

Methods Used To Teach Early Reading and Writing in Turkey: Continuity and Change across a Century

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to trace the historical development of the teaching methods used for early reading and writing instruction in the Turkish Republic. Documentary evidence from Turkey's National Ministry of Education was used as a primary source of data in the study. Interpretive historical techniques were used to identify patterns in the data over a 100-year period. Results indicate that eight periods of policy reform shaped instruction in reading and writing.

Keywords: Teaching Methods Used For Early Reading and Writing, Early Reading and Writing, Literacy, Turkish Education System

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to trace the historical development of teaching methods used for early reading and writing instruction in the Turkish Republic during the last 100 years. Three questions framed the analysis: (a) How long was a particular teaching method adopted as policy? (b) Why was it adopted as policy? and (c) Why did another teaching method supersede an existing method as policy?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The primary framework used to conceptualize this study was a pragmatic one: the Turkish Ministry of Education's formal policy shifts were used to mark eras of curricular change and continuity. Since the founding of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923, there have been eight policy shifts that provided continuity or change to the national curriculum's direction. This process of rapid change, followed by a period of relative continuity (ranging from two to twenty years in length), started shortly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a key founder of the new republic, thought the country's transformation into a modern republic could only be managed through education. Atatürk recognized that the basis for such a modern, dynamic educational curriculum could build upon 600-year Ottoman educational practices and institutions (1299-1923 AD), but that such growth would need to evolve through cycles of rapid change, short- and mid-term continuity, to be followed by yet more change and continuity. In the language of social change theory, this pattern is referred to as "punctuated equilibrium" (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). As such, periods of continuity (i.e., equilibrium) are broken (i.e., punctuated) by phases of rapid change that turn, over-turn, or re-turn human events, ideas, policy, or other phenomena into another period of continuity.

METHODS & DATA

This study examines the historical development of the methods used for reading and writing instruction from the foundation of the Turkish Republic until today. We used documentary

evidence from Turkey's National Ministry of Education and interpretive historical techniques to examine the methods used across this 100-year period (Monaghan & Hartman, 2002; Stahl & Hartman, 2011). We traced how long various methods were used, why they were widely adopted, and why then vanished. For instance, we studied the when the current *Phoneme Based Sentence Method* rose to policy prominence, why it did so, and its current status within the Turkish educational system.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

From the perspective of “punctuated equilibrium,” patterns in the data indicate that changes in the methods of teaching early reading and writing in Turkey generally occurred within the larger national process of continuity and change in educational curricula. We identified eight periods of policy continuity for reading and writing instruction since 1924.

The 1924 Elementary School (İlkMektep) Curriculum

As the new Turkish Republic was being formed, a new, but continuity-like, course for Arabic reading and writing instruction was formed too. Instruction during this initial era of the new republic was determined to occur for 12 hours a week with first graders. Furthermore, the Board of Education (i.e., the Turkish Ministry of National Education) adopted an Arabic phoneme-based method and word-based methods for the teaching reading and writing in elementary schools (MEB, 1924).

The founders of the republic believed the necessity of training people appropriate with political, economical and social construction in order for society to develop and modernize quickly (Fidan&Erden, 1998). After The War of Independence, Ataturk stated an education understanding satisfying the expectations of society, age and environment as: “Our most important and productive matters are the work of National Education... So, teaching programs and systems should be organized according to this.” (Çetin&Gülseren, 2003). With the law on Unification of Education legislated in 1924 and numbered 430, all of the schools were connected to the Ministry of National Education and madrasahs were removed. With this change, letter method started to be used as teaching of early reading and writing in all educational organizations.

When founding the basics of new republic, primary schools' methods and targets used in teaching of early reading and writing are listed below:

- a. Arabic alphabet will be read at the same time with writing and children will write the words and sentences and they will read what they write.
- b. There will not be meaningless syllables and sentences and the words that are not be used by children in the course of Arabic alphabet.
- c. When teaching the letters, letter and syllable order would not be abided by, for example; the letters will not be read as (elif, be, te, se, he).
- d. The letters will not be taught with their names but they will be taught with their sounds in words and sentences. So, correct usage of the sounds in sentences will be taught.
- e. Before writing and reading of a letter has been taught completely, the next one will not be started. The newly taught words will be used in the next lesson.
- f. Teacher will have students do sample word about meaning and usage of every words used in the course of Arabic alphabet and these words will be used in new sentences. Teachers will take care of correction of the accent and dialect on every occasion.

