

THE 4+4+4 IN THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE TEACHERS TEACHING THE FIRST GRADE STUDENTS IN TURKEY: YOZGAT CITY AS AN EXAMPLE*

Mehmet SAĞLAM**

Abstract

This study aims to uncover the educational experiences of the teachers teaching the first grade students in 2012-2013 educational year in Yozgat city center. These experiences derived from narratives of the teachers mainly include the reflections of teachers about their educational practices since the implementation of the code 6287 known as 4+4+4 among public. The study consists of two parts, the first of which is to focus on the narratives of the teachers about their teaching practices in the classrooms by taking into account the 4+4+4 change which has come to the fore since August 2012. The second one is to concentrate on what sort of recommendations are in the teachers' narratives to amend the shortcomings of the system. It also comprises the teachers' memories shaped in the last seven months. The method of the study is oral history methodology, that is, to analyze the narratives of twenty primary schools' teachers.

Key words: *4+4+4, educational experience, teachers, narratives, curricula.*

Türkiye'de Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerini Okutan Öğretmenlerin Eğitim Deneyimlerinde 4+4+4: Yozgat Örneği

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı 2012-2013 s0mestirinde Yozgat şehir merkezinde ilkokul birinci sınıf 0ğrencilerini okutan 0ğretmenlerinin eğitim deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Öğretmenlerin anlatılarından esinlenen bu deneyimler temelde kamuoyunda 4+4+4 olarak bilinen 6287 sayılı yasanın uygulanmasından itibaren 0ğretmenlerin birinci sınıflardaki eğitim pratiklerine özgü düşüncelerini içermektedir.

* This study was partially presented at ULEAD 2013 Conference.

** Assistant. Prof. Dr., Bozok Üniversitesi Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Bölümü.

Çalışma iki bölümden oluşmaktadır, bunlardan ilki Ağustos 2012den beri başat konumda olan 4+4+4 değişikliğini dikkate alarak öğretmenlerin sınıf içerisindeki öğretim pratiklerini yansıtan anlatılarına odaklanmaktadır. İkinci kısım da sistemin eksikliklerinin giderilmesi için öğretmenlerin anlatılarında ne tür önerilerin olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu kısım son yedi ayda öğretmenlerin belleklerinde yer edinen bazı anıları da kapsamaktadır. Çalışmanın yöntemi sözlü tarih yöntemidir, başka bir ifadeyle yirmi tane ilkokul öğretmenin anlatılarını analiz etmektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: 4+4+4, eğitim deneyimleri, öğretmenler, anlatılar, müfredat.

INTRODUCTION

There have always been remarkable strides in Turkish educational system in the history of Turkish Republic. While some of them have been comprehensive¹, some haven't. 4+4+4² is one of the drastic ones and has been evaluated by some educationalists as a controversial school reform. It has increased the compulsory education from 8 years to 12. However, it intermitted the 8 year compulsory education³ via dividing it into 4+4 (Güven, 2012) and dropped the starting age of children to primary school from 72 months to 60/66⁴. The change over the starting age of children to primary school was a

¹ The Law of Unification of Education, on the 3rd of March, 1924, the Law of Basic National Education coded as 1739 on the 14th of June, 1973, the change bringing about increasing compulsory education from 5 years to 8 on the 18th of August, 1997 are some of these changes and can be taken into account as cornerstones of the Turkish educational system (Sakaoğlu, 2003, pp. 291; Güven, 2012, pp. 556).

² As this change increased the age of the compulsory education both 'upwards' and 'downwards' without putting a great emphasis on pre-school education, I may also call it as a process of institutionalisation of childhood as Alan Prout famously indicates in one of his studies (Prout, 2003, pp. 16).

³ The Turkish Ministry of Education has planned and mentioned several times to increase the compulsory education from 5 years to 8 years since 1946. It was first planned in the 8th National Council of Education on the 10th of December, 1946 by uniting elementary and middle (secondary) schools. The next attempt was declared in 1973. Despite these attempts, this need was only realized in 1997 (Güven, 2012, pp. 561; Sakaoğlu, 2003, pp. 373).

⁴ The starting age of children for primary school in European countries which we usually take as reference for our educational system changes from one country to another. For instance, while in Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Austria and Ireland children have to start school when they are six, in Sweden, Finland and Estonia they begin school at the age of seven. There is no question in mind with at what age the children begin their compulsory education; however, in most of them pre-school education is widespread and compulsory. That makes a quite big difference as when they start school they are homogenous in terms of their adaptation to school with their educational and cultural baggage. Increasing the compulsory education from 8 years to 12 seems to be an advantage since only Belgium and Hungary have such a long period of

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

bone of contention among various parts of the society owing to different political way of thinking and educational concerns. It also seems to be a critical issue in the narratives of the teachers in terms of their educational practices as well.

