The Content Analysis of the News in the National Papers Concerning the Renewed Primary Curriculum

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Abstract

The news in the national papers has an important role to inform the people about the content of new primary school curriculum. This study investigated the way of function with the comparison of the studies in the litera-ture. The news concerning the renewed curriculum appearing in the national media in the period between 2004 and 2007 was obtained through document analysis and were compared to scientific studies in terms of consis-tency. For our purposes, 484 news articles and columns from14 newspapers which were grouped into 3 catego-ries were examined through document analysis. Consequently, it was found that the highest rate was in the year 2004 and that the rate of concepts decreased as the years passed by. The information on the novel curriculum was brief statements made by officials and was in the form of headings in the early years; yet in the following years such knowledge as the philosophy of the curriculum, its being student-centred as well as details of mea-surement and evaluation was presented. In the literature, findings related with inadequacy and content/ design categories were seen taking place heavily.

Key Words

Primary Curriculum, National Media, Content Analysis.

In the era when science and technology is advanc-ing rapidly, the development of societies at the same speed is possible only through a well-quality system of education. With an educational system which is obsolete, which does not suit the students and the circumstances and which is static, quality is impossible. Attention has been attracted to the curriculum in studies of quality in education, and the importance of curriculum development has been stressed. Countries which cannot reform of development are candidates to be undeveloped (Ayten, 2006).

Constructivism (Henson, 2006) has recently influ-enced the Turkish educational system as a develop-ment affecting curriculum development activities. Accordingly, an activity of changing the curricu-lum for the primary school subjects of Social Stud-ies, Science, Turkish, Mathematics and Life Sci-ences was started by the Ministry of Education. The changed curriculum was gradually implemented in 2005 across the country following the pilot applica-tion conducted in 2004.

A curriculum is all the situations concerning expe-riences that are facilitated through planned activi-ties. Saylor and Lewis (1981) define a curriculum as the plan of providing individuals with learning experiences (cited in Demirel, 2004). Gagne, on the other hand, describes the topic field as the con-tent, and statement of objectives as the observable behavior; and suggests that arranging the content and the pre-evaluation of students' introductory skills should be handled together. The researcher bases the curriculum on concrete output or experi-ences rather than considering it to be an abstract document. A curriculum is the whole of dynamic relations between objectives, content, educational states, and evaluation. In designing all these, sci-ence, society, the learner (individual), topic field and nature are considered as the sources (Demirel,

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2004; Sömez, 2001). Erden (1998) describes curriculum as the whole planned educational activities organized according to aims of education institution. In this respect, a curriculum is one of the most important components of education. Therefore, it is an important issue which interests all the society. Society as a whole do not have the opportunity to follow the developments in education through numerical data published by the Ministry of Education or through scientific work produced by academic staff. As stated by Ben Bagdikian (1971) *"A great majority of people cannot learn or hear about happenings in the world if media does not publicise. Therefore, most of the event we know of is what we are presented by the media, what we only find in the media; in other words, what the media gives us as the news."*

Media has great importance in leading societies and shaping the culture, and thus spreading and transfering it down to the next generations (Akdoğan, 1994). When seen from the perspective of such influences as instilling, the beliefs and ideas or attracting attention and guiding, the media is considered as an influential component of power (McQuail, 1994). Today, people acqire knowledge regarding a good lifestyle and the policy of the society through what they watch on TV, listen to on the radio, and read in newspapers; they also shape their attitudes towards others accordingly. In other words, the media affects indiciduals' worldview, attitudes, and behaviors; and change individuals in a certain way through messages. The point common to all the vehicles of the media is that they affect people's thoughts and enable them to arrive at a synthesis, and provide them a shared form of behavior (Terkan, 1999). Newspapers, one of the important components of the media, are the vehicles of printed media which collect; compile, and process the news and the thoughts and communicate them to others. Newspapers illuminating and leading the public opinion and also influenced by the public opinion differ from other vehicles of the media in that they communicate the true and fresh news, ideas and thoughts in "printed" form (Akdoğan, 1994). Undoubtedly, televisions are in every home now. The widespread use of televisions has reduced interest in newspapers. Although people watch TV, they read newspapers in order to go into the details and understand the importance of the news items (Yetik, 1991). Moreover, the availability of various newspapers on the Internet with no charge has increased the effectiveness of them. Many news items concerning the whole society are in newspapers. They have special pages for educa-

