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EVALUATION OF 2018 LIFE SCIENCES CURRICULUM CONTENT

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Abstract:
Primary school education is the first level of basic education in the Turkish Education System. The basic education is the stage where children start to develop both personally and academically. In the primary school period, in addition to literacy education in Turkish, children receive education related to other basic skills through such courses as mathematics, sciences and life sciences. Life sciences course is regarded as the pivotal lesson, which has been in the heart of all the other lessons from past to present. Life sciences curriculum underwent changes, starting from the first years of the republic, in the years of 1926, 1936, 1948, 1968 and 1998, 2004, 2009, 2015, 2017 and 2018. Considering the 2018 life sciences curriculum structure, which was revised last, it is observed that this curriculum is composed of general objectives, values, basic life skills, concepts, units and attainments. In 2018 life sciences curriculum, the themes were replaced by the units. Based on the unit-based approach of the life sciences curriculum, six units having the same titles namely "Life at Our School", "Life at Our Home", "Healthy Life", "Safe Life", "Life in Our Country" and "Life in Nature" were determined for three grade levels. In this study, the opinions of classroom teachers regarding the 2018 life sciences curriculum content were revealed. The sample of the study consisted of 323 classroom teachers, teaching the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, chosen from the classroom teachers working in Pamukkale and Merkezefendi districts of Denizli province through simple random sampling method. The data in the study were collected via the "Evaluation of life sciences curriculum according to teachers' views" developed by Türkyılmaz (2011). The Cronbach Alpha value of the original scale was 0.895, and it was found to be 0.978 in this study. The classroom teachers presented their opinion by stating “I agree” about the appropriateness of the content in 2018 life sciences curriculum. The classroom teachers believed that the topic of "willingness to do research" is not sufficiently covered in 2018 life sciences curriculum. There is no significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers about the 2018 life sciences curriculum content according to gender, professional seniority, education level and the grade taught.

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1. Introduction

Primary school education is the first level of basic education in the Turkish Education System. The basic education is the stage where children start to develop both personally and academically. In the primary school period, in addition to literacy education in Turkish, children receive education related to other basic skills through such school subjects as mathematics, sciences and life sciences. Through these school subjects, they gain basic knowledge, skills, values and behaviors. Children utilize the basic knowledge and skills they have acquired in primary school to maintain their lives, and also make use of them at the next levels of their education. One of the school subjects that contribute to children's adaptation to social life is the life sciences lesson given at primary school. Life sciences lesson is a course aimed at familiarizing students with social life. Life sciences lesson, which is designed on the basis of integrated teaching principles, has taken its place in the first three grades of primary school as the pivot lesson (Yılmaz & Göçen, 2019:77). Life sciences lesson is regarded as the pivotal lesson, which has been in the heart of all the other lessons from past to present. Life sciences curriculum underwent changes, starting from the first years of the republic, in the years of 1926, 1936, 1948, 1968 (Aykaç, 2011) and 1998, 2004, 2009, 2015, 2017 and 2018 (MoNE, 2004, 2009, 2015, 2017, 2018). The changes implemented in the life sciences curriculum were made in order to ensure the adaptation to the changing conditions of the time. The changes in the life sciences curriculum were made in the components of aims, content, learning-teaching process and evaluation. One of the important components of the life sciences curriculum is content.

Content consists of a set of topics determined in accordance with the attainments (Erbağcı-Kaf (2020: 104). The following criteria should be considered in the selection and creation of content: (i) Social and individual benefit, (ii) Consistency with social realities, (iii) Creating curiosity and willingness to do research, (iv) Opportunity to gain new experience and skills, (v) New learning approaches, (vi) Interdisciplinary understanding, (vii) Contribution to personal development, (viii) Creating depth and width in learning (January, 2003: 33-36; Çelik, 2017: 31).