The pervasive side of these changes since the foundation of the Turkish Republic is that they have been in a recursive cycle since having been formed mostly with the political concerns rather than taking into account the conditions⁵ and views of the stakeholders of the educational system i.e, educationalists, academicians, school directors, teachers, parents. Despite various features of 4+4+4 to discuss, I'd rather focus on the narratives of the teachers teaching the first grade students at primary schools because otherwise discussing 4+4+4 as a whole subject would be over the task of such a study. Now that it has almost been seven months since the implementation of 4+4+4, there have been some studies⁶ partially dealing with the outcomes of it. However, it seems to be an attractive issue for the academic studies nowadays and I also hope that this study will probably give more chance to the voice of the teachers being the real agents of educational activities in the educational system.

compulsory education. Nevertheless, with 4+4+4 bill, the first 8 compulsory years is intermitted and the children don't have to go to secondary and high school, they can continue their education by following the open secondary and high school. This may lead to the decrease in the number of girls attending to school (Büyükcın and Karakaş, 2012. pp. 20; Güven, 2012, pp.559; Ergün, 2012).

⁵ One of the studies performed recently mostly display that the principals/directors have observed and directly lived the shortcomings of the immediately applied new system. Particularly, dropping the starting age of children for primary school to 66 months and allowing the parents of the children who are between 60 and 66 months to decide whether they should let them begin to primary school or not have brought principals, teachers and parents face to face and led to emerging discussions among them (Örs, Erdoğan and Kipici, 2013, pp. 149).

⁶ Güven's *the 4+4+4 School Reform Bill and the Fatih Project: is it a Reform?* presents a historical background of Turkish Primary School Education and details his own concerns about the change (Güven, 2012, pp. 556, 557). Also, Aras's study called *4+4+4=Psikososyal Gelişime Zararlıdır* conveys how the change would affect the psychosocial development of children (Aras, 2012). Dilşat Peker Ünal's *Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin 4+4+4 Uygulamasına Yönelik Görüşleri* is another study performed on 4+4+4 reform. It reveals the necessity of the relationship between the success of educational reform and teachers' understanding and implementation of educational reform (Peker, 2013, pp. 324-337). Selçuk Beşir Demir, Soner Doğan and Mehmet Ali Pınar's *4+4+4 Yeni Eğitim Sistemi'nin Yansımaları: Beşinci Sınıflardaki Eğitim-Öğretim Sürecinin Branş Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri Doğrultusunda Değerlendirilmesi* evaluates the problems faced by the branch teachers of the fifth grades regarding the change resulted from 4+4+4 (Demir, Doğan and Pınar, 2013).

The content and course of the study have been reconstructed on the basis of transcripts of the teachers' narratives. Focusing on the narratives, we can derive some vital conclusions from their experiences given as answers to the previously provided questions before the interviews⁷. I have tried to categorize these narratives into two parts as what they have experienced and faced while teaching and whether they have had any recommendations and memories during these practices. To begin with, when they responded the question of what they have confronted with in their educational practices while teaching the first grade students who were mostly not the same age groups except for a few examples where the students were grouped into classrooms by taking into consideration their ages, they significantly reveal the negative sides observed during the last seven months. These can be displayed as heterogeneous classrooms regarding the age gap and cultural baggage. In the last part, the teachers particularly pay attention to the point that the ideas and educational experiences of stakeholders of the educational system such as, teachers, principals, academicians and parents are to be reckoned with.

METHOD

The method of the study is oral history methodology⁸ when it is applied to collect data for the present cases, it can be evaluated as descriptive study to some extent. This reveals that oral history methodology is primarily an interdisciplinary method which is the area of intersection for sociologists, antropologists, historians, those studying in literature, culture and education. Oral history has a unique power as it helps us reach the experiences of masses

⁷ The interviews were materialized in April 2013.

⁸ Oral history is a method of collecting, preserving, and interpreting historical information through recorded interviews with people, communities and participants in past events and ways of life. Despite this description of oral history as a methodology it has been used by various researches in different fields of social sciences including history, sociology, education, antropology, law, journalism and pshychology etc. Each discipline has contributed vital insights into the art of interviewing and enriched the methods used by the researchers (Maryland Humanities Council, 2005 p. 2; Russell, 2013, pp 2-3). Particularly, in educational studies with oral history methodology we come across studies illuminating children's educational experiences which have not only vital importance for their history but also for their educational experiences reflecting what sort of games they played, how they were treated as students, what subjects they learned. Like children's educational experinces, those of the teachers have little chance to appear on written documents. Thus, oral history methodology with its open-ended questions lets them raise their voices about their educational experiences as clues to reconstruct the education.

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

whose voices have been hidden and living on the margin of power relations (Thompson, 2006). In other words, it allows the voices of those that have been partially or totally ignored, marginalized or silenced within particular contexts to be heard (Haynes, 2006). Teachers are a sort of group taking place in such masses. Therefore, the views reflecting educational practices of the teachers about the first grade students in relationship with 4+4+4 bill is significant. In any educational system teachers take a substantial role, because of this they are simply not the objects of an educational system but are seen as active agents of it. During the interviews they were feeling heard, valued and also being treated as responsible citizens. That is what oral history methodology leads to. It opens its ears to the voices of those who have been excluded from the dominant way of making social and educational sciences.

