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# Primary School Teachers' Educational Thoughts

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## Abstract

Every science exists on a philosophical basis / thought and becomes functional. As in all sciences, philosophy forms a necessary basis for the educational science. The need for philosophy, emanated from the need to make learning environments meaningful, as well as to find answers to the questions of why and how education should be done. The basic purpose of this research is to investigate educational philosophies of primary school teachers who are still working in a medium-sized province in Turkey within the framework literature. Quantitative survey design was employed in the study. The study group is comprised of 225 primary school teachers working in primary schools within a medium-sized Anatolian city in terms of demographic structure. The "Educational Thoughts and Practices" scale was used to collect the research data. The variance was conducted parametric one-way analysis. One of the significant results of the study is that the primary school teachers participating in the study mainly adopt popular educational thoughts and practices. Given the overall results of the study, it is seen that the scores close to each other in the popular and traditional dimensions. It can thus be implied that teachers are aware of the attractiveness of the creative learning environment ensured by student-centered learning, however, they do not give up on their duties and habits of transferring knowledge.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of Education, Education Science, Primary School Teacher, Traditional Thought

## 1. Introduction

Thinking, which is a major human activity based on needs and curiosities, has to be consistent within itself. This consistency is ensured by philosophy and mathematics. In this sense, it can be argued that philosophy (Magee, 2007) and mathematics lie at the root of all kinds of conscious - purposeful human activities.

Science might be the most significant conscious-purposeful human activity. This might be because science promotes self-awareness and allows the individual to comprehend and influence the environment he/she lives in. However, before producing scientific knowledge, there are questions that need to be addressed and issues that need to be clarified. First, the questions why and how science will be done, how the obtained scientific knowledge will be different from other knowledge (artistic, religious, daily, etc.) should be answered from a philosophical perspective.

In the process of producing scientific knowledge, it is seen that the first answers to these questions are related to the positivist philosophy. In this context, it is the positivist thought that created modern sciences. According to Weber (1998: 1), "the theory of knowledge becomes 'positive philosophy' or 'positivism' when it abandons metaphysical thinking and is satisfied with being a synthesis of mathematics and experimental sciences." However, in the following century, it was seen that positivist thought, which would be used in experimental and engineering studies, was insufficient in explaining and generalizing social events. Particularly in the field of Social Sciences, the fact that questions such as correct and accurate information, the role of the researcher in this process, the generalizability of the obtained information, and the context cannot be answered by a positivist understanding (Ozden & Simsek, 1998) have led to the weakening of positivism and the emergence of post-positivist constructivist approaches. As a result, every science exists on a philosophical basis / thought (Magee, 2007) and becomes functional. In Weber's words, in a sense, philosophy and science are inseparable, and when they are separated, they no longer live in each other's pockets. In a similar vein, according to Weber (1998: 2), 'science without philosophy; is a lifeless body.

One of the sciences that philosophy gives meaning to life is education. Education is one of the sciences that strive to understand people, such as psychology and sociology (Osler, 2013; Zierer, 2009; Murphy, Mufti, & Kassem, 2009). Education, which attempts to find the laws of how to change human behaviors in a consistent way or how to gain the desired behavior, has become one of the important scientific-intellectual endeavors. As in all sciences, philosophy forms a necessary basis for the educational science. The need for philosophy, like other sciences, emanated from the need to make learning environments meaningful, as well as to find answers to the questions of why and how education should be done. The effect of philosophy on the emergence of learning environments and teacher behaviors is visibly tangible (Orstain & Hunkins, 1988; Winc, 2012; Gosselin, 2007). In fact, one might find a philosophy addressing to questions of why and how education should be done concerning the teacher who walks between the benches of the students with an authoritative stare and checks the course book and notebook. Likewise, another educational philosophy encourages John Dewey (Dewey, 2008) to go for shopping for educational tools.

Although there are many mainstream philosophies and educational philosophy movements that have implications for the educational process, it is possible to divide the philosophical movements into two main groups according to their perspectives on knowledge, teachers and students. While Idealist, Realist, Perennial and Essentialist movements form one group, Pragmatic, Progressive, Reconstructive, Existential and Humanist movements form the other group (Kumral, 2015, 74).

