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*The case of student-centered pedagogy in Turkey*

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# 16 Assumptions and Implications of Adopting Educational Ideas from the West

## The Case of Student-Centered Pedagogy in Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal reform movements of recent decades, the globalization of educational policy, and increasing practices of “borrowing” and “lending” school reforms have led many observers to conclude that educational systems around the world are converging toward one international model (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). These reforms have often been initiated on the rationale that education systems need to prepare citizens for the knowledge society, which is characterized by increasing globalization, progressively shorter half-lives of knowledge, and increasing importance of knowledge creation to sustain development and economic competitiveness (Riel, 1998).

Within this context, school pedagogy has increasingly received attention, and particularly after the 1990s, the global political discourse has been progressively shaped by approaches that are based on constructivism (e.g. student-centered pedagogy (SCP), child-centered pedagogy, active learning, and collaborative learning). Such approaches have become a “part of a discursive repertoire of international rights and quality education” (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008, p. 4), and by the late twentieth century they have become globally ubiquitous (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Some argue that the interest in reconstructing school pedagogy closely relates to “knowledge-based economy” discourse which is defined as “a new, very powerful, discursive imaginary” (Robertson, 2007, p. 2).

This chapter seeks to analyze SCP as an educational idea which originated in the West and was adopted by Turkey at the turn of the century as part of a major curriculum review process. SCP is “a pedagogical approach which gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the content and process of learning. What is learnt, and how, are therefore shaped by learners’ needs, capacities and interests” (Schweisfurth, 2013, p. 20). Turkey’s revised curriculum emphasizes these aspects and redefines the roles of teachers and students. Accordingly, rather than imparting direct information, teachers are expected to facilitate, guide, and supervise students’ learning processes, and students are asked to assume much more responsibility for their learning and actively participate through raising critical questions, handling materials, developing projects, doing research on select themes, and cooperating and discussing with their peers and teachers (MONE, 2005). The reform rationale emphasizes the importance of improving education quality. Within this framework, SCP is linked to improving teacher quality through transforming teachers’ autonomy, roles, and responsibilities within the classroom. The assumption was that through SCP, teachers will acquire new strategies and techniques, and will eventually make an important difference in student learning outcomes.

This chapter explores how primary school teachers viewed adoption of SCP as a Western pedagogical approach, and the ways in which they implemented SCP in their classrooms. By illustrating the resistance or favor SCP courts among Turkish teachers, the chapter responds to calls for directing “our attention to agencies resisting, inverting, or indigenizing educational imports” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000, p. 158). Indeed, research on educational transfer tends to neglect agency (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000), even though it is crucial to identify why and in what ways local actors—such as teachers—appropriate “foreign ideas” in their educational practices, and to discern how they welcome or resist global policies. The following research questions guide the analysis in this chapter:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers on borrowing SCP from the West?
2. To what extent and how were teachers’ voices incorporated in curriculum development processes before nationwide implementation of SCP at primary schools?
3. To what extent and how did teachers welcome or resist SCP in their classroom practices?

The chapter is structured as follows: First, a range of theories on why educational transfer occurs are outlined, and they are applied to SCP in an effort to explain its widespread appeal globally. The following sections offer some contextual information about Turkey, and describe the methodology of the study. The analysis of the findings is structured around the following themes: borrowing from the West, voluntary transfer or imposition, context and feasibility of educational transfer, teacher voice in policy adoption process, and policy enactment. Finally, the chapter highlights some implications of the findings for policy and practice.

## EDUCATIONAL POLICY TRANSFER

Within the field of comparative education, scholars have studied “foreign influences” through the notion of *educational transfer*, which is defined as the movement of educational ideas, practices or institutions across international borders (Beech, 2006). Until the 1960s, the discussions within the field revolved around two main opposing positions: 1) educational transfer is possible and desirable, and 2) it is neither desirable nor possible. In the 1960s, the debate increasingly focused on the scientific methods that would guarantee the success of transfer, and later how such processes could be interpreted as (neo)-colonialist imposition (Beech, 2006) or cultural imperialism (Carnoy, 1974). Recent studies on the topic attempted to build theory on educational transfer and develop frameworks for analysis (see Dale, 1999; Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). An important research area in this field is concerned with explaining why countries borrow or lend educational policies across international borders. When we apply this question to the thematic focus of this chapter, we would then ask: If the official discourses seem to be converging around the same pedagogical model globally, why is this so?