Content of life sciences curriculum should be prepared on the basis of the abovementioned principles. Life sciences lesson incorporates a curriculum which is designed based on integrated teaching approach (Tay-Baş, 2015: 363). Also, in life sciences curriculum, the content is determined primarily according to the aims and attainments. Recent developments and changes should also be included in the content design. Furthermore, the content should be appropriate to the learners' readiness level (Belet, 1998: 18-19). Considering the life sciences curricula that underwent changes, it is observed that the developmental characteristics of children have been taken into consideration in the creation of the content. Being cognizant of the content design will ensure the revision and updating of old and new information in the content, and the appropriateness of the design for students will contribute to the student's perception, picking out the basic meanings and transfer (Özden, 2006). Taking the above-mentioned

features into account in the content creation process further increases the applicability and contribution of the lesson. It should be kept in mind that information and skills that learners will acquire in the teaching process constitute the content. Another point that needs to be considered is that the content should be appropriate for the learner level. For instance, the contents part of a coursebook explain the content of that book (Özgüç, 2019: 4). When the life sciences curricula are examined in terms of the content, the differences in 2005, 2009, 2015, 2017 and 2018 curricula can be specified as follows (Karaman, 2019: 350; MoNE, 2009, 2015, 2017, 2018): (i) in 2005 Life Sciences Lesson Curricula of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, a content arrangement based on a spiral curriculum approach was dominant (Uğur, 2006: 29). The content was created by taking these features into account. (ii) Since thematic approach was prevalent in 2009, four learning areas namely "the individual", "society", "nature" and "change", and cross-curricular disciplines were included: (iii) It is observed, however, that the thematic approach was abandoned in 2015. (iv) The number of units was increased to 6 in 2015, 2017 and 2018. (v) In 2015, 2017 and 2018, there were no cross-curricular disciplines included and the number of attainments was reduced. Basically, it is understood that in the life sciences curriculum, the unit approach and attainments were simplified and the curriculum was shortened.

It is seen that the 2018 life sciences curriculum was organized on the basis of "*raising individuals with knowledge, skills and behaviors' integrated with our values and competencies*" (MoNE, 2018). Besides, it can be remarked that a content which is suitable enough to enable the learners to gain "core values" and skills was designed. In addition, the life sciences curriculum was created on a unit basis with a holistic approach in terms of content. The units were designed according to an individual-centered approach. It can be said that the units have a content that will ensure the individual's being raised safely and healthily in the school and family, within a good nature and country. Based on the unit-based approach, six units having the same titles namely "Life at Our School", "Life at Our Home", "Healthy Life", "Safe Life", "Life in Our Country" and "Life in Nature" were determined for three grade levels (MoNE, 2018). We can say that the curriculum has been designed with such a content that enables the child who reaches the end of the 3rd grade of primary school to accomplish the targeted level in terms of "*basic life skills, values and concepts*" (MoNE, 2018).

With the life sciences curriculum, it is expected that the individual will gain personality traits equipped with basic knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in terms of being both local and world citizens who maintain a good life in the society (Gündoğan, 2020: 34). According to the results of the study conducted by Uğur (2006), the teachers found the content of life sciences curriculum quite sufficient. When the 2009 and 2018 curricula are examined, it is observed that 3 themes were determined in the 2009 curriculum, and a unit-based approach was adopted in 2018 and 6 units were prepared. It has been determined that the names of the units were arranged according to near to far principle as in the 2009 curriculum (Güldalı, 2017: 85). In the study conducted by Tuncer (2009), classroom teachers stated that they regarded the themes determined in the life sciences curriculum appropriate in terms of content. Çakır (2007), in another study, reported that teachers viewed the content as positive in general. According to the result