The philosophical thoughts in the first group put the teacher in the center. It is the teacher who is in charge in the classroom while students are passive. The teacher is the only person who talks and directs what and how the student will learn and how the student will think and behave. For instance, according to Gutek (2014), an idealist teacher is professional, experienced and skilled, cultured and has a strong and versatile personality. The duty of the school in realist education is to inform students about the real world (Demirhan, 2003). Experiments and observations are made, and the results are objectively and independently evaluated (Erkılıç, 2013). While perennialism is based on the idea that the basic reality in the universe is absolute and unchanging (Sonmez, 2017; Gokbulut, 2019; Bakir, 2020); Essentialism holds the view that the individual should grasp the absolute truth and adapt it to life (Turgut, 1991; Sonmez, 2017; Gokbulut, 2019; Dag, 2020).

The philosophical thoughts in the second group put the student in the center. It is the student who will build the knowledge in the classroom. The teacher is the student's assistant in this process. According to Dewey (2008), education is valuable as long as it brings students face to face with real life problems and produces solutions. In this process, students will learn through their own experiences and acquire new information. Students can gain skills in making connections in the learning process, comprehending relationships, and producing solutions (Gutek, 2014; Noddings, 2016). The progressive movement prioritizes development and change and argues that education should be designed in a way that allows the individual to keep pace with changing conditions. From this point of view, a student is not one who keeps up with life, but the person who directs and develops it (Cevizci, 2016; Sonmez, 2017; Ergun, 2018; Keskin & Sahin, 2018; Kalafatoglu, 2019; Bakir, 2020). Reconstructionism claims that the primary purpose of education is to rebuild society in order to overcome the

cultural crisis of our age, and regards education as a major tool to achieve this (Cevizci, 2016; Sonmez, 2017; Aslan, 2017; Akpınar, 2017). According to Existentialism, which includes prominent existentialist thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, education is the process of self-realization of all human beings. Education will be valuable to the extent that it enables people to exist (Sartre, 2010; Yapici, 2013; Ergün, 2018).

Teachers are not only role models for their students but also play a vital role in raising a generation since they enable students to gain cognitive, affective and psycho-motor knowledge and skills. The importance of the teacher's role remains unchangeable at every stage of education from pre-school education to higher education. However, primary school education and primary school teachers have a more permanent effect on the individual, from acquiring primary reading skills to behavioral training. Senemoğlu (1992: 43) asserts that the primary school teacher has a crucial importance in the cognitive, emotional and social development of the individual. Additionally, "... the teacher is like a sculptor who gives shape and form to an unshaped object. For this reason, many teachers (in Turkey), and especially primary school teachers, commonly use the term "dough" or "mud" when describing a student, waiting to be shaped and formed" (Ozden and Simsek, 1998: 76). The primary purpose of this research is to investigate educational philosophies of primary school teachers who are still working in a medium-sized province in Turkey within the framework of the above-mentioned literature. Specifically the study sought answer to the following question:

- 1- Which major philosophical movements do primary school teachers mostly adopt considering their educational thoughts and practices?
- 2- Does primary school teachers' educational philosophies significantly differ by gender variable?
- 3- Does teachers' educational philosophies significantly differ by seniority variable?
- 4- Does teachers' educational philosophies differ by teaching level?

## 2. Method

In this section, the research model, study group, data collection and analysis, validity, and reliability information are included.

### 2.1. Research Model

Quantitative survey design was employed in the study. "Basically, surveys deal with research question of What is? with, possibly, some emphasis on attempting to explain what is." (Wiersma, 1985: 139). Cross-sectional survey was used to identify the educational thoughts of primary school teachers working in primary school.

### 2.2. Study Group

The study group is comprised of 225 primary school teachers working in primary schools within a medium-sized Anatolian city in terms of demographic structure. Primary education in Turkey lasts four years. Table 1 contains information on teaching levels (1st Grade, 2nd Grade, 3rd Grade and 4th Grade), gender characteristics and years of seniority of the primary school teachers participating in the research.