- g. After completion of the book of Arabic alphabet as a whole class, in the second grade, 12-hour Turkish courses consist of reading fluently and explanatory in maximum level, learning spelling in permanent reading texts, and works about construction and separation of writing (MEB, 1924).

It was planned to teach reading and writing with 12-hour Turkish courses in 1924 Primary School Curriculum Program and letter method was suggested to be used. Many aims and targets were identified about the application of letter method in teaching reading and writing.

The 1926 Elementary School (İlk Mektep) Curriculum

Continuity prevailed when changes were recommended two years later; no fundamental changes in teaching early reading and writing methods were made. The phoneme- and word-based methods continued to serve as official pedagogical policy for the Ministry of Education. But as the new country sought an identity and place on the world stage, there were discussions about which letter system would best serve the interests of Turks sitting around the table with other global players. One relatively minor curricular adaptation did occur: Connections between reading and writing instruction were now to be made with other school subject areas (MEB, 1926).

In primary school, much as Turkish lesson are divided into parts such as composition, grammar and writing, all of these are not separate lessons. In this respect, each of the courses in Turkish category is complementary and assistant of the others. Only one teacher should give the Turkish Courses of a class (MEB, 1926). The method was not changed in 1926 Primary School Program. Teaching early reading and writing continued with letter method. With the aim of organizing National Education System, Education Organization Act was accepted with the law numbered 789 on March 22, 1926. Turkish Education Board was founded in March 22, 1926 with this law. Beside new arrangements, current levels of the system were identified and all educational institutions were connected to Ministry of Education (Akyüz, 1999). After the legal changes, alphabet reform accepted with the law numbered 1353 in November 1, 1928 is the most fundamental change of Republic. With alphabet reform, Arabic alphabet was abandoned and Latin alphabet was started to be used. Latin alphabet was reorganized in the manner that it enables Turkish to be stated better and new Turkish Alphabet using Latin alphabet was formed (Ergün, 2005). New Turkish alphabet: “a, b, c, ç, d, e, f, g, ğ, h, i, ı, j, k, l, m, n, o, ö, p, r, s, ş, t, u, ü, v, y, z”. This program and suggested early reading method was used for 4 years till 1930.

These are the aims of alphabet course;

- a. To teach the words 7-8 year-old children generally know and use.
- b. To teach the dictation of the same words.
- c. To make children’s writings legible and beautify them step by step (MEB, 1926).

The 1930 Elementary School (İlk Mektep) Curriculum (Big Change in Alphabet & Method)

There were significant changes made in curriculum policy four years later. Instead of teaching early reading and writing in the Arabic alphabet (“Elifba”), the Latin alphabet was now to be used. The Latin language methods had gained momentum several years earlier with a literacy campaign called the Latin Alphabet Reform, which appeared in a most visible way 1928. Phoneme- and word-based methods continued to serve as official pedagogical policy for the Ministry of Education, but they would not be used to teach the letters of the Latin alphabet (MEB, 1930). The targets in prior program were preserved as the same. New

suggestions about teaching alphabet and writing took place. Because phoneme and word methods were used together, new precautions were taken. Instead of following a certain order, it was suggested to adopt a teaching construct from simple to complex, from easy to difficult. It was adopted to start teaching letters with capital letters, and to teach small letters after teaching capital letters. Usage of vertical basic letters or italic letters is up to students' preferences. This program and suggested early reading program was used for 6 years till 1936.

The points should be cared in teaching alphabet;

- a. Teaching alphabet will be held two hours a day – in the morning and afternoon.
- b. Teaching alphabet will be held at the same time with teaching writing. In teaching writing, it is beneficial to use pencils at first.
- c. The terms mostly used in teaching and training will be taught firstly and they will be used in sentences.
- d. The meanings of each words learned in alphabet course will be taught and these words will be used in meaningful sentences.
- e. Teacher should benefit from wallboards and mobile letters in the aim of making teaching alphabet easier.
- f. Because it is not possible to save the same level in the process of education, we should take students' personal differences into consideration (MEB, 1930).

Issues to be considered when writing;

- I. In teaching alphabet in the first grade, reading and writing should be taught together. Besides reading of a letter in a syllable or word, the writing of it should also be shown.
- II. To ease teaching capital letters to first graders, it should be benefited from manual training.
- III. For teaching handwriting, both pencils and thick-pointed writing pen can be used. Embellishments that disturb the content of writing should not be allowed.
- IV. When writing, sitting style of the children should be checked and between the paper and child there should be 30 cm distance.
- V. It is not important whether the writing is vertical or italic. This should be up to students' preferences. Students' success is important.
- VI. Writing of the numbers should also be taught well (MEB, 1930).

