Full Length Research Paper

How geography teachers deal with the curriculum changes in Turkey

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The changes in Turkish geography curriculum in 2005 have placed geography teachers to adopt completely different approaches from what they were used to throughout their careers. This study attempts to explore to what extent teachers of geography have adopted the new curriculum and how they are dealing with the recent curricular changes in Turkey. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 geography teachers based in the cities of Kayseri and Nevşehir. According to our findings, the new curriculum is not entirely adopted by teachers because of the lack of teachers’ ownership, of the features generated by the Turkish centralised educational system, of the lack of continuous professional development as well as the lack of their professionalism.

Key Words: Geography curriculum, geography teachers, teacher change, continuous professional development.

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed a radical change in the social conditions and in the context of education (Hargreaves et al., 2010). The 1990s and 2000s witnessed many educational reforms in the world, particularly in the Eastern part of Europe including Turkey, in order to keep pace with the social and economic changes. The curricula of different subjects have been re-written in ways that develop critical and multiple insights and explanations with regards to societies and the world. The geography curriculum in Turkey was also renewed in 2005. It did not only brought changes in terms of the content but also more extensive changes including learning and teaching processes and assessment methods. The new curriculum emphasises a geography education based on constructivism, student centered learning, active learning and multiple intelligences (Karabağ et al., 2007; Öztürk et al., 2007). This situation has naturally placed teachers in a position to adopt different educational strategies unlike their previous practices.

The fast, flexible and vulnerable world of the 21st Century (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009) requires to prepare students to operate through a range of scales from local to global (Öztürk et al., 2007) and to take their place in diverse communities, characterised by heterogeneity, unfamiliarity, unpredictability and risk (Huckle, 2001). In this regard, education should prepare students for multiple and evolving forms of citizenship (Lynch, 1992; cited by Huckle, 2001) and for a more inclusive, inspiring, and sustainable future (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009), “exercised at different levels and across the different dimensions of their lives (ecological, economic, political, social and cultural)” (Huckle, 2001: 2). It is very obvious that preparing young people for such a future first require us to prepare our teachers with the right mindset and skills. Teachers are at the centre of all educational practices (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 2010) and they are the most important factor in student achievement (Smith and Gillespie, 2007).

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Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) explain the success of such countries as Finland, Singapore and Canada in education that these countries develop the teaching profession in a way that students continuously have good teachers. They discuss the importance of developing teachers’ “professional capitals” for successful education. Capital is “an asset that has to be invested, accumulated and circulated to yield continuous growth and strong return” (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012:1). In this respect, professional capital has three components: human (qualities of the individual), social (being able to work in groups collaboratively) and decisional (making decisions in complex situations) (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012). Once policy makers are aware of the fact that teachers need to have high levels of professional capital, it is relatively easy to organise pre-service teacher education to meet these standards through relevant activities such as case studies, drama and micro teaching (Öztürk, 2012). However, it is relatively difficult to achieve such professional capital with current teachers, particularly in the context of educational change. If a reform is taking place in a country where teachers were educated through traditional practices, the increasing of their professional capital becomes a difficult job because in most education systems including Turkey, “behind the classroom door, teachers are islands unto themselves” (Fullan, 2012).

In such isolated systems, two problems emerge. The first is that good ideas do not get around; they remain trapped in individual classrooms or schools. The other problem is that poor teaching can remain entrenched, because good practices are not being disseminated (Fullan, 2012: 2).