Table 1: Demographic information about the sample

Gender	Seniority	Grade in Charge				Total
		1	2	3	4	
Female	1-10 year	5	6	4	3	18
	11-19 year	13	7	17	10	47
	20 year>	17	16	16	11	60
	Total	35	29	37	24	125
Male	1-10 year	0	0	0	6	6
	11-19 year	7	9	3	11	30
	20 year>	20	14	15	15	64
	Total	27	23	18	32	100

### 2.3. Data Collection Tool

The “Educational Thoughts and Practices (ETP)” scale developed by Kumral (2014) was used to collect the research data. The validity and reliability of the scale were ensured by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The scale seeks to determine the views of teachers or pre-service teachers about the education process, to provide an insight into how they organize classroom learning environments, and as a result, to name their educational thoughts and practices in the context of philosophy of education. The scale consists of 42 items. The 21 items on the scale are called “Traditional” and the remaining 21 items are called “Popular” and have the construct validity and scale reliability that can reveal the educational thoughts of teachers or pre-service teachers (Kumral, 2014). The traditional sub-scale indicates that teachers’ thoughts and practices are mainly based on Realism, Perennialism and Essentialism in terms of educational philosophy. In the popular sub-scale, on the other hand, teachers’ thoughts and practices regarding the educational process are mostly related to Pragmatic, Existential and Constructivist approaches along with a progressive and reconstructive educational philosophy.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Prior to performing any analysis, the variables were first tested to determine whether they had a normal distribution. Since the sample size was higher than 50, the normality tests, namely, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were performed. Consequently, the distribution of variables was found to be normal [ $p > .05$ ] (Table 2). For this reason, parametric one-way analysis of variance was conducted.

Table 2: Test of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Traditional	,048	225	,200	,990	225	,119
Popular	,037	225	,200	,992	225	,297

For multiple comparisons, homogeneity of the distribution of variances was also tested. Parametric tests were used since it was found that the distribution was homogeneous [Levene test:  $p > .05$ ] (Table 3).

Table 3: Test of homogeneity of variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Traditional	,489	3	221	,690
Popular	2,058	3	221	,107

### 2.5. Validity and Reliability

As mentioned previously, the scale used in the study is a valid data collection tool. The reliability values of the scale are tabulated in Table 4. Based on these values, it can be argued that the present study is reliable.

Table 4: Reliability statistics

	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
All Scale	42	,809
Traditional	21	,839
Popular	21	,856

### 2.6. Ethical Permissions of Research

Ethical permission was obtained from Pamukkale University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee (23.03.2022-G06) for this research.

### 3. Results

To understand the educational philosophy of the primary school teachers participating in the research, variance analysis was performed. The first analysis revealed the educational philosophies adopted by each participants. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Educational thoughts of primary school teachers

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.D.	df	t	p
Traditional	225	29	95	68,02	11,512	224	3,295	,001
Popular	225	42	97	71,72	11,401			

Given Table 5 which entails the average scores obtained from the sub-dimensions of the ETP Scale, it is seen that the primary school teachers participating in the research have mostly popular educational thoughts and practices, and there is a statistically significant differentiation when compared to teachers' traditional thoughts and practices ( $p < ,05$ ).

The second variance analysis conducted to determine educational philosophies of the primary school teachers is related to the gender variable. The results of the analysis performed to find out whether the gender of the primary school teachers had a significant effect on their educational thoughts and practices are detailed in Table 6.

Table 6: Gender and educational thoughts of the primary school teachers

	Gender	N	Std.		df	t	p
			Mean	Deviation			
Traditional	Female	125	66,70	10,996	223	1,925	,050
	Male	100	69,66	11,979			
Popular	Female	125	71,12	11,342	223	,889	,375
	Male	100	72,48	11,486			

From Table 6, which reveals whether the gender variable has a significant effect on educational thoughts and practices, it is seen that the mean scores of male teachers in the traditional dimension are higher than that of female teachers, and the mean scores differ significantly. In this respect, it can be contended that being a male teacher is effective in creating a more teacher-centered environment in the classroom. In the popular dimension, the mean scores of female teachers are higher than that of male teachers. However, no significant gender differences are found in the popular dimension.

