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An Investigation into the 11th Grade National Philosophy Curriculum in Turkey

Faruk Manav

Correspondence: Faruk Manav, Nevsehir Haci Bektas Veli University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Philosophy, Nevsehir, Turkey.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to evaluate the attainments and their descriptions, and units of the 11th grade level Turkish Philosophy curriculum, introduced in Turkey in the academic year 2018-2019 in order to display its advantages and disadvantages. In this study, a qualitative research method 'document analysis technique' was used. The attainments of the curriculum what learning domains they corresponded to and what level of behavior they represented were analyzed. The study, found that all the attainments belonged to the cognitive domain and that out of the 21 attainments, 10 of them corresponded to representative behaviors at the comprehension level, 5 of them at the analysis level, 5 of them at the evaluation level and 1 of them at the knowledge level. The units integrated in the curriculum that referred to the periods of history of philosophy were named differently from widely accepted names used Philosophy literature. The descriptions of the attainments did not fully reflect the scope of some attainments and neglected some periods in the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, the curriculum had positive qualities such as philosophical writing, text reading and the inclusion of Turkish-Islamic philosophers. The study recommends that the identified problems should be resolved to make the curriculum functional and eliminate its defects.

Keywords: philosophy teaching, curriculum, philosophy, history of philosophy, 11th grade level

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 year, high school Philosophy courses have been conducted in a centralized manner within a framework of applied curriculums. Subsequently, different curriculums were adopted at different time points (Dombayci, 2013; Kiziltan, 2014; Manav, 2015). These curriculums also differed substantially from each other in terms of their basic features and qualities (Kiziltan, 2014; Manav, 2015). Further to this, in 2017 the Board of Education in the Ministry of National Education finally approved a philosophy curriculum (MEB, 2017a, p. 1624) that was to be implemented during the 2018-2019 academic year after it had been updated (MEB, 2018a, p. 1776). The curriculum that was prepared with different philosophical teaching approaches would cover two grade levels. This Philosophy course curriculum is currently listed among compulsory courses that would be taught to 10th and 11th grade levels students for two hours every week following changes made to weekly course schedules (MEB, 2017b, pp. 1549-1565). The 10th grade curriculum comprised of a classical introduction to philosophy, had 18 attainments and their descriptions, while the 11th grade curriculum comprised of a history of philosophy had 5 units and 21 attainments and their descriptions (MEB, 2018b).

Studying the structure of a new curriculum and determining its positive and negative attributes is important in preventing potential problems in practice. However, studies in the literature on the 2018-2019 curriculum have not yet been conducted. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of research studies have been published on the 2009 Philosophy curriculum. The 2009's Philosophy curriculum studies can be classified into those, based on teacher opinions (Firat Durdukoca, 2011; Bicer, 2013; Sakar, 2014; Okumus, Bozok, Ozdemir & Apaydin, 2014), related to curriculum's components (Dombayci, 2013; Manav, 2016; Unsal & Korkmaz, 2017), related to curriculum's units (Manav, 2015) and related to philosophy of education as regards the 2009 Philosophy curriculum (Manav, 2014). This study aimed to provide a theoretical evaluation of the attainments of the curriculum and their contents by examining the structure of the 11th grade level of Philosophy curriculum. This would be done by illustrating the positive and negative qualities of the 11th grade level of philosophy curriculum.

2. Method

In this study, document analysis was used. This qualitative research method that evaluates written documents containing information about the subject of interest, considers written materials as valuable sources of easily accessible information

to the researcher and therefore saves time and cost (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011, pp. 187-188). The documents reviewed in this study were, the curriculums, books, theses and articles within the scope of the subject covered.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Evaluation of the Attainments

Table 1 that includes the structure of the attainments of the 11th grade level of philosophy curriculum and that covers information about the levels and the domains of the attainments is as follows:

Table 1. Structure of the Attainments of 11th Grade Level of Philosophy Curriculum

