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Elementary teachers' views about their roles in curriculum development and evaluation process: The case of Denizli

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the elementary teachers' participation level to curriculum development process and their views about their own roles on this process. The study was designed as a descriptive study based on the survey model. Semi-structured interview form was used for the study. The questions were prepared according to "The Program Evaluation Forms" that were sent to schools by Ministry of National Education and offers were taken from curriculum and instruction professionals. The form consists of 12 questions five of which are personal ones. The participants of the study are 15 (8 female, 7 male) elementary school teachers working at schools from low, middle and upper socioeconomic levels in Denizli. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and notes were taken by the researchers. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Interviews were transferred to computer and thirteen pages of raw data were obtained. After that, raw data texts were grouped based on the interview questions and data was analyzed.

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Keywords: Elementary teacher; teacher view; curriculum development; curriculum evaluation.

1. Introduction

It is essential that the curricula be dynamic and meet the changing needs of the era. According to this philosophy, (to keep with the changes) Head Council of Education and Morality decided Turkish, mathematics, social sciences and science and technology curricula for 5th grades (MEB, 2004).

During the transition to new curriculum, many studies were carried out both before and after the implementation. Before the implementation of curriculum, seminars were given first to the teachers (MEB Hizmet-içi Eğitim Dairesi Başkanlığı, 2004) and then to the supervisors to introduce the elementary schools curricula (MEB Hizmet-içi Eğitim Dairesi Başkanlığı, 2005). For the evaluation process, after the implementation of the new curriculum, teachers were asked to fulfill an evaluation form to give an idea about what is wrong and what works well. Teachers are always in

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touch with the curriculum in classes. Hence, teachers can be said to have the closest relationship with the curriculum (Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthens, 2004: 59). With this evaluation study, a kind of coordination is tried to establish between teachers and curriculum developers. However, there seems to be a handicap for this coordination: curriculum is described as a process which is designed by curriculum developers and evaluators rather than a practical process which is affected by teacher, student and classroom activities (Hewitt, 2006: 4). The assumption underlying many approaches is that the teacher is an important part of not only curriculum development but also evaluation process (Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthens, 2004; Hewitt, 2006). However, awareness of the teachers about their roles in those processes is the key point because an individual can contribute to the systems only if he/she is aware of his/her role and its importance. This can be related to “Hawthorne effect” (Karasar, 2005). Particularly in countries such as Turkey where curriculum development studies are carried out by central authorities, teachers perceive their roles as only implementers rather than a part of these studies. This perception can be a notable factor that affects teachers’ contribution to curriculum development and evaluation processes. In this context, teachers’ perception and views about how they participate in curriculum development process seem to be significant. In literature, there are many studies concerning teachers’ views about particular curricula (science, social sciences, primary teacher education..etc.). However there is a lack of studies about the whole process and teacher’s role. In the light of all above, the main purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers define their roles in curriculum development process.

1.1. The purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine elementary school teachers’ views about curriculum development attempts which are carried out by Ministry of National Education and teachers views about their own roles in these studies. According to this main purpose, these questions will be answered:

1. What are the opinions of elementary school teachers’ about:
2. Their own roles about the curriculum development process?
3. If they have any experience about these kinds of studies?
4. The relationship between curriculum development and curriculum evaluation?
5. The aims of curriculum development/evaluation and the current activities in schools?
6. And the level of serving to the purpose of these activities?

2. Method

This study is a descriptive study because it is based on teachers’ views. This study is designed as a qualitative study. Qualitative study is a research design aspiring to present perceptions and events in a holistic and realistic way by using tools like observation, interview and document analysis (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005: 39). The participants of the study are fifteen teachers (8 female, 7 male) from four different schools in Denizli. Maximum variation and convenient sampling techniques are used. In screening, some information about the study was given to the participants and interviews carried out with the volunteer teachers. Some qualities of the participants are summarized in the Table 1:

Table 1. Some Qualities of the Participants

	Gender	Socio-Economic Level of the School	Experience (as year)	The Last Educated School
P ₁	Male	Low SEL	26	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P ₂	Female	Low SEL	21	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P ₃	Female	Low SEL	21	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P ₄	Female	Low SEL	13	Faculty of Education
P ₅	Female	Low SEL	29	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)+ Completing undergraduate degree
P ₆	Male	Low SEL	27	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P ₇	Male	High SEL	25	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P ₈	Female	High SEL	30	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)+ Completing

P₉	Female	High SEL	12	undergraduate degree
P₁₀	Female	High SEL	23	Faculty of Education Teacher Training Institute (2 years)+ Completing undergraduate degree
P₁₁	Male	High SEL	23	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P₁₂	Male	High SEL	28	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P₁₃	Male	Middle SEL	20	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P₁₄	Male	Middle SEL	33	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)
P₁₅	Female	Middle SEL	23	Teacher Training Institute (2 years)+ Completing undergraduate degree

2.1. The Tools for Collecting Data

The data for the study was gathered with “semi-structured interview form” developed by the researchers. While developing the form, the researches were focused on the role of teachers in the curriculum development and evaluation process, and the first draft of the form was presented to the curriculum development professionals. After gathering two experts offers (the instructors who are working in the Curriculum and Instruction Department), two trial interviews were occurred with two elementary school teachers. According to the interviews, interview form was reviewed and the last form was obtained. The interview form has twelve questions five of them are personal information questions.