Curriculum change presents both challenges and opportunities for the all involved actors. It presents a challenge because individuals have to change their routine, practice, beliefs and attitudes. It presents an opportunity because it implies a new type of learning process which leads to “new ways of thinking and doing, new skills, knowledge and attitudes” (Fullan, 2001: 84). Yet, for most of the time, as Stoll and Fink (1996) point out, a change means taking risks and being in new areas where one feels insecure. Although bringing a new understanding of education into the curriculum provokes change and innovation, every change involves loss, feelings of anxiety and threat (Fullan, 2001). This is especially true for unwelcomed change. James (2010: 49) stresses that “there are two main reasons for the effect of unwelcome change: the disruption of defensive behaviours and the complex feelings that results from loss of meaning”. James (2010) argues that a good deal of educational practice is usually intended to experience positive feelings against negative feelings. The requirement to change practice may bring out “conservative impulse” to preserve and safeguard the predictability of life of those concerned that we would like to infuse positive feelings (James, 2010). This then may be accompanied by feelings of loss, insecurity and inadequacy which turn may all bring anxiety (James, 2010). A similar case exist for the loss of meaning. Throughout our lives we attach meanings to certain things. In educational change, we may need to discard our practices, materials, resources that we attach meanings. Withdrawing from an attachment and reattaching to others generate conflicting feelings and anxiety that can influence the behaviour (James, 2010).

What should be done to reduce such outcomes of the change process? One of the most rehearsed statements on teacher change is that teachers tend to fail to adopt change mandated by policy makers or people from outside the classroom (Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009) because teachers find themselves responding to an unplanned cultural shift, rather than implementing a new approach from the bottom up (Öztürk et al., 2007; Karabağ et al., 2006); when curriculum change is the appropriate objective, then this vision should not be imposed on teachers. Professional involvement should be ensured (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009) and teachers should find it meaningful. They should be able to make a personal connection, a necessary condition for engagement and conviction. If teachers attempt to adopt change without understanding it, they will, for example, temporarily use part of the new teaching method, but it will not significantly change their practice in the long run (Ertmer, 2005). Therefore, to implement educational change, staff should have the necessary skills to adopt the change and they should be given opportunities to evaluate the potential and quality of the change (Fullan, 1993).

The best way to provide teachers with the necessary skills and understanding to adopt change is through continuous professional development. How teachers learn to change is best defined as a composite outcome of change in students, practices, beliefs and attitudes (Opher et al., 2011). Similarly, Guskey (2002) points out the major goals of professional development as change in teachers’ classroom practices, change in their beliefs and attitudes and change in the learning of students positively. However, Guskey (2002: 386) proposes an alternative model of teacher change (professional development) by changing the sequence among the three goals mentioned above because “change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs is primarily a result, rather than a cause, of change in the learning outcomes of students”. He persuasively argues that if teachers do not have any evidence of improvement in students’ learning, they probably will not change their beliefs and attitudes because after all there is no need for it. However “improvements typically result from changes teachers have made in their classroom practices- a new instructional approach, the use of new materials or curricula, or simply a modification in teaching procedures or classroom format” (Guskey, 2002: 383).

What Guskey (2002) describes as an alternative model
In this study qualitative research and analysis methods are used. The qualitative approach, the most common method of analysis in the social sciences, provides possibilities to relate conceptual explanations to individual teachers. As Patton (1980: 67) states ‘how you study the world determines what you learn about the world’. Qualitative research methods make it possible to investigate critically the origins, nature, and the process of adapting to changes with respect to the new curriculum. The method for data collection was the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are the most common interview technique as it provides room for both researcher and participant (Silverman, 2005; Bryman, 2001, Robson, 1993). The researcher asks the questions s/he wants to ask but the participant can also intervene in the process by bringing up issues that the researcher did not think of before.

Data were collected through interviews with 24 geography teachers who work in the cities of Kayseri and Nevşehir in Turkey in spring 2011. The majority of teachers who took part in the study have more than ten years of experience (18 teachers). The rest have 8 to 10 years of experience. The sample was selected by teachers’ years of experience. Since the current geography curriculum in Turkey was changed in 2005, only those teachers who started working before 2005 were included in the study. It should be noted that the sample is representative in the sense that the overwhelming majority of teachers based in the city centres are experienced teachers with more than 7 years of teaching experience. Since the Turkish education system is much centralised, all the teachers in the study, no matter what kind of school they teach in, follow the same curriculum. Out of 24, 8 of the participants were female. Interviews were carried out in an informal manner usually in free lessons. Interviews lasted about twenty to twenty-five minutes and were recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher also took notes of the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed and printed out. Having read them many times to get acquainted with the transcripts (Bryman, 2001), these transcriptions were then coded and categorised under themes (Silverman, 2000; Mason, 1996). The names of the interviewees have been changed.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the interviews may be summarised and presented broadly within two themes, attitudes towards curriculum change and how teachers really deal with the change.