Participants: The universe of the research group is the teachers teaching the first grade students at different primary schools in Yozgat City center in 2013. After literature reviews, I have come across the studies on 4+4+4 change in general. Yet, there have appeared no comprehensive studies on the teachers teaching first grade students just after the 4+4+4 change. To fill this void, the answers of what the teachers have experienced during their teaching process after the change and their recommendations in relation with their experiences were tried to be found out.

Data Instrument: Data collected for this study were derived from the interviews that were carried out with the teachers that were teaching the first grade students at primary schools in Yozgat City center in 2013 via a recording device. For this study, totally twenty interviews including women and men were carried out. The interviews were recorded by a recording device and then decoded by keeping their original form and the text reflecting their educational experiences during their educational practices was reconstructed. The open-ended questions that were expected to be replied by the interviewees were that; 1) What have you experienced during your seven month educational practices in relation with the 4+4+4 change? 2) What are your recommendations in relation with 4+4+4 after your seven month educational practices? 3) Do you have any memories related with your educational experiences in the last seven months to share?

Data Analysis: A descriptive analysis was used in order to analyze the interviews so that I was able to organize the experiences of teachers based on their teaching practices in a consecutive order to find out the shortcomings of

the change for the first grade students with the original words of the teachers. (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2013). The validity and reliability of interviews was proved both by getting the approval of the interviewees after decoding the interviews and the help of an academician about the framework provided previously so as to use the narratives in the text.

Procedure: In this study, oral history methodology was used to collect data. At the first stage, I tried to reach the teachers teaching the first grade students at primary schools in Yozgat City center in 2013. To fulfill this, I reached the teachers I had to have interviews with through visiting primary schools for which official permission had already been taken from the local National Educational Directorate of Yozgat City attached with the question list prepared previously. Before each interview, an oral history document that gives us general information such as where he/she went to primary school, what his/her parents' educational and economic level was was filled. Just after the interview had been performed, a oral history interview story (memory) which reveals how the interview was actualized was written (Tan et al, 2007) .

To Form a Framework for a Descriptive Analyze: Here a framework was provided along with the dimensions of the conceptual framework of the study. Thus, it was determined to under which theme the data is to be used.

Data Reduction: At this stage, the data formed according to general framework of the previous stage was examined and organized and thus, the narratives were classified accordingly.

Description of Findings: At this stage, the description of the organized data was directly quoted to the related place in the text in their original form. While doing this, common narratives were identified by categorising the data in terms of their context and the results were interpreted for the emerging patterns in the text.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As it is mentioned above the findings part includes the teachers' views revealing their educational experiences relying on their educational practices in the process of teaching and training the first grade students, their recommendations in order to grapple with its deficiencies for the sake of the change in the following years. Moreover, some of their unique memories related with these educational practices also need to be exclusively specified.

The Narratives Reflecting What Teachers Have Experienced in Their Educational Practices Since the Implementation of 4+4+4

When the teachers replied the question of what they had encountered with since the inception of the term after the implementation of the code, they mostly have listed a number of problems they have faced. Some of them have been elaborated as having classrooms where the students' age and cultural baggages are not homogeneous, the incompetencies of the teachers for the new curricula, the incompatibility of the context of the curricula with the whole period of the year and the pressure on teachers by the parents demanding that their children are supposed to learn writing and reading in a short period of time.

Heterogeneous Classrooms Resulted From the Students' Age Gap and Cultural Baggage:

One of the most substantial issues indicated by the teachers is to have heterogeneous classrooms⁹ in which the students differ from each other in terms of the *age*, having students being 60, 66, 72 months or even more in the same classroom, and *cultural baggage*¹⁰ resulted from attending to the pre-school education¹¹ or not and being grown by a family whose social and economic life standards vary from each other. Unlike the former one, the later one was stated by few teachers. There are several narratives displaying the heterogeneous

⁹ Having students with different age groups leads to teachers' negative appraisals rather than the positive ones about the 4+4+4 change. One of the teachers puts into words as "There appeared two groups among the first grade students resulted from the age gap" (Külekcı, 2013, p. 373).

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu tries to prove that parents render cultural capital to their children. His major interest was about how cultural capital transforms into benefits in educational meaning (Wallece, Ruth and Wolf, 2012, pp. 165). He states that the middle class parents equip their children with cultural capital upheld by various linguistic and cultural skills. In order to be successful at schools, children need to have these skills whose contexts are under the superintendence of the rich. Whereas, the children coming from the working class can not learn these skills at schools. Hence, it is obvious that the appraisements made at schools which pretend to be impartial virtually legitimize the economic imparities via transmuted socio-cultural skills to acquiring status hierarchies that show up as though these skills were the results of the inherent aptitudes (Marshall, 1999, pp 448). Cultural capital provides prominent advantages to the children of middle and upper class families (Apple, 2004, pp. 12-24).

¹¹ It seems vital that pre-school education has to be made common as much as possible so as to reduce the inequalities particularly resulted from being deprived of attending to pre-school education among the children starting primary school. According to the statistics of 2012-2013 educational and training year provided by the Ministry of Turkish National Education, the schooling of children being between 36-72 months is %30, 87 (it was % 30,93 last year) and that of the 48-72 months children is %40,04 (it was the same last year) (*Eğitim İzleme Raporu, 2012*, pp. 51).

classrooms, but here I will try to present a few of them which may be enough to give the gist of the discussion.

