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# CHAPTER 7

## TEACHERS' PRINCIPLED RESISTANCE TO CURRICULUM CHANGE: A COMPELLING CASE FROM TURKEY

Hülya Kosar Altinyelken

### INTRODUCTION

'Competency-based curriculum' has been one of the most pervasive educational reforms in the world in recent decades. This curriculum model has been developed to compensate for the "irrelevance of much knowledge-based education to occupational performance and the failure of educational qualifications to predict occupational success" (Raven, 2001, p. 253). It is based on a demand-oriented and functional approach as it conveys the demands of the economy to the school. In other words, as the world of work started to make stronger demands on what and how schools teach, the notion of competence has become a key parameter (Han, 2008).

In the 1960s and 1970s, a growing interest in competence-based education and training emerged in Western countries. However, a renewed interest worldwide has been observed in the last two decades. Globalisation, the rising importance of information and communication technologies, and the emphasis on knowledge accumulation as one of the most important drivers of economic development, have made competence-based education a leading paradigm for innovation (Dochy and Nickmans, 2005). The popularity of competence discourse is also closely linked to the lifelong learning concept, which began to prevail in the early 1990s. In this respect, the involvement of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been critical. The OECD introduced the concept of competencies as a universal standard for human achievement (both academic and vocational) and linked it to the concept of lifelong learning and learning society. These latter concepts are closely associated with school and work, academic subjects and work performance, academic achievement of school subjects, and the competencies of the workplace (Rychen and Salganik, 2003).

The OECD has recently redirected the measurement of international student achievements from the school stand-alone model (e.g. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS]) to the core competencies model (e.g. Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]), choosing competence as an attractor to measure and compare student academic achievement (Han, 2008). Furthermore, in countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, competencies became a core feature of the national curriculum of primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions (Han, 2008). Similarly, in several developing countries (e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa), a competency-based curriculum was adopted and efforts were made to implement it at various levels of education system (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008; Altinyelken, 2010).

Turkey has followed these international trends and adopted a competency-based curriculum after a major review of the primary school curriculum in 2004. The new curriculum attempts to move away from a content-based curriculum, and emphasises the development of a select number of competencies (MONE, 2005a). Although the revised curriculum reflects the principles and objectives of a competency-based curriculum, the taught curriculum conveys gaps both between proposal and practice, and the aspirations of policy makers and teacher practices. Drawing on a broader study that examined curriculum implementation and pedagogical reforms in Turkey (Altinyelken, 2011), this chapter seeks to examine to what extent teachers welcome or resist changes in curriculum content, and how they mediate the new curriculum in their classrooms. The study was conducted in the spring of 2009, and included interviews with 14 members of school management and 69 teachers from eight public primary schools in Ankara.

The findings revealed that more than half of the teachers did not approve of the substantial reduction in content, as they were concerned about pupils' academic success, nationwide examinations, increasing demand for private tutoring and deepening educational inequalities. These teachers supplemented the curriculum and continued to impart additional knowledge to their pupils. The chapter highlights that there might be positive reasons for resisting certain proposals of curriculum reform, and discusses teachers' motivation for implementing the curriculum in different ways other than those intended by policy makers. Teachers who resist reforms are often stereotyped as conservative and adverse to change by policy makers and some other educational stakeholders. This chapter challenges such characterisation and points to good sense in resisting certain reform changes.

## TEACHER RESISTANCE TO CURRICULUM CHANGE

Teacher resistance is typically defined as a desire and intention to maintain existing practices in the face of changes that they consider to be undesirable and threatening (Giles, 2006). Research shows that resistance might occur when teachers do not understand and appreciate the need for change. In such cases, they will be more interested in maintaining the status quo. Habit also plays a role, since it might be easier to continue teaching in the same way rather than working to develop new skills and strategies. Moreover, many people get a sense of security from doing things in familiar ways. Hence, teachers might fear the loss of what is familiar and comfortable, and might feel uneasy about the unknown when their well-established professional and instructional patterns are disrupted (Greenberg and Baron, 2000). Teacher resistance might also stem from a reduced inclination to commit to change in the later years of life and career (Huberman, 1989), and from motives to protect teacher status and self-interest when proposed changes are perceived as threatening (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Furthermore, teachers or other school-level staff might demonstrate obstructionism or outright resistance when they view proposed changes as being imposed by outside actors, such as by international aid organisations or bilateral donors. In such cases, teachers may believe that proposed reforms are irrelevant to the needs, priorities and concerns of the school

community (Sultana, 2008), and may be even interpreted as a form of cultural imperialism. Resistance can also take the form of collective action, as in the case of organised teacher union response (Grindle, 2004). Depending on its form and intensity, teacher resistance can generate various reactions, such as vocal opposition, outright hostility, efforts to discredit the change agents (Giles, 2006) and refusal to implement reforms.

