International Journal of Business, Human and Social Sciences
ISSN: 2517-9411
Vol:3, No:7, 2009

New Curriculum and New Challenges: What do School Administrators Really Do ?*

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***Abstract*—**The aim of this qualitative case study is to examine how school principals perform their new roles and responsibilities defined in accordance with the new curriculum. Of ten primary schools that the new curriculum was piloted in Istanbul in school year of 2004-2005, one school was randomly selected as the sample of the study. The participants of the study were comprised of randomly-selected 26 teachers working in the case school. To collect data, an interview schedule was developed based on the new role definitions for school principals by the National Ministry of Education. Participants were interviewed on one-to-one basis in February and March 2007. Overall results showed that the school principal was perceived to be successful in terms of the application of the new curriculum in school. According to the majority of teachers, the principal has done his best to establish the infrastructure that is necessary for successful application of the new program. In addition to these, the principal was reported to adopt a collegial and participatory leadership style by creating a positive school atmosphere that enables the school community (teachers, parents and students) to involve school more than before.

***Keywords*—**case study, curriculum implementation, school principals and curriculum

I. INTRODUCTION

In the centralized educational systems of developing countries principalship is defined as a public position and the role definitions of principals are solely based on administrative and managerial functions. Unlike this, in developed countries principalship is seen as a means to improve student achievement necessary for their development and thus, principals are expected to concentrate more on instructional tasks [1].

In Turkey the new curriculum reform of 2005 has led to an expansion in school principals' role definitions. In addition to their roles as school managers, school principals are expected to assume the role of instructional leadership, which is declared as essential for the successful implementation of the new curriculum by the Board of Education [2]. With the new role definitions, school principals are primarily expected to have in-depth knowledge about the new program to guide teachers through its implementation and to create an environment that facilitates the establishment of the constructivist paradigm underlying the new curriculum [3].

The aim of this case study is to examine how school principals perform their new roles and responsibilities defined in accordance with the new primary school curriculum of 2005.

II. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In 2004 the Ministry of Education started working on a new curriculum of primary schools in Turkey. With the participation of representatives from non-governmental organizations, universities, schools including students, parents, teachers and inspectorate, new program were developed for main courses, namely, Life Science, Turkish, Social Sciences, Science and Technology taught through grade 1-5. The first draft of the program was evaluated by experts and then it was piloted in 120 schools in 9 different cities. After the evaluation of the pilot study, necessary revisions were made and new course books as well as new instructional materials were designed. The new curriculum was put into action in 2005-2006 school year in all schools throughout the country [2].

This renewal of the primary curriculum can be considered as a reform movement in Turkish education system taken towards achieving more quality and contemporary education, which is essential to survive and prosper in our rapidly changing world. Unlike the former curriculum that was heavily drawn from behaviorist understanding, the new primary curriculum is based on constructivist paradigm and multiple intelligence theory, which imposed on considerable changes in schools.

With this new curriculum reform, a step was taken to improve education provided in our schools in the light of contemporary approaches to instruction and learning [2]. The new curriculum aims to increase students' awareness of their own learning through exposing them multiple but holistic learning experiences enriched by various instructional strategies and materials. Students are no longer seen as passive learners, as it was the case in the former curriculum, which was heavily relied on traditional teacher-centered teaching methods. Schools have made to emphasize creativity, productivity, critical thinking and multiple technology use in students' learning to raise students who are able to cope with the demand of the 21st century [4].

The shift from behaviorist curriculum to constructivist one has entailed changes in school management as well. In line with the new curriculum of 2005, the role of school principals have redefined and enumerated by the National Ministry of

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*Paper presented at WCCES XIII World Congress Comparative Education Societies, Sarajevo, 3-7 September, 2007.

Education. With the new roles and responsibilities, school principals are expected:

1. to have essential knowledge and skills related to the new curriculum so that they can handle any problems in practice by making the best possible decisions.
2. to establish the necessary physical environment for meeting the new program requirements.
3. to make teachers work as a coordinated team.
4. to create a learning environment which encourages teachers to share their knowledge and experience with each other.
5. to ensure that school activities for a whole year are determined with the participation of all teachers during the annual meetings held at the beginning of each school year.
6. to organize monthly meetings to make teachers follow the program in the same sequence by employing similar procedures and techniques.
7. to hold evaluation meetings for each unit or theme taught in each grade level.
8. to meet all teachers at the end of school year to evaluate and to make judgments to what extent teachers achieve the monthly and annually pre-determined objectives for the implementation of the program.
9. to provide a platform for teachers to share their portfolios full of activities they carried out for a whole year
10. to make contributions to teachers' professional development through conferences, seminars or workshops organized either at school or outside the school,
11. to guide teachers to read books and to watch films, documentaries that have the potential to have an impact on their professional development
12. to organize peer-training sessions through assigning teachers in groups to work on a piece of work to be presented.
13. to encourage teachers to be innovative; to provide opportunities that teachers can reveal their own knowledge, skills and creativity; to make teachers accountable for the success they have in planning and implementing teaching-learning process.
14. to deliver informative seminars for parents.
15. to facilitate students' participation to activities outside school
16. to build laboratory and library and control their functional use.
17. to ensure that school has a web site which is actively used to help establish the new program.