Unit	[1]Attainments	Domain/Level[2]
6th Century BC – 2nd Century AC	11.1.1. Explains the environment of thought that prepared the emergence of philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.1.2. Explains the characteristics of 6th century BC – 2nd century AC philosophy	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.1.3. Analyzes the philosophical views of 6th century BC - 2nd century AC philosophers from the example philosophical texts.	Cognitive/Analysis
	11.1.4. Evaluates philosophical aspects of example ideas and arguments in the 6th century BC – 2nd century AC philosophy.	Cognitive /Evaluation
2nd Century AC –15th Century Philosophy	11.2.1. Explains the environment of thought that prepared 2nd century AC – 15th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.2.2. Explains the characteristics of 2nd century AC – 15th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.2.3. Analyzes the philosophical views of 2nd century AC – 15th century philosophers from the example philosophical texts.	Cognitive/Analysis
	11.2.4. Evaluates philosophical aspects of example ideas and arguments in the 2nd century AC – 15th century philosophy.	Cognitive /Evaluation
15th Century – 17th Century Philosophy	11.3.1. Explains the environment of thought that prepared 15th century – 17th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.3.2. Explains the characteristics of 15th century– 17th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.3.3. Analyzes the philosophical views of 15th century – 17th century philosophers from the example philosophical texts.	Cognitive/Analysis
	11.3.4. Evaluates philosophical aspects of example ideas and arguments in the 15th century – 17th century philosophy.	Cognitive /Evaluation
18h Century – 19th Century Philosophy	11.4.1. Explains the environment of thought that prepared 18th century – 19th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.4.2. Explains the characteristics of 18th century – 19th century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.4.3. Analyzes the philosophical views of 18th century – 19th century philosophers from the example philosophical texts.	Cognitive/Analysis
	11.4.4. Evaluates philosophical aspects of example ideas and arguments in the 18th century – 19th century philosophy.	Cognitive /Evaluation
20th Century Philosophy	11.5.1. Explains the environment of thought that prepared the 20th Century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.5.2. Explains the characteristics of 20th Century philosophy.	Cognitive/Comprehension
	11.5.3. Analyzes the philosophical views of 20th Century philosophers from the example philosophical texts.	Cognitive/Analysis
	11.5.4. Evaluates philosophical aspects of example ideas and arguments in the 20th century philosophy.	Cognitive /Evaluation
	11.5.5. Shows the names of the 20th and 21st century philosophers and the geography they live in on the map.	Cognitive /Knowledge

The 11th grade Philosophy curriculum consists of 21 attainments in 5 units (MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-37) that all belong to

[1](MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-27)

[2]The levels of the attainments were determined according to Sonmez (2010) and Demirel (2013). Thus, the state of Bloom's Taxonomy in these sources were taken into account.

the cognitive domain where "... majority of mental learning occurs…" (Demirel, 2013, p. 96). In terms of their domains/levels, as described by Bloom's taxonomy, two attainments in each unit are at the level of *comprehension*, one attainment is at level of *analysis*, one attainment is at the level of *evaluation* and in the final unit that has 5 domains, one is unit is at the level of *knowledge. Comprehension* is described as "… internalization, assimilation and capture the meaning of the behaviors gained at the knowledge level by the student…" (Sonmez, 2010, p. 67). Whereas in *analysis*, facts are distinguished from assumptions, hypotheses, opinions and value judgements while results are distinguished from facts and causes, and where cause-effect and before-after relationships are identified (Bakircioglu, 2016, p. 273). The attainment of *evaluation* is defined as "…to demonstrate the value, accuracy and consistency of cognitive skills and behaviors that have been synthesised for a particular purpose with internal and external criteria…" (Bakircioglu, 2016, p. 274). Finally, the attainment at the level of *knowledge* covers "…verbal and memorized information about each subject area (lectures) taught in school, and concepts, facts, classifications, orientations related to that area…" (Bakircioglu, 2016, p. 273). In summary, ten attainments correspond to the level of cognition, five attainments to the level of analysis, five attainments at the level of evaluation and one attainment to the level of knowledge. The obvious aspect of this curriculum that is open to criticism at this point is, of course, that most of the attainments belong to the knowledge and comprehension level, which correspond to behaviors at a lower level.