The classical literature on educational change considers teacher resistance as a significant factor in education reform failure (Zimmerman, 2006), and generally reduces it to a psychological deficit in the 'resistor' or to an unwillingness to change (Achinsteins and Ogawa, 2006). Teachers who show signs of resistance to a particular innovation or reform proposal are often characterised as traditional, conventional, stubborn, not having pupils' best interests at heart, passive or lacking professional knowledge (Van Veen *et al.*, 2005). From these perspectives, teachers are viewed as actors who stand in the way of change. Their resistance is judged as conservative and viewed a problem to be overcome (Rosenholtz, 1989) without considering the possibility that such resistance to reform might actually offer some insights to the reform initiatives (Gitlin and Margonis, 1995). Such research studies implicitly lean towards overcoming teacher resistance with short-term solutions so that external mandates can be institutionalised more effectively in schools (Giles, 2006). Suggestions for overcoming teacher resistance include involving teachers in shared decision-making, collaboration, professional development, principles modelling, and preparedness for limiting the forces of resistance (Zimmerman, 2006).

Nevertheless, some studies point to a different perspective, where resistance is characterised as "good sense" (Gitlin and Margonis, 1995), and highlight the positive rationale for resistance from teachers' perspectives (Achinsteins and Ogawa, 2006; Giles, 2006; Van Veen *et al.*, 2005). Such studies provide instances of 'principled resistance', which involve overt or covert acts that reject instructional policies, programmes, or other efforts that contradict teachers' professional principles. These case studies challenge the dominant portrayal of teacher resistance as a conservative act, and illustrate that resistance also arises from a deep commitment to one's profession rather than from psychological deficits or a basic reluctance to change (Achinsteins and Ogawa, 2006). Likewise, declining teachers' enthusiasm for an innovation might also stem from their different perceptions of what constitutes good education and teaching, or might simply reflect different concerns and interests than those highlighted in official reform proposals (Van Veen *et al.*, 2005). As McLaughlin (2006, p. 215) notes:

*Implementation is not about mindless compliance to a mandate or policy directive, and that implementation pitfalls are not just cases of individual resistance, incompetence or capability. Rather, implementation involves a process of sense-making that implicates an implementer's knowledge base, prior understanding, and beliefs about the best course of action.*

Cuban (1992) also confirms that teachers often see their profession as a reflection of their beliefs; therefore, their beliefs directly influence how and to what extent they implement curriculum reform. Substantial research on teachers has confirmed that teachers are creative, intelligent decision-makers and have well-established beliefs about the needs of

their pupils and their own roles in the context of education (Wildy and Wallace, 1995). Hence, when a curriculum reform proposal contradicts teachers' beliefs on what their pupils need, then it is likely that the reform will be ignored or significantly modified by teachers. Other studies demonstrate that teachers choose not to implement curriculum materials that conflict with their ideas about content and how this content should be taught (Gess-Newsome, 1999). Therefore, teachers' resistance to reform not only reflects their own personal and professional convictions but may also shed light on the reforms themselves.

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

### The rationale for curriculum change

Curriculum change was perceived to be urgent in Turkey in recent years to address concerns relating to education quality and equity, and to make the education system more responsive to social and economic needs, such as sustaining a democratic society. Moreover, there were concerns about low pupil motivation in attending school and for reading and learning in general (MONE, 2005a). Furthermore, the achievement level of Turkish pupils in various international tests (such as TIMSS, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS] and PISA) was found unsatisfactory, as they performed well below international averages in these tests (Akşit, 2007).

According to the Ministry of National Education (MONE), a new educational approach had also become imperative due to the new trends and demands that were emerging in the global environment. The most critical dimensions of change include globalisation, the evolution of the knowledge-based economy, and the information and communication revolution. Knowledge accumulation and its application have become important determinants of national economic development and competitiveness in international markets. These major changes have influenced the content and the processes of education, and have made it necessary to reform educational thinking and practices (MONE, 2005a).

*In the contemporary world, knowledge is produced and reproduced at a high speed. In such a world, the future of an individual and a society is dependent on its ability to reach, use and produce knowledge. The development of such skills and their life-long sustainability requires a modern education system based on knowledge production, not one based on memorisation (MONE, 2005a, p. 14).*

Consequently, curriculum reform was considered crucial, as it was regarded as a prerequisite for sustainable development and for protecting and improving the country's competitiveness in the globalising world. MONE also acknowledges that educational reforms in a variety of East Asian, North American and the European Union (EU) countries have been influential. The role of the EU, in particular, was prominent. As a candidate for EU membership, Turkey has been adopting related legislation and undertaking reforms for harmonisation (Akşit, 2007). In this framework, adopting a competency-based curriculum, together with a student-centred pedagogy (SCP) was regarded as an important step in harmonising the Turkish education system with that of the EU countries.