In order to fulfill these overlapping and exhaustive roles and responsibilities, the definition of school principalship is extended to include instructional leaders qualities. In other words, instructional leadership came to the fore for school principalship to meet the new program requirements in Turkey.

According to one of the most prominent instructional leadership model that was developed by Hallinger and Murphy in 1985, instructional leadership behaviors include defining the mission of the school, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate. Instructional leadership emphasizes the role of school leaders in coordinating, supervising and evaluating curriculum to enhance students' learning at school [5]. Considering the new program of 2005, it seems that the success mostly lies school principals' effective management of curriculum at schools.

Marsh and Willis provided a list of leadership behaviors that school principals follow in managing curriculum: (1*) model on understanding of essential curricular processes; (2) assist teachers in modifying their curriculum; (3) encourage teachers to acquire the knowledge base of essential curriculum practice and skills; (4) encourage teachers to critically examine the congruence between their philosophy of teaching and learning and their own behaviors; (5) promote an understanding about the macro curriculum which necessitates the interdisciplinary and complementary linkages among all subjects in the entire curriculum* [6].

Middlewood, on the other hand, defined four curriculum leadership roles including, having view of the whole curriculum, ensuring accountability for high standards in learning and teaching; developing an appropriate culture and environment; and being a role model for both learners and teachers [7].

It is possible to draw a general framework of school principals' role in curriculum management. It is essential that principals have a profound knowledge about the curriculum they use in their schools. This knowledge base includes a considerable knowledge about the paradigm underlying the curriculum and its interpretation for practice as well as knowledge in curriculum development and evaluation [8].

As the curriculum leader of their school, principals help teachers acquire necessary knowledge of curriculum and serve as a guide in its implementation [6]. By analogy, like an orchestra conductor, principals are expected to create a harmony among the whole parts of the curriculum. They promote "*horizontal and vertical curriculum articulation"* to help students have a holistic curriculum experience. Since students' experience with the curriculum is based on what they received as individual learners when they leave school, it is necessary to make all students experience a holistic and quality curriculum experience [9].

It is highly recommended that school principals be a role model for teachers in the implementation of the curriculum [7]. This is basically what the new curriculum demand from school principals. To what extent, principals are doing this? In his study to evaluate the effectiveness of primary school principals as instructional leader in the development and evaluation of the new curriculum, Can found that principals were reported to have inadequate curriculum knowledge and expertise, fail to participate in material selection and to create environments for teachers to share their knowledge and experience. The school administrators were found to be effective in some aspects of program development such as organizing meeting at the beginning of each term to determine the school-wide activities to be carried out throughout the term; supplying materials and equipments that are required to understand the program and to fulfill the program objectives; helping teacher use time efficiently [10]. Principals, on the

other hand, were found to reflect their inadequacies and put the blame on teachers, who are believed to be ineffective in their use of time and performing their duties, reluctant in improving themselves and inept in developing relations with parents [11].

III. Research Design

This study is a qualitative case study. The aim of this study is to focus on a single school to reach a detailed explanation of school principal's performance with regard to the new program. The following question guided the study: *How do school principals perform their new roles and responsibilities defined in line with the new school curriculum of 2005 ?*

To seek an answer to this particular question, of ten schools that the new program was piloted in Istanbul, one of them was randomly selected for this study. Since the subjects' consent was based on protecting the anonymity throughout the research process, the name of the school as well as the names of principal and of teachers was not revealed in here.

In this school school staff is composed of the school principal, head of vice-principals and three vice-principals, 26 class teachers, 38 branch teachers and 2 guidance and counseling teachers. The school has 25 classrooms, all of which have the capacity of 30-35 students. All classrooms are equipped with TV, video and overhead projector. In addition to 25 classrooms, the school has a computer lab, science lab, a study hall for teachers, teachers' room, library and a conference hall.

Seventeen curriculum leadership roles defined in line with the new primary school program were used to prepare the structured interview guide utilized in this study. Each role definition was turned into a question without adding or extracting anything from the original statements. Twenty-seven teachers were randomly selected for interview. An informal interview was also conducted with the school principal. The interview with each teacher took 30-45 minutes but the informal interview with the principal took almost an hour. Both researchers were present during the interviews.