According to modernization theorists, countries borrow educational reforms from other contexts because they are better. Hence, the emerging global curriculum has developed as a response to the demands of globalized economies and knowledge societies (see Anderson-Levitt, 2008). SCP in this regard represents a more advanced way of organizing teaching and learning in schools. A second view is proposed by World Culture theorists, who argue that countries have (more or less) freely adopted “a common educational culture, resulting in increasing policy isomorphism” (Vaughan, 2013, p. 119), because a set of ideas and practices are perceived as the most successful and progressive. In other words, nations adopt educational ideas not because they are truly better, but because they are perceived as such by policymakers (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). For instance, SCP is perceived as effective in improving cognitive outcomes, and in developing skills and competencies that are deemed crucial in preparing young generations for

the labor market. In the current globalized, increasingly competitive knowledge economy, the corporate world demands employees who think in creative ways, adapt flexibly to new demands, identify and solve problems, and cooperate with others in effective ways (Windschitl, 2002). Moreover, SCP is associated with democratization of classrooms and developing citizenship skills for effective participation in society and politics (Ginsburg, 2009).

These two theories emphasize the voluntary nature of education policy transfer, and they downplay the power inequalities among countries. The World System Theory, in contrast, considers power (as in political and economic hegemony) central to the discussion, suggesting that global convergence of education policies represents power, not progress. Hence, if school pedagogy is converging around the world (at least in the official curricula), it is because a specific pedagogical approach benefits powerful states or international organizations (Gutherie, 1990; Tabulawa, 2003). From this perspective, SCP can be seen as part of an international agenda which aims to improve educational systems in ways that might support the spread of capitalism and liberal democracy (Carney, 2008). These perspectives emphasize imposition or coercion as educational transfer mechanism, and highlight the role of international aid agencies as major players that have contributed to the diffusion of SCP by advocating it as a prescription through educational projects and consultancies (Tabulawa, 2003). It is important to note here that the World Culture theorists also highlight the importance of international organizations in spreading Western justifications and models of education, even though the rationale of such organizations is explained differently by them (Vaughan, 2013).

Postcolonial theorists, on the other hand, are concerned with the continuing impact of the legacies of European colonialism, and they illustrate how with only few exceptions educational ideas predominantly travel from the Western countries to the Global South. While doing so, they draw attention to the false universalism of Western educational ideas. They argue that subordinate countries sometimes consider a global culture of schooling genuinely attractive since it is associated with and promoted by powerful countries (see Anderson-Levitt, 2008). Indeed, in many developing countries, SCP is viewed as a Western “best practice” and a well-established educational approach in Western schools. Therefore, it enjoys a hegemonic position with its “justified,” “admirable,” and “inspiring” educational ideas (Carney, 2008), and as such is perceived as “inevitable.” Walker and Dimmock (2000) also refer to a dependent and subservient preoccupation with the developments in the West, and describe how policymakers and educationalists in some Asian countries believe that adopting “modern” Western philosophies, teaching, and learning practices would lead to taking advantage of the forerunners.

## **TEACHERS AND POLICY ENACTMENT**

Decades of implementation research have shown that putting reform ideas into practice is far more complex and difficult than foreseen by policymakers and curriculum designers (Fullan, 2007), as “the lived experience of legislated changes by those forced to implement them often bears little resemblance to the outcomes anticipated by policymakers” (Schweisfurth, 2002, p. 14). Change is dynamic and challenging, and the impact of national reform is often unpredictable and uneven. The role of implementers at the “bottom” of the education system is critical. In this respect, teacher’s role as interpreter of and responder to policy is as crucial as that of policymakers at the “top” who develop or import policy ideas (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Indeed,

hundreds of implementation studies testify to the fact that any given policy varies across and within implementing systems and sites and that the “policy” that matters ultimately is the one enacted within the system, not the one originated outside of it.

(McLaughlin, 2006, p. 212)

Research has shown that teachers mediate the external demands placed on them to produce interpretations of their priorities and desirable classroom practices, which often tend to be very different from those intended by policy directives (Osborn, 2001). In keeping with their knowledge, beliefs, and pre-existing teaching practices (Fullan, 2007), as well as contextual factors, teachers respond to imported educational ideas through compliance, incorporation, mediation, retreatism, and resistance. Incorporation has been the most common response as teachers most often consolidate innovations selectively into their own practices (Pollard, Broadfoot, Croll, Osborn, & Abbott, 1994). This selectivity protects teachers from radical change and allows them to preserve beliefs and practices that they consider important (Schweisfurth, 2002).

