

Effective Use of Lesson Plans to Enhance Education in U.S. and Turkish Kindergarten thru 12th Grade Public School System: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast yearly and daily lesson plans in both U.S. and Turkish education. Similarities and differences of lesson plans of both countries were worked out, and their functions and effects in learning and teaching process were analyzed. How the lesson plans were prepared and implemented in education process was explained. New ways of writing and implementing lesson plans are proposed in this study taking into account effective use of class time and classroom management by having positive expectations for student. More effective use of lesson plans via incorporation of C-Scope program into Kindergarten thru 12th grade United States public schools' academic program is examined.

Key Words: Administrivia, audio-visuials, bell-work, extracurricular, treasurers

1. Introduction

Research reveals that the teacher is probably the single most important factor affecting student achievement in a study with 60,000 students (Marzano et al., 2003:1). As cited in *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher* (Wong, 2009:12) (1) an effective teacher has positive expectations for student success; and lesson plan reflects such expectations, (2) an effective teacher knows how to design lessons for student mastery; which is reflected in lesson plan, and (3) an effective teacher is an extremely good classroom manager; which is possible via good time management during class time and that is possible only by effective implementation of a good lesson plan.

Planning is the systematic process of deciding what and how students should learn. Planning is mostly the responsibility of teachers. Teachers decide about the form and content of their instruction, such as how much presenting, questioning, and discussing to do; how much material to cover in the allotted time; and how in-depth to make their instruction (Borich, 2007). In planning process defining goals and objectives is important. The other factors in planning process are knowledge of the learner, knowledge of subject matter, and knowledge of teaching methods.

In this study, it was aimed to review and compare the lesson plan practices in both U.S. and Turkey. Commonly implemented lesson plan practices include the concept or objectives to be taught, time block, procedures to be used, required materials, questions, independent practice, and evaluation.

Lesson plans affects not only teachers instruction but classroom management as well. Characteristics of a well-managed classroom are that (1) students are deeply engaged with their work; which would be possible if their roles are described and they have a goal as provided in a good lesson plan; (2) students know what is expected; which would be possible via routinely implemented good lesson plans; (3) there is little wasted time, confusion; which would be possible via effective implementation of a good lesson plan; and (4) the climate of such a classroom would be work-oriented, but relaxed and pleasant; which would be possible via good time management due to effective implementation of a good lesson plan (Wong 2009:81).

Lesson plans should be ready latest as one week before the beginning of the academic year for the necessary arrangements to be made. The plan should be practical and usable, be economical in terms of teacher time, and strengthen the educational program. Depending on the grade level and subject matter, teachers may be required to follow curriculum designated by campus or district administration.

The literature review reveals that the importance of lesson planning is emphasized in the education process of many countries. Borich (2007) states that as a combination of lesson objective designing, teaching, modeling, checking for understanding, re-teaching and teacher's self-reflection, lesson plan is a crucial element in the process of meeting national content standards and optimizing the outcome of classroom teaching and learning.

In U.S., usually lesson plans are categorized into (1) yearly lesson plans, (2) weekly lesson plans which consist of five daily plans, (3) daily lesson plans and (4) substitute teacher plans (Farrell, 2002; Bailey, 1986:15-40);

While in Turkish education process- Kindergarten to thru 12th grade- mainly two types of plans, unit-based yearly plan and lesson plan are implemented (TD, 2003).

In this study, researchers aims to give basic knowledge about lesson parts and compare lesson plans of both U.S. and Turkey and their implementations in education process.

2. Methodology

This study is in qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a variety of scientific investigation that tries to answer questions, collects data, and produce findings. This type of research is particularly effective in getting culturally specific information about the values, thoughts, manners, and social contexts of specific people. Qualitative research is inquiry that focuses on studies that are in depth and therefore smaller samples can be used. In essence qualitative research is an exploration of a research question or situation in depth. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research includes an interpretive and naturalistic approach. This means that inquiry takes place in its natural setting. The researcher tries to make sense of what occurs and tries to make sense of the experiences he or she is seeing. This type of research can help us often identify situations or issues that may be intangible such as gender roles, religion, ethnicity, norms and socio economic status. Qualitative research usually tells us the story of the human aspect of an issue that is often inconsistent manners, beliefs, emotions, relationships and thoughts. Document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. Researchers reviewed and compared related educational laws and policies on lesson plans and procedures in Turkish and American public school systems with the document analysis method. Data obtained from the documents were analyzed by content analysis method.