Mehmet Baymak as one of the teachers puts his opinions about the age gap into words as *“Really? When the school opened, in our classrooms there were those who were 66, I even saw that there were 82 months old children in my classroom. There were students who had had pre-school education. 27 of the 30 had had pre-school education. Since they had seen the same materials there they began to feel bored after a few days and wanted to do different things. Thus, we got confused because the activity we gave to the students is expected to be performed in forty minutes but they were doing it in five minutes. three of them had not had pre-school education. We had to choose one of the two ways: either following the 12 week programme¹² or shortening it. If we had followed this 12 week programme, we would have had to ignore and break the rest. So we have had to take into account the majority.”*

Gülay Narin¹³ also displays her ideas about the age gap as *“Most of the students (about 10) had not gone to the pre-school education. Those who had attended were about four or five. Of course they were a bit more aware of painting, how to use pencil, what the books and notebooks were like. There is a big difference between the older and younger age groups, even a month makes a lot difference between them. The older age group children comprehend what you tell them immediately because their hand muscles, writing skills are more developed. We have had difficulty with those who had not attended to pre-school educational process while drawing line. They had a great difficulty since their hand muscles have not developed enough, they can not do it properly, particularly in writing.”* Soner Öz also voices the negative side of children starting school at younger age group. *“They have difficulty while using pencil, they can not hold it properly and get tired so early. For these age groups, becoming even a two month period of time older affects the child a lot during the development period of him/her.”*

¹² With the implementation of 4+4+4, a 12 week programme was sent to the schools for the adaptation of the students to the school milieu. This programme was not able to sent at the beginning of the term and it was not compatible with the educational baggages of the students since some of them had been part of the pre-educational process.

¹³ In her school the students had been separated as peer age group, small and big age groups. She had the small age group; however, one third of her students had been part of the pre-school educational process.

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

Ali Baycan raises his voice via stressing the age gab and students' levels as in the following lines. *“When 4+4+4 came to the classroom we came across with the problem of age and class level. When I look at the students having difficulty in reading, what I see is that they are particularly small age group and had not attended the pre-school education. There are problems resulted from their families' cultural baggages. Since we work in Yozgat city center schools, the level of the students is a bit better. When we talk with our friends working in the suburbs of the city, the problems they face is much bigger over there.”* Cemal Ayhan¹⁴ underlines the necessity of thinking about the small age group as well. He puts his words as. *“We are trying to educate the 5 year children. They are kindergarten children. They were to be in a kindergarten but they came to primary school. What can you expect from them? They are 5 and 7 years old, there is a age gap between the children and they are exposed to the same education. We are still trying to teach the rest how to read.*

In spite of having a tendency to support the change some teachers reveal the significance of the cognitive, social and psychological development of the children while beginning school. Zeki Ayyıldız: *“The level of all of them is enough in terms of their cognitive deveelopment. We are talking with our teacher friends for the 60 months children. Apart from their affective and cognitive development, there is their psychological development as well. I have a student who sits and cries when he can not do his homework. I also have a student crying for an hour when I remind him his mistake politely. It is the first time I have never seen so far. The child is the most intelligent student in the classroom; however, when I do not enjoy his hand writing or just say it is ok, normal, I evaluate as “very beautiful, beautiful or normal” I told him that it was normal. He cried for hours. Although I inculcated him I could not help him be normal. He was not able to recover. Briefly, all areas should be researched. In my opinion, a child's cognitive development is not enough for him/her to start school.”*

¹⁴At his school the students had been seperated as small and big age groups. His classroom has small age group students. Even thought it seems to be a logical and pedagogical way to fallow for a temporary solution to the intricacy resulted from the newly implemented regulation as I had recommended to the principals at the beginning of the educatinional year of 2012-2013, it seems to become a problem as these small age groups students' educational background differ from each other as well owing to attending the pre-school education. The teachers teaching the small age group students only complains 4+4+4 in various respects and find it harmful for the small age group students (Sağlam, 2012,pp. 8)

As experiences of teachers, these narratives reflect that the pre-school education for the children has a vital importance. Had the children not attended the pre-school education, they would not have easily fulfilled the needs to be met according to the curricula that has to be reconsidered when prepared. This shows that not only the pre-school education is to be a compulsory stage in educational process, but also the peer/age group is necessary to care for so as to create a more homogenous milieu for the children so that they can adapt the school easily and get used to their classrooms and do not lose their concentration while continuing their education in the long process.

The Incompetencies of the Teachers for the New Curricula:

The teachers' academic knowledge and educational experiences are not compatible with the content of the new curricula, frankly mentioning the 12 week adaptation programme. It is important to support teachers' training and their career development as a prerequisite for the sake of educational quality while enforcing a new programme (Yılmaz, Taşçı, Fidan and Nurlu, 2014). Despite having been informed about the new curricula for a short time via distant seminars, they have had difficulties to meet the requirements of the curricula. The materials to be taught for the first three months are more related to what is generally practised at pre-school educational process and of course performed by the teachers having pedagogy of such education. Therefore, they generally feel incompetent themselves to exercise the course materials according to the level of age groups.