The World Culture Theory and the World System Theory tend to attribute little or no national agency in policy development. Yet recent research has increasingly shown that there is much variation in how countries respond to global education policies, with different degrees of agency at national and school levels in the ways in which they received and enacted global policies (Altinyelken, 2012; Vaughan, 2013; Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012). Postcolonialism particularly draws attention to the agency of local actors in policy transfer and illustrates how those living in the peripheries are active players, not passive receivers. Put another way, local actors are capable of interpreting, accommodating, and resisting dominant discourses or imported ideas (see Rizvi, 2007), and creating hybrid or creole practices; that is, creating locally distinct classroom practices (Anderson-Levitt, 2008). One of the ways in which teachers respond is open resistance to imported educational ideas. Nevertheless, teacher resistance has often been viewed as a “problem” and reduced to some sort of conservative attempt to frustrate reform initiatives. Hence, the good sense embedded in teachers’ resistant actions is overlooked, and their understanding of what is good for students and for society is disregarded (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). These accounts and the varied responses to imported ideas indicate that teachers influence—to a large extent—the degree of penetration of education reforms at the school level (Napier, 2003). Therefore, the image of the teacher as a neutral conduit between policy and the child is naive and distorted. Such an image ignores teachers’ active and creative selves, and the fact that they too have an agenda (Schweisfurth, 2002).

## **PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE IN TURKEY**

Turkey initiated a major curriculum review process in 2004, replacing the old curriculum for primary schools which was in place since 1968. The official documents articulate the rationale for change by referring to national needs, globalization, and harmonization with the European Union (EU). Accordingly, the curriculum change sought to make education more responsive to the social and economic needs of the Turkish society, improve student motivation and achievement levels, equip students with select abilities, skills, and competencies that are critical to live and work in the contemporary world, and address some other concerns with regard to education quality and equity (MONE, 2005). Reference is also made to some of the international tests (such as PISA and PIRLS) in which Turkish students received disappointingly low results. Moreover, harmonization with the EU policies and education standards has been an important motive (Tarman, 2008). In 1999, Turkey was granted “candidate” status, and accession negotiations were opened in 2005 with the chapter on “Education and Culture.” Within this framework, curricular reforms were viewed as important steps to harmonize the Turkish education system with that of EU countries. In addition, the critics emphasized the impact of globalization and neoliberal policies as the main driving forces behind the curricular changes (Inal, 2009).

The Curriculum 2004 proposed changes in curriculum content and organization, pedagogical approach, and student assessment. The content load was reduced and a thematic approach was adopted in the revised educational programs. The curriculum focuses on the development of competencies, and prioritizes eight core competencies: critical thinking, creativity, communication, inquiry, problem solving, using information technologies, research, and entrepreneurship (MONE, 2005). Furthermore, the revised curriculum adopts a constructivist approach and displays a strong commitment to the principles of SCP. It attempts to center learning activities around students, and redefines the role of teachers as facilitators and guides, charged with the responsibilities of creating stimulating learning environments.

Moreover, the curriculum advocates active learning methods such as dramatization, cooperative learning, and project work, hands-on-learning, integration of learning activities in and outside of the school, research, and increased use of learning materials and information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Educational Reform Initiative, 2005; MONE, 2005). The curriculum documents advise that instead of lecturing, more time and attention should be diverted to student activities. These efforts rhetorically aimed at eliminating memorization, and teaching students how to learn and be interrogative and inquisitive.

Adoption of SCP is coupled with continuous assessment which proposes new assessment mechanisms, such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, project and performance assignments, observation forms, and student portfolios (MONE, 2005). The revised curriculum was piloted in the 2004/5 academic year in 120 public primary schools across Turkey. In the following year, nationwide implementation was initiated at the first five grades at the same time (Educational Reform Initiative, 2005). The curriculum change was portrayed as a “revolutionary move in education” by the authorities, and there were extensive debates in the media (Güven & İscan, 2006).

## THE STUDY

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in Turkey in spring 2009. Eight schools took part in this research, and they were sampled from public schools that piloted the revised curriculum before nationwide implementation in the province of Ankara. Because of taking part in piloting, these schools had longer experience with the revised curriculum at the time of research and more prolonged contact with the institutions involved in curriculum implementation, and their teachers had longer in-service training. The schools were located in different districts, often in middle- to low-income neighborhoods, offering relatively higher-quality education compared to other schools in their locality. Student numbers ranged widely between 662 and 3,339, and the average number of teachers was 65.