3. Results and Discussion

a) Yearly Lesson Plan

U.S. Case

In U.S. Yearly Lesson Plan or Overall Yearly Plan provides an overview of the course in curriculum. It indicates the units to be taught and the time devoted. Yearly plans are usually submitted to the dean of academics, who is usually an assistant or vice principal either directly by the teacher or through department heads at the end of first week of instruction of the respective academic year. A shorter version of the yearly lesson plan may be included in the syllabus as well.

Yearly lesson plans contain the units to be taught along with the subtopics and serve as a guideline when preparing the daily lesson plans and the weekly lesson plans that consist of the daily lesson plans. Yearly lesson plans also include major curricular and extracurricular activities to be performed, without going into their details, especially if they are to be performed when transiting from one unit to another.

Turkish Case

In Turkey Unit-based Yearly Lesson Plan (UYLP) is implemented in education process, which is almost similar to Overall Yearly plan in U.S. Unit-based Yearly lesson plans are prepared ahead of beginning of instruction and submitted to the school administration in a timely manner in the beginning of the academic year. UYLP includes the units and topics to be covered throughout the academic year stating the dates and durations that will be spent on each of them. In fact yearly lesson plan consists of summarized unit plans. The teacher that prepares the yearly lesson plan must know his/her curriculum of the class he/she will be teaching with its details.

To encourage schools and teachers to improve the quality of lesson planning, the Ministry of Education of Turkey often controls the procedure by sending inspectors to schools periodically.

Other topics included in UYLP are; daily, weekly, yearly class hours; sub-units, objectives of each unit; connections between the units; interdisciplinary approaches; connections with the reforms realized by the founder of Turkey, Atatürk; instructional methods and technologies to be used; instructional materials to be used; titles of the activities, field trips, experiments, demonstrations to be realized.

UYLP must be ready by the beginning of the academic year. Time to be devoted to the students receiving special education services must be allocated in the plan. Teachers refer to the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) of students when noting the details about students receiving special education services in the lesson plans.

Teachers await for the final course schedule to be ready before finalizing the yearly lesson plans. This means they have to know what classes they will teach for how many hours and on which days.

It is essential to make plans in learning and teaching process in elementary and high schools in Turkish education. Plans are updated timely according to education needs. Preschool education teachers prepare UYLPs and Daily Lesson plans (DLP) according to preschool education policy as well.

In the process of UYLP, certain units and subjects are planned monthly and timely during education terms. UYLPs are designed by Branch Teachers' Council at beginning of academic year and it is delivered to school administration. When the UYLPs are prepared, the following points are considered:

- The UYLP is prepared at the very beginning of academic year.
- When the lessons are taught, the subject matter mentioned in the UYLP is paid attention.
- In suggested period, it is determined that in which grades, in which months and how many hours should be spent for each lesson weekly.
- In the UYLPs , units are categorized under specific subject matters, and how much time needed for each subject matter is determined.
- The UYLP are categorized into monthly lesson plans, weekly lesson plans which consists of daily lesson plans.
- The UYLP include the number of scheduled classes periods, key learning goals students are supposed to achieve at the end of the school, major activities and events supporting teaching and learning in the academic year.

Within unit-based yearly lesson plan, number of hours that will be taught for each course within the allocated time must be determined monthly by taking into consideration the subtopics. An academic calendar is prepared also taking holidays into account. Yearly lesson plan shows the weekly work hours that are grouped into monthly intervals.

Preparation of UYLP

a) First, dates for joint events such as field trips, experiments, projects, etc. are set at the department meeting.

b) Secondly, teachers prepare their UYLPs in collaboration with other teachers after reviewing the lesson plans prepared in the previous years.

c) UYLP is submitted to the campus principal 15 days ahead of beginning of instruction, mostly in August.

d) Teacher files UYLPs he/she prepared and use it as a reference throughout the year and make a note of the deviations form it along with the reasons.

e) Teachers shall also update the plans based on the needs of students with disabilities depending on students' IEPs (Individualized Education Plan).

Based on the regulations of the Ministry of Education, UYLPs are prepared as two copies by the teachers, of which one is submitted to the school administration.