Metin Bayrak puts stress to their inadequate knowledge and practices for small age group. *“When we looked at the programme, we saw that it was totally a programme which was for the pre-school education. At first we saw that it was so different from our previous educational habits. A 12 week lasting programme that was about cutting, painting, agglutination, mainly game based for the children was given to us. Since we were the teachers who teach the first grade students we had difficulty in its application when we started to apply it. Because, it is for the pre-school education and we did not have such an education. We did not have a preparation period for it. We were not given any detailed work or seminar. We were only given some information about the programme through distant training however, the programme that we were to apply was given to us just after the school had opened.”*

Beyhan Taş likewise puts his opinions as *“We have been made to be a sort of teacher teaching pre-school education. We were not ready for such case,*

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

frankly speaking namely we are not ready for this. I think we are not qualified enough to do this, most of us are not. There has appeared a complexity. What happened is to the children. Pre-school education was in a right way in Turkey. I hope it will continue and they will recover from their mistake ” Mehmet Bayrak also mentions his ideas as *“We have come across some positive and negative cases. Since we have not had a pedagogical education about the implementation of the programme we faced with adversity at the beginning. Essentially, the children are not that age group, i.e; they are not children of that programme.”* These narratives disply that despite being primary school teachers and having practised the adaptation programmes during their previous educational process they still admit not having sufficient and satisfying pedagogical skills and educational experiences for fulfillment of the new programme prepared for the small age groups.

Incompatibility of the Context of the Curricula with All Educational Year:

Additionally, incompatibility of the context of the curricula with the whole period of the year is another problem the teachers have encountered with. According to the new curriculum, the first three months are expected to be spent for accommodating the students to school and its environment. Just after this period there comes the previously applied old curriculum that is to be applied for all year. Thus, there is a three month extra period which includes materials for painting, drawing and playing games. All this renders the idea that the curriculum had been prepared in a short time without considering the whole year. This has hamstrung the teachers to make use of the curriculum fully.

Metin Bayrak, Kenan Aksüt and Yeşim Çevik reflect their ideas based on their educational practices shaped in the last six months. Metin Bayrak puts his views as *“There is another case I have to indicate here. We were given a 12 week programme. Yet, we did not have a new programme after this 12 weeks period. We still haven’t had it. Now I am using the last year’s first grade students’ programme starting in September and lasting for 38 weeks. On the one hand there is a 12 week programme, on the other hand again there is the last year’s old programme starting from September. There is a paradox here.”* As Kenan Aksüt likewise puts *“We didn’t have programme to be followed after the 12 week preparation programme. We have had the 12 week programme and the books for the 36 week programme. $12+36= 48$ weeks. Nothing new was sent*

to us by the Ministry for using after the 12 week period. We expected to have a new product but it has not come yet.”

Yeşim Çevik also indicates that *“There is another hardship. We have not had any sources for the physical course. They are all what we have researched, created and obtained from the internet. Can you imagine, the year is ending, the last two months left, but we are just receiving the documents. Apart from this, what I have seen is that the books seem to be the same, there is not much change particularly in the life science book. All these narratives of the real agents of education explicitly point to the issue of curriculum and its impetuous preparation in relation with the change. The more a programme is enforced hastily without considering the students physical, mental (cognitive) development and teachers’ performances in a whole year, the more the students, the teachers and the parents are victimized.*

Parents’ Pressure over the Teachers to Teach the Children How to Read and Write:

Finally, the parents have put pressure over the teachers and demanded from them to teach their children how to read and write by neglecting what is expected to be fulfilled by the new curricula. Whenever they have been warned by the teachers who have to apply the curriculum in a harmony and accordingly, they either have reacted to the teachers or complained about them to the Ministry of Education. This has brought about a discontentment among the teachers and let them feel worthless, inferior and being treated badly. No matter the teachers have backed up the change or not most of them have put forth that the parents have coerced them during adaptation period and wanted them to let the children learn writing and reading owing to the parents’ previous childrens’ and their own school experiences.

Yasin Dağ Yazgan depicts this as *“As the excercises like drawing lines, painting to develop small muscles have lasted long, parents have started to worry willingly or unwillingly. ‘When is my child going to start reading? How is it going to be like?’ My friends and I have had difficulty about this. We have explained to the parents. However, according to the previous curriculum the children began reading and writing in December. It is December but we are just starting to learn the sounds of the letters. That’s why the parents have asked us when their children were going to read.”* Lütfü Dere also indicates his views as

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

“the parents¹⁵ whose first grade children we had already taught before wanted us to teach their children reading and writing in a short time. You as a teacher have to obey to this situation, as soon as the children come to school to start education you feel to pay attention to reading and writing heavily.