The analysis presented in this chapter is mainly based on interviews with teachers and school management. However, interviews with a number of key informants (e.g., academics and officials from the Ministry, Board of Education, and some other educational institutions) were also conducted to contextualize the study and reflect on broader discussions. For teacher interviews, those teaching at Grades 1, 2, and 5 were selected. The reason for choosing the first two grades was the fact that this study was compared with another case study conducted in Uganda (see Altinyelken, 2010). Grade 5 was also added in the case of Turkey since at the time of this research, Grade 5 students were the only students who had been educated according to the SCP since the start of their schooling. Because of the high number of students per school, there were several streams at any grade level, reaching up to 12. When the number of streams was more than three for a grade level, the classrooms were randomly selected. In total, 69 interviews were conducted with teachers (57 female and 12 male; 26 teaching at Grade 1, 24 at Grade 2, and 19 at Grade 5) and 14 interviews with school management (13 male and

one female). Teachers' ages ranged between 30 and 64, while the average was 40. In terms of education level, five had master's degrees, 62 were university graduates, and only two were graduates of teacher training institutes. The years of experience ranged between nine and 43, the average being 16. The majority of teachers had work experience in various parts of the country, both in urban and rural settings (Altinyelken, 2011). The semi-structured interviews were often held in classrooms or in staff rooms. A list of general topics was prepared to make interviewing systematic and comprehensive, but multiple other sub-topics were probed.

## FINDINGS

### **Borrowing from the West**

Interviews with various actors point out that the process of curriculum reform was mainly inspired by the educational structures and practices in the West. For this purpose, a number of study-tours were organized prior to the curriculum review process, including countries such as the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, and Finland. Teachers' view on adopting SCP was primarily favorable as it was perceived as a "modern," "advanced," and "progressive" pedagogical approach. Many believed that SCP was the only alternative to the traditional teaching methods which were harshly criticized by a wide range of educational stakeholders, including policy-makers, teachers, and parents, for "being ineffective, boring and outdated." In that sense, the adoption of SCP into the Turkish context was considered an inevitable outcome of modernity and development. One teacher exclaimed:

No one could be against it as no one can openly oppose development and improvement.  
(Classroom teacher, Grade 5)

Some other studies also confirm such overwhelmingly affirmative opinions and attitudes among Turkish teachers toward SCP (Çınar, Tefür, & Mehmet, 2006). There were a range of implicit assumptions made between the use of a specific pedagogical approach and the level of development in a given country. Although there are no empirical studies that establish a direct linkage between economic development and a specific pedagogical approach (Alexander, 2008), in the imaginations of teachers as well as policymakers, SCP was closely associated with stimulating economic growth and raising the competitiveness of the Turkish economy globally. In addition, teachers believed that this pedagogical approach is the norm in schools in the West. They viewed the West as more advanced, modern, developed, rich, and successful. Hence, adopting their educational ideas was a "rational," "common sense" approach.

The USA and the EU are using this. In order to advance, we also feel the need. This is their educational approach, and they are richer than us.  
(Classroom teacher, Grade 2)

It was successful in Europe, that is why we are also adopting it.  
(Classroom teacher, Grade 1)

I guess, this is used globally. Turkey should not be missing out on this. ... The education systems of the developed countries are tested, their success is proven, there is no doubt this approach is good.  
(Deputy head teacher)

These accounts confirm that the majority of teachers viewed the West as a “reference society” (Werning Rivera, 2004) for borrowing educational policies. This corroborates with long legacies of borrowing from the West in the past three centuries to modernize and reform the military, legal, economic, and political systems (Ulusoy, 2009). In that respect, the pedagogical approaches that might be commonly used by the Western educators had credibility, legitimacy, and validity. A scholar with long years of research in the Turkish education system confirmed that Western pedagogies have high appeal among Turkish teachers and academics in Educational Sciences Departments, because so many believe that the Western ways of doing things are superior:

In countries like ours, there is a pervasive belief that whatever the West did is right, that is why they are advanced. Hence, we should emulate them to improve our education system. ... One reason why this is so pervasive is the fact that so many scholars do their MA or PhD abroad. Hence, they internalize cultural imperialism.