Unit-based yearly lesson plan consists of the following categories: (1) the number of scheduled classes periods, (2) objectives and behaviors (3) content/topics, (4) instructional materials, teaching methods and techniques, (5) evaluation.

b) The Daily Lesson Plan

U.S. Case

Daily lesson plan is a written account of what a teacher would like to have happen during a certain lesson or class period. It should contain the concept or objective, the time block, the procedure and the instructional materials needed. Daily lesson plans are submitted usually via email either to dean of academics, who is usually an assistant or vice principal or to the department heads at the end of each week for the following week. The first year teacher must realize that as a general rule, it will be necessary to plan in considerable more detail than the teacher with more experience and training (Cicek, 2013).

Modified lesson plans would be needed for students receiving special education (SPED) services (Spooner, 2007, English as a Second Language (ESL) services (Constantino, 1994:37-57), or Gifted and Talented (G/T) services (Burns&Reis, 2010) if instruction is in the same environment with other students. For AP (Advanced placement) courses in high school, lesson plans that are in line with detailed curriculum that is submitted and approved the previous academic year will be needed (Mattern et al., 2009). Honor sections have upper courses or modified lessons, thus modified lesson plans will be needed (Haley, 2004:163-180). Other supplementary tools may need to be inserted into lesson plans such as Study Island, Accelerated Reader (AR) or Math programs. Study Island is an online program helping students to improve in core subject areas and prepare for state standardized tests, while AR is a reading program intended to encourage recreational reading and a lifelong love for reading and both will need to be incorporated into lesson plans because AR for instance requires coordination of the following units (Vollands et al., 1997: 197-211); Library, Computer Lab, Homeroom due to implementation of Pleasure Reading or AR Reading or DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time and English Classes. While Study Island requires the extensive coordination of computer labs and the classes of core subject areas that are English, Mathematics, Science and Social Sciences and AR Math requires the extensive coordination of computer labs and Mathematics classes.

Pre-planning Strategies for Writing-up Lesson Plans

Before writing-up a lesson plan the teacher first should be aware of the learning styles of the students, reading levels/skills of students and inventory access to technology. Answers of following questions will also help teacher writing-up an effective lesson plan;

- What do I want all students to know and be able to do at the end of this lesson?
- What will I do to cause this learning to happen?
- What will students do to facilitate this learning?

- How will I assess to find out if this learning happened?
- What will I do for those who show through assessment that the learning did not take place?

The correct question to ask when preparing lesson plans is what students are going to learn, achieve, and accomplish tomorrow and not what the teacher is going to cover tomorrow because the role of the teacher is not to cover, it is to uncover. Learning has nothing to do with what the teacher covers. Learning has to do with what the student accomplishes (Wong, 2009:87).

Based on the answers of these questions, teacher should prepare the lesson plan establishing a variety of instructional strategies focusing on academic expectations and core content to connect writing to what is being taught. More specifically, a lesson plan should address the following (Richards, 1998:103-121);

1. Concept or objectives to be taught, which tells the student what they will learn.
2. Time blocks, e.g., approximate time expected to be devoted to the lecture.
3. Procedures to be used for instructional design.
4. Materials needed both for the student and the teacher.
5. Independent practices or student time on task.
6. Evaluation, applications, and student understanding, e.g. main questions to be asked by the teacher to check student understanding.

In other words, a successful lesson plan provides for each class to have a focus; each minute of the class and role of students are planned; lecture is designed to engage class making the students active participants; important points are repeated multiple times within a period and throughout the semester; and how new class material relates to earlier material are pointed out building a foundation for students' learning (McCutcheon, 1980: 4-23; Purgason, 1991: 419-431). Teachers should also expect to cover less material than planned thus be prepared and have a back-up lesson plan.