**Attitudes towards curriculum change**

Geography teachers who took part in this study were asked about their overall feelings about the change which took place in 2005 in order to understand if they have positive or negative feelings. The answers to this query fall into three categories as seen in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, in addition to positive and negative attitudes, there were a number of teachers who were in between. However, out of 24, 14 teachers considered the curriculum change in positive terms. Within this group, two sub-groups could be distinguished. The first sub-group consisting of nine teachers was clearly in favour of the changes that have taken place in the geography curriculum:

I have been a teacher for fifteen years. I have taught the old and new curricula and the current...
one is really much better than the previous one. We can cover many interesting topics, and discuss real life issues in the classrooms which were limited previously (Halil, IT).

Although I only taught the old curriculum for two years, I can tell the new curriculum is much better as it is better organised and less loaded (Ayse, IT).

This group of teachers usually makes reference to the content of the curriculum. Compared to the old one, the new curriculum is found to be less intensive in terms of the content and less complex in terms of organisation. The teachers have positive feelings about the helical structure of the curriculum. From grade 9 to grade 12, the content is organised under the same five themes, namely: natural systems; human systems; environment and society; global environment, regions and countries; a spatial synthesis: Turkey, which make more sense to teachers. As teacher Huseyin points out, previously, geography at secondary school level used to be delivered under different names, such as general geography, physical geography of Turkey, human and regional geography of Turkey, and world geography. This made it difficult to develop a geographic consciousness in students because these different geography syllabuses focused on some particular issues of geography usually leaving out many others. As another teacher pointed out, for example, previously in the world geography lesson, students had to learn about more than seventy countries whereas now they are only required to learn about four countries. Previously, teachers and students were inclined to mainly go through some facts about those countries in terms of their population and economic structure; now the physical features of four selected countries are critically examined by the students as a geographer would do.

The second sub-group consisting of five teachers was also in favour of the new curriculum, but their position was rather passive. Instead of stating clearly why they liked the new curriculum, they tended to argue that it was needed in the global context so the Ministry of Education had to make such a change:

There are many experts working in academia and the Ministry following the developments in the world. They had to change the textbooks because there was a need for it; the whole world is going in that direction (Ali, IT).

Our State knows what is best for students. If they had to change it, then we have to accept it (Kasim, IT).

Although this group of teachers is in favour of curriculum change, from their rather passive stance it seems that they just try to float on the surface. The second quotation probably reflects the culture of teachers or the culture of the Ministry of Education in Turkey. Since teachers are civil servants, they have a job for life. This causes stagnation within schools as many teachers do not tend to take initiatives or risks apart from submitting top-down decisions. In addition, an up-bringing that teaches submission to the State might have played a role in teachers holding such a position.

On the other hand, the first quotation clearly indicates a common misunderstanding among teachers in that they treat textbooks as the curriculum itself. When asked about the curriculum, some other teachers also made comments about the changes which took place in textbooks. As Öztürk (2012) showed, there is a strong tradition of textbook pedagogy in Turkey because curriculum equals textbook in teachers’ understanding. Although being in favour of the change, this group of teachers arguably did not change much because they do not seem to have a sense of professionalism that requires developing one’s own practical theories (Day, 1999). As we earlier discussed, teachers change once they see the results of their practices (Guskey, 2002) as well as through their own practical theories (Fullan, 2011).

Secondly, six teachers stated that they would prefer the old curriculum. All teachers had more than fifteen years of teaching experience so they had a good chance to make comparisons between the old and new curricula because they had taught for a long time using both curricula. Teachers in this group, however, usually did not criticise the content. They had complaints with regards, in particular, to the pedagogical and assessment requirements of the new curriculum:

I wouldn’t say that the content is not adequate. It has a fair content similar issues in the textbook...However, it states that one of those buzz words, constructivism, should be employed in the classroom. In the beginning I used some of those techniques, used power point slides in the class or got students to make presentations but the result was not promising. Students do not understand well with these new methods (Yasemin, IT).