Hüsniye Çabuk puts stress to the point that since the students in her classroom are not homogenous in terms of their age group and have not been used to the adaptation programme properly, she has confronted with some parents' pressure. *“When you try to conform the programme to the class atmosphere, then parents intervene to your job. The parents want horse race at big schools. In other words, they want their children to be the first. The other classrooms are different from us, some had been separate as younger and older age groups. The parents are going and looking to the other classrooms where they have relatives and saying that the other classrooms have started to this or that issue and asking why we have dropped back and what shortcoming my child has, why we haven't started maths. I show them the book and the curricula. Despite this, they still assert that we should do these things, buy books, tests etc., You can not say anything to the parents. Thanks to our previous minister who dropped the teacher's respectability and value down. When you say anything to them they immediately go to the Directorate of National Education and say that they have the right to complain. “*

Feray Karlı Ay likewise criticizes the manner of Ministry of National Education as it has reduced the classical importance of teachers among the public by courtesy of giving right to the parents to complain about them when they feel mistreated by the teachers and the school administrations. *“Thanks to our government and the minister, we, the teachers, have been trivialized. We no longer have our previous reputability. I think myself as an ordinary citizen. we are the people who educate the minister, president, prime minister; but, we do not get this value. Now I find myself, as a job, as a valueless person lost his/her previous honor. We have been left under the pressure of parents, I think when this proceeds, it will decrease the quality of education. Why? It is because when you talk to the children a bit loudly, they immediately go to the National Education. They activated a complaint phone line for absurd reasons. We are*

¹⁵ Normally the curious parents dealing with their children profoundly and wanting them to learn even just after birth have a tendency to put pressure over the teachers at the pre-school institutions to see them in the form of primary school where they believe their children learn how to write and read (Niron, 2013, pp. 18-20).

educationists, we are not in a tendency to torment the children or beat them. Why are the parents so ahead? If the parents know more than us, why are we here then. I have not been content in the last two years since the talks about 4+4. We do not have power to impose sanctions at all. When I can not say anything to the children, how am I going to make them do anything, educate them.”

In short, broadly speaking when implementing such a new and immense programme and its curricula exercised nationwide, there is a need to educate and inform the parents accordingly with a range of palpable and elaboratively prepared seminars by which they can be hip to the new curricula and hence this results in reducing their pressure over the teachers and school administrations. Besides, it seems that giving the right of complaint about teachers needed has risen the question of being valueless among the teachers and let them feel inferior, disreputable and interrupted during the educational process of a whole year.

The Teachers' Recommendations and Memories About 4+4+4

The last segment is to suffice our demand of learning what sort of recommendations they could let us know so that their propositions may be taken account of as solutions to the existing disruptions of new curricula and the change entirely. Moreover, in connection with these recommendations, their customized memories inspired by their educational experiences also might help us enrich our perspective about the immediacy between the emergence and formation of memories and the educational activities.

Some teachers put forth the necessity of prerequisites of the system such as supplying educational materials and equipment properly and training teachers accordingly, providing appropriate physical conditions, the need to implement the new programme in pilot cities. As recommendations, Zeki Ayyıldız who actually supports the change denotes that *“the well-prepared equipment of the programme must be delivered to all teachers at the very beginning of the semester. Present course books have to be changed as they are not convenient with the teaching process of all semester.”* Beyhan Taş attracts our attention to the necessity of preparing teachers well for the new programme and their voices about any change taking part in education for a proper educational milieu. *“While educating teachers, they have to be educated according to the new programme. The applicability of decisions taken in Turkey is too hard as they have been taken from the top void of taking the views of the those who are at the bottom.”*

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

Besides, another substantial issue here to be accentuated is the schools' physical conditions which most of the teachers notably touched. Zeki Ayyıldız states that the physical conditions of the schools have to be reconstituted according to the younger students. *"The physical environment has to be prepared for the 60/66 months children. When you checked the toilets you will see how little children have difficulty while washing their hands, all their bodies get wet. They can not use the toilets properly. Even the stairs are too high for them. The physical conditions ought to be reconsidered."* Orkun Özgen likewise reiterates that he has a request from the National Ministry of Education *"I have a request if this reaches to the related offices, when a system is tried to be accommodated, its primacy must be its substructure. Should not the substructure be, the success stays artificial. The most important part is the accommodation of its substructure in university, high school and primary school."* Hüsnüye Çabuk also thinks the physical conditions of the classrooms are not expressly compatible at least for the adaptation activities to actualize. *"If they want the children to be dependent much to the classroom according to application of this programme, what must we do? We ought to organize the classroom like the pre-school education classrooms. One corner of the classroom can be used for games. Another one can be used for another activity. We can not play games on the desks satisfactorily. When you want to do something for the small age group students, you can not move freely in the classroom accordingly as they like skipping in the classroom and they want to play¹⁶ with toys."*

Some teachers, inter alia, add that implementing the new curricula of 4+4+4 in a few pilot cities could have been much better it is because its deficiencies would have been resolved so that it could be seen whether it is proper to be carried out nationwide or not. The narratives of Ali Baycan, Yeşim Çevik, Kenan Aksüt support this assertion. Ali Baycan: *"I would have preferred this system to have been applied in at least three, four pilot cities after reducing its shortcomings than to all parts of Turkey. I would find it more suitable. It would have been more successful."* Yeşim Çevik : *"Only a decision was taken and actually it would have been better providing it had been implemented in a pilot region."* Kenan Aksüt likewise puts as *"I wish this system had been*

¹⁶ As it can be encountered from the other studies, younger age group children mostly have desire to play games in the classrooms. The teachers have problems working with 60-66 month old children (Yılmaz et al, 2014, pp. 147).

applied a year later, it could have been better. At least the Ministry would be ready for it.”