C-Scope

C-Scope is a curriculum support system that is fully aligned to the state mandated curricula designed to provide a common language, process and structure for curriculum development. It is also a viable curriculum tool for all four major content areas providing school districts and teachers to teach the mandated curricula by the states, e.g. TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) for the state of Texas. Via the online teaching tools provided by C-Scope curriculum alignment is made possible between grade levels. This way students may expect smooth transitions between content taught at different grade levels ruling out gaps and differences primarily due to change of teachers and change of school (Gulick, 2011). To serve purposes such as teaching the mandated curricula and aligning curriculum between grade levels, C-Scope provides the following tools, which serve as overall yearly and daily lesson plans that include lectures, assignments, group work, etc. thus taking away the need to prepare lesson plans but to implement them. Departments prepare themselves for the vis-à-vis lesson plans included in C-Scope purchasing all the materials associated with the C-Scope activities, printing out all the materials, etc. from the beginning of the year. Major tools provided by C-Scope are (Gulick, 2011; and as cited in English Language Proficiency Standards and the 5E Model of Instruction, 2012; A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum: Taking A Closer Look, 2008; and Planning Instruction Using CSCOPE, 2012) are VAD and YAG.

Vertical Alignment Document (VAD) presents clearly articulated and aligned standards among grade levels using state mandated curriculum statements that delineate student expectations with specificity, ensuring that the teacher understands exactly what should be taught. Thus, a teacher can be aware of what his/her students learned in a specific subject area in the previous years and what they will learn in the following years and as a result can design instruction.

Another lesson plan document is the Year at a Glance (YAG) document, which is designed to present a snapshot of the entire year's instructional plan. The YAG is a map and pacing guides for the units of study. It makes the curriculum viable by ensuring that the teacher has adequate instructional time to present the required content. In that sense, YAG is like a yearly lesson plan.

Turkish Case

In Turkey, a daily lesson plan includes the student learning objectives to be realized within a class period or several class periods and the experiments, demonstrations, inquiry questions, practice questions, instructional materials, etc. those are to be used to realize such objectives. In other words, daily lesson plan includes to be realized on a daily basis using the yearly lesson plan as a guideline. Daily plan covers the activities to be realized for the whole day for classroom teachers, while it covers only the limited number of hours taught by a subject teacher, e.g., one-hour mathematics (TD, 2003).

A good daily lesson plan includes the timeline of classes such as when it will begin and how long will it take to cover a subject; instructional materials and pedagogical methods to be used to realize the learning objectives; how to connect the previously taught content with the current one, practical examples from daily life, etc. It should be also noted that daily lesson plans may be revised based on the needs that arise.

The practice in Turkey is that teacher books are used instead of lesson plans for courses that have teacher's book available. However, teachers may prepare their own daily lesson plans as well. Title and the learning outcome of the activity are recorded in the lesson notebook. For courses those do not have teacher's book, classroom teachers gathers with the subject teachers and/or with the department chair to prepare the daily lesson plans.

Teachers must consider the following points when preparing a daily lesson plan: 1. Each student has different educational needs. Thus, teacher should note that each student will have different interests, needs, and skills and therefore each and every student may not be expected of the same learning performances and behavior patterns. 2. Instructional materials to be mentioned in the daily lesson plan must consist of reasonable items and not of items that cannot be made ready on the day of the lesson. 3. Teacher should recognize the parents and neighborhood of the school and take advantage of such factors when preparing the lesson plan. 4. Teacher should act as he/she is the leader of the class and thereof; however should listen to the students as well. 5. Teacher should encourage the students to individually work and research; but should not overload the students with too much and difficult homework. 6. Teacher should plan the time well not allocating too much time. Time is the only quality that is the same for all students unlike the physical conditions, students' intellect, their age and socio-economic status, etc. 7. Daily lesson plan should also include a backup plan explaining how the parts of the lesson plan those cannot be realized can be made up for. 8. Teachers should avoid activities such as directing students to copy a page in the book, which are nothing but waste of time. 9. Teachers should grade all the homework and projects that they assign to the students. 10. Lesson plans must be prepared based on the intellectual level of students. 11. Daily lesson plans must be flexible enough and not too strict. 12. They should not be too short or too long. 13. They should serve as guidelines hinting the teachers and students not including all the details. 14. Title of the course and units, allocated time

for each activity, instructional methods, instructional materials are all to be cited in the daily lesson plans. 15. Daily lesson plans may be recorded in a notebook or on single pages to be filed afterwards. 16. Teachers may use the time efficiently and teach the main points easier via using daily lesson plans. 17. Daily lesson plans serve as proofs that the teacher had implemented the activities mentioned within the daily lesson plan. 18. Daily lesson plans help connecting the content taught at different class periods. 19. Daily lesson plan consists of the plans of each class period. 20. If block scheduling is implemented, then one lesson plan may suffice for two class periods. 21. Additionally, the plan for a field trip or for an experiment may be included in the daily lesson plan or attached as a supplemental document.