tion, there are authors who write only about education, and some of them give extras about education. Those educational articles published in newspapers are available to great masses of people since they are also on the Internet at the same time. Besides, even those who cannot afford to buy a newspaper can read them online. From this perspective, the articles may be said to have great influence over people. Because the Ministry of Education is aware of the situation, a special unit for following the media has been formed by the ministry. The unit follows the articles related to education, the ministry and its units; and when the news is misleading, it responds to the news through the official web site under the title of "informing." Indeed, here such questions should be asked: "which issues related to education does the press use as the news item?" "Are those news items written by educational experts as differently from other news items? Or are they written by people with no knowledge of education?" "How is a novelty in education evaluated by experts of education and how do newspapers reflect it?" The number of such questions could be increased and each of them is a topic of research. However, this research aims at researching the way novel primary education curriculum-which were put into pilot application in 2004- was reflected in the press in the 2004-2007 period as well as the concepts that were highlighted, and comparing the findings with the findings of academic studies.

Method

This research employs a qualitative design; more specifically, it is a case study. According to Yin (1984), case study is a research method (1) which studies a phenomenon within its real life framework, (2) in which boundaries between the fact and the content are not clear, and (3) which is used when more than one evidence or source of data is is available (cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Case study is a research strategy aiming to understand the social phenomenon of one single or a small group in its natural environment. The purpose is to make sure that it is described in detail (Bloor & Wood, 2006). That is, case study is a method of research which is based on the "how" and why" questions and which enables the researcher to investigate an uncontrollable phenomenon or event in depth. Cases may appear in various forms. An individual, an institution, a group, or an environment may be an example for a case to be studied. The selection of the case is important for the purpose of the study (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2007; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

The shared aim in case studies that are conducted in qualitative and quantitative approaches is to reach conclusions for a certain case. The most essential property of qualitative case study is that it investigates one or more cases in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this sense, the renewed primary school curriculum which was put into application in the 2004-2007 period was designed as a case and the news articles appearing in the national press were considered as the phenomenon; and thus attempts were made to reach realistic conclusions regarding the case.

Study Group

The renewed primary school curriculum was put into pilot application in 2004 and it was implemented in schools all over Turkey in 2006 following the modifications according to the feedback. In order to determine views in the national media concerning the curriculum before and after the application and to reveal the scientific content of those views, the research data were restricted to newspaper articles and columns about the renewed curriculum which were published between the years 2004 and 2007.Frequently, the investigation of a restricted system is described in case studies (Bloor & Wood, 2006). In this sense, "the years 2004-2007" and "the renewed primary school curriculum" were considered as the restricted system for the content analysis, and 484 news items were studied for the purpose.

Procedure

More than one method of data collection are employed in general in case studies; and in this way effort is made to reach wide variety of data confirming each other. The techniques may be interviews, observations, document analysis, or audio, or video records (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In quantitative studies, to strengthen internal validity and to prevent researcher's prejudice, observation and interviews should be done by more than one researchers (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008). The data were obtained through document analysis of newspaper articles which were collected from news items under the categories of (1) serious, (2) popular), and (3) sensational which were published in the national media in the 2004-2007 period. Thus, 172 news items in 2004,

167 news items in 2005, 85 news items in 2006, and 60 news items in 2007 were analysed in relation to the renewed curriculum in 143 newspapers (namely; Akşam, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Ortadoğu, Posta, Radikal, Sabah, Star, Türkiye, Vakit, Vatan, Yeni Asya, Yeni Şafak, and Zaman). Between 2004-2007, a total circulation of these newspapers cover the universe% 65-70 (Basın İlan Kurumu, 2010).