When we give homework, for example a performance task, students bring something in totally downloaded from the internet. The idea...
behind it may be fine, but it does not work in reality and should be abandoned (Hasan, IT).

It is not surprising that experienced teachers would have a more reserved attitude to change as they have built a vast amount of experience on the basis of their habits (Day, 1999). However, as seen particularly from the first quotation, there is a major misunderstanding about constructivism and the new requirements of the curriculum. Using ICT in itself is thought to be something related to constructivism and getting students to make presentation is a way of making them more active. The message of the curriculum has clearly not reached to some groups of teachers.

Constructivism and some skills that teachers are required to teach, such as critical thinking, decision making, statistical analysis, evaluation and process of information, map skills, and computer skills are ill-defined and are not understood well by teachers. Some teachers during the interviews could not understand what was meant by constructivism and geographical skills so further explanation had to be given to make the concepts understood. The teachers did not seem to recognise that geography has a great potential in enabling the students to process information, use critical thinking, navigate their way or communicate effectively. In fact some of these skills are cross-curricular so there is no need to deal with those ones in their geographical skills at the very centre of geography education in Turkey (Veysel, IT).

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As far as geographical skills are concerned, we only do some work with maps, but even that is not to a sufficient degree (Ali, IT).

As seen, although the curriculum puts the teaching of skills at the very centre of geography education in Turkey (Şahin, et. al., 2007), the majority of the interviewed teachers state that they only use maps and try to increase students’ map skills as far as the geographical skills are concerned. Geographical skills, therefore, hardly receive the attention that completion of the curriculum does. The emphasis on completion of the curriculum seems to have two major causes. One is mainly about the time constraints; according to the teachers, the time allocated to geography in the general curriculum is not enough for them to improve their students’ geographical skills. The second is the pressure inspectors put on teachers to follow the curriculum strictly. However, the second explanation is somehow paradoxical as geographic and transferrable skills find a very central place in the curriculum.

The last group composed of 4 teachers did not make any arguments that could be interpreted as positive or negative as illustrated with the following:

I like some bits of the new and some bits of the old curriculum. I wouldn’t say that one is better than the other. Textbooks are now more shiny and have more pictures but the rest seems the same (Fehmi, IT).

When asked what sides are better in each curriculum, the participant said that “in every respect, they have pros and cons”. Indeed in spite of the curricular change, some other elements that need to be in line with the change have not followed the new curricular demands entirely. Textbooks are one of the most important elements that do not follow the curricular change. Because the concepts of constructivism, active learning and multiple intelligences were new for almost all stakeholders including textbook authors and assessors, they could only achieve textbooks with more pictures and activities which usually involve asking students certain questions. Other teachers in this group also made confusing statements indicating that they themselves have not yet decided whether the new curriculum is good for them or not.

However, it should be noted that one teacher from this group stated that “the new curriculum is good for students, but not good for teachers” (Fatma, IT). When she was inquired more in what respect she thinks that it is bad for teacher, she explained that: Now, there is more demand from teachers. Teachers now have to organise lessons incorporating different activities and resources that need a good deal of preparation whereas before they were used to follow the textbook page by page. The new curriculum is good for students because they do not have to sit and listen during the big part of the lesson but take part in the lesson by getting actively involved with
activities and interacting with one another.

It seems that teachers are caught up in a dilemma in that they feel that the change brings new dimensions for the geography learning of their students, but since they do not have the right skills and capacities, they feel incompetent.

**Dealing with change**

How teachers have dealt with the change was the second important issue that was raised during the interviews. The adjustment to the change can be a very educative process but if it is not well managed it can be very distressing (Fullan, 2001). As the literature reveals (Fullan, 1993; Day, 1999), there is a clear link between adaptation to change and teachers’ experiences. Those teachers who had less than ten years experience in the study did not seem to have many problems with adopting the requirements of the new curriculum. However, the number of teachers who had less than ten years experience in the study was only 6. The rest, 18 teachers, were more experienced having a relatively difficult time in terms of fulfilling the demands put on them. Table 2 provides a very general overview of main problems of the teachers in terms of adjusting themselves with the change.