The 1936 Elementary School (İlk Mektep) Curriculum

Continuity represented the pattern in 1936 when minor changes, adjustments, were made to the methods put forth in early reading and writing policy. While the former curriculum started with phonemes, words and Latin letters, the adjusted curriculum continued with teaching words and sentences shortly after the teaching of letters, but then added the formation of sentences strips cut into flash card-sized words (flashcard). Through analysis, students were to form a sentence with these flash-card words by inserting them in plastic slip holders. In this adjusted curriculum policy, the phoneme-word-letter method was linked to an analytic method for early reading and writing instruction (MEB, 1936). There are important similarities between 1936 Elementary School Curriculum Program and 2005 Primary School (1-5 grades) Turkish Course Program. 1936 Program suggests using letter and word methods together. According to this program, shortly after teaching letters, usage of these letters in

words should be taught, sample words should be given, and it is suggested to construct regular sentences consisting of these words. In 2005 Primary School Turkish Course Program, it is adopted to use Phoneme Based Sentence Method. It is adopted to teach mostly used phoneme firstly, and to teach sample words according to the situation that phonemes are in the beginning, middle and at the end of the word by starting teaching the first phoneme. It was suggested that these words learned should be form meaningful sentences. While 1936 program starts teaching early reading and writing with teaching letters, 2005 program starts it with teaching phonemes. However, there are many important similarities in steps of teaching early reading and writing.

The 1948 Elementary School (İlk Mektep) Curriculum (Big Change in Methods)

Big change represented the 1948 policy Elementary School Curriculum, when the analytic method first put forward in the 1936 Elementary School Curriculum policy was fully applied. The analysis method was thought to be more professional and relevant than former curriculum policies. Teachers were to given even weight, a kind of “balanced approach,” to the phoneme-word-letter methods *and* the analytic sentence forming (MEB, 1948). The program and suggested early reading method was used for 20 years till 1968. The suggestions about better application of the new method are listed below.

The issues to be considered in teaching early reading and writing;

- a. Early reading and writing exercises in the first grade constitutes an integral part of all teaching activities of this class.
- b. Teaching early reading and writing will start with simple sentences and words. Over time, these sentences will be divided into words, words will be divided into syllables, and syllables will be divided into letters. New sentences and words will be formed from words, syllables and letters gotten from the divisions.
- c. It will be noticed that all letters in Turkish alphabet is repeated sufficiently in texts.
- d. Reading and writing activities will always be held together; children will write the sentences and words that they learn to read.
- e. At first, capital letters will be taught appropriate with writing principal stated by early reading and writing program, and small letters will be taught in due time (MEB, 1948).

Tools that will be benefited from apart from books in teaching early reading and writing;

- I. Big or small reading receipts including the sentences and words that will be taught reading and writing.
- II. Reading passages, stories, tongue twisters, riddles and poems composed of the words and sentences learned.
- III. Resolution boards repeating the same syllables in different words, the same words in different sentences.
- IV. There should be black boards more than one in classrooms in order for teachers and students to benefit from.
- V. Sand table
- VI. Mobile letters. When the words are not solved, these tools can be used.
- VII. Newspapers.
- VIII. Game tools.

- IX. Sticks, slate, classroom magazines, alphabet book, and other tools prepared by students (Günçer& Kaya, 1952).

The 1968 Elementary School Curriculum (Grades 1-5)

For 20 years the “balanced approach” held sway as official instructional policy by the Ministry of Education. The continuity of this approach continued to hold sway in a 1968 policy adjustment, which set forth that majuscules and minuscules were taught together instead of teaching majuscules first. Moreover, when needed, it instruction was to draw attention to the relationship of majuscules to minuscules in terms of the shapes of the letters, writing directions, the area of the letters covered on a line (MEB, 1968). This program and suggested early reading program was used for 13 years till 1981.

The issues to be considered in teaching early reading and writing;

- a. When starting learning early reading and writing, capitals and small letters should be taught together appropriate with writing principals in the program. When needed, it should be taken into consideration that of the shapes of the letters, writing directions, the places they cover in lines, the relationship between capitals and small letters, and the rate between them.
- b. Exercises have an important role in learning reading and writing. But, just repeating a thing is not important very much. Besides boring sentence repetitions, sentences that can attract students’ interest should be used. These sentences can be used in tongue twisters, jokes, and interesting stories. Teacher should get the sentences write on the board and in students’ notebooks and pay attention to the writing of the sentences (MEB, 1968).