## The structure of the new curriculum

The *Curriculum 2004* introduced changes in content load and its organisation, pedagogical approach, and assessment methods. With the new curriculum, the authorities aimed to reduce the amount of content and the number of concepts taught. Furthermore, in the new programmes, a thematic approach was adopted. Although, in the previous curriculum, terms such as 'goal', 'objective', and 'targeted attitudes' were frequently used, references to 'competencies' is often made in the new curriculum (Educational Reform Initiative, 2005). The new curriculum places special emphasis on development and reinforcement of eight core competencies, which are further defined and operationalised in each subject. Between the first and fifth grade, the development of the following eight competencies was prioritised: critical thinking, creativity, communication, problem solving, research, using information technologies, entrepreneurship, and language skills in Turkish (MONE, 2005a).

In terms of pedagogical approach, the new curriculum adopts SCP and suggests new ways of learning and teaching. The aim is to move away from a teacher-centred or subject-centred approach to a student-centred model. The new educational programmes recommend that the majority of the lesson time should be spent on classroom activities. The role of teachers has been modified in the sense that rather than directly providing information, they are expected to facilitate, guide and supervise pupils' learning processes. Pupils' roles and responsibilities are also redefined as they are expected to assume more responsibility for their own learning, and participate in learning and teaching activities by raising questions, handling materials, developing projects, doing research, and cooperating and discussing with their classmates and teachers. The new curriculum also advocates increased use of learning and teaching materials and aims to stimulate the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Furthermore, assessment methods have been modified and a range of alternative methods has been suggested. The new approach, called 'authentic assessment', aims to assess the learning processes of pupils. In addition to traditional assessment methods such as oral and written tests and quizzes, a number of alternative methods are suggested, including self-evaluation, evaluation of classmates, project and performance assignments, observation forms and pupil portfolios (MONE, 2009a; MONE, 2009b; MONE, 2009c; MONE, 2005a).

## Turkey's exam-oriented education system

Understanding the implementation of a competency-based curriculum in Turkey requires a closer look at how examinations are embedded in the Turkish education system. Indeed, the Turkish education system is defined as a highly exam-oriented system. Pupils are assessed at primary eight through a nationwide exam. The performance at this exam determines (to a large extent) to which type of secondary school a pupil can be admitted. All pupils completing primary education are entitled to attend secondary schools which offer four years of education (MONE, 2005b). However, competition is intense for *Anatolian high schools and Science high schools* due to their reputation for offering high quality education and for providing education in foreign languages, mainly in English. Likewise, admission to higher education programmes is also governed by a highly competitive nationwide exam. For instance, in 2008, around 1.6 million students registered for the university entrance exam, and only around 265,000 of them were placed at higher education institutions that offered Bachelor's degree programmes (ÖSYM, 2008).

Due to its exam-oriented education system, private tutoring is a widespread phenomenon in Turkey. It takes mainly three forms: the first type is one-to-one instruction by a teacher either at the teacher's house or at the pupil's house. The second type is provided at primary schools by teachers after standard lesson hours. The third type is undertaken by profit-oriented, school-like organisations, where teachers with professional teacher training teach pupils in classroom settings. This type of private tutoring is the most widespread form of private tutoring in Turkey. Pupils attend these centres outside formal education hours. Classrooms are much smaller (up to 20 pupils), and depending on the quality of the centres, they are often equipped with better educational materials (Tansel and Bircan, 2006). The content of learning materials in these institutions is entirely determined by the content of examinations, and teaching is geared to achieving high scores in the nationwide exams. According to the statistics of the Private Tutoring Centres Association, there were 4,222 private tutoring centres in May 2009. The number of pupils attending these centres was 1.2 million, and the number of teachers working in these centres was around 51,000 in the same year (ÖZDEBİR, 2009).

### Implementation process

Once the preparation of curriculum documents was finalised, the revised curriculum was piloted in the 2004/2005 academic year in 120 primary schools in nine provinces across Turkey. In the following academic year, the nationwide implementation started at the first five grades at the same time (Bikmaz, 2006); while at upper grades (6-8), the implementation was phased over three consecutive years. Teachers who were teaching at the selected pilot schools were informed about the curriculum change in August 2004, and were invited to participate in an in-service training in the following month, just before the start of the new academic year. Academics from a number of universities in Ankara introduced the new curriculum in a two-week training programme. In one school that was established as a model school to pilot the new curriculum, teachers received intensive training for two months. There was a subtle acknowledgement on the part of official authorities that there were limits to what they could achieve in a two-week training programme. However, they believed that it provided a solid foundation for the piloting process.