IV. Results

Seventeen leadership behaviors defined as earlier in the study are used to analyze data. Some of them are too intertwined or quite similar that we prefer to group these roles in three broad leadership roles, otherwise, we have to dismantle the data into pieces because teachers' responses overlap most of the time. As a result of our attempt to bring similar items together, three leadership role groups emerged:

(1) School principals are expected to have in-dept knowledge of the curriculum and to guide teachers through its implementation in a collaborative and participative school environment.

(2) School principals are expected to create a physical environment and to supply materials and other sources that facilitate the implementation of the curriculum.

(3) School principals are expected to encourage and support teachers in their professional development.

TABLE 1 LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS REVEALED THROUGH NEW ROLE DEFINITIONS FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Relevant new role definitions	Leadership behavior 1:
1. to have essential knowledge and skills related to the new curriculum so that they can handle any problems in practice by making the best possible decisions. 3. to make teachers work as a coordinated team. 4. to create a learning environment which encourages teachers to share their knowledge and experience with each other. 5. to ensure that school activities for a whole year are determined with the participation of all teachers during the annual meetings held at the beginning of each school year. 6. to organize monthly meetings to make teachers follow the program in the same sequence by employing similar procedures and techniques. 7. to hold evaluation meetings for each unit or theme taught in each grade level. 8. to meet all teachers at the end of school year to evaluate and to make judgements to what extent teachers achieve the monthly and annually pre-determined objectives for the implementation of the program. 9. to provide a platform for teachers to share their portfolios full of activities they carried out for a whole year 14. to deliver informative seminars for parents.	school principals are expected to have in-dept knowledge of the curriculum and to guide teachers through its implementation in a collaborative and participative school environment
Relevant new role definitions	Leadership behavior 2:
2.to establish the necessary physical environment for meeting the new program requirements. 15.to facilitate students' participation to activities outside school 16.to build laboratory and library and control their functional use. 17.to ensure that school has a web site which is actively used to help establish the new program.	school principals are expected to create a physical environment and to supply materials and other sources that facilitate the implentation of the curriculum
Relevant new role definitions	Leadership behavior 3 :
10.to make contributions to teachers' professional development through conferences, seminars or workshops organized either at school or outside 11.to guide teachers to read books and to watch films, documentaries that have the potential to have an impact on their professional development 12.to organize peer-training sessions through assigning teachers in groups to work on a piece of work to be presented. 13.to encourage teachers to be innovative; to provide opportunities that teachers can reveal their own knowledge, skills and creativity; to make teachers accountable for the success they have in planning and implementingteaching-learning process.	school principals are expected to encourage and support teachers in their professional development

Leadership behavior 1: School principals are expected to have in-dept knowledge of the curriculum and to guide teachers through its implementation in a collaborative and participative school environment.

As it was discussed above, the new curriculum was a shift from a long tradition of behaviorism to constructivism, which, at the outset, requires a profound knowledge base in new paradigm. Our data revealed that the principal developed an adequate knowledge base related to the new curriculum. Teachers believed that the informative seminars organized for school principals by the Ministry of Education helped the principal be familiar with concepts and practices that are prioritized in the new curriculum. Our data also suggest that teachers ascribed the success of the school to the principal's ability to deal with problems arising due to the implementation of the new curriculum in class.

Avenstrup pointed out that most of the countries like Norway, Denmark, Finland, Britain and others have experienced difficulties while changing the behaviorist paradigm to constructivist paradigm in their curriculum reforms. This stems from the nature of constructivist paradigm; that is, constructivism, to a great extent, provides us an understanding about learning rather than about curriculum design. Since constructivism emphasizes the critical role that learner play in their own learning, curriculum designers reflect this into curriculum and aim to achieve "learner-centered" learning and experiences at elementary schools [4]. (p.1).

Considering the principal in our case school, it seems that the principal managed to internalize "learner-centered" instruction and encouraged teachers to design lessons accordingly. Teachers felt themselves free to experiment with the authentic materials and different instructional methods that focus on learners' autonomy.

Teachers believed that the principal put efforts to guide them through the implementation of the program by communicating his interpretation of curriculum and helping teachers to adapt the philosophy of the curriculum into practice in class. In addition to this, it was found that the principal evaluated the implementation of the program to see whether teachers achieved the pre-determined objectives of their classes. Teachers stated that with the new curriculum program evaluation becomes a routine practice in their school.

The new curriculum necessitates coordinated, collaborated and participated practices at school. Being aware of this, the principal started to meet teachers more than before. Yet, these meetings were still not the part of normal routines, so, ad hoc meetings were usually preferred at school. It was found that the only regular one was the meeting held at the beginning of each term. The principal, himself was present in some meetings, particularly in each department meetings to inspire teachers to share their best practices with each other and to discuss classroom activities or to monitor how curriculum is implemented at each grade level. He also meets teachers at the end of each semester to evaluate the whole-term practices to make some valid judgments with regard to failures and successes.