These observations confirm some of the arguments of postcolonial theory outlined earlier, and reflect that teachers are unaware of increasing scrutiny and critique of SCP in the West (Windschitl, 2002).

### **Voluntary Transfer or Imposition**

Teacher narratives outlined above imply that Turkey adopted SCP voluntarily. One head teacher remarked that:

I do not know of anything we develop ourselves. We import from the West. It is tested and proven efficient. We chose to adopt it, it is not imposition.

(Head teacher)

Several other teachers and key actors also emphasized the rationale of Turkish policymakers and curriculum designers for adopting SCP and discounted the probability of coercion. In fact, foreign influences in educational reform processes appeared to be a highly sensitive issue and the policymakers were particularly keen to underscore that even if the heads of commissions for various educational programs traveled abroad to study educational systems, and they were influenced by the international literature, there was a high sense of national ownership and sovereignty in the adoption process. An expert involved in the curriculum review process confirmed that “foreign influences create resentment.” This was illustrated by a teacher who participated in one of the commissions. She explained that a Dutch consultant participated in her commission, and during one meeting, a teacher stood up and said he did not belong there. Other members applauded her, and all expected him to leave the meeting. But, he did not.

Some others refuted the claims of voluntary transfer, suggesting that even if the official discourse was framed as “we imported SCP because we think it is great, because its success is proven elsewhere,” this was far from the truth. These teachers were suggesting that there were elements of coercion and imposition in the transfer process:

This is imposition from the EU. This is a conditionality for the EU membership. They expect that we align our education system with theirs.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 1)

It is political, it is about integration to the EU norms.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 2)



We were told that the program was put in front of us by the EU. One of the teacher unions opposed the program because it was initiated by the Westerners.

(Head teacher)

There are some grounds to these claims as the curriculum review was funded by the EU through “Support to Basic Education Program.” The program was initiated in 2002 and phased out in 2007, with a budget of 100 million euros. It aimed at improving access to good quality education, and did not originally include financing of a new curriculum (Nohl & Somel, 2015). The funding raised questions among teachers, as they enquired whether the funding was accompanied by lending of educational ideas. These teachers were convinced that financing from the Westerners was almost always coupled with “foreign ideas.”

Yet such a possibility was strongly discounted by policymakers, arguing that the EU funded the curriculum development process but did not intervene or influence the reform process in any way. The implications of “outside imposition” appeared to touch a raw nerve among policymakers who were keen to emphasize national ownership in the reform process. This sentiment was confirmed by Ziya Selcuk, the President of the Board of Education, the institution within the Ministry of National Education responsible for developing and accrediting curricula and textbooks. In an interview, Selcuk argued that the European Commission only had a supportive role through funding and consultancies (mostly in the design of textbooks), and did not have “a decisive role in the curriculum development process” (Nohl & Somel, 2015, p. 74).

These discussions were closely related to the question of whether SCP was a form of Westernization. Indeed, the implication of SCP for the local culture was a controversial and hotly debated topic: Some viewed it as “outright Westernization” with resentment, while some others welcomed its potential for changing classroom culture and the Turkish society in general. Teachers who viewed SCP as a form of Westernization framed it as cultural imperialism:

This programme is an extension of Western imperialism.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 2)

By changing the education system you can eliminate nationhood within a country. This approach is adopted from the West. This is done purposefully. This Western style education is a form of Western imperialism.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 1)

There is a cultural imperialism dimension of it since [SCP] implies changes in culture.

(Head teacher)

One of the themes discussed within this context was individualism. Several teachers commented that the revised curriculum and the SCP in particular accentuate individualism among children. Some perceived this as an undesirable development, undermining collectivist values within the Turkish society and leading to alienation of the new generations to some deeply held societal values and norms. Few others, on the other hand, welcomed this development, arguing that the Turkish society is too collectivist and more individualism is much needed. One teacher argued that “Children are not seen as individuals within their families or at school”; hence an individualist, Western model might help to create a better balance between collectivism and individualism. Likewise, the potential of SCP

in democratizing classrooms and contributing to democratization in broader society was welcomed by the majority of teachers (for a broader discussion on this see Altinyelken, 2015). A teacher's comments illustrate such sentiments:

The average teacher profile in Turkey is one who is dominant, authoritarian, and undemocratic. With SCP we might be able to change this ... children are learning that they are individuals, their ideas matter.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 5)

## CONTEXT AND FEASIBILITY OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSFER

The discussions on the feasibility of education policy transfer highlighted the importance of context, affirming that the same policy can work in different ways in diverse contexts. Teachers believed that educational ideas might work well in the countries of their origin; however, they might have limited effect or might produce “disastrous results” when they are emulated as such and transplanted into new socio-economic, political, and educational contexts.