2.2. Gathering and Analysis of Data

Interviews were carried out face to face with the teachers in schools (at the free hours of teachers, in the principal’s or vice-principal’s room) in 2008-2009 academic year, spring term. Every interview has been lasted approximately twenty five minutes. Participants did not allow the researchers to use voice recorder, so the researchers just took some notes while interviewing.

Content analysis was used in study. In reporting, reliability was tried to get higher by taking more quotation. Participants were coded as P₁, P₂ etc. Lecompte and Gomez (1982, cited by Yildirim and Simsek, 2005) proposed to represent whole data which are collected by observation, interview or document analysis totally without any comment, and then interpretation should be occurred to get the reliability higher. In this study, data were represented by some subtitles without any interpretation and with a lot of quotation from participants’ interviews. Under discussion title, all data were wholly interpreted and discussed. LeCompte and Goetz’s (1982, cited by Yildirim and Simsek, 2005) other suggestion to get the reliability higher is to do the data analysis with another researcher and to verify the results. The data were analyzed by two researchers who have qualitative research experience. Two researchers were coded the interview text separately, and then the consistency between two analysis were examined. The cases under different categories were discussed and reached an agreement by researchers. The inter coder reliability was calculated as .93.

3. Findings

The findings of the study were categorized according to the aims of the research and represented below:

3.1. The Teachers’ Views about the Participation in Curriculum Evaluation Survey which was carried out in 2007-2008

When teachers’ views about the participation in curriculum evaluation survey which was carried out in 2007-2008 academic year were investigated, it is seen that teachers described and remembered the curriculum evaluation study as “the report prepared by sub branch teachers”, “the forms that have to be filled”. Two of the participants declared that they did something about it at the end of the term, but they did not remember it exactly. Thirteen of the teachers said that they prepared a report and filled some forms with sub branch teachers; however they did not give

any details about the content of the forms, how it was filled or how it was prepared. Some examples from the teachers' views are represented below:

P₂: I remember that we participated in the evaluation process. Actually at the end of the each year, in seminar term, we usually focus on the new curriculum. Also directorate of national education office asked for some information. We do direct them as much as we can do. We give a detailed sub branch report to the principal of the school to send it to directorate of education.

P₆: This kind of study was occurred in our school, but I do not remember the content of it. It is asked to be filled some forms to us. Actually, I do not think that they really take into consideration of these studies.

P₈: Yes. We filled them in a day. We filled it ourselves and delivered them. There is not any direction about it.

P₁₄: We prepared a report with our sub branch. The evaluation of the curriculum, the evaluation of the books. We wrote about advantages and the disadvantages. There was a form. We followed the instruction.

P₁₅: There was a form. It was asked to evaluate the books, the contents. We did it with the sub branch teachers.

3.2. Teachers' Views about the Performed Curriculum Evaluation

Eleven of the fifteen teachers think that the curriculum evaluation study did not reach its goals. When the reason of this idea is questioned, all the teachers who share this idea tell some reasons like "teachers' views are not taken into consideration, and the forms are not evaluated". There are some quotations that represent teachers' views below:

P₅: Maybe, in fact this was a progressive study, but, as I said before, as we knew that they would not take this study into consideration, so we did not study with might and main.

P₁₂: It is a regular study. I do not think that we get any result. It was done it the last year, too; but we did not get any result again. When we examine the books, the entire positive and the negative ways are the same. They do not take into consideration the advices, explanations and editing that we do.

P₁₃: The critics that teachers have done should be read and taken into consideration.

P₁₅: I think they do not take it into consideration. For any kind of progress, it should be taken into consideration. Deficiencies should be filled and there should be some feedbacks.

3.3. Teachers' Views about the relationship between curriculum evaluation and curriculum development studies

When the teachers' views were asked about the relationship between curriculum development and curriculum evaluation studies, it is seen that teachers were in a similar despair because of the belief about their studies not being taken into account. Twelve of the fifteen teachers said that they tried, but their attempts were not taken into account. They also said that, because of this situation their motivation decreased. Below, there are some examples from teachers' speech:

P₂: It is hard to say this study have a lot of contribution. I do not think that something has been changed because of our study. Actually, if they would take into consideration our opinions more, they could solve some problems easier.