Nevertheless, teachers who participated in this study appeared to be highly critical of the training. Very few teachers recognised the benefits of the in-service training; it was viewed as a general introduction to the new curriculum and some sessions were found particularly helpful. However, the majority believed that the training was severely inadequate to prepare teachers for the implementation process. Teachers claimed that the duration of the training was too short, and the quality was low as it was too theoretical and lacked practical guidance. Teachers also alleged that some of the lecturers were reading from their notes or power-point presentations, and they did not seem to have a good understanding of the new curriculum. Moreover, during the lessons, there were often heated discussions on the reform proposals. Therefore, a significant amount of time was spent on discussions and protests between teachers and academics about whether such changes were indeed necessary or would be beneficial to the Turkish education system. Hence, there was less time left for actually comprehending and understanding the proposed changes, and learning how they should be effectively implemented in classroom settings.

Teachers unanimously believed that once the academic year started in 2004, they would feel ill-equipped to implement the new curriculum as the training left them with several unanswered questions, confusions and uncertainties. Many also noted feelings of panic and inadequacy (see Altun and Şahin, 2009). These teachers still considered themselves in a better position compared to teachers in non-pilot schools since the second group received an even shorter training period. In general, the duration and quality of training was perceived as a false start in curriculum implementation. In retrospect, teachers suggested that perhaps one of the most important shortcomings of the training was failure to adequately explain the rationale and philosophy of the revised curriculum. They believed that this inadequacy has resulted in less-than-desired implementation outcomes and, in several cases, strong resistance to change.

## TEACHER VIEWS ON CHANGES IN CURRICULUM CONTENT LOAD

Teachers who participated in this study unanimously believed that the previous curriculum was overloaded with information, which was sometimes outdated and redundant. High content coverage requirements resulted in rote learning, stress and overloading of pupils. Likewise, teachers felt pressured to complete a loaded curriculum in a prescribed period. Hence, there was a general acknowledgement among teachers that change was urgently needed. Nevertheless, teachers had different views on what kind of change was required and whether the changes introduced by the new curriculum were indeed helping to overcome previous inadequacies or were producing new ones.

With the exception of two teachers, they all agreed that content load in the revised curriculum was reduced substantially. Yet, their opinions differed on the appropriateness of these reductions. Some teachers, few in number, approved of some of the reductions and disagreed with others. For instance, they criticised omissions in the teaching of Turkish grammar or Turkish history and culture in Social Studies lessons. A larger group of teachers thought that the new curriculum was adequate for this age group. Finally, the biggest group within the sample (more than half of the teachers who participated in this research) appeared to be very critical of the new curriculum, believing that the content load was reduced too much and that the development of competencies was emphasised at the expense of knowledge acquisition. Both the opinions of the teachers welcoming change and those resisting it are further elaborated below.

### Welcoming change

The teachers who approved reductions in content load believed that children up to grade five did not need to acquire much information. They emphasised the role of education in behavioural and attitudinal development. Therefore, an increased focus on select competencies and skills, such as communication, oral and written expression, and confidence building was considered appropriate for this age group. In addition, they noted that the content load was reduced at lower grades (up to grade five) since some subjects were moved to upper grades (between six and eight). Indeed, primary and middle schools were combined in 1997, and compulsory education was increased from five to eight years (Eurydice,



2009). However, the curriculum was not revised accordingly. Therefore, there remained a number of overlaps and discontinuities between lower and upper grades which the new curriculum attempted to eliminate.

These teachers suggested that lessons were now easier and more enjoyable. They believed that since pupils were required to learn less at a given grade, they learned better and they retained more of what they had learned. In addition, teachers maintained that the success rate had increased since the majority of pupils were able to accomplish competencies defined for their grade level. For instance, in the previous system, only a few pupils could master required competencies in Mathematics at grade one or two, and the rest struggled to follow higher-achieving children. Yet, in the revised curriculum, the number of those competencies was reduced, resulting in an increased number of 'successful' pupils. The teachers also highlighted the futility of overloading children with too much information: "We used to teach them about countless wars in the Ottoman period or wars before that time; the number of dead, the number of wounded soldiers [...] Nobody remembers those, it is not even noteworthy to remember them."