Data Analysis

Relations analysis, a technique of content analysis, was used in the current research. Description of a case, researching the theme, collecting data regarding the themes and comparison of the themes are usually conducted by the researcher in case studies (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Texts forming the data base in the research were analysed through relational analysis, a technique of content analysis which was developed by Osgood (1959) and which examines the relations between elements rather than elements one by one in a message. Relational analysis aims to determine what collocates with what, and what kind of relations are available between various elements of a message in a whole (that is, a text); but it does not aim to find out the number of times an element appears (cited in Bilgin, 2006). The following steps suggested by Osgood for relational analysis were used in the analysis of news items appearing in newspapers with regard to the renewed curriculum in the 2004-2007 periods:

- Determining the units of record (for instance key words), and categorising if necessary;

- Dividing the message or the text into pieces (units of context) (the units are sentences, paragraphs, a day in a diary, every 120-200 words in a novel, etc);

- Encoding: determining whether or not units of recording are available in each piece;

- Calculating the frequencies of collocating and showing them on a relational matrix;

- Representing and interpreting the results (cited in Bilgin, 2006).

Case studies take very complex research content into consideration for especially experimental and review studies. Even though we have a research strategy which is valid according to our trues, quantitative techniques containing other methods of research beside this can also be employed in case studies (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Conclusions and Discussion

The highest number of concepts concerning the renewed primary education curriculum was used in the year 2004 in the national media, and the frequency of use of the concepts reduced as the years passed by. This result shows that the number of news items published in 2004 was higher than in the other years. Knowledge about the curriculum was limited to the statement made by bureaucrats and news headings in the form of slogans with no details in the early years whereas the news about the philosophy of the curriculum, its student-centeredness, and details of measurement and evaluation was also included in the following years. However, there was no one single attitude towards the issue in the press; instead, various reactions were given. For instance some of the media gave positive news under such slogans as "revolution in education", "reform in education", "back to the beginning", "a through/ from top to bottom renewal", "hopeful and exciting "while some others gave it negatively under headings such as "the new curriculum is weak"; and still others presented discussions of the curriculum under such headings as "there is no curriculum, but fight". In general, properties such as learning through experience- a property of constructivist theory, allocating no place to memorisation, student-centred education, and a questioning individual are emphasised in the press.

Whereas the news items published in the 2004-2005 period made the category of content/design of the curriculum more remarkable, those published in 2006 laid emphasis to inadequacies, and those in 2007 tended to be about testing/evaluation. Those were the results to demonstrate that news items in 2004-2005 period focused on explaining the philosophy of the curriculum, beginning with 2006 discussions were ignited due to feedback received following the application; and in 2007 news concerning the high school entrance exam taken by students who had been education through the new curriculum was in newspapers. Apart from that, news in the parents category was published in the minimum level each year. This state showed that parents, who were the application component of the curriculum, were not sufficiently informed by the national media in becoming conscious and participating in the process.

On studying the correlations between categories and years, high correlation was found between the categories in 2004-2005 years whereas the correlations were low in the 2006-2007 period. This result shows that news items published in the early years were highly correlated. Besides, the fact that inadequacy category was also highly correlated showed that criticism and discussions regarding the renewed curriculum (such as uncertainty, teacher training, physical conditions, the distribution of course books) were also available in the 2004-2005 period. However, generally speaking, concepts for the inadequacy category were in a higher rate in the 2006-2007 periods than in other years.

