
| • Long texts including discrete concepts in Turkish and Social Studies courses | 3 | 12 | 3.The absence of the materials or quality |
| • Inadequacy of directing practices in the Maths course | 9 | 8 | 4.Inadequacy of the Parents |
| • Requires too much material | 3 | 9 | 5.Crowded classes |
| • Too much theory in the music course | 9 | 7 | 6.Teacher-centered classes |
| • Measurement-evaluation takes a lot of time | 2 | 4 | 7.Inadequacy in technological base |
| • Requires great physical effort to carry the books | 3 | 12 | 8. Inedequacy of students's prior knowledge |
| • Inadequate physical opportunities to implement the program | 3 | 9 | 9. Inedequacy practices |
| • The absence of visual material | 3 | 21 | 10.Activities taking long time |
| • Difficult to write in own handwriting | 9 | 18 | |
| • Crowded classes | 5 | 16 | |
| • Disqualification in some course books | 3 | 18 | |
| • Inadequate education of the parents | 4 | 12 | |
| • Inadequacy in pre-school education | 8 | 12 | |
| • Inadequacy in terms of technological base | 7 | 15 | |
| • The time given is not enough to fulfill the activities | 10 | 11 | |
| • Teacher-centered classes | 6 | 15 | |
| • Difficult to implement the new program in multigrade classes | 8 | 12 | |
| • Inadequacy of students' prior knowledge | 8 | 9 | |

Some teachers' views are given below:

- "The new program has a very extensive content. Unfortunately, the educational institutions in our country are not adequate for responding to the necessities of the new program in terms of technology and material richness. And this process shows the program has been developed bearing in mind the institutions located at the center of the cities or towns, and has ignored the institutions that function under poor economic and social conditions."
- "There are many planned activities for each course and these activities require more time for the courses, clasrooms are generally crowded in our country."
- "There is more than one source book for each course and this taxes the learners physically while carrying their goods to school."
- "The parents are now out of this new constructivist approach. The parent should support the students in the constructivist

approach. If there is no support, there may be deficiencies during this process."

- "We did not face a lot of difficulties. It is one of the most enjoyable lessons we had, we can say that we have no complaints."

Table 7 reveals the distinguishing features of The New Program. The features are "learner-centered, activity-based curriculum, product and process assessment and constructing knowledge".

Table 7. The perceptions of the teachers on "What are the distinguishing features of the new program?
(Tablo 7. "Yeni programın önceki programlara gore ayırtedici özellikleri nelerdir?" üzerine öğretmenlerin algıları )

| Codes of answer to the questions of the teachers | | F | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | Number of themes | | |
| • Constructing knowledge | 4 | 15 | *1.Learner-centered* |
| • Guidance counsellor/teacher | 5 | 12 | |
| • Skill-based | 1 | 9 | *2.Activities* |
| • Learner-centered | 1 | 24 | |
| • Ready-made guidelines are presented | | 6 | *3.Product and process assessment* |
| • Activities | 2 | 12 | |
| • Implementing instead of memorizing | 2 | 13 | |
| • Learning responsibility belongs to the learner | 1 | 12 | *4.Constructing the knowledge* |
| • Its basic philosophy is self-learning | 1 | 3 | |
| • Performance-based learning | 1 | 9 | |
| • Developing multi-directional points of view | 1 | 9 | *5.Teacher guidence* |
| • Evaluating product and process | 3 | 15 | |
| • Real life subjects | 2 | 10 | |

Some of the teachers' comments were:

- "The new program is based on the changes and is related to one of Socrates' sayings "The only thing I know is I know nothing." The program defends continuous development and alteration".
- "In the new program, the learners share the process with the teachers and the learners carry the responsibilities. The basic philosophy of the new program is that "the teacher does not teach, the learner learns himself."
- "The most distinguishing feature of the new program is its learner-centered frame and beside this, the teacher should serve as a counsellor as well".
- "The subjects of the new courses are entirely taken from real life. If we compare new subjects with old ones, the old subjects are not taken from real life. So, I find the new subjects more suitable and positive. And also, the students become active participants in the classroom for it informs the students".

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS (SONUÇ VE ÖNERILER)

Activities based on the constructivist approach have been applied at primary schools. The perceptions of the teachers on this curriculum are summarized below:

- This research identified the views of teachers involved in the implementation of the primary programme. First of all the research required teachers to give a short explanation of their

understanding of the term constructivism. Teachers defined it as thus: a learning view, a period of information development, the relationship between new knowledge and prior-learning and as an active learning method. This information could be said to show that teachers had a sound knowledge of the programmes basis.