of another study, it was stated that teachers found the content sufficient and appropriate in general, and that it should be improved in terms of such features as readiness, interestingness and information (Öztürk-Kalafatçı, 2017). In another study, it was reported that the 1st grade classroom teachers found the new 1st grade life sciences curriculum sufficient in terms of content / textbooks. Additionally, they stated that the curriculum provided an attainment-subject association, and it was enhanced by including current issues. The teachers also found it satisfactory in terms of visual design (Ünsal, 2018: 1087-1088). According to the results of the study carried out by Türkyılmaz (2011), on the other hand, the classroom teachers maintained that the content of the curriculum was not sufficient in terms of being appropriate for students' readiness level, attracting their interest, supporting their ability to do research, giving them flexibility, providing different activities, encouraging students for self-learning, having the feature of a pivot course and achieving personal qualities and skills. There are also different research findings regarding the content of the life sciences curriculum. Kalafatçı (2017) suggested that the themes do not contain sufficient and satisfactory information in terms of content, and that the information and concepts they cover are not adequately suitable for students' readiness levels. Özgüç (2019) revealed that teachers view the content at a sufficient level, but it is not enough to attract attention, it is partially effective in doing research and not sufficient in activities. (Ünsal, 2018). Karaman (2018) indicated in his study that the classroom teachers welcomed the simplification of the subjects, especially regarding the content of the last life sciences curriculum, but they did not regard it as adequate, and the teachers stated that the duration of the lesson hours was not enough. It can be observed that different opinions have been displayed in the research studies into the content issue and the perspectives of the teachers about the programs are different.

Life sciences lesson provides essential contributions in all areas of life, including adapting children to social life. Teachers strive to teach the topics included in the content of the life sciences curriculum based on a holistic approach. Classroom teachers, who are the practitioners of the topics in the life sciences curriculum, aim to make students adopt the knowledge, skills, values and behaviors' in the content according to the environment they work.

No matter how good-quality the topics in the life sciences curriculum are, they are meaningful to the extent that they are understood and adopted by classroom teachers who are the practitioners. When the relevant studies in the literature are examined, it is emphasized that the content in the life sciences curriculum should be understood and adopted by the teachers.

Further research is required on how classroom teachers evaluate the content of life sciences curriculum, which was revised and put into practice in 2018. In this study, the opinions of classroom teachers regarding the content in the 2018 life sciences curriculum were discussed. The sub-goals addressed for the purpose of the study are as follows: (1) What are the opinions of classroom teachers regarding the content in the 2018 life sciences curriculum? (2) Do classroom teachers' opinions on the content of the 2018 life sciences curriculum differ according to gender, professional seniority, education level and the grade taught?

2. Material and Methods

The study was conducted to determine the opinions of classroom teachers working in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades of primary schools about the elements of the 2018 Life Sciences curriculum. For this purpose, survey design was used to detect and reveal the current situation. Survey method is used to reveal the past or current situation as it is (Karasar, 2009: 77); to get the opinions of participants about a phenomenon or case (Karakaya, 2009: 59); to determine the attitudes, actions, ideas and beliefs of individuals (Gümüş, 2015: 370-371); and to describe the situation as it is (Çınkır-Demirkasımoğlu, 2015, p. 296). In this study, the opinions of classroom teachers about the content included in the 2018 life sciences curriculum were obtained. The study was carried out with a sample group representing the population of the study (Karasar, 2009: 79).

The population of this study was composed of classroom teachers working in Pamukkale and Merkezefendi districts of Denizli province. The sample of the study consisted of a group of classroom teachers selected by simple random sampling technique among the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade classroom teachers working in Pamukkale and Merkezefendi districts in the 2019-2020 academic year. The sampling criteria was that classroom teachers were teaching 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades in the 2019-2020 academic year. A total of 323 classroom teachers were included in the sample via simple random sampling technique. Demographic information about the classroom teachers included in the sample group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the classroom teachers participating in the study according to demographic variables

Variable		**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Female	166	51,4
	Male	157	48,6
Experience	1-5 years	3	0,9
	6-10 years	14	4,3
	11-16 years	38	11,8
	16 years and more	268	83.0
Educational level	Associate degree	43	13,3
	Completion of BA	55	17,0
	Bachelor's degree	204	63,2
	Postgraduate	21	6,5
Grade taught	1st grade	101	31,3
	2nd grade	109	33,7
	3rd grade	113	35,0