In news items in the *students category*, it was pointed out that students were in the center (active), they were questioning, criticising, researching, asking questions, able to express the self, thinking, creative, solving problems, making decisions, handling problems without violence, communicating, sensitive to Turkish language, and laying emphasis to collocated concepts. Literature review also made it clear that the renewed curriculum was student-centred, led students to thinking and researching, made educational activities enjoyable, and contributed to students' linguistic development (Çınar, Teyfur, & Teyfur, 2006; Halat, 2007). Those concepts may be said to be parallel to the ones in the newspapers.

In the *teachers category*, such concepts as teacher training, adjustment, in-service training, and guiding were mostly stressed in the news items. According to the relevant literature, teachers usually held positive views concerning the renewed curriculum (Bayram, 2005; Korkmaz, 2006; Turgut & Arı, 2006; Yücel, Karaman, Batur, Başer, & Karataş, 2006). Yangın (2007), on the other hand, believes that primary education 4th and 5th grade teachers' views of Science and Technology course which was implemented in 2005 changed in a negative way in the teaching process. Halat (2007), İzci, Özden and Tekin (2006), Özdemir (2007) conclude that teachers must be offered seminars and in-service training at regular intervals by experts in terms of the philosophy and and application of the curriculum. Although teachers did not consider their level of knowledge of the novel curriculum, most of them were found to approach the curriculum in a positive way (Korkmaz, 2006; Turgut & Arı, 2006). Bukova-Güzel and Alkan (2005) found that teachers had difficulty in classroom management and in the selection of activities at the stage of concept formation in the new learning environment and that they did not prefer to share responsibilities. The emphasis made in the above mentioned studies that teachers have inadequacies regarding the renewed curriculum and that it is one of the prob-

lems encountered in the application of the curriculum complements the concepts of teacher training, adjustment and in-service training presented in the new items.

In the *parents category*, active participation in the process and arousing consciousness were made remarkable in the national press. However, those concepts were at low rates in each year. In relation to that, conclusion was reached in literature that while applying the new mathematics curriculum, no change was seen in teacher-parent negotiations (Halat, 2007). According to Ersoy (2007), parents reported the inadequacy of knowledge presented in course books and incompatibility of the curriculum with the test system (the system of testing in Secondary Education Institutions Entrance Exam) as the negative views but the increase in willingness to learn along with the curriculum, improvement in their research skills and increase in self-reliance as the positive views. In the above mentioned study, parents also thought that the new curriculum was more suitable to their children and that the former one was based on memorisation.

In the news items of *content/design category*, such concepts as avoiding memorisation, leading to occupations, stressing the individual, considering the developments in the world, the EU vision and standards, a constructivist approach, attaching importance to philosophy, education based on active learning, democracy and human rights, teaching with music/songs, education instead of teaching, application-based education, removing unnecessary knowledge, induction rather than deduction, principle of keeping up to date, Kemalism system of thought including the basic Republican principles, and life skills were emphasised. In the relevant literature conclusions that it prevents students from memorisation (Çınar et al., 2006), it is student-centred (Bağdatlı, 2005; Güler & Şimşek, 2007), it is based on constructivist approach (Aykaç & Başar, 2005), its basic philosophy is appropriate to the EU norms (Canerik, 2005), activities and learning by experiencing and doing are effective in teaching the topics (Halat, 2007), and that it is more up to date and more positive in objectives, content, method and evaluation (Şahin, Turan & Apak, 2005; Tabak, 2007) are reached. Erdoğan (2005) reports that activities which were done in class in the previous year are done in the lab in applied form thanks to the new curriculum. Besides, teachers stated that the former science course curriculum contained theoretical, abstract knowledge isolated from real life but that the topics in the renewed curriculum were re-arranged in a way easier to understand, they were concrete and connected to real life and were appropriate to students' level of development. According to Ercan and Altun (2005), 95% of teachers believed that students expressed the self more easily thanks to the new curriculum and that they participated more actively in the learning process than they had done in previous years. According to Güler and Şimşek (2007), teachers' view that the science and technology course curriculum of 2004 is student-centred, it leads students to think and comment, it improves teachers' quality as well as students' interest, attitudes, skills and creativity is a positive feature. Yapıcı and Demirdelen (2006) point out, by refering to teachers' views, that the main strengths of the curriculum are its spiral structure, its consideration of individual differences, emphasis on thinking individuals, concretizing, the basis of the curriculum, and associating the topics with real life. Özdemir (2006) states that most of the elementary school teachers think the topics in the curriculum are arranged in a way so as to accomplish the objective behaviours, and that they find the topics suitable to students' levels. The teachers point out that there is unity between topics and the topics are sequenced from the abstract to the concrete and from the simple to the complex, and that the topics are application-oriented. They also say that the curriculum are suitable for teaching by giving examples from real life, that they enable students to participate in learning partly actively and that they make students partly creative.