P₃: Nominally we give some information every end of the year. We evaluate the curriculum. However, I think that they even do not take it into consideration.

P₆: All this study is grounded on some positive intent. In the process, they are taking our opinions. However, the revised curriculum is not even close to our advices. So, I do not think that this study is a functional one.

P₇: Before this curriculum implemented, they gave some seminars, and they took our opinions. They said ok, the books will be edited according to your opinions. Then, we realized that the books haven't changed. We did study a lot, we gave our opinions, but they even have not taken them into consideration.

P₁₄: There is not any contribution, because the implementers' ideas do not take into consideration. Actually, if they would take them into consideration, there would be a lot of contribution. Subjects do not distribute normally through the year, and there are very serious problems in mathematic curriculum. Subjects are too intense. For example, before the course, I try to understand them.

3.4. Teachers' views about their own roles in curriculum development / evaluation

When teachers' views about their own roles in curriculum development / evaluation process are examined, we conclude that ten teachers' responses could be categorized under two titles. The titles are, "teachers should take an active role in curriculum development / evaluation process" and "teachers' attempts should be taken into consideration by the related authority". There are some examples from teachers' expressions below:

P₇: All these development and evaluation studies should not come from a central authority. It should be started from the ground. Schools conditions and sources are not the same. For this curriculum implementation some technologies are required. But in the schools which do not have enough technology or in some village schools, the implementation has some deficiencies. I think that I am an efficient teacher.

P₁₀: We had some hesitation about the curriculum at the beginning, but it was not like as we expected. The curriculum was explained, the books have more details, and there are a lot of technologies in the curriculum. I think that being a teacher is easier now. At the beginning, there was a lot reaction. Teacher should be in the curriculum development studies. Nobody could know what is happening in the classroom better than him / her.

P₁₁: Teachers should be a part of curriculum development process. Teachers should be one of the stakeholders who develop the curriculum.

P₁₅: Although we know that they do not take our opinions into consideration, we write all our beliefs fearlessly. But we write them because we have to do.

3.5. Teachers' Feelings about the Participation in Curriculum Development / Evaluation Process

Teachers' feelings about the participation in curriculum evaluation process are asked. Two of the fifteen teachers said that they did not remember the process; however the other teachers' feelings about the process could be categorized under "dissatisfaction", "despair" and "disappointment". Teachers said that they are doing all the things they can do, although they know that they do not take their opinions into consideration. They said that they are doing the same stuff every year. Below, there are some examples from teachers' views:

P₂: I hope that they will take our opinion into consideration every year. I tell the deficiencies, but there is not any progress.

P₅: I confess that I did not do my best in the process, owing to knowing they do not take them into consideration.

P₆: I admit that I did not participate in these studies voluntarily, because I know that they will not take our opinion into consideration.

P₇: I dissatisfied with the curriculum evaluation process, because I know that they do not take our ideas into consideration.

P₁₃: Anyway I know that they will not take our ideas into account. We are doing it like a routine.

3.6. Teachers' views about the environments where curriculum development / evaluation studies are discussed

Teachers declared that they discussed the curriculum or curriculum development and evaluation process in the seminar terms, in the sub branch teachers' meetings, but most frequently in teachers' room.

P₁: We share our ideas in seminar terms which are at the beginning and at the end of the term, in sub branch teachers' meetings, and at the school teachers' room.

P₆: Especially in the first year there were very hot debates. But, then we started to share our ideas in the teachers' room. We share our ideas and beliefs about the curriculum, and we benefit from each other.

P₉: We talk together with the teachers, we talk in sub branch teachers' meeting, and we also follow some internet sites about our branch.

3.7. Teachers' evaluation about the curriculum development / evaluation process

When we examine the participants' views about the curriculum development and evaluation process and their participation in these processes, twelve of fifteen teachers declared that they believe the importance and positive effect of teachers' participation in curriculum development process, but their ideas do not take into account by other

commissions. One teacher did not want to share her/his ideas about the question, but twelve teachers said that they would like to have a more active role in curriculum development process. There are some examples below from teachers' expressions:

P₂: Any of teachers' opinions about the curriculum haven't been asked before the implementation. I do think that asking after the implementation of the curriculum is not a constructive way.

P₃: ...Any of the teachers' opinions weren't asked before the implementation. One of the most important problem, we implement the program, then we realize some problems, and we decide our ways according to these problems.