These teachers emphasised that, during in-service training, they were often reminded by their trainers that the new curriculum dramatically altered the role of the pupil and the role of the teacher in classroom settings. Their role as a teacher was no longer imparting knowledge, but teaching children about the ways to seek and attain knowledge. The following statements of the teachers are illustrative in this sense:

*Information is not important. When children's intellectual capacities improve, they can and will learn themselves. What is important and essential is to teach them how to find information.*

*You can find knowledge everywhere. Knowledge is abundant in our age; we are flooded with knowledge. What is critical is to have the skills to attain knowledge that one desires to have.*

*If we teach pupils, it would result in rote learning, yet the new curriculum aims to minimise it. Instead, if we teach pupils how they can find information and if they do, we believe they would learn better.*

*The dilemma is whether teachers should give information or pupils themselves should seek information from other educational sources. This curriculum aims to promote the latter.*

## Opposing change

In contrast, the majority of teachers who participated in this study believed that, with the new curriculum, the amount of content load shifted from one end of the spectrum to the other, like a pendulum swing. Hence, they were convinced that the content load was dramatically reduced; the subjects were either shifted too much to upper grades or several of them were discarded altogether. They complained that the lessons were entirely based on pupil activities. Indeed, the curriculum documents also clearly suggest that most of the lesson time should be spent on classroom activities (MONE, 2005a). In this respect, a teacher complained:

*We keep doing all sorts of activities without even knowing what the pupils are supposed to learn from them. Pupils are active for the sake of being active. They are active since activity is cool, since it is the 'trendy thing' to do.*

Such teachers believed that the quality of textbooks was very low. According to them, the textbooks provided insufficient information on subject matters; the themes were listed, but there was little content on them, or they were treated superficially. Moreover, teachers reported a lack of cohesion and insufficient integration among themes within the textbooks as well as problems with chronological order (see also İflazoğlu and Çaydaş, 2005). While explaining their views on the textbooks, teachers often used statements such as 'the books are empty', 'they are not even serious' or 'the books are a joke'. Indeed, such comments were common not only among teachers who criticised reductions in content load but among others as well. Consequently, these teachers believed that the lessons were very boring and superficial. They acknowledged that pupils were achieving higher grades now, and that perhaps the students felt more successful and happy. Yet, the teachers questioned: 'Are they really more successful?' Apparently, many of them did not think so, as they seemed entirely concerned with pupils' academic success:

*These pupils are not more successful. At school, they are less challenged intellectually, so their cognitive development is also slower. This is a real pity, since the new generation of children is actually more intelligent.*

The teachers were also highly concerned about what they called 'the exam dilemma'. The revised curriculum now emphasised the development of competencies. However, the nationwide exams, held at grade eight, have traditionally evaluated pupils on the basis of their knowledge acquisition. The exams have not been aligned yet to the competency-based curriculum, leading to mismatches between the objectives of the curriculum and the exam system. Therefore, teachers believed that since pupils receive less information, mainstream schools fail to prepare them adequately for the exams and the demand for private tutoring increased. Some schools reported that the number of pupils attending private tutoring institutions has doubled in recent years. Such concerns were not only expressed by teachers, but also even with greater concern by head teachers. One head teacher, for instance, exclaimed that:

*The government is not at peace with itself. It introduces a curriculum, which emphasises competencies and skills and yet keeps an examination system that assesses knowledge acquisition. Then how can we implement this curriculum effectively, with the full knowledge that our pupils want to be admitted to good quality secondary schools, while the education we offer does not prepare them for that goal?*

Indeed, teachers noted that quite a number of parents voiced similar concerns and were alarmed by what 'little knowledge' their children were attaining at school. Depending on their economic situation, some parents reacted by sending their children to private tutoring institutions so that their children would be better prepared for the exams, and change more successfully from primary to secondary schools, and from secondary schools to universities. All teachers and head teachers in visited schools noted that increasing numbers of pupils at upper grades had started to attend private tutoring institutions. According to estimates provided by the school management, in some classes up to 60 per cent of pupils attended

private tutoring centres. The participation levels were lower in schools situated in low-income neighbourhoods.

The expansion of private tutoring raised a number of apprehensions among teachers. They believed that attending both mainstream schools and private tutoring institutions consumed the majority of children's time and left little room for play and interaction with peers. Parents even seemed reluctant to permit their children to participate in sports and cultural activities organised at school, since such activities were regarded as a waste of time. Moreover, attending both mainstream schools and private tutoring centres placed children under considerable pressure and stress, negatively influencing their social and psychological development. As explained by a teacher:

*The children are studying all the time. They do not play. They keep on reading and answering multiple-choice questions. This is very unhealthy. Their mental health is compromised.*

Furthermore, private tutoring interfered with schooling; it created disparities between children who received private tutoring and those who did not, and it dramatically increased the rate of absenteeism in the months close to the nationwide examinations. Additionally, parents and pupils often believed that the quality of instruction was better at private tutoring centres; hence, their respect for and confidence in mainstream schools was lower.