The most noteworthy thing in the negative sense is that the attainments in each unit are written in the same way except for the last attainment in the last unit (MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-27). Although this doesn't raise any flags at first glance, there are problems with the expressions of the attainments. In the first place, the description of an attainment of analysis as "... analyzes the philosophical views of philosophers" (MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-27) is problematic. It implies that all units that are so titled, are related to the introduction of *philosophers' views* of other fields because the philosopher who is the first to come to mind when it comes to the subject of philosophy "... is the person who is equipped with philosophical knowledge and has a philosophical attitude. Because philosophical thought is something based on inquiry, questioning and critical attitude, the philosopher is primarily passionate about questions." (Koc, 2009, p. 227). Therefore, because philosopher is the person who produces philosophical knowledge (Uygur, 2013, p. 164), ideas, views and thoughts that he or she produces must have a structure that is primarily philosophical, it will be better to use the expression *'analyzes the philosophers' opinions'* rather than '*the philosophical views of the philosophers*' in the attainments. Moreover, it will also be a precaution for not deviating from the scope of the philosophy course.

It is unclear what purpose the last attainment of the last unit that "Shows the names of the 20th and 21st century philosophers and the geography they live in on the map." (MEB, 2018b, p. 27) serves as this statement does not completely match with the curriculum. In the description of the attainment, there is an expression saying that the places where philosophers lived are to be shown on the map and this should not be done by memorization (MEB, 2018b, p. 27). If such an attainment is required, it must apply to all philosophers and not only for 20th and 21st century philosophers. Otherwise, it seems inevitable that the 20th and 21st century philosophers will be perceived as being superior to others that lived in other periods.

3.2 Evaluation of Unit Names

Unit names differ from widely accepted philosophical periods in the philosophical literature. For example, the content of the first unit of the curriculum, *6th Century BC – 2nd Century AC Philosophy*, is birth of philosophy, the first philosophers, opinions about the arkhe and philosophers such as Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (MEB, 2018b, p. 23). The period in philosophy literature where those subjects and ideas of the philosophers are discussed, is referred to as '*Ancient Philosophy*' (Annas, 2000; Von Aster, 2005; Duignan, 2011a; Hadot, 2011; Cevizci, 2014; Gokberk, 2004; Kenny, 2006; Heidegger, 2008), '*Ancient Age Philosophy'* (Durusken, 2016), '*Greek Philosophy*' (Weber, 1998; Zeller, 2008; Vorlander, 2017; Wright, 2009), or '*Ancient Greek Philosophy*' (Preus, 2007). Moreover, it is widely accepted that this period extends to the year 529 (Zeller, 2008, p. 29, Cevizci, 2014, p. 28, Vorlander, 2017, pp. 225-226). However, the unit name denotes that this period ended in the 2nd century.

A similar problem is presented by the title of the second unit of the curriculum named *2nd Century AC – 15th Century Philosophy*. This unit is predominantly comprised of medieval Christian philosophy, Islamic philosophy and philosophers (MEB, 2018b, p. 24). These ideas and philosophers are addressed in a period referred to as *'Medieval Philosophy*' or '*Philosophy in the Middle Ages*' in the literature of philosophy (Weber, 1998; Gilson, 2005; Gilson, 2007; Brown & Flores, 2007; Thilly, 2007a; Cevizci, 2016; Vorlander, 2017; Maurer, 1982; Marenbon, 2007; Duignan, 2011b). In addition, this period has a lower limit of the 2nd century AC, which was also the upper limit of the first unit, does not reflect medieval philosophy which covers the period after ancient philosophy, centered in Ancient Greece (Gokberk, 2004, p. 125; Thilly, 2007a, p. 235-236; Cevizci, 2016, p. 15). From this point of view, starting the medieval philosophy from the 2nd century seems problematic.

Challenges posed by naming of the 3rd and 4th units stem from mentioning multiple centuries together (i.e. 15th - 17th Century, 18th – 19th Century) rather than individually (MEB, 2018b, pp. 25-26). Presenting the centuries separately would have been preferable because there is a possibility that it may be difficult to identify in which century which philosopher, trend or thought structure occurred. In summary, that unit names that do not correspond to those used in philosophy literature, have a potential of creating problems and difficulty in learning environments for students and even for teachers.