In addition to these suggestions, there are also intriguing educational experiences of the teachers to be denoted to elucidate to what extent their reminiscences reflect their memories that may provide us some clues to establish their connection with the educational practices being a part of 4+4+4. Such as what Orkun Özgen explicates seems striking to see how necessary the school starting age is. *“What I have in my mind about this year’s system is that the younger children, those who are 60 months, 64 months old were fearing to enter the classroom. I remember them sitting on the desks with their mothers for long time.”* The memory of Gülay Narin appears to be stunning to indicate here as well. *“One point had attracted my attention when I first spoke of Atatürk. Since they had never had pre-school education, they had not known much about him. They did not ever care when I was talking about Atatürk as if I had been talking about an ordinary person. I was surprised, it had not drawn their attention at all. One or two could remember. I have tried to introduce Atatürk with his photos. As I said, somethings like this seem so abstract to them at the beginning.”*

The offers and memories denoted by the teachers prove that there is a close intimacy between their educational practices, experiences and advices, as well as the memories. Here they especially emphasize how seriously not only having appropriate physical conditions and essential teaching materials at schools but also the practice of a new programme in pilot cities before applying it nationwide. Furthermore, asking the ideas of teachers let them feel valued as the real implementers of the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

After presenting the narratives of the teachers about their educational practices in the first degree classrooms, it is possible to derive some conclusions which constitute the core and essence of these narratives and let us comprehend partially the favorable and insufficient sides of the system. In the point of considering the narratives, no matter they politically endorse the change or not the teachers commonly call attention to the deficiencies of the implementation of 4+4+4 programme in the first degree classrooms. The paucities of the system result in the rise of certain questions. One of the salient shortcomings they actually expressed was about how to perform the programme properly in the

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

classrooms owing to having heterogeneous classrooms in terms of the diversity of students' age and cultural capital. Essentially, lowering the age of those who are supposed to start primary school brought about gathering the 60/66/72 months children in the same classroom except for quite a few examples. While some of these children had had pre-school education some had not. Therefore, they can not perform in a harmony while they are doing the activities and learning something new. In order to remove this heterogeneity resulted from dissimilar physical and cognitive features of the children, primarily pre-school education is to be compulsory nationwide.

Besides, the question of teachers' incompetency for the new curricula in connection with the younger age group is another issue to be taken cognizance of by the Ministry of Education. They distinctly acknowledge their unsatisfying pedagogical skills to actualize what is expected to perform in the classrooms exactly. Teachers often mention that the system is not suitable to educate younger age groups as they did not get an appropriate training for this age groups (Yılmaz, Taşçı, fidan and Nurlu, 2014). Hence, their preparedness for the new changes has to be reconsidered and its substructure is to be ensured duly. Moreover, the lateness of the material and its insufficient context according to newly formed programme has led to the occurrence of complexities at schools and appearance of disorder in the minds of teachers particularly about what to use as material after the adaptation period. For them, the curricula has to be heeded and shaped according to the level of the students and whole year to empower the system.

Also, the parents' ignorance about the context of curricula has given rise to the parents' continous interference to the teachers' teaching process. To remove this complicacy, the families ought to be informed about what is expected to be fulfilled during the first year of their children's education. Because, otherwise it will be a recurring issue having been raised between the teachers and the parents recently. Once and for all, the teachers claim that the voices and educational experiences of the people, particularly the teachers, being the real agents of the curricula at schools and central to the educational reforming process, are to be taken into consideration during the decision-making process by the politicians.

REFERENCES

Apple, M. W. (2004). Creating Difference: Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Conservatism and the Politics of Educational Reform. *Educational Policy*, Vol, 18, 12-44.

Aras, Ş. (20 Nisan, 2012). 4+4+4 Psikososyal Gelişime Zararlıdır, *Cumhuriyet Bilim Teknik*, [Available online at: www.muratkaymak.com/?syf=26@sy2=119909], Retrieved on July 25, 2013.

Büyükcın, T. and Karakaş, (Mart, 2012). H. Avrupa Ülkelerinin Eğitim Sistemlerinin Yapısı, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Araştırma Merkezi.

Büyükcztürk, Ş., Çakmak, E. Ç., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş. and Demirel, F. (2013). Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri. Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayınları.

Eğitim İzleme Raporu 2012, (Eylül, 2013). Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, İstanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi.