They researched good education systems, those with higher educational outcomes. Yet, their society is different from ours. Parents, students, infrastructure are all different. Hence, this approach could not take root in our education system.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 5)

In this respect, Turkey was perceived as a highly different context in comparison to Western Europe. Problems addressed by policies, the cultural context within which they are implemented, and the characteristics of the population are all viewed as distinct. The most cited aspects discussed by teachers included Turkey's vast socio-economic differences between the western and the eastern regions, and between urban and rural citizens; the highly competitive nature of its education system; the hierarchical relationships that involve an element of authority; the dynamics of parent-child relationships; the status attached to having a university degree; and the nature and level of parental involvement in education. In consideration of such divergent contextual realities, one teacher concluded that:

They try to adopt program from abroad to our country but in implementation they do not work out well always.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 1)

According to some, drawing lessons from contexts that are not comparable leads to alienation within the education system, and a failure to develop indigenous educational policies that can address educational problems within Turkish society more effectively. In other words, an attitude of trying to solve problems at home by adopting solutions from elsewhere might undermine education quality and hamper development. Some teachers particularly stressed that there are educational traditions and resources in Turkey that were not used during the curriculum review process. They were concerned that the tradition of adopting from foreign contexts might undermine the trust in the wisdom and capacity of Turkish educators in addressing educational concerns, and can perpetuate dependency on the Western knowledge. These comments underscore some of the arguments of Ball, who suggests that Southern experts are often educated in Northern countries, and this phenomenon

contributes to the perpetuation of cultural and political dependency. Their return to home countries “carries” ideas and creates dependency, resulting in devaluation or denial of “local” solutions to educational problems (Ball, 1998).

## TEACHER VOICE IN POLICY ADOPTION PROCESS

The policymakers often remarked that the process of revising the curriculum and adopting educational ideas from the West has been an inclusive process, including a wide range of stakeholders, such as students, teachers, parents, civil society organizations, academics, and teacher unions. An officer from the Ministry stated that it was a “very inclusive process. NGOs, academics, universities were all involved.” However, the inclusiveness and participatory nature of the adoption process was often critiqued by some others, suggesting that participation was mainly window-dressing to present the review process as a democratic undertaking. Indeed, a series of meetings were organized which brought together these actors, yet the critiques noted that eventually the officials decided what will be included in the curriculum texts. The same critique was also made by two teachers who participated in commissions which were in charge of developing educational programs. Nohl and Somel’s study (2015) points out that participation of civil society was surprisingly limited, yet it was mostly them who remained distant for a range of reasons, including disagreement with the political line of the government, doubts about any serious consideration of their feedback, and perceptions of these stakeholder meetings being organized due to the EU pressure.

Overall, the policy adoption process was experienced as a top-down approach and a “quick fix,” leaving very little space for teachers’ voice. Several teachers remarked that the entire curriculum review process and the development of new educational programs were finalized within a year, which was perceived as an impossible undertaking. One teacher noted, “It all happened suddenly. The majority of the teachers believe so.” Teachers suggested that such a “quick fix” approach gave rise to chaos and resentment. The SCP was glorified together with the curriculum overhaul, and was promoted as “an entirely different approach” and “a complete shift from the past.” This appears to have alienated teachers with long years of experience as they received such statements as a critique on their work:

Some teachers who have been teaching for years particularly resented the SCP as it was seen as an imposition on them. They have been teaching for years, and almost suddenly they were asked to change. They said “I have been doing this job for years and now they brought this top-down, I do not know what to do.”

(Classroom teacher, Grade 5)

Teachers’ comments also suggested that their participation in policy adoption and implementation processes should not be limited to participation of a few in the commissions. Instead, they proposed that teachers’ voices should be more broadly integrated into the reform process in an ongoing manner with regular contact with the Ministry officials. During the piloting phase, these eight schools had intensive contact with the Ministry, as the officials frequently visited the schools. Teachers at pilot schools were also requested to report their opinions on the textbooks and on how they implemented SCP and continuous assessment. Teachers maintained that they viewed such requests very seriously, and studied the textbooks in great detail, had discussions with fellow teachers, and compiled their remarks in neatly organized reports. They were also invited to fill in a number of questionnaires that explored their experiences with the revised curriculum.