Within the group of teachers who are experiencing difficult times adapting to changes, almost all of them made a reference to lack of understanding. They generally think that change is something imposed upon them without them being involved. What they are told in terms of the initial stage is well summarised by the following relatively long quotation from teacher Riza (IT):

> We had heard about the works that had been carried out to renew the curriculum but that was all we knew. They introduced the new textbooks in 2005 for year 9 and for year 10 in the next year. These new textbooks were quite different from the old ones because they included many pictures, graphs etc. However, No one told us how to use these textbooks. They also did not give us a guide book unlike other teachers at primary level. We started learning about student centred education or construc-tivism but did not exactly understand what they were. We started teaching the lessons as before, only with small changes as the textbooks required us to do certain activities in the class.

No matter the particular circumstances, such as the lack of resources or physical inadequacies, the responsibility for implementing the curriculum is the teachers. Yet there seems to be no such arrangements in place that will help teachers to implement the curriculum in a technically and philosophically efficient way. Such arrangements may be developed by teachers themselves in time, but it is obvious from the teachers’ interviews that the negotiation and the development of such arrangements are not made easier. In fact it is harder, because of the already existing centralised educational system:

> I have worked in all kinds of schools and in different places. In all of them it was the same story: state schools do not have a big impetus to do things differently (Adnan, IT).

All teachers lack the sound pedagogic understanding and practice that the new curriculum expects from us. We do not know how to teach specific topics, or teach with different methods; let’s say students do not understand something, and then we do not have an alternative technique to make it understood by students. We do not actually do ‘teaching’ (learning does not happen). What we do is to cover the topic. This is what inspectors and principals care most about anyway. If you don’t teach something properly nothing happens to you because you have job guarantee for life (Aliye, IT).

Therefore, in practice, teachers are still asked only to cover the curriculum but nothing else by principals, inspectors and school culture. Here the problem seems to be arising from the fact that, as stated earlier, many stakeholders do not entirely grasp the philosophical and practical dimensions of the change that has taken place in various curricula, in particular, in geography curri-culum. When people do not understand about something, they inclined

To focus more on its parts that make sense for themselves. Usually procedural practices are always easier to understand because one can track how many

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**Table 2. The reasons hindering teachers’ adaptation of change.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers attitudes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of what change is all about</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of pedagogic repertoire</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficient in-service training provisions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficient pre-service training</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
objectives are done within certain time frame by just checking the record log of teachers. Then inspectors seem to just making procedural controls rather than assessing the quality of teaching taking place in geography classrooms.

Almost all teachers made a strong point that their pre-service and in-service training gave none or only a few skills that would prepare them better for complex and changing times. In-service trainings are organised by different levels including national, provincial and school. It is compulsory that every school runs in-service trainings at the end of and in the beginning of school year in June and September respectively. To attend provincial and national in-service trainings, teachers themselves need to apply for it. However, from 2012 year on, all teachers started having long-distance in-service trainings in national level through Internet. However, despite of these in-service provisions, the teachers who took part in the study are not educated as change agents. They are left alone to deal with the new curriculum. The followings comment from another teacher illustrates this fact:

"We are not given any guidance on how to do things differently. All we do is to finish the curriculum on time. There are no provisions, encouragement or support given to us so that we can conduct different kinds of lessons. We are totally left alone (Fikri, IT)."

As we can see from the above quotations, teachers are covering-the-curriculum oriented rather than improving their practice. Textbook pedagogy (Öztürk, 2012) still seems to persist. Some teachers, though, emphasise the difficulties arising from the social and managerial context of schooling in the sense that they are not given much room to navigate by. In fact the freedom provided by the curriculum to teachers does not seem to be coupled with the practices of principals or other stakeholders as illustrated in the quotations as follow:

"We were not provided with a mindset to be ready for change. From university onwards, we have always been told to conform to the existing structures. We are warned by family, colleagues, principals and friends to not take risks (Oguz, IT)."