Demir, S. B., Doğan, S. and Pınar, M. A (2013). 4+4+4 Yeni Eğitim Sistemi'nin Yansımaları: Beşinci Sınıflardaki Eğitim-Öğretim Sürecinin Branş Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri Doğrultusunda Değerlendirilmesi. *Turkish Studies*, Vol, 8/9, [Available online at: [www.turkishstudies.net/Makaleler/488479498_070DemirSelçukBeşir-vd-2%20\(2\)-1081-1098pdf](http://www.turkishstudies.net/Makaleler/488479498_070DemirSelçukBeşir-vd-2%20(2)-1081-1098pdf)], Retrieved on July 03, 2014. pp. 1081-1098.

Ergün, M. (2012). Türkiye'de Son Eğitim "Reformu" (4+4+4). [Available online at: ergunegitim.tr.gg/Yeni-makaleler.htm], Retrieved on July 03, 2014.

Güven, İ. (2012). The 4+4+4 School Reform Bill and the Fatih Project: is it a Reform? *Elementary Education Online*, 11 (3) 2012, 556-577, [Available online at: <http://ilkogretim-online.org.tr>], Retrieved on August 13, 2013.

Haynes, Kathryn. (2006). *Other Lives in Accounting: Critical Reflections on Oral history Methodology in Action*, University of York, [Available online at: <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk//2582/1/ymswp21haynes.pdf>], Retrieved on June 18, 2013.

Külekcçi, E. (2013). 4+4+4 Eğitim sistemi Kapsamında Birleştirilmiş Sınıf Uygulamasına İlişkin Öğretmen Görüşlerinin Değerlendirilmesi, *Jret*, Vol: 2, Number, 2, [Available online at: File:///C:/User/aaa/Downloads/birle-tirilmi-%-20s-2-f.pdf], Retrieved on July 03, 2014. pp. 369-377.

Marshall, G. (1999). *Sosyoloji Sözlüğü*, Translated by O. Akınhay ve D. Kömürcü. Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat.

The 4+4+4 in the Educational Experiences of the Teachers Teaching The First Grade Students in Turkey: Yozgat City as an Example

Niron, G. D. (Şubat, 2013). Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumları Neden ‘Okul’ Gibi Olmamalı, *Çoluk Çocuk*, Özgüenkök Yayıncılık., Sayı, 100, pp. 18-20.

Maryland Humanities Council. (2005). Oral History: Methods for Documentation and Research, (November, 2005). by *Historical Society of Cecil County in Partnership with Cecil Public Schools*, November 2005. (1-16), [Available online at: <http://www.cecilhstory.org/aids/oralhistory.pdf>], Retrieved on April 14, 2013.

Örs, Ç., Erdoğan, H., Kipici, K. (2013). Eğitim Yöneticileri Bakış Açısıyla 12 Yıllık Kesintili Zorunlu Eğitim sistemi: İğdir Örneği, *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Sayı, 4, [Available online at: [sosbilder.igdir.edu.tr/Makaleler/275728428_08_ors_\(131-154\)](http://sosbilder.igdir.edu.tr/Makaleler/275728428_08_ors_(131-154))], Retrieved on July 03, 2014. pp. 131-154.

Peker, Ü. (Kasım, 2013). Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin 4+4+4 Uygulamasına Yönelik Görüşleri, *Jret*, Vol: 2, Number, 4, [Available online at: http://www.jret.org/FileUpload/ks281142/File/36.Peker_unal.pdf], Retrieved on November 12, 2013. pp. 324-337.

Prout, A. (2003). Participation, Policy and Changing Conditions of Childhood. In Chtistine Hallet and Alan Prout (Eds.), *Hearing the Voices of Children*, (pp. 11-25). London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Russell, David E. (2013). *Oral History Methodology, the Art of Interviewing*, pp 2-3, Santa Barbara, California, [Availableonlineat:<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/oralhistory/199xDrussellUCSBOralHistoryWorkshop.pdf>], Retrieved on September 13, 2013. pp. 1-22.

Sağlam, M. (5 Ekim, 2012). 4+4+4’le Eğitime Başladığımız Bu Günlerde... *Yozgat YeniGün*, pp. 8.

Sakaoğlu, N. (2003). *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Eğitim Tarihi*. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi.

Tan, M., Şahin, Ö., Sever, M. ve Bora, A. (2007). Cumhuriyet’te Çocuklar. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Thompson, P. (2006). 21. Yüzyılda sözlü Tarih İçin Potansiyeller ve Meydan Okumalar. In Aynur İlyasoğlu ve Gülay Kayacan (Eds.), *Kuşaklar Deneyimler Tanıklıklar*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, ss. 23-48.

Wallece, Ruth A., Wolf, Alison, (2012). Çağdaş Sosyoloji Kuramları, Traslanted by Leyla Elburuz and M. Rami Ayas. Ankara: DOĞUBATI, pp. 165.

Yılmaz, N., Taşçı, G., Fidan, M. and Nurlu, Ö. (2014). 4+4+4 Sistem Değişikliğinin İlk Yılında İlkokul Birinci Sınıflardaki Durum: Sorunlar ve İhtiyaçlar (Erzincan Örneği). *Journal of Educational Science Research*, Vol, 4,

Mehmet Sađlam

[ebad-jesr.com/images/MAKALE/EYFOR.08.pdf], Retrieved on July 03, 2014.
pp. 133-145.