Nevertheless, teachers believed that their feedback was not taken into consideration adequately by the authorities. They have noticed over the years that changes have been made to the curriculum materials, yet they felt disappointed to see that their comments were hardly reflected in such modifications. This created a feeling that things remained the same in essence, and their input had little impact on the reform process. These impressions were also shared by some academics who suggested that the new educational programs were implemented nationwide without carefully considering the feedback received from pilot schools (Gömleksiz et al., 2005; Guven & Iscan, 2006). Consequently, many teachers have lost their enthusiasm and drive to offer feedback. Several teachers explicitly said that they started to respond to the questionnaires by giving socially desirable answers and by portraying a rosy picture in which all seemed in place and everything worked efficiently as planned by policymakers. “Why bother?” said one teacher:

The policy makers do what they believe is the best with such little regard for teacher feedback. So when they ask, we tell them that everything is great, simply brilliant.

(Classroom teacher, Grade 2)

## **ENACTING SCP IN CLASSROOMS**

The findings of this study revealed that teachers selectively incorporated aspects of SCP in their practice, creating a mosaic of different implementation profiles at school and classroom levels. Hence, the Curriculum 2004 and SCP in particular appear to have changed its shape and focus in the course of its implementation, echoing similar experiences in other parts of the world (Anderson-Levitt, 2008; Bantwini, 2010; Dello-Iacovo, 2009). This might be a surprising finding for some because teachers in Turkey are viewed as being highly committed to the principles and directives of centralized education policymaking (Karakaya, 2004). Nevertheless, teachers' accounts demonstrate that they modified the curriculum in accordance with their beliefs, interpretations, convictions, and classroom realities.

An overview of implementation profiles pointed out that some aspects of the new pedagogical approach were easily embraced, while some others were left out. For instance, the use of a variety of learning and teaching methods and materials, increasing student talk, and incorporating ICTs were adopted by the majority of teachers, yet opportunities for cooperative learning and group work were rarely exploited. In line with SCP, teachers appeared to demonstrate a greater effort to use different teaching and learning methods (such as drama, games, brainstorming, and singing), in an effort to make learning more enjoyable and enduring. More teachers also made use of computers (e.g., using educational CDs while teaching Turkish and mathematics), and to a lesser extent TV. They also tried to stimulate student talk during lessons, however, such efforts were constrained by large classroom sizes and time limitations imposed by the stresses of covering all curriculum subjects.

Although within the African context grouping is often the first or only indicator of change after implementation of child-centered pedagogy (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004), in Turkey students were rarely seated in groups, and teachers admitted that they only occasionally organized group work or created opportunities for students to interact with each other. There was much emphasis placed on classroom activities, project, performance, and research assignments. During lessons, teachers invested a greater part of lesson time in activities listed in student workbooks, which needed to be carried out individually, in pairs, or in groups. As a result, the noise level in classrooms has risen, and teachers encountered more challenges with classroom management. Moreover, in line with curriculum expectations, project and performance

assignments were organized to stimulate learning through discovery and hands-on learning. Although a few teachers appreciated their value, several others expressed concern that students delegated such obligations to their parents or significant others in the family.

The new program has good intentions but does not work in reality. We give project and research assignments but students go and look for persons who can do the assignments for them. ... Parents compete among themselves for better performance, some even do not hesitate to directly ask the teacher “what grade did I get for this assignment?”

(Classroom teacher, Grade 2)

Consequently, some of the objectives of the assignments were not achieved in practice. Similar concerns were articulated for research-related assignments as well. Parents’ excessive involvement has become such a phenomenon that many referred to the new curriculum as “parent-centered education.”