A close examination of the *inadequacy category* showed that insufficiency of teaching aids and equipment, difficulties in application, teacher training, lack of materials (failure to distribute reading-writing course books, having no access to resources, etc), pedagogical inappropriacy, defraudation, physical conditions (such as crowded classrooms) were stressed in the news items of 2004-2005 period while uncertainty in secondary education institutions entrance exam, mistakes in course books and lack of materials were stressed in the 2006-2007 period. Literature on inadequacy category concludes that problems in teacher training and adjustment are available (Canerik, 2005; Çınar, et al., 2006; Ercan & Altun, 2005; Gelen & Beyazıt, 2006; Kurfallı, 2007; Özdemir, 2007; Tabak, 2007; Yapıcı & Demirdelen, 2006; Yaşar, Gültekin, Türkan, Yıldız, & Girmen, 2005), a great majority of teachers do not receive in-service training and have serious problems with the curriculum (Akamca, Hamurca, & Güney, 2006; Ercan & Altun, 2005; İzci et al., 2006; Özdemir, 2006; Özdemir, 2007;

Tabak 2007; Yaşar et al., 2005), and that teachers need training in using and preparing measurement techniques (Akamca et al., 2006; Gelbal ve Kelecioglu, 2007; Erdal, 2007; Erdemir, 2007; Yapıcı ve Demirdelen, 2006; Yaşar et al., 2005). In an evaluation made by the board of curriculum and teaching professors (Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Alanı Profesörler Kurulu [EPÖAPK], 2006), it was pointed out that the 2004 curriculum for primary education was enforced without offering teachers and other employees sufficient in-service training, and therefore, they had to apply the curriculum without knowing the properties and application principles of the curriculum.

In addition, research studies state that such problems as insufficient infrastructure, inconvenient physical conditions, crowded classrooms, lack of teaching aids and equipment, problems encountered in using the vehicles of measurement, and lack of time are available (Aykaç & Başar, 2005; Bağdatlı, 2005; Canerik, 2005; Çınar, et al., 2006; Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007; Gelen & Beyazıt, 2006; Güler & Simsek, 2007; Günay, 2006; Korkmaz, 2006; Subaşı, 2006; Tabak 2007; Yangın, 2007; Yangın & Dindar, 2007; Yapıcı & Demirdelen, 2006). Moreover, problems in application (Bağdatlı, 2005; Yangın & Dindar, 2007; Yaşar et al., 2005), occasionally significant measurement and evaluation problems (Aykaç & Başar, 2005; Gelen & Beyazıt, 2006; Korkmaz, 2006), insufficiency of educational technology (computer and the internet) (Kurfallı, 2007) are also emphasised in research studies. Canerik (2005) states that concepts such as Ataturk, Turk, homeland, Republic are repeated 43 times among the general objectives of the former curriculum but those similar concepts are repeated 10 times in the renewed curriculum. It is also said that a similar case is true for the course books. Another remarkable modification is that no place is allocated to topics related to Kemalism in the new curriculum. One of the weakest sides of the curriculum stated in literature is that insufficient training was not given to teachers and administrators in relation to the curriculum. According to Yapıcı and Demirdelen (2006), the weakest points in the curriculum are teacher support training, unity in terms, integration of mathematics and science, integration of science and life sciences, the concept of joined classes, and sources for use in the application of the curriculum.