These teachers were also concerned about the consequences of private tutoring on intensifying educational inequalities within the system. They believed that the revised curriculum aggravated existing inequalities since it increased the demand for private tutoring and reduced the chances of pupils succeeding in the exams without supplementary private coaching. Private tutoring institutions often charge high admission costs; hence, they are beyond the reach of households with average income. Studies have shown that households with higher income and higher parental education levels invest more resources in private tutoring, and private tutoring expenditures are higher in urban areas in comparison to rural areas (Tansel and Bircan, 2006).

Teachers noted that in the previous system, there was substantial information contained within the books used. Therefore, highly motivated, intelligent, and driven pupils could still succeed in the entrance exams by mastering the books, even if they did not attend any private tutoring centres. One teacher exclaimed with frustration:

*Now, the books only have titles, they are full of inquisitive questions and activities which assume that pupils already know the content or they would gather background information from other sources. Yet, the books are the only educational material for pupils in poor urban neighbourhoods or for the majority of pupils in rural areas.*

Therefore, teachers believed that in the absence of private tutoring, pupils from underprivileged backgrounds are destined to fail in the exams. The quality of secondary school education has a direct impact on access to universities and employment opportunities in the labour market. Therefore, there was a strong conviction among these teachers that the educational gap between income groups, and between urban and rural areas would be further accentuated, leading to an increasingly stratified society.

## TEACHING PRACTICES

Teachers responded to the inadequacy of curriculum materials by the use of supplementary resources which they gathered from bookstores or from educational websites on the internet. Some also benefited from old textbooks on various subjects. Since teachers and pupils were not permitted to use books other than the new textbooks within classrooms, teachers photocopied these materials to share with pupils or fellow teachers. Thus, some actors who participated in this research called the revised curriculum 'photocopy-centred learning' as opposed to 'student-centred learning', which the new curriculum claims to be. For instance, according to the majority of teachers, the textbook for Turkish dealt inadequately with grammar. They argued that the omission of grammar was a major shortcoming as children were not learning their mother tongue properly and were making numerous spelling and grammatical mistakes. Hence, the majority of teachers were required to teach grammar as well.

Another example concerns topics related to the life and contributions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. Some teachers explicitly mentioned that the new curriculum intentionally omitted topics relating to him for ideological reasons. Therefore, they tried to add new content materials relating to Atatürk in order to counterbalance the omissions in the curriculum. Similarly, teachers were very critical of the new Social Studies textbook, as they believed that the book lacked cohesion and omitted significant information on Turkey's geography and history. Teachers responded to these perceived inadequacies by providing direct information through short presentations and, in some cases, requiring pupils to take notes. These efforts increased teacher workload and intensified demands on lesson time.

Some teachers voiced their concerns to the inspectors visiting their classrooms. However, the inspectors advised them to stick to the curriculum and not to supplement it with additional sources so that the outcomes of the revised curriculum could be clearly observed. If teachers complemented the curriculum, the inspectors argued, the curriculum might then appear perfect. Yet, these teachers were not convinced. They believed that they must not lose a whole generation of pupils for the sake of such an experimental learning experience.

When teachers' statements and claims were compared with their practices observed during lesson observations, a slightly different picture emerged. In the presence of a researcher, teachers seemed to be more concerned with demonstrating that they were capable of practising recommended teaching and learning methods in the new curriculum. Therefore, more than half of the teachers emphasised student talk and activity during lesson observations. This was more discernable at grade five, during Social Studies lessons. Teachers frequently asked questions and gave opportunities to as many pupils as possible. In some other lessons, children had individual or group presentations on a topic that they had been asked to prepare earlier. Therefore, in most of the cases, teachers briefly introduced the topics and explained some of the concepts that came up during question and answer dialogues. Nevertheless, since the vast majority of teachers were observed only once, lesson observations cannot be taken as a rigorous indicator of how and what teachers teach in an entire semester. What is more, the presence of a researcher obviously altered classroom dynamics for both teachers and pupils.

Not only teachers who were critical of the changes in the curriculum content, but also teachers who had a positive view on the changes, appeared to supplement the curriculum with additional knowledge for a variety of reasons. Their main motives are outlined below.

## TEACHER MOTIVES FOR SUPPLEMENTING THE CURRICULUM

### The 'emptiness' of the books

Several teachers noted that effective implementation of the revised curriculum made it necessary to provide additional information to pupils. For instance, the activities in the pupil workbook assumed that children had background knowledge on the themes studied. However, the books did not provide that kind of information; they only made reference to the themes and introduced them in a rather superficial and casual way. Hence, teachers felt the need to provide a proper introduction to the topics. Otherwise, pupils were not able to carry out the activities at all or they did not learn much.