Although the new curriculum asks us to also put emphasis on cultural issues including political and social issues, if you give a lesson dealing with such issues, then there is still a danger that you may be labelled as a fundamentalist (religious), communist, or socialist. People in the school, including my department and the principal still have a mindset that sees things in black and white. You are one thing or another! Teachers then do not fully conduct constructivist lessons with open-ended enquiry and questioning because of external and internal pressures. The mindsets of people are still the same, so it is not feasible to expect constructivist lessons yet in Turkey (Huseyin, IT).

A successful professional development policy by definition results in lowering such interference from others in the classroom (Smith and Gillespie, 2007). Continuous professional development is, when it works, a shield behind which teachers have freedom to exercise their full potential without being concerned about any unprofessional pressure from outsiders, because teachers would gain self-esteem and professional involvement (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009) through the continuous professional development (CPD).

All teachers in the study strongly state that there was no adequate provisions exist for CPD, so one can anticipate great confusion, unpleasantness and pressure for the creation of a sense of professionalism to find ways out of the closed circle of their habits (Fullan, 2012). In fact the sense of professionalism that one understands within the context of, let’s say, England is not a familiar concept for the majority of teachers (Day, 1999). For instance, the majority of the interviewed teachers do not believe that they, as professionals, should have a say in issues regarding the curriculum, its content, structure, or organisation as illustrated as follows:

"Our responsibility is to cover the curriculum. This is what we do, nothing more (Pinar, IT)."

However, the geography curriculum asks teachers to determine the content, structure and organisation of the lessons (Karabag et al., 2007). There are certain objectives but teachers are given a large degree of independence to carry out teaching according to their professional judgements in terms of content and teaching and learning processes.

The majority of the teachers, no matter how much experience they have, still think that they lack pedagogic knowledge and practice. They clearly recognise the need for in-service provisions, especially on how to teach the subject. In this respect, many teachers in the study were quite willing to seek out good practice in different contexts or situations. Even though there is great demand, except for three teachers, the rest did not attend any in-service training particularly organised on geographical learning and teaching. However, all of them had in-service training during their careers in various subjects such as the use of ICT in the classroom, teaching and learning processes and classroom management. However almost all teachers criticised the current in-service education system due to fact that they do not take into account teachers’ felt needs. According to the teachers, these programmes, in practice, serve as a means of
getting a good holiday because in-service training usually takes place in the summer and in holiday resorts in the form of traditional professional development (Smith and Gillespie, 2007). The term traditional professional development means short-term training programmes that involve seminars, workshops and lectures. These programmes are usually organised in advance without taking the teachers’ needs and demands into account. In this respect, they are top-down trainings through which teachers are told what to do. Indeed the teachers who took part in this study also find these programmes a ‘waste of time’ because the training usually takes place in the format of a seminar using PowerPoint slides. Having stated this, interestingly, many of the teachers in the study were actually exercising a large degree of autonomy in terms of their practice. Each teacher created a certain set of practice patterns depending on their world-views (which determines to some extent their motivation; idealist teachers seem to be more motivated to teach than the other teachers). How they see the world and the place of education in that somehow determines how they approach the subject and children. Teachers’ idealism, therefore, seems to be the most important and probably the only motivating factor for themselves because there is no (other) sense of accountability for institutional performance in teachers. The following long quotation explains the reasons for this very well:

As far as I know teachers in Europe have contracts with schools or local authorities to be renewed each year or every two years and teachers are given some room in terms of curriculum development. Let me tell you my situation; I have a guaranteed job, no one can sack me. Maybe I do not try to improve myself because of this conformity. However, if my situation was like my colleagues in Europe, then I would have to improve myself, produce some new lesson plans or materials. Well that, of course, would be much better than the present situation. However this could only be achieved, if we change other things as well. First, then, the education given at universities needs to be changed in accordance with this new approach…(Elif, IT).