Leadership behavior 2: School principals are expected to create a physical environment and to supply materials and other sources that facilitate the implementation of the curriculum.

The new curriculum necessitates a learning environment which is supported by technological infrastructure and various learning materials. This entails a great amount of investment on the part of school since the state funding has diminished over the years. Teachers reported that the principal put strenuous efforts to increase the physical capacity of the school and he converted some classrooms into new computer lab, library, meeting room and science lab, teachers' study. He not only provided the necessary materials and equipments but started to monitor their functional and efficient use as well. Teachers stated that they were in a better position than most other schools in terms of the implementation of the program. Since they had the necessary technological equipments and modern labs, they could use various activities and instructional techniques to enrich students learning experiences in school.

The school has a website which provides necessary as well as updated information about the school. However, when it comes to using website for instructional purposes, teachers were found to be unwilling to share the activities they used in the class. They complained about the heavy work load in designing new instructional materials and activities, so they claimed that they have no time to put them on the website. The principal also did not ask the teachers to do so.

We found that the principal was believed to be more effective in curriculum management if he was supplied adequate resources. Although teachers generally reported that he was successful in terms of improving the physical conditions, our data revealed that most of his attempts did not go beyond making some practical changes inside the school buildings.

Leadership behavior 3: School principals are expected to encourage and support teachers in their professional development.

Most of the teachers reported that the school principal makes observations in class. However, it was found that most of the teachers were not satisfied with the way school principal perform his supervisory role in class because of his heavy emphasis on corrective attitude rather than concentrating on the improvement of teachers. This is quite contradictory considering other findings about the principal's efforts for teachers' professional development. It was found that the principal support teachers to participate in seminars organized inside or outside the school. However, he failed to influence teachers to read professional books or journals published by universities or educational institutions.

Our results suggest that leadership behaviors 1 and 2 are given more emphasis, whereas, leadership behavior 3 is less prioritized. This may partly due to the paradigm change that underlies the new curriculum. The principal devotes more time on getting familiar with the new curriculum requirements to help teachers acquire competence for an entirely new concepts and practices and to coordinate teachers' individual

efforts to ensure the parallel and coherent implementation of the new program at each class level.

V. DISCUSSION

In Turkey so-called educational changes or reforms are considered as problematic for mainly two reasons. In the first place, the majority of the reform efforts fail to address the problems of the whole system; secondly, pilot studies are rarely conducted before establishing any changes in the system [12] [13].

These two problems are, to some extent, eliminated with the new curriculum reform of 2005, which is regarded as the first stage of a broader curriculum reform that the Ministry of Education has strived to achieve. The first stage includes grades 1-5, which is followed by a new curriculum for grades 6-8. The last stage involves designing a new curriculum for grade 9th which is an obligatory and common year for students in both general high school and for vocational high school [2]

Curriculum reform is a kind of restructuring schools in western world [14]. The same applies to Turkish context; three-staged curriculum reform is a step taken towards establishing a more result-oriented education system and facilitating integration of Turkish schools into European school systems. [2]

Instructional leadership that came to the fore with the new curriculum is not an entirely new concept for our school principals. In his research in 1996, Gumuseli tested the instructional leadership model developed by Hallinger and Murphy in Turkish school context. His study with 104 school principals and 185 teachers revealed that while the principals perceived themselves as adequate in performing school tasks associated with instructional leadership, teachers' responses were found to differ slightly [15]. This study shows us that instructional leadership was studied long before the curriculum of 2005 in Turkey. However, given that the demand of new curriculum on the part of school principals, curriculum management and instructional issues will be high on the agenda of school principals and will be a fruitful area of study for researchers.

It is too early to make sound evaluations regarding the instructional leadership performance of the school principals in line with the new curriculum. However, a regular and systematic evaluation system is a must if the reform intended to be a long-lasting one. Besides, the school principals' role is crucial in the new curriculum, so it is fundamentally salient to see how they deal with their new role expectations.

In his study Can warned us to approach his results carefully considering the interval between the implementation of the new curriculum and his research. He further drew our attention to the need for a large body of research to reach some conclusions about principals' effectiveness in the new curriculum [10]. Bearing this in mind, our aim is neither to make hazy conclusions nor to make generalizations regarding the effectiveness of the principals in the new program. This study is the first stage of our efforts to carry out a comprehensive study with the participation of more schools. We also aim to carry out both qualitative and quantitative studies to evaluate principals' degree of conformity to their new roles and cross check their results. Thus, any answer for the question that we ask at the title of the study is likely to be incomplete for the time being because there is a need for further studies to picture what exactly school principals are doing these days related to the new curriculum in Turkey.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the success of the program lies in creating clear image related to the curriculum on the part of each stakeholder, especially school principals and teachers, whose understanding and contribution have a vital role for effective curriculum implementation.

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