A range of reasons were discussed to explain why the implementation of SCP diverted from the official prescriptions. These included, among others, inadequate teacher preparation, large classrooms sizes, lack of teaching and learning materials, and backwash effects of examination system which pressures students, parents, and teachers to emphasize knowledge acquisition (see a discussion on these in Altinyelken, 2011). Furthermore, the majority of teachers were concerned that SCP effectively reinforces the social inequalities of the society as it inadvertently favors children who come to school with higher cultural and linguistic capital. They believed that, particularly in an exam-oriented education system, such as in Turkey, emphasis on the development of competencies at the expense of marginalizing knowledge acquisition has far-reaching negative implications for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. For this purpose, around 60 percent of teachers who participated in this research compensated curriculum with the use of supplementary resources, and they devoted more time (in comparison to what was advised in the curriculum documents) to direct teaching and imparting knowledge. These accounts reveal that teachers demonstrate *principled resistance* when they perceive proposed changes as detrimental to their students and to society in general (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

“Look West” and “learning from the West” have been historically powerful metaphors in Turkey. These metaphors have appeared to be significant in the adoption of SCP in the primary school curriculum, coupled with some economic and political assumptions, such as economic growth, improving competitiveness, democratization, and the EU harmonization. Overwhelmingly, SCP was perceived as a Western “best practice” by Turkish teachers: hence, its adoption was viewed as logical and practical by many. Nevertheless, teacher views on this were by no means uniform, as some of them questioned the feasibility and desirability of such transfer. These sentiments might have increased in recent years because of the de-Europeanization process in Turkish politics. In fact, there is increasingly little mention of the Western countries in the narratives of change or educational reform discourses used by policymakers (Onursal-Besgul, 2016), and “the post-2005 period has been marked by a downturn in EU–Turkey relations and growing disenchantment on both sides” (Aydın-Düzgüt & Kaliber, 2016, p. 1).

The cross-national transfer of educational ideas is a complex and multi-dimensional undertaking. The Turkish case demonstrates that even when “the foreign educational ideas” are welcomed by teachers discursively, they might still show considerable resistance in the process of curriculum enactment. One of the reasons for glaring differences between policy and practice relates to the quality of in-service teacher training. In this study, such training—both

in terms of content and presentation—was found weak, and the lack of demonstrations and practical work was viewed as disappointing. Therefore, teachers felt ill-prepared to implement SCP. This has resulted in misconceptions, wide divergences in interpretations of the pedagogical approach, and as suggested by some teachers, even resistance to change proposals. Nevertheless, teachers' main motivation in resisting specific aspects of SCP had more to do with its (in)compatibility with the Turkish context, and the perceived impacts on social equity. In this respect, there was a widespread sentiment that SCP inadvertently intensified social inequalities, and favored students with higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Furthermore, teachers noted that despite the rhetoric of curriculum development process being a democratic process, their voice was limited, being represented only by a few teachers who took part in the commissions. Such disappointment was also expressed for teacher feedback during the pilot year. In fact, teachers appeared to be alienated by poor use of their feedback, and they felt that surveys and school reports were primarily formalistic. These findings point to the importance of democratizing policymaking, and incorporating teacher voice at different stages of policy transfer. As Jansen suggests, if policy can learn, it should learn from experiences at lower levels in the system, where it is creolized and re-creolized in response to local realities and contextual factors (Jansen, 1997).

This requires a broad and ongoing participation of teachers in the curriculum development process, both in policy formulation and in re-assessing and modifying the curriculum during the implementation stage. Providing teachers with opportunities to study and discuss the curriculum materials together with their colleagues is also important since such avenues can generate self-reflection and growth. Moreover, supporting teachers' professional autonomy is highly critical to the enactment of pedagogical reforms. On a discursive level, SCP requires enhancement of teacher autonomy as it professes a teaching approach tailored to the needs, interests, and capacities of students from diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, teacher autonomy remains limited in Turkey, and the Ministry continues to exercise strict control over the school curriculum and other aspects of schooling (Ozturk, 2011). Democratizing policy adoption also requires attention to the broader political processes. Yet serious limitations to social and political democratization continue to persist under the successive governments of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, and worse, there has been an increasing shift toward conservatism and authoritarianism in recent years (Özbudun, 2014).

By throwing light on the role of teachers in the processes of education policy transfer and implementation, this chapter responds to the question on whether there is a convergence on school pedagogy globally. The narratives of Turkish teachers confirm convergence around education reform talk and persistence of divergences at the classroom level. This supports historical and comparative evidence which indicates that there can be “much loose coupling in practice” between the national adoption of global education policies and their local enactment (Bromley, Meyer, & Ramirez, 2011), and that continuities prevail through successive education reforms (Schweisfurth, 2002). Therefore, “convergence often occurs exclusively at the level of policy talk, in some instances also at the level of policy action, but rarely at the level of implementation” (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006, p. 6), because *global policies* are mediated, re-contextualized (sometimes beyond recognition), selectively adopted, undermined, or openly resisted by local actors.

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