This is the case because teachers in Turkey are civil servants. This means that they work for the government and their job is guaranteed for life unless they commit a criminal act. Such a situation gives teachers a degree of conformity because they are not evaluated by their performance. Pay rises depend on the years one has worked as a teacher rather than on the quality of one’s performance. Add to this, the low wages compared to other professionals increases teachers disinterest towards their profession. In such a context, as touched on the above, only idealist teachers seem to be very willing to make a change, and improve themselves.

Finally teachers were asked what they did with regards to self-improvement as a teacher. The main source (for some teachers the only source) is reading books (reference books too), magazines (National Geographic is the most mentioned one) or Internet encyclopaedias (most popular Wikipedia). The professional and personal use of the Internet is sound among teachers, becoming less so according to age. However, the financial hardship of teachers comes into play here as well, because especially after having a family, teachers’ state that they stop buying books or magazines. One female teacher also stated that family responsibilities (taking care of her two children) and the work-load she has at school does not allow her time to do anything in terms of self-improvement, even if she really wanted to.

CONCLUSION

If it is well managed, change in the geography curriculum can be liberating when it is a positive force in empowering and helping teachers to work together. However, it can also be debilitating when it locks people into entrenched positions and destroys trust. Poorly handled change generates significant costs in schools and departments in terms of frustration, disappointment, poor performance, lost of time and energy (Fullan, 1993). Fullan (2001) emphasises the complexity of the social process of change. The personal voice and attitude of the teachers have an important role within the implementation of change. However they find it difficult to cope with externally imposed change (Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 2002). This reflects one of the most rehearsed statements on teacher change which is that teachers tend to fail to adopt change mandated by policy makers or people from outside the classroom.

In this study it appears that the geography teachers who took part in the study were involved in change without being very willing to take the professional initiative. In fact they do not seem to have a professional attitude towards their occupation. In a much centralised education system, a top-down change process has taken place leaving teachers blind-folded with regards to the process of change. All is expected from above. Therefore, even the issue of student-centred education or the need for professional development is to be advised on by the government. Many teachers unfortunately do not have a strategic agenda for future educational reforms and for their own professional developments.

Constructivism, multiple intelligences, active learning and student-centred education are buzz words that have been around for some time to justify the change in geography curriculum. These are big and meaningful words that, if they are achieved, they would provide a meaningful learning experience for students, but the schools, teachers and education systems have not yet
been able to change in the same way to reflect that change. After seven years since its inception, teachers are still struggling with the requirements of the curriculum, particularly teaching and learning processes and assessment. In this respect, few seemed to grasp the underlying ideas of constructivist geography education. The majority still seems to be operating with a modern mindset that seeks to help students fit into a predetermined and defined world of thoughts and practices. The teachers were generally more interested in what they covered in the curriculum than on geographic and transferable skills that have a central place in the Turkish curriculum. It appears from the findings that skills were neglected and in many cases are abandoned by teachers in Turkey. To ease things for teachers, effective professional development could be the key. However, professional development is not considered as "continuous" in Turkey. It is organised in the traditional sense and is given to teachers in the format of seminars (Smith and Gillespie, 2007). In practice these are to a large extent based on lecturing from computer slides. Such professional development practice is less likely to bring changes in teachers’ practice (Guskey, 2002; Öztürk, 2012). Reflective practice should be embedded into people’s practice so as to pursue a more integrated and professional vision of teacher change. There is a need to plan opportunities for staff to experience directly and take control of their learning development which many of them at present tend not to consider as part of their job. One way to achieve such a vision is through job-embedded professional development that compromises reflection and action research. It has to be continuous in nature and necessary provisions need to be taken by the school administrations and local educational authorities.

Further research is needed to better understand teachers’ levels of adaptation to new requirements of the curriculum across Turkey including urban and rural settings. Particularly the effects of certain in-service provisions could be assessed in terms of their quality and their capacity to prepare teachers as change agents. Furthermore, the perceptions and attitudes of teacher’s trainers with regards to issues discussed here should also be studied.

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