The data of the study were collected via the "Evaluation of Life Sciences curriculum according to teachers' views" developed by Türkyılmaz (2011). The scale consisted of two parts. The first part included personal information questions asked about the classroom teachers to whom the scale would be applied, and the second part was comprised of questions about the content of the curriculum. The scale has 18 items concerning the content of the Life Sciences curriculum. The 5th item which is included in the content

dimension and which is expressed as "It is positive that the themes within the scope of the curriculum maintain the same titles for 3 years" was rearranged as "It is positive that the units within the scope of the curriculum maintain the same titles for 3 years" in line with the objectives of the 2018 curriculum. The 15th item in the same dimension which is expressed as "It is sufficient to provide students with the personal qualities prescribed in the curriculum" was changed as "It is sufficient to provide students with the basic life skills prescribed in the curriculum". While the Cronbach Alpha for the original scale was found to be 0.895, it was calculated as 0.980 in this study.

In the analysis of the data, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used for the opinions of classroom teachers regarding the content included in the Life Sciences curriculum. In order to reveal whether there was a significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers, the normality of the distribution of the data was checked at first. Kolmogorov Smirnov test was performed to test the normality of the distribution. Kolmogorov Smirnov test results [K-S (z) = 1,095; p: 0.181] indicated that the data had a normal distribution. Since the distribution was found to be normal, t-test and ANOVA, which are both parametric tests, were used to determine the difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers.

Data was kept continuous during the interpretation of the data. Based on the assumption that the intervals were equal, score intervals were calculated as follows: The number of intervals was divided by the number of options (4/5 = 0.80). The value obtained was added starting from the option with the lowest score, and the scores obtained were interpreted as: 1.00-1.80 "Completely Disagree", 1.81-2.60 "Disagree", 2.61-3.40 "Partially agree", 3.41- 4.20 “Agree” and 4,21- 5,00 “Completely agree”.

3. Findings

The opinions of classroom teachers regarding the content of the 2018 Life Sciences curriculum are presented below.

Table 2: The opinions of classroom teachers about the content included in the 2018 Life Sciences curriculum

Item Number	Scale item	N	Mean	Interpretation
1	It is appropriate for achieving the attainments.	316	3,86	Agree
2	It has been developed in accordance with students’ readiness levels.	316	3,79	
8	It has been designed from simple to complex.	317	3,77	
10	It has been designed based on near-to-far principle.	318	3,74	
9	It has been organized from concrete to abstract.	317	3,70	
5	It is positive that the units included in the scope of the curriculum maintain the same titles for 3 years.	317	3,66	
3	It attracts students’ attention.	315	3,62	
16	It encourages students to work collaboratively.	316	3,61	
15	It is sufficient to provide students with the basic life skills prescribed in the curriculum.	316	3,60	

11	It conforms to modern scientific knowledge.	317	3,59	
18	It allows students to gain new skills.	318	3,58	
13	It has been developed in a way that forms the basis of other courses.	317	3,57	
6	It has been arranged flexibly to be suitable for the environment in which students live.	317	3,54	
17	It allows students to design new studies.	318	3,53	
7	It has been organized in a way that allows the teacher to do different activities.	315	3,53	
14	It arouses curiosity in students.	313	3,51	
12	It supports students' desire for self-learning.	317	3,46	
4	It increases students' willingness to do research.	315	3,38	Partially Agree

Table 2 indicates that the classroom teachers selected the "agree" option for the appropriateness of the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content. However, none of the classroom teachers opted for the "Completely agree" option. The teachers stated that they "Agree" with the statement "It is appropriate for achieving the attainments" regarding the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content. The participant teachers stated that they "Partially agree" with the statement "It increases students' willingness to do research" regarding the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content.

Table 3: The opinions of classroom teachers about the 2018 Life Sciences curriculum content according to gender

Gender	**N**	**X**	**ss**	**sd**	**t**	**p**
Female	162	3,55	0,77	317	-0,859	0,804
Male	157	3,62	0,81			

Considering whether there is a significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers on the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content according to gender, it was observed that there was no significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers.