The 1981 Primary Schools Turkish Course Programme (Grades 1-8) (handwriting added + a 3-week preparatory added for reading & writing in 1st grade)

More continuity than change prevailed in the 1981 policy, which continued to recommend the teaching of early reading and writing with a balanced approach. Though, small changes for early reading and writing took place when it came to adding handwriting and a three-week preparatory (i.e., readiness) curriculum for reading and writing in first grade (MEB, 1981b). This program and suggested early reading program was used for 24 years till 2005.

Maybe, most of the new students do not have physical, social, and emotional maturity needed to start reading and writing and they can be lack of pre-skills. A preparation period is needed for these kinds of children. In preparation period, the things needed should be planned according to the needs of children. Preparatory exercises in the frame of this planning are listed below:

- a. The preparation for using tools needed for reading and writing: After students are accustomed to the school and classrooms, reading and writing tools should be given to their hands and they should be taught how to use them.
- b. The preparation for writing: after teaching holding pencils and notebooks, at first, they should draw free lines, some kind of rough drafts. Then, they should be helped to do drawing exercises contributing small muscle development.
- c. The preparation for reading: In this period, they should understand that reading the tools prepared appropriate with the techniques is from left to right. Some exercises should be held for extending the gripping area of the eye from left to right, and passing to the next line when a line finished. So, it should be tried to be perceived that the things written is a way of expression (2098 Notifications Paper, 1981a).

- d. Big and small receipts on which sentences and words that will be taught reading and writing are written.
- e. Reading passages, stories, tongue twisters, riddles, poems prepared by adding some new words to the words taught.
- f. On the other hand, resolution boards in which the same words are used in different sentences.
- g. Writing board and letters (these letters are cut from paper, plastic, carton). These letters can be used to make new words when the students get accustomed to the letters by solving the words (MEB, 1981b).

The 2005 Primary (1-5 Graders) Schools Turkish Course Programme (big change in method)

Over 20 years later a decision was made to make substantial change to the policy for early reading and writing instruction. The change involved teaching early reading and writing with a “Phoneme Based Sentence Method (PBSM),” which is a considerable change from the methods adopted in former periods. PBSM teaches early reading and writing by starting with phonemes. After teaching several phonemes that can form a meaningful whole, syllables are formed from phonemes, words are formed from syllables, and sentences are formed from words. When learning all the Turkish phonemes is complete, students start to do extensive work that involves forming meaningful words and sentences. The approach is seen as more dynamic than previous approaches and one that permits students to learn more words for sentence building, while continuously introduced to the phonemes of the language. This method is thought to be more applicable and one by which students can learn and improve rapidly (MEB, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e).

The remaining analysis will integrate the stated and implied rationale for policy decisions into the descriptions of continuity and change. Among them are: aspirations to develop a modern Turkish society, recommendations from external visitors (e.g., John Dewey), reactions to internal political debates, and ambitions to become a full member of the European Union. The remaining analysis will also provide explanations for why one teaching method extended, reshaped, or superseded an existing method as policy.

Phoneme Based Sentence Method

Teaching early reading and writing starts with phonemes in phoneme based sentence method. After giving some phonemes that can construct a meaningful whole, it is reached to syllables, words and sentences from phonemes. Teaching early reading and writing should be organized to reach sentences in a short time.

During teaching early reading and writing, reading and writing are held together. Every element that is read is written; and the one that is written is read. In teaching writing, italic hand writing letters are used.

The Features of Phoneme Based Sentence Method;

- a. Teaching early reading and writing in phoneme based sentence method is not conducted as developing listening and speaking skills but it is conducted with five learning areas of teaching Turkish.
- b. That teaching early reading and writing starts with phonemes, meaningful syllables and words are constructed by combining phonemes ease the construction of students’ knowledge. With this aspect, Phoneme Based Sentence Method is a suitable method for constructive teaching approach.

- c. This method gives importance to multiplicity and diversity instead of teaching early reading and writing with a certain number of sentences in certain forms. For this reason, in the process of teaching early reading and writing, it necessitates students to learn early reading and writing with many and various syllables, words and sentences.
- d. Rich content presented to the students contributes to the development of their basic thinking, creativity and intelligence.
- e. The progress in teaching reading and writing is conducted in a specific order from simple to difficult.
- f. This is a suitable method for attention level of a student just started early reading and writing. Phoneme Based Sentence Method contributes to the development of students' attention level in teaching and learning process.
- g. By force of the method, phonemes contribute to the development of the construction skills of letter, syllable, word, sentence and text.
- h. This method develops students' creativity because they engage in syllable, word, and sentence and text construction processes.
- i. With this method, students work with many syllables, words, sentences and texts in teaching early reading and writing. This prevents students from memorizing the sentences; on the other hand, it requires students to learn a sentence by understanding it. So, the understanding level of the students develops.
- j. This method is suitable for phoneme structure because each letter meets a phoneme in Turkish.
- k. This method helps students comprehend the phonemes they hear and they produce. Thus, it contributes to students' language development (true pronunciation, fluency, differentiation the phonemes and so on) (MEB, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e).