The study also investigated whether the years of seniority of the primary school teachers participating in the study had a significant effect on their educational thoughts and practices. To this end, the Levene test was applied to see whether the distribution of scores was equal or not. As a result of the test, it was found that the scores for both groups had a homogeneous distribution ( $p > ,05$ ). Further, the Anova test performed showed that the seniority of the participants made a statistically significant difference ( $p < ,05$ ) in the traditional dimension. The least significant difference (LSD) test was employed to reveal significant pairwise difference among the variables. The results are reported in Table 7.

Table 7: Seniority and educational thoughts of the primary school teachers

	Seniority	N	Mean	Std.D.	df	F	p	Mean Difference
Traditional	1-10 year	24	68,92	13,803	2/222	3,397	,035	C-B
	11-19 year	77	65,29	11,849				
	20 year>	124	69,54	10,573				
Popular	1-10 year	24	68,17	11,177	2/222	1,916	,150	--
	11-19 year	77	71,04	11,652				
	20 year>	124	72,84	11,200				

Note. A: 1-10 year; B: 11-19 year; C: 20> year

When the analysis results shown in Table 7 are examined, it is seen that primary school teachers with 20 years or more seniority tend to create a more traditional learning environment than teachers with lesser tenure. Although there is no difference, interestingly, those who are in the first 10 years of the teaching profession also tend to adopt traditional teaching methods. It may be argued that while teachers create more traditional learning environments to discipline students in the early years, they intend to create a more democratic learning environment as they gain experience, and eventually they adopt traditional learning environments again with the effect of their seniority.

The study also examined whether the teaching level variable had a significant effect on the primary school teachers' educational thoughts and practices. To this end, the Levene test was applied to see whether the distribution of scores was equal or not. As a result of the test, it was found that the scores for both groups had a homogeneous distribution ( $p > ,05$ ). Further, the Anova test performed showed that the teaching levels of the participants made a statistically significant difference ( $p < ,05$ ) in the traditional dimension. The least significant difference (LSD) test was employed to reveal significant pairwise difference among the variables. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Teaching levels and educational thoughts of the primary school teachers

	Grade	N	Mean	Std.D.	df	F	p	Mean Difference
Traditional	1	62	64,44	12,023	3/221	2,874	,037	1-2 1-3 1-4
	2	52	69,06	10,986				
	3	55	69,25	10,355				
	4	56	69,80	11,914				
Popular	1	62	72,66	11,327	3/221	,429	,733	--
	2	52	70,33	9,538				
	3	55	71,55	11,468				
	4	56	72,16	13,059				

From Table 8, which reports whether the teaching level variable had a significant effect on the primary school teachers' educational thoughts and practices, it is understood that the difference in the traditional dimension is between the 1st grade primary school primary school teachers and the teachers at the other three grade levels. In the light of the findings obtained, it can be argued that as the grade level increases in primary school, the knowledge to be transferred also increases, and the idea of creating subject-centered learning environments as well as student-centered education comes to the fore.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

One of the significant results of the study is that the primary school teachers participating in the study mainly adopt popular educational thoughts and practices. Previous studies in the literature yield similar results as well. In a study conducted by Altinkurt, Yilmaz and Oguz (2012), it was seen that teachers frequently agreed on the following sub-dimensions, respectively: existentialism, progressivism, perennialism, reconstructionalism and essentialism. Kanatli and Schreglman' study (2014) reports that the primary school teachers mostly adopt progressivism in their instruction. Similar results are also observed in Aslan's study (2017). Accordingly, primary school teachers prefer more contemporary educational philosophies whereas they prefer less traditional educational philosophies. In a similar vein, Oksuz's study (2020) exhibited that primary school teachers tended to adopt more progressive and reconstructive educational philosophies, whereas they tended to adopt less essentialism.

Likewise, studies on educational philosophies conducted with teachers from different fields yielded similar results. The results of the research carried out by Dag (2020) concluded that the philosophical approaches of school principals, assistant principals and teachers are existentialism, progressiveness, perennialism, reconstruction and essentialism respectively. Further, it is seen that the philosophical approaches adopted do not differ according to the task variable. Demir and Aktı-Aslan (2021) sought to determine the education philosophies adopted by teachers in terms of different variables. According to the results of the research,

teachers adopted these education philosophies respectively: Existentialism, Progressivism, Perennialism, Reconstructionism, and Essentialism.