LPs include outcome of classroom teaching and learning and objectives which are available in curriculum and subject matters which can be studied in a certain lesson or in a few classes period, experiments related to subject matters, discussion questions, projects and assignments, applications, lesson materials. LPs are prepared by lesson teachers with help of subject teachers.

LP is a plan of subject matter that can be studied in a class period or a few classes period. The teacher is responsible for planning daily lesson plan. LP contains objectives, the time bloc, the procedure and instructional materials needed. Daily lesson plans are submitted to school administration at the end of each week. Teacher can use guidebooks prepared by ministry of education instead of lesson plan. If the lesson does not have a guidebook, teachers then make an extra lesson plan which is in compliance with the curriculum.

A daily lesson plan consists of 4 chapters: The first chapter includes grade, unit topic, course/subject, approximate time required. The second chapter includes behavioral objectives, unit concepts, symbols, security precautions (if needed), methods, instructional materials and activities. The third chapter includes assessment/evaluation, interdisciplinary relationships. The fourth chapter includes explanations about the implementing the lesson plan. Daily lesson plans include educational trips, observation and experimental plans.

Educational Trips

Educational trips are very useful instruments since they involve learning via all senses. In the plan of a field trip, those activities are to be mentioned; the title of the course and the unit that the field trip is about, the objective and the subject of the trip, location or venue of the trip, duration of the trip, participants of the trip, route of the trip, precautions to be taken, and activities to be performed at the site of the trip.

If the trip is within the borders of the bigger city/county, then permission of the superintendent of the school district would suffice, however for trips to outside the larger city/county borders, then permission of the governor is required.

Observation and Experiment Plan

Observation and experiments are effective in presenting the retaining learning interactions/lives. For experiments, it is essential to do "experiment plan". Experiment plan includes the course in which experiment will be done, the topic of experiment, the aim of experiment, its time, and how the experiment will be done, the results of experiment and evaluation parts.

Briefly, a daily lesson plan consists of the following categories: (1) the teaching objectives, (2) warm-up activities, (3) instructional activities and learning experiences, (4) checking for understanding activities, (5) reflection activities, and (6) homework (TD, 2003).

c) Substitute Teacher Plan

U.S. Case

Lesson plans for substitute teachers should be carefully planned and written in detail. Detailed plans give the substitute teacher a feeling of confidence and security. The lesson plans should be placed on the teacher's desk in plain view and included in the sub-teacher folder.

In case there is no sub-folder provided by the regular teacher to the substitute teacher, which normally includes lesson plan, materials to hand out, etc then the substitute teacher should still be strict and may give a test, puzzles, summarizing assignments or have students read or write an essay or even watch educational movies or documentaries as the last resort.

Turkish Case

According to the Ministry of Education of Turkey, substitute teachers are hired in most Turkish public schools when necessary. Substitute teacher use same lesson plane with the other teacher. There are guide textbooks for teachers. There are lesson plans and detail information in those guidebooks. So they do not have to type or print out the daily lesson plans.

4. Conclusion

Considering yearly lesson plans in both U.S. and Turkey, they are prepared ahead of beginning of instruction and submitted to the school administration in the beginning of the academic year. They include the units and topics to be covered throughout the academic year stating the dates and durations that will be spent on each of them. They have same functions in education process. However, unit-based yearly lesson plans are done in detail, including daily, weekly and yearly class hours, objectives of each unit, instructional methods and technologies to be used. In U.S. yearly lesson plans are more flexible, instructor can modify them according to his/her pace and regional conditions.

The content of the lesson plan of each country is almost same, In Turkey recently, daily lesson plans is not mandated for teachers, if they need, they can do it. Lesson plans are presented by National Ministry of Education on its web page. There have been guidebooks for teachers. Teachers can use them instead of daily lesson plans. Daily lesson plans include educational trips, observation and experimental plans as well.

In U.S., beside lesson plans, Bell Schedule, Homeroom Period in which taking school attendance, making announcements, is a determined sequence establishing a routine exist in education process. C-scope is a curriculum support system which provides overall yearly and daily lesson plans, and it saves time for teachers and takes away the need to prepare the lesson plan, teachers can implement them without losing time.

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