Table 1. 1924 – 2012 Methods Used to Teach Early Reading and Writing in Turkey

Period	Year	Grades	Reading Method	Characters	R&W Flashcards	Handwriting Sequence	Preparation Period	Handwriting Learned
1	1924	1↔5	Sound-Word Method	Arabic	None	-	No preparation period for learning to read & write	-
2	1926	1↔5	Sound-Word Method	Arabic	None	-	No preparation period for learning to read & write	-
3	1930	1↔5	Sound-Word Method	Latin	None	Learn upper- and lower-case letters together	No preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 2
4	1936	1↔5	Sound-Word-Letter Method	Latin	Sentence	Learn upper- and lower-case letters together	No preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 2
5	1948	1↔5	Sentence Method	Latin	Sentence	Learn upper- and lower-case letters together	No preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 2
6	1968	1↔5	Sentence Method	Latin	Sentence	Learn upper-case letters first, then lower-case letters	No preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 2
7	1981	1↔8	Sentence Method	Latin	Sentence	Learn upper-case letters first, then lower-case letters	3-week preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 1
8	2005	1↔5	Phoneme Based Sentence Method	Latin	None	None	3-week preparation period for learning to read & write	Grade 1

(MEB, 1924, 1926, 1930, 1936, 1948, 1968, 1981, 2005)

PROVIDES INTERIM RESULTS

In this research, we identified that the changes in the methods of teaching early reading and writing in Turkey occurred in connection to the changes of curriculum. In the process of research we identified that that curriculum of primary schools in Turkey has been changed 8 (eight) times so far. We understand that new applications appeared in connection to development trials.

1. In 1924 Elementary School Curriculum, Phoneme Method and Word Method was adopted.
2. In 1926 Elementary School Curriculum, there was no significant change in teaching early reading and writing.
3. In 1930 Elementary School Curriculum, instead of Arabic alphabet used in teaching Elifba and early reading and writing, Latin alphabet, which was developed compatible with the process of Turkish, was started to be used. Teaching alphabet gained importance instead of teaching Elifba. The subjects in 1924 and 1926 Elementary School Curriculum that must be considered were conserved.
4. In 1936 Elementary School Curriculum, it was suggested to teach words and sentences just after completing the letters. Then, forming writing sentences on slips (flashcard) was suggested. Then, it was suggested to form a text using these sentences and finally to analyzed these texts.
5. In 1948 Elementary School Curriculum, Analysis method was started to be used. Although it was dealt, it could not be applied effectively in former curriculum. Analysis method became more Professional and applicable than the former curriculum.
6. In 1968 elementary School Curriculum, being different from the former curriculum, majuscules and minuscules were taught together instead of teaching majuscules first and teaching minuscules next. Moreover, when needed, it was noticed to draw attention to the relations of majuscules with minuscules in terms of the shapes of the letters, writing directions, the area of the letters covered in line.
7. In 1981 Primary Schools Curriculum, it was adopted to teach reading and writing with analysis method. The most significant detail in this curriculum was that preparatory Works for reading and writing took place in this curriculum although it was discussed in this former curriculum.
8. In 2005 Primary School (1-5 graders) Turkish Course Curriculum, it was decided to teach reading and writing with “Phoneme Based Sentence Method (PBSM)”, a different method from analysis method. Teaching reading and writing is started with phonemes in Phoneme Based Sentence Method. After teaching several phonemes that can form a meaningful whole, syllables are formed from letters, words are formed from syllables, and sentences are formed from words. However, forming meaningful words and sentences starts shortly after teaching several phonemes without waiting to teach all the phonemes.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important as a comparative policy study. The policy path it traces outlines the continuities and changes of a national educational system as it forms policy that reflects its commitments and reactions to internal and external forces. The study is also important as an

historical study of pedagogy, highlighting the ideological, material, institutional and practical forces that shaped instructional methods for the teaching of early reading and writing that are unique to the Turkish historical context.

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