The studies on pre-service teachers also obtained very similar results. Kumral (2015) examined the tendencies of pre-service teachers to educational philosophies. As a result of the research, it was determined that most pre-service teachers adopted the popular education philosophy. The findings of the aforementioned study revealed that pre-service teachers studying in Preschool Teaching, Primary school Teaching and Social Studies Teaching departments were more inclined to traditional education philosophies. The results also denoted that pre-service teachers studying in English Language and Turkish Language teaching programs mostly adopted a post-positivist and constructivist approach. Hayırsever and Oguz's study (2017) included pre-service teachers attending Pedagogical Formation Programme. The results of the study showed that pre-service teachers' educational beliefs were based on progressivism on first level and on essentialism on last level. Kozikoglu and Erden's study (2018) revealed that the educational philosophies frequently adopted by the pre-service teachers are Existentialism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, Perennialism and Essentialism, respectively.

It is also important to note that the gender variable did not have a significant effect on the primary school teachers' educational philosophies in the present study. Similarly, Altinkurt, Yilmaz, and Oguz (2012) obtained the same result. Additionally, Aslan (2017) found female teachers were more inclined to adopt progressivism and existential education. Oksuz (2020) found no statistically meaningful difference on the teachers' opinions of the Perennialism, Progressivism, and Reconstructionism educational philosophies in terms of gender whereas there was statistically meaningful significance in the Essentialism subscale in favor of males. Ilengiz (2019) investigated social studies teachers' beliefs in educational philosophy, and accordingly it was found that male teachers tended to adopt perennial philosophy of education more than female teachers. Likewise, Dag's study (2020) illustrated that male teachers adopted essentialism more than female teachers. According to the study done by Demir and Akti-Aslan (2021), male participants only adopted essentialism philosophy more when compared to females and in terms of the gender variable, there was no meaningful difference in other education philosophies.

In addition to that, there are other studies arguing that women adopt popular educational philosophy more. For instance, according to Kumral's study (2015), male pre-service teachers adopted traditionalist thought whereas female pre-service teachers mostly adopted popular education philosophy. According to Kozikoglu and Erden (2018), male teachers scored higher on perennialism, essentialism and existentialism, and female teachers scored higher on progressivism.

The study also revealed that the seniority variable had a significant effect on the primary school teachers' educational philosophies. In this respect, it is seen that primary school teachers with 20 years and more seniority are more inclined to create a traditional learning environment compared to their colleagues with less seniority. A similar result is also observed in Aslan's study (2017). As the professional seniority of the teachers increased, they tended to adopt perennialism more. Thus, as the years of seniority in the profession increased, teachers adopted the teacher-centered traditionalist education approach. Ilengiz (2019) found that teachers with 16-20 years of seniority adopted perennialism more than teachers with less than 10 years of seniority. Further, teachers with 21 years and more seniority adopted perennialism more than teachers with 15 years or less seniority. Teachers with 16 years or more seniority adopted essentialism more than those with 6-10 years of seniority. Oksuz's study (2020) also highlighted that, on the basis of the age variable, older primary school teachers (over 40 years old) are more inclined to the essentialism in education. According to the study conducted by Demir and Akti-Aslan (2021), teachers with 16 years and more seniority tended to adopt perennialism more than those with 5 years or less seniority. Additionally, teachers with 21 years and more seniority were found to be more inclined to adopt perennialism educational philosophy than those with 6-15 years seniority. Other previous studies, on the other hand, yielded opposite results. To illustrate, Kanatlı and Schreglman's study (2014) demonstrated that the more teachers' seniority increases, the more their educational philosophies change from perennialism to progressivism.



The final result of the study is that there is a statistically significant difference in the traditional sub-dimension in terms of the teaching level of the primary school teachers. The difference was found between the 1st grade primary school teachers and the teachers at the other three grade levels. Given the overall results of the study, it is seen that the scores close to each other in the popular and traditional dimensions. It can thus be implied that teachers are aware of the attractiveness of the creative learning environment ensured by student-centered learning, however, they do not give up on their duties and habits of transferring knowledge. Further studies might clarify the major problems contributing to this result considering the possible causes such as the country's central examination system, parents and school administrations' expectations for the students' academic achievement.

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