3.3 Evaluation of Descriptions of Attainments

The positive and negative features identified in the descriptions of the attainments of the curriculum coverage are discussed below.

The description of the first attainment of the first unit, "The effects of the understanding of being, knowledge and values on the birth of philosophy in Sumerian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, and Iranian civilizations are mentioned" is problematic (MEB, 2018b, p. 23). Although emphasizing the contributions of different cultures and civilizations to the birth or origins of philosophy can be regarded as positive, where philosophy was born (or emerged) is controversial in philosophy literature (Keklik, 1978, pp. 153-155; Cevizci, 2014, pp. 14-23; Skirbekk & Gilje, 2004, p. 19; Arslan, 2009, pp. 21-24; Störig, 2011). Including such a subject in the content of the first attainment in a high school Philosophy curriculum carries the potential to cause confusion of young minds. Moreover, the fact that many sources agree on the emergence of Philosophy as a discipline and the contribution of Ancient Greece to philosophy (Hadot, 2011, p. 21; Gokberk, 2004, p. 12; Cevizci, 2014, pp. 23-28; Zeller, 2008, pp. 51-55), are not mentioned in the description, is also problematic. The content design principle “The content should be ordered moving from concrete to abstract, from simple to complex, from easy to difficult and from close to distant.” (Sonmez, 2010, p. 127) is also ignored by introducing students a complex subject at the beginning of a Philosophy curriculum.

This description “The place where the philosophers who lived in Anatolia (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Heraklitus, Epiktetos, Diogenes, Lucian, Xenophanes and Aristotle) was born and lived is included, and brief biographical information is given about them.” (MEB, 2018b, p. 23) maybe misleading. Emphasizing that these philosophers of ancient Greek culture[3] lived in Anatolia (in the past) may cause students to perceive this to be the present day 'Anatolia' in Turkey. This may conceive the misperception that these philosophers were brought in the Turkish culture.

In the description of the second attainment of the third unit, “The main differences between scholastic thought and modern thought are emphasized.” (MEB, 2018b, p. 25), presents an intellectual disconnection. Medieval philosophy consists of several periods in itself (Gilson, 2007; Cevizci, 2016; Gokberk, 2004, pp. 123-158) and this has been missed out. In its place only scholastic philosophy was included.

In the second attainment of the third unit the description "Humanism, scientific method, Cartesian philosophy and philosophy of law are emphasized." (MEB, 2018b, p. 25) it is impossible to claim that Cartesian philosophy, contains the same thoughts as the currents and subjects that prevail in the Renaissance philosophy (Gokberk, 2004, pp. 159-218; Bloch, 2010). Cartesian philosophy is the philosophical understanding that corresponds directly to the Descartes’ philosophy a well-known school of thought of 17th century philosophy/modern philosophy that was developed on the basis of Descartes’ philosophy by philosophers who adopted his ideas (Cevizci, 2010, p. 916; Doney, 2006), Whereas currents and subjects that prevail in the Renaissance philosophy refers to humanism, political philosophy, philosophy of nature and (Duignan, 2011c, pp. 25-50). Thus, it is not right to treat them as if they were in the same period.

In the third attainment of the fifth unit, “Analyzes the philosophical views of 20th Century philosophers from the example philosophical texts “F. Nietzsche, H. Bergson, J. P. Sartre, and T. Kuhn have been included in its descriptions (MEB, 2018b, p. 27). However, these philosophers do not comply with the movements in the description of the second attainment of the same unit which is "Some of the main features of 20th century philosophy, its problems and some of its key movements (phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, dialectical materialism, logical positivism, new ontology) are discussed." (MEB, 2018b, p. 27). In the literature, Nietzsche and Bergson are known for philosophy of life (Akarsu, 1994; Dedeoglu, 2012), and Kuhn stands out with his understanding of revolutionary science in philosophy of science (Cucen, 2013, pp. 177-178; Losee, 2012, pp. 246-247). Of these philosophers, only Sartre is involved in existentialism (Blackham, 2005; MacIntyre, 2001). Besides, Nietzsche is not a 20th century but a 19th century philosopher (Aiken, 2015; Thilly, 2007b, pp. 328-329; Skirbekk and Gilje, 2004). Therefore, subject integrity cannot be guaranteed.