P₁₁: Actually, the process is like "we did it, you implement it". Before implementing this curriculum none of teachers' opinions were asked. It could be developed by asking all teachers' point of views. We always implement something, then looking for the deficiencies, and then decide our ways. We do not take the job seriously from the beginning of it. For example, there are still a lot of private courses, there is still memorization. The curriculum could not get rid of the old curriculum system, because there is still fear of some national end year exams. The pilot curriculum studies enacted, but the evaluation of the pilot study hasn't published. We could not event comprehend what is going on. Then they declared that the new curriculum will be implemented.

P₁₄: Educators and implementers should be taken into place in these studies, and the evaluation forms should be taken into consideration.

4. Discussion

Teachers occupy a central position in curriculum decision making (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988: 213). They are the key points of all decisions from classroom activities to the evaluation of the instruction. As one of the participants of this study stated: "Nobody could know what is happening in the classroom better than him/her" (P 10). However, in Turkey, decisions are taken by rather central authorities when it comes to curriculum development process. Although teachers take place in curriculum development committees, because of the central decision making (Türkoğlu, 2005) teachers feel themselves out of the process. Anyway, according to the findings of the study, teachers think that they are in fact essential for curriculum development but in practice it doesn't exist. This is so much related to the Ministry of National Education's organizational culture and how teachers define their roles in this organization.

Organizational culture provides an identity that affects all aspects of organizational life and social integrity above formal collaboration and rules (Hoy, 1990). Organizational culture can be defined as a belief and expectation system which strongly shaped the behaviors of individuals and groups in the organization (Aslan, Ozer and Bakır, 2009). Form this perspective, teachers believe that their views aren't considered by curriculum development centers and therefore they have no expectation in practice according to the evaluation studies. The lower the expectation is, the lower the performance and efforts about then issue are, and vice versa. Named as the Pygmalion effect, this situation directly affects the quality of the outcomes (Miller and Satewell, 2006; Alanpay and Morgan, 2000). So, it can be said that the beliefs of the teachers about their contribution to the development process not being considered affect the quality of their contribution to the evaluation process negatively.

According to the findings, attempts of the Ministry about curriculum development and evaluation are not perceived as sincere by the teachers. Teachers expressed that no revision has been made based on their views and critics. This situation causes a loss in beliefs of teachers towards any kind of attempts. Considering the curriculum development processes, an intensive communication which is one of the requirements of curriculum process (Marsh and Willis, 2007) can not be achieved. Curriculum developers such as Walker (2003) who prefer descriptive curriculum development approaches indicate that communication is the basic element of curriculum development process (Brice and Ornosko, 2000. Cited by Marsh and Willis, 2007). The mutual and healthy communication is the key point of an effective process. On the other hand, feedback and correction are one of the basic elements of communication (Demiray, 2008). Teachers gather with their colleagues from the same branches and discuss about the new curricula and than tried to get contact with related institutions. However, after that they get no feedback and no report is published about the revision throughout these contacts. This situation causes teachers to believe that they are not a part of the process. When the teachers were asked "How do you feel when you answer the surveys about curriculum development studies?" the feelings of disappointment and despair are the indicators of this situation. Moreover, teachers share their views and critics that can be affective for the curriculum development and

evaluation process in teachers' room informally rather than in formal ways. That can be because of the disappointment and despair stated above. According to Doll (1996), the thing that makes teachers effective for the process is sharing the experiences. However, the informal share of the experiences limits their effect.

Indeed, teachers should be involved in cooperative curriculum work, and they should be part of curriculum advisory committees, which have partial responsibility for program evaluation (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988: 274). Curricula to be developed should be designed by the active participation of teachers and being aware of the characteristics of learning environment. Then curricula will be more successful in practice (Unal, Costu and Karatas, 2004).

According to Hoy and Miskel (1982), the contribution of teachers to the decision making process is; 1. The opportunity to share in formulating policies is an important factor in the morale of teachers and in their enthusiasm for the school organization. 2. Participation in decision making is positively related to the individual teacher's satisfaction with the profession of teaching. Also, according to Aydın (2000), if their views are considered for the solutions to the problems, staff can get a real satisfaction. Supported by the results; when teachers' demands to participate in curriculum development studies are taken into account, this kind of interaction can increase the effect of the curriculum.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

According to the findings of the study, teachers stated that their views aren't taken into account in curriculum development studies and they think they have an unimportant role. The majority of the teachers think that teachers should be active in curriculum development process but in Turkey their effort is not regarded by the related institutions. Generally, they feel disappointment and despair during their participation in curriculum development process.

In the light of all these findings, these recommendations can be made:

- Reports about how the evaluation of teachers is reflected in the curriculum development studies after their participation in the process can be published.
- In-service training can be organized about the roles of teachers in curriculum development process.
- Formal platforms can be organized where teachers can share their experiences about curriculum development and evaluation process.

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