The most remarkable concepts in news items in the *course category* are Religion and Moral course, Turkish, Foreign language courses, Mathematics,

Science and Technology, Elementary Reading and Writing, Chess course, Art and Sport Activities, and Trade and Entrepreneurship course. In literature statements are made mostly to such courses as Social Sciences (Kutlu, 2005), Life Sciences (Bayram, 2005; Kutlu, 2005), Mathematics (Bukova-Güzel ve Alkan, 2005; Erdal, 2007; Halat, 2007; Kutlu, 2005), Turkish (Kutlu, 2005) Science and Technology (Akamca et al., 2006; Bağdatlı, 2005; Dindar & Karasu, 2006; Erdoğan, 2005; Güler & Simsek, 2007; İzci et al., 2006; Kutlu, 2005; Özdemir, 2006; Özdemir, 2007; Tabak, 2007; Yangın, 2007; Yangın & Dindar, 2007). It may be said that the science and technology course topics are mostly studied topics in the renewed curriculum.

In the *materials category*, remarkable concepts are course books, work books, information technologies (the internet, technological hardware, and computers). In literature for this category it is stated that the majority of teachers never use teaching materials such as data show, the internet and computers, that they lack in knowledge of using teaching materials (Dindar & Karasu, 2006), that sources for use in the application is the weakness of the curriculum and thus problems occur (Akamca et al., 2006; Bağdatlı, 2005; Yangın, 2007; Yapıcı & Demirdelen, 2006), and that crowded classrooms is a problem (Yangın, 2007).

In the *exams/evaluation category*, concepts such as testing system, the Secondary Education Entrance Exam, achievement score, performance evaluation, product evaluation, project assignments, alternative techniques of measurement and evaluation, portfolio, and process evaluation are outstanding. In relevant literature, it is stated that students are not evaluated individually (Aykaç & Başar, 2005), occasionally significant problems are encountered in the measurement and evaluation process (Erdal, 2007; Gelen & Beyazıt, 2006, Yılmaz, 2006), evaluation activities take excessive time (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007; Tabak, 2007), classrooms are crowded (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007), and teachers do not receive sufficient training in measurement and evaluation at university and therefore they do not have adequate knowledge of measurement and evaluation techniques (Erdal, 2007; Erdemir, 2007; Gözütok, Akgün, & Karacaoğlu, 2005; Korkmaz, 2006). On the other hand, Kutlu (2005) states that measurement and evaluation concepts are available in curriculum of science and technology, Turkish, social sciences and life sciences; yet the meaning of the concepts are not clear and examples for application are not given. Thus, studies in relevant litera-

ture adopt a critical approach towards alternative techniques of measurement and evaluation which are aimed to be applied with the new curriculum. In additional to that, they reveal the inadequacies and negative sides in application. Those results may not be said to be parallel to the concepts highlighted in the news items.

Academic publications concerning the renewed primary education curriculum focus mostly on the categories of inadequacies and content/design. The number publications on the content/design category increased in 2005 whereas in 2006-2007 the number of publications concerning the category of inadequacies increased. As for the national press, news items appearing in the 2004-2005 period highlighted the category of content/design of the curriculum; in 2006 the focus was on inadequacies but in 2007 the remarkable issue was exams/evaluation. Those results show that news items in the 2004-2005 period made efforts to reveal the philosophy of the curriculum but beginning with 2006 criticisms and discussions started due to feedback received from applications, and in 2007 news items about students who receive education with the renewed curriculum and who took high school entrance exams appeared in newspapers. On examining the rates of categories closely, it may be said that the results and categories in the news items are parallel.

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