

## Quality of Education in Rural Schools: A Needs Assessment Study (Ankara-Kalecik Sample)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the quality of education provided by elementary schools in Kalecik, a rural district of Ankara, from the perspectives of administrators, teachers, and students. The participants of the study were 3 administrators, 33 teachers, and 212 students from 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades chosen from 3 elementary school. Data related to school facilities, students' family backgrounds and educational expectations, teacher characteristics, school climate and education quality, parent involvement, curriculum implementation and availability of technology, and instructional materials were collected by using questionnaires. Results indicated that both teachers and students are satisfied with the school's physical conditions. Conversely, the number of teachers teaching outside their areas of license is quite high. Besides, lack of technology and lack of parental involvement were found to be factors that might have an effect on the quality of education. Moreover, teachers tend to encourage competition rather than cooperation among students.

**Keywords:** School Quality, Educational Needs, Rural Schools, Perceptions of Education Stakeholders.

### Introduction

During the period extending from the past to the present day, economists, social scientists, and politicians have suggested that education has a crucial role in the development of a country. Social and economic developments of a country depend directly on the education levels of workforce (Mayer, Mullens & Moore, 2000). Today, there is a global and intense competition in the marketplace. In this competitive world, in order to meet the expectations of the business, quality of education provided for the adolescences is

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becoming increasingly important (Yıldız & Ardıç, 1999). In order to make the future better than today, educational authorities explore tools to assess the quality of the educational outcome by measuring the effectiveness of the components of educational systems, and search the ways to make educational reforms.

According to Gedikoğlu (2005), deficiencies in Turkish education system, especially in rural areas, are financial difficulties, shortage of teachers, and lack of school buildings, laboratory equipments, computers, and libraries. The regional infrastructures of education system eliminate equal opportunity in education (Adaman & Keyder, 2006; Gedikoğlu 2005). For Basaran (1974), the level of benefit from education differs not only from one city to another, but also from one district to another in the same city. Although basic education secured by the laws, there are some differences in practices of education based on various variables such as region and socio-economic status. Most parents are not satisfied with the quality of rural schools. They thought that the quality of rural schools could not compare with urban schools. Besides, for parents the physical conditions of the rural schools are not good (UNICEF, 1999). Since the children seen as human power in the rural areas, boys have to learn farming and agriculture, whilst girls have to learn home economics (Yücel, 1994).

The quality and the effectiveness of education depend on qualitative variables such as characteristics of schools, teachers and classrooms, as well as quantitative variables such as achievement scores (Mayer et al., 2000). The Working Committee of European Report of May 2000 identified sixteen indicators for school quality (European Report, 2000). The commission's indicators were used as criteria for determining school quality indicators in this study. Teacher qualifications, curriculum implementation, school climate, parental involvement, availability of educational technology and instructional materials were acknowledged as important indicators of school quality. Educators, researchers, and the public believe that there are some differences between rural and urban education quality. Namely, the education in smaller and rural schools was found to be less qualified and less effective than the education in larger urban or suburban schools (Young & Fisher, 1996).

Researchers claim that the school quality is relatively high if teachers have high academic skills, teach in the field they are trained, have at least several years of teaching experience, and participate in professional development programs (Mayer et al., 2000). The experience and qualifications of teachers were assumed to have a direct impact on the overall performance of both the school and students (Scheerens, 1997). Especially in rural school districts where children often have less support at home, teachers play a critical role in schooling. Moreover, educators agree that experienced teachers and teachers getting high quality professional development increase student achievement. Teachers with strong academic skills are very successful to teach students (Ballou 1996; Ehrenberg & Brewer 1994, 1995; Ferguson 1991). Therefore, in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of schools, the investigation of teachers' perceptions is considered a simple, gainful, and time efficient method (Heck, 2000; Sezgin, 2002).

Successful implementation of curriculum is essential to increase school effectiveness. Researchers suggest that there are some differences between the intended curricula defined by officials, and the implemented curricula, how teachers translate the intended curriculum into practice. Therefore, the impact of curriculum implementation and teaching quality in schools were considered as significant school characteristics that could clarify effectiveness variation among schools (Mayer et al., 2000).

Many researchers suggest that school climate have an effect on school effectiveness; hence, teaching process, learning process, and educational outcomes are affected by school climate (Cohen, 2006; Creemers & Reezigt, 1999). Students' learning and performance depend mainly on the sort of school climate of their school. Many research indicated that the students in schools having a well school climate are more successful than those in schools having a poor school climate (Bulach & Malone, 1994). Therefore, recognizing the factors that facilitate a well school climate is very important to understand the school effectiveness.

Parental involvement at all grade levels, as another indicator of school quality, is a critical factor influencing quality of education (Flaxman & Inger, 1991). It refers to both teachers'

attempts to involve parents in ongoing classroom or school activities (Haynes, Corner, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989) and parents' involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1986). To ensure the quality of schools, parents must be involved at all levels in the school (Henderson, 1994).