### The myth of research assignments

The curriculum advises exploratory work and research to be conducted by pupils so that they would be prepared for lessons and their research skills in general would be enhanced. However, according to many teachers, in reality this did not work in the ways intended by the policy makers. Very often, when children were given research assignments, they delegated the assignments to their parents or others who could do the research and prepare a printout. Another common practice was to visit stationery shops that had internet access. Children would briefly explain the topic to shopkeepers and shopkeepers would in turn do a quick internet search and print the results. This practice became so common that stationery shops had advertisements in their windows, informing prospective clients that they did research assignments for primary school children. Parents, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods, were increasingly annoyed by the financial implications of such practices. Teachers noted with much frustration that children did not even read these printouts before coming to class. They suggested that only a few pupils did research and read the findings. Consequently, the flawed result of providing research assignments forced several teachers to provide more direct information to their pupils.

### Preparing pupils for nationwide exams

The majority of interviewed teachers taught children from low socio-economic background. Teachers seemed very conscious of their pupils' educational disadvantages and, as explained above, they believed that the revised curriculum further exacerbated their disadvantages. Unlike children from middle to upper-income groups, their pupils had fewer opportunities to supplement their knowledge at good-quality private tutoring institutions or at home. Therefore, some of the teachers supplemented the curriculum content in order to better equip their pupils for the exams. They explicitly noted that they would stick to the curriculum once they were convinced that the entrance exams were no longer assessing

knowledge acquisition. They acknowledged improvements in the first Seviye Belirleme Sınavı (SBS, Level Determination Examination in English) in 2008, but they needed to see how the type of questions would evolve throughout the years. They stressed the importance of aligning the exam questions with the philosophy and objectives of the new curriculum.

## Competition among teachers and schools

It is important to note that teachers' concerns about the academic achievement of their pupils and performance at entrance exams were not only motivated by personal integrity or accountability, but were also closely related to their own performance as teachers and the success of their schools. Very often, teachers feel competition among colleagues for being one of the most highly esteemed teachers and popular among pupils and parents. They are informally evaluated by their attitudes towards pupils (e.g. warmth, caring behaviour, genuine concern, content knowledge, structure) and towards fellow teachers and parents (e.g. being respectful, cooperative, open and friendly). Another very important dimension of such evaluation is the general academic success of their pupils and their performance level at nation-wide exams. Likewise, the perceptions of a school's success are also very much dependent on the number of its graduates who are admitted to prestigious secondary schools. Consequently, even teachers who believed that a reduction in content load was appropriate tended to provide their pupils with extra content due to the pressure of competition among teachers and schools. This illustrates one of the significant ways as to how the introduction of a competency-based curriculum influenced teachers' work in an exam-oriented education system. They experience the contradictions between the curriculum expectations and the realities of an exam-oriented education system, and feel pressured to respond to both demands. Some teachers, in fact, suggested that their workload has increased as a result, while some other teachers, who were not too bothered by the competitive pressure, suggested that the new curriculum simplified their work.

## Strengthening national identity

Some of the teachers believed that, in the past, children learned a great deal about their country, about its history, geography, and people. Yet, they consider that, now, pupils hear about these topics very superficially and, for example, they do not learn much about regions besides their own. As a result, some teachers believed that the new generation of pupils tended to have a more diffuse sense of national identity. Efforts to teach more history, particularly the history of the Republic and the life of Atatürk seemed to be motivated by such concerns.

It was possible to find similar concerns among parents as well. Indeed, one parent applied to the court for the cancellation of new education programmes on the grounds that there were strong religious influences in the textbooks. In March 2009, Danıştay (The Presidency of the Council of State), decided that the education programmes for "Life Knowledge" (for grades one, two and three) were not sufficient to stimulate a democratic culture and patriotism. Therefore, the programmes were abolished. Likewise, the education programmes for Turkish at grades one and two were considered to be 'not recommended', and for grades four and five, they were 'recommended' on the condition that necessary amendments would be made (Öğretmenlersitesi, 2009).

## Old habits

Some teachers also mentioned that teachers who were relatively senior in age and who had many years of experience (i.e. 20 years or more) continued with extensive lecturing because they perceived change as ‘tiring’ and ‘demanding’, and had difficulty in changing their traditional teaching styles. These teachers were also ‘problematized’ during interviews with policy makers, suggesting that once they have left the system through retirement, the new curriculum will be more broadly embraced by teachers. Indeed, some of the more experienced teachers explicitly noted that they continued to transmit information out of old habit. That was what they had been doing for many years and what they believed was real teaching. Otherwise, they thought they were not doing their job properly, betraying their own personal principles and the standards of their profession.

## CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that the teachers who participated in this study implemented the new curriculum for primary schools in accordance with their beliefs on the benefits and costs of change. The majority of teachers did not approve of the substantial reductions in content load due to concerns about pupils’ academic success (also identified in Korkmaz, 2008), nationwide examinations, increasing demand for private tutoring, deepening educational inequalities, and development of a diffuse sense of national identity among new generations. Therefore, these teachers tended to supplement the curriculum with additional information gathered from other educational resources and they continued to impart knowledge at a level that they believed was adequate.

Moreover, this chapter has shown that when teachers agreed with the reduction in content load, some of them still chose to impart more knowledge than recommended by the curriculum due to competing beliefs and pressures related to their ‘performance’. In this case, concerns about the achievement levels of pupils at nationwide exams, and the success and status of teachers and schools were significant. Therefore, the study challenges the stereotypical and unfair characterisation of teachers who resist reform proposals, and argues that teachers demonstrate *principled resistance* when they perceive proposed curriculum changes as detrimental to their pupils and to the society in general (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2006; Gitlin and Margonis, 1995).

In addition, the findings suggest that teacher resistance should not be viewed as a ‘problem’ since it provides opportunities for policy makers to reflect on the reform proposals and to learn from teacher responses. “Not only can teacher resistance to innovation make good sense, but also, under certain conditions rarely supported by standardised reform, it can evoke a resilient, even activist, self-renewing response to change otherwise perceived to be disruptive or harmful” (Giles, 2006, p. 179). According to Achinstein and Ogawa (2006), teachers’ resistance can play a crucial role in reform initiatives, although it works against the implementation of the reform in the short run. Fullan (2007) also suggests that change does not necessarily mean progress. Therefore, resistance to change may be the most appropriate response when there is disagreement about an innovation.

A number of other conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. First, the findings suggest that some of the assumptions made in the revised curriculum are not in line with pupils' backgrounds and the realities of the Turkish education system. For instance, the curriculum states that in the contemporary world, the future of individuals and societies is dependent on competencies to access, use, and produce knowledge (MONE, 2009c; MONE, 2005a). Research assignments were designed as an important tool to improve pupils' competencies to access and retrieve relevant information, and to encourage self-directed learning. However, in reality, it did not work according to the expectations, as pupils delegated their responsibility to others. Moreover, research assignments falsely assume that children have access to the internet at home or in their neighbourhoods, or have access to written educational resources. These assumptions are in contradiction with the realities of many households that do not have computers, an adequate amount of reference books, or financial resources for frequent visits to internet cafés. Furthermore, research assignments require parental involvement, yet parents do not always have time, nor the educational background and commitment to help their children.

Second, some of the principles of the curriculum are in contradiction with the highly exam-oriented education system in Turkey. The curriculum puts emphasis on the development of skills and competencies, yet the education system retains a highly competitive exam structure which primarily assesses knowledge acquisition. Substantial reduction in textbook content seems to lessen schools' capacity to prepare their pupils adequately for the exams. As a result, parental confidence and respect for mainstream public schools appears to suffer. In addition, the demand for private tutoring has increased and this has led to a *de facto* privatisation of the education system as some critics argue. Consequently, private tutoring in Turkey maintains and exacerbates social inequalities and stratification, just as it does in several other countries where private tutoring continues to be a widespread phenomenon, such as Hong Kong, China, Japan, Singapore or Romania (see Bray, 2005).

Third, as illustrated in the previous two points, the findings suggest that the revised curriculum might aggravate social inequalities, because children who have better access to cultural, economic, and social resources are in an advantageous position. Therefore, the new curriculum appears to reproduce or even aggravate existing social and economic inequalities rather than helping to ameliorate them. Such concerns were also reported in other contexts. For instance, the authorities have attempted to introduce a competency-based curriculum in China. However, these reforms have raised serious equity issues in the country as examination-oriented education has long been deeply embedded in Chinese culture and society (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

Finally, the study highlights a number of misconceptions regarding teaching and learning. It seems that some advocates of the new curriculum, as well as some teachers, perceive teaching and learning as two different processes, almost as dichotomies. Then, one might ask, "What is teaching if not bringing about learning?" (Alexander, 2008, p. 73). In some of the curricular changes in the past decade, 'knowledge' is almost seen as diametrically opposed to 'skills' or 'competencies' (Alexander, 2008). Unfortunately, such a dichotomous understanding seemed to be strong among the Turkish policy makers who were involved in curriculum reform and some of the teachers who participated in this study. There is no



doubt that education has important roles to play in developing select competencies and skills of pupils, but such a role should not be assumed to the detriment of education's other important objectives, that of improving pupils' understanding and knowledge base. Young (2009) also points to the dangers of 'emptying the content' which he identifies as a trend in the educational policies of many countries. Such 'dangers' appear to be a serious concern for many educators in Turkey as well.

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