Conversely, there are positive qualities in the descriptions in this curriculum. For example, in the descriptions of the third attainments in all the units, and in the fourth attainment of the last unit, there are expressions about examination of

[3]About these philosophers, see Cevizci (2014), Vorlander (2017).

the opinions of the philosophers through compilations of their works (MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-27). These descriptions, by analyzing some texts about the history of philosophy, provide have a better understanding of concepts and ideas of that period.

Moreover, it is extremely important for the students to interact with the texts as this allows the use of the 'text analysis method/technique[4], one of the methods/techniques of philosophy teaching. As Sozer (2014, p. 134) points out "Without reading the masters and setting unity and solidarity with them in that reading, one cannot philosophize". However, it is important for teachers be cautious not to present philosophy as 'boring and heavy' when compiling from the texts in question.

The inclusion of writing activities related to some concepts or subjects selected for the fourth attainment of each unit (MEB, 2018b, pp. 23-27) is a feature that qualifies the Philosophy curriculum since "Writing is a kind of thinking" (Warburton, 2017, p. 55). Writing is important in philosophy teaching as it provides an avenue to think and to bring out the ideas.

Another noteworthy positive aspect of the curriculum is the presence of Al-Farab î, Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Mevlana, Yunus Emre and Haji Bektash Veli in the second unit (MEB, 2018b, p. 24) and Nurettin Topcu and Takiyettin Mengusoglu in the fifth unit (MEB, 2018b, p. 27). These philosophers inform students about the philosophers in their own cultural geography and nurture a sense of belonging to philosophy literature.

4. Result and Recommendations

This study, that examined in detail the attainments and content of the 11th grade Philosophy curriculum that was first implemented during the 2018-2019 academic year found some problems with the curriculum. The levels of attainments were written with the same expressions in all units and at a lower level of behavior. The fact that most of the attainments of the philosophy course, which is based on thinking, criticizing, questioning, analyzing and evaluating, are at the level of knowledge and comprehension does not conform with field-specific skills such as "reasoning, questioning, analytical thinking, critical thinking, generating original ideas ..." (MEB, 2018b, p. 13) that are included in the introduction of the curriculum nor with the nature of the course.

Additionally, names assigned to the units were different from those in the Philosophy literature. Because by assigning names that go beyond the current literature leads to confusion during the course and in the course of the research activities that are required of students. This may eventually lead to problems in fulfilling the aims of the course.

Problems in the descriptions of the curriculum can be classified as those resulting from the attainments and those not. The problems stemming from the attainments are related to the fact that some attainments in the third unit are written in such a way that they cover more than one period, which causes overlap in periods in the history of philosophy which then become indistinguishable. Some descriptions did not comply with the scope of the attainments. E.g. leaving out the contribution of Ancient Greece to the birth of the philosophy, mismatch between the philosophers and the main philosophical currents and movements mentioned in the fifth unit and misrepresentation of the periods in which some philosophers lived.

As a result, it is necessary to overcome these challenges in order to enhance the positive aspects of the curriculum such as text review, philosophical writing, inclusion of Turkish-Islamic philosophers and make the curriculum more functional to fulfill the curricular goals of the philosophy course. Otherwise, there will be difficulties in teaching this curriculum.

The study proposes the following suggestions to resolve these problems:

1. Unit names in the curriculum should correspond to those in the philosophy literature to limit confusion.
2. The attainments in the units should also conform to periods of history in philosophy. Separate attainments should also be written indicating to which period they belong.
3. That Attainments ought to be written in accordance with the nature of the philosophy course and by focusing on higher level cognitive behaviors.
4. Attainments should not be written in the same format.
5. Problems in the descriptions should be addressed, and care must be taken to ensure that -they comply with the scope of the attainments and philosophy literature. Controversial topics should not also be included in the description.

[4]For this method/technique see Cucen (2016, p. 34); Dombayci (2002, pp. 109-110).

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