- Teachers defined a constructivist programme as: a learning view, a period of information development, the relationship between new knowledge and prior-learning and as an active learning method and showed that they had a sound knowledge of the programmes basis. They also emphasize the need for a richer variety of activities. When asked about the new programme teachers emphasized student-centered, activity based, skills based, the need for families to take part in education and the need for varying methods of evaluation. The teachers had received in-house training regarding the new programme and been personally involved in its implementation over a period of 2-3 years.
- Teachers identified ***positive features of the new programme.*** While answering the above questions, those features were once again mentioned. Student and skills-based, the teacher having the role of facilitator, theme based, active learning, group work, materials, values education, a spiral programme and continuous assessment were heavily stressed. This shows the value they place on a scientific, emotional and skills based education. When teachers were asked to identify ***negative features of the new programme*** we can see that there are still some areas in need of improvement. These result from, physical conditions, materials, the programme itself as well as both students and parents. The main concern being over the readiness of teachers to implement a constructivist programme. This shows that their in-house training is not yet at a high enough standard. Teachers had a short period of training that was not enough. In addition, age old behavioral patterns were reproduced. For many years a teacher-centered system has been in place. Thus a constructivist approach was alien to them. A further cause of concern was a lack of material and poor physical conditions. A lack of infra-structure and suitable material was stressed. In this area textbooks are some of the materials that need to be developed. Crowded classrooms and a lack of technological resources also contributed to the negative feedback. A further area was that families have still not adapted to the new programme. In this programme families are expected to aid their children in certain activities. Thus parents need to be informed. Teachers stressed that under this system activities and evaluation took a lot of time and were lacking in implementation. Students limitations stemmed from a lack of prior knowledge.
- When teachers were asked to describe how a constructivist programme different from the old one their answers were similar to those that they had given to previous questions. These answers included: learner-centered, activity based, product and continuous assessment, information development and the teacher as facilitator. This data shows that teachers have belief in a constructivist programme but also have concerns about its implementation.

In this study, the main themes are "learner-centered curriculum, constructing knowledge, activities-based learning, learning theory,

skill-based learner, teacher guidelines, process and product assessment etc." Constructivist categories were adopted from Murphy (1997 in Boghossian 2006). These categories are problem oriented, with the teacher as coach, there are multiple perspectives, and they foster reflective practices, learners interpret multiple perspectives of the world, attempt knowledge construction, colloboration and cooperative learning, it encourages ownership and the student has a voice in the learning process etc. Bulut (2007) studied curriculum reform in his article, Turkey: a case of primary school mathematics curriculum. The findings indicated that several changes have been made and are reflected in the classroom; implementation and student-centered approaches have been incorporated into the instruction. Babadoğan and Olkun (2005) studied reforms in the Turkish primary school mathematics curriculum. In terms of content, the Turkish elementary mathematics curriculum seems to adopt more of a subject-centered approach, although the claim was that it is a learner-centered one. In terms of methods, learning is more emphasized than teaching. Conceptual understanding, rather than rote memorization of facts and rules, is given more importance. Yanpar's (2005) research consists of constructivist activities for social studies courses in primary school. The results of this study contain some implications for constructing activities to foster desired outcomes. And carefully planned group activities based on the constructivist approach can encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning.

This study shows that there are some disadvantages with regard to the new primary school curriculum in Turkey. These are: inadequacy of the teachers, activities taking a lot of time, the absence of materials, crowded classes, the need for in-service training for the teachers, inadequate education of the parents etc. Bulut's (2007) research discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the newly developed mathematics curriculum. The strength of the curriculum is its emphasis on learning by doing and living, encouraging the students to construct their own knowledge, student-centered, involving cooperation, encourages self-confidence etc. The weaknesses of this curriculum is the inadequecy of in-service training, unsuitability of activities for crowded classroom, lack of infrastructure in schools, insufficient use of technological devices. Ekiz (2004: 339) studied the primary views of school teachers with regard to the new science curriculum. Some common remarks were: the majority of teachers are not ready for the teaching and learning activities created by the new curriculum, and schools should have the necessary equipment and conditions. Şahin (2007) assessed the New Turkish curriculum from grade 1 to 5. The number of students in each class, the lack of educational technology and materials, lack of school facilities and the quality of teachers were discussed in this study. As a conclusion, the findings of this study suggest some chnages for improving primary education:

- ***The teacher should be educated about the new curriculum through in-service training.*** The teacher should know more than one teaching and learning method to guide the learning of the students. MONE has also redefined teacher competencies. Two sets of competencies were determined. These are: core competencies across disciplines, and subject area-specific competencies. The core compedencies include considering students' needs, interests and wants, the process of teaching and learning, the monitoring process, and the relationship with parents and the community (Akşit, 2007).

- The program is effective with parents. Parents must be informed about the new curriculum. Parents often help and support their children, like the teachers.
- Primary teacher education programs should be changed according to the new National Curriculum for primary schools. Student-teachers have to learn this approach in the initial teacher education program. Active and skill-based teacher education should be implemented. Skills should consist of creative thinking, critical thinking, research, comunication, use of ICT etc. Mentors could be trained by the universities to demonstrate constructivist methodology and how to use constructivist methods and assessments, introduce ICT into instruction, arrive at authentic assessment, impart citizenship education across the curriculum and through classroom management strategies (HEC, MONE 2006; Aksit 2007). Turkey needs adequate investment in teacher training facilities to increase teaching quality (OECD DT, 2005).
- Group interaction is very important in the learning process. Knowledge should be interpreted and transferred by the students instead of memorizing. Therefore, group activity should be pioneered in these courses.
- Sufficient conditions and contexts should be created for schools. The situation of insufficient use of technological devices and lack of infrastructure at primary schools should be changed.
- Information sharing between teachers can be provided. The internet can be used for this and provide a forum for teachers to share questions and information.
- Materials should be developed for teachers and it is desirable that teachers also take on board the idea of life-long education and personal development.
- New curriculum creates opportunities for schools. ***So curriculum development is of vital importance***.

Both positive and negative features of the programme have been identified. This research was carried out with teachers. Research could also be undertaken with administration, students and families. In addition, this research study was carried out in selected primary schools in Turkey. It throws light on the need for high quality learning education in this region. Future studies on the application of constructivism may study different samples to examine curriculum and instructional practices. Comparative studies in this subject can be made between our country and other countries.

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