Table 4: The opinions of classroom teachers about the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content according to experience

Source of Variance	**Sum of squares**	**Sd**	**Mean square**	**F**	**P**
Between groups	3,743	3	1,248	1,985	0,116
Within groups	198,050	315	0,629		
Total	201,793	318			

Considering whether there is a significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers about the content in the 2018 Life sciences curriculum according to experience, it was determined that there was no significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers.

Table 5: The opinions of classroom teachers about the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content according to educational level

Source of Variance	Sum of squares	Sd	Mean square	F	P
Between groups	1,179	3	0,393	0,617	0,604
Within groups	200,614	315	0,637		
Total	201,793	318			

Considering whether there is a significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers on the content in the 2018 Life sciences curriculum according to educational level, it was found that there was no significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers.

Table 6: The opinions of classroom teachers about the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content according to the grade taught

Source of Variance	Sum of squares	Sd	Mean square	F	P
Between groups	2,738	2	1,369	2,173	0,116
Within groups	199,056	316	0,630		
Total	201,793	318			

Considering whether there is a significant difference in the opinions of classroom teachers about the content in the 2018 Life sciences curriculum according to the grade taught, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the opinions of the classroom teachers.

4. Results and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the opinions of classroom teachers about the Life sciences curriculum content according to gender, educational level, experience and the grade taught. In the study, the majority of the classroom teachers stated that the content of the life sciences curriculum is acceptable. Based on this finding, it can be suggested that classroom teachers believe the Life sciences curriculum is sufficient in terms of the content. In the studies conducted by Gömleksiz (2005), Uğur (2006), Bulut (2006), Çakır (2007), Kayalar, (2007:62), Demir (2007), Tuncer (2009), Özkan (2009), Alak (2011), Kalafatçı (2017), Ünsal (2018), and Özgüç (2019), classroom teachers reported that the life sciences curriculum is appropriate in terms of content, which coincides with the findings of the present study. However, in the study results of Gülener (2010), Türkyılmaz (2011), and Kalafatçı (2017), the content of the Life sciences curriculum was not found sufficient by the classroom teachers. In the study by Türkyılmaz (2011), it was concluded that the content was not sufficient in terms of being appropriate for students' readiness level, attracting their interest, supporting their ability to do research, giving them flexibility, providing different activities, encouraging students for self-learning, having the feature of a pivot course and achieving personal qualities and skills.

According to the findings of the study, the fact that the teachers' view of "Partially agree" for the statement "It increases students' willingness to do research" can be

considered to coincide with the finding of the study by Türkyılmaz (2011) which reported that the content of the life sciences curriculum is not capable of achieving research skills. In the study by Çelik (2017), considering the gender variable, it was observed that the mean score of the opinions of male teachers was higher than that of female teachers in terms of the appropriateness of the content for the readiness levels. In the findings of the present study, on the other hand, no difference was found in the views according to gender. According to the results of the study conducted by Çelik (2017), it was revealed that female classroom teachers showed lower level of agreement than male classroom teachers with respect to the content of the curriculum in terms of readiness, associating with daily life, and appropriateness of the attainments. It can be argued that these results differ from the findings of the present study. In the study conducted by Tunalı (2009), unlike male classroom teachers, female classroom teachers believe that the content is not sufficient to achieve the attainments. It can be stated that this result differs from the present study. The fact that the majority of the classroom teachers in the present study stated that they "Agree" with the units' maintaining the same titles shows similarity to the results of the study performed by Şenay (2015). In the study conducted by Türkyılmaz (2011), while the views on the themes are in favor of female teachers when evaluated in terms of gender, there is no difference between the genders in the findings of the present study. In the research results of Alak (2011), as in the results of this one, no significant difference is found in the opinions of classroom teachers regarding the content according to gender.

In addition to the content of the 2018 life sciences curriculum, it can be maintained that the teachers expressed similar views in the results obtained regarding the content of the previously implemented curriculums. In this study, in which the opinions of classroom teachers about the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content were investigated, the teachers selected the "Agree" option for almost all the items on the scale and they only "Partially agreed" with the statement "It increases students' willingness to do research". It can be suggested that classroom teachers have a positive view on the 2018 Life sciences curriculum content.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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