Research has concluded that availability of computers (Baker, Gearhart & Herman 1994) and qualified school library media programs correlate positively with student achievement (Sivin-Kachala, 1998). Although use of educational technology has a significant positive effect on achievement, computers and the related electronic equipments required for connecting computers into network is generally absent or insufficient in rural areas.

Rural schools are vital parts of the Turkish public education system, serving 56 percent of the nation's students [Ministry of National Education (MONE), 2002]. Various educational policies have been implemented in terms of rural development during the entire process from the declaration of the Turkish Republic to the present; hence, some positive educational developments have occurred.

However, access to quality education in rural areas is still problematic in Turkey (UNESCO, 2004). There are very large differences in the allocation of both physical and human resources and in the distribution of educational resources among the schools in different regions in Turkey (World Bank, 2005).

Some conditions are often associated with rural schools: First, rural schools fail to meet the national standards of MONE in terms of student competences. Second, in rural schools, library and computer resources are insufficient to meet the needs of especially economically disadvantaged students in community. Third, teachers and administrators are not provided with much opportunity to participate in professional development activities in rural areas. Fourth, the geographic distance to the city center and lack of official support make it more difficult to appoint, recruit, and retain well-trained teachers in rural areas (Gedikoğlu, 2005; UNESCO, 2004). Although, more than half of the Turkish students attend schools in rural areas, there is little research on the perceptions of

students, teachers, and administrators as stakeholders on the quality of education provided in rural schools.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the quality of education provided by elementary schools in a rural area from the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators.

## **Method**

This part includes a brief description of the participants, the data collection instruments, the data collection procedures and the data analysis procedures of the study.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were randomly selected from three Public Elementary Schools of Kalecik, a district of Ankara. There were three reasons for selecting this district. First, Kalecik is an agricultural district that is located in a rural setting—an area outside of the city center. Second, that the researcher was a primary school teacher in Kalecik made the time shorten to get permission for the survey from Ministry of Education. Third, there were totally three elementary schools (K-8) in the town center, and 13 first stage primary schools (K-5) located in connected villages. As a result, three elementary schools were selected for the study. There is only one-school administrator in those schools. Thus, 3 administrators, 33 elementary school teachers, and 212 students from 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades participated in the study. Among the 212 students fifty-two percent were female and the remaining were male (48%). The age of the students ranged from 11 to 16. Thirty-seven percent of the participant students were 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 36 percent of them were 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 27 percent of them were 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

For collecting the data, three questionnaires were developed by the researchers: the administrator questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire, and the student questionnaire. In

order to help determine questions and issues to be asked in questionnaires a comprehensive literature review was conducted (European Report, 2000; Fuller, 1986; Mayer et al., 2000; UNICEF, 2000), and group interviews have been conducted in a face-to-face situation with students and teachers. The questions were asked to 27 participants in three focus groups. Focus group participation was voluntary. All members of the focus group were given background information about the study, the aim of the focus group and instructions about the procedures that were followed.

The first part of both the teacher and student questionnaires included demographic information questions, and the second part of the questionnaires included five point Likert type items concerning the school climate, teacher qualifications, curriculum implementation, availability of technology and parental involvement. The administrator questionnaire included 5 questions related to demographics, personal, and professional aspects, 9 questions related to school facilities, 5 questions related to teacher characteristics, and 13 questions related to school opportunities and availability of technology. The items of the first draft of the questionnaires were derived from the literature, and from the focus group results. Before pilot testing the questionnaires were given to a school administrator, three elementary school teachers, and five students to check the items in terms of clarity and content. Based on their comments, some items were revised or changed in order to make them clear and comprehensible, or eliminated. Then the, questionnaires were piloted. Overall reliability for the student questionnaires ( $\alpha=.91$ ) and teacher questionnaires ( $\alpha=.77$ ) were calculated using Cronbach Alpha. This value is higher than .75 criterion which is regarded as an acceptable level of internal reliability as a rule of thumb (Tuckman, 1999).

The data were collected during 2007-2008 academic year. The administrators and teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire and put it in an envelope, to give them back to the researcher visiting the school. They were constantly assured about the confidentiality of their responses. The student questionnaires were administered in their classrooms by the first author with the permission of the teachers. The data collected was analyzed through quantitative techniques. Descriptive statistics were used in order to analyze the

data collected. The descriptive statistics includes the use of frequency tables, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

## **Findings**

The findings of the study were presented in line with the indicators of school effectiveness—school facilities, students' educational expectations, teacher characteristics, school climate and education quality, parent involvement, curriculum implementation and availability of technology, and instructional materials collected.

### **School Facilities**

The administrators of the three elementary schools were asked to indicate the availability of school facilities listed in the questionnaire. According to results, the average number of students in each elementary school was 388. Each of the three schools had a guidance teacher, janitor, science laboratory, computer laboratory, audio-visual equipments, internet connection, playground, and transportation. However, none of these three schools had a language laboratory, cafeteria, and health center. Only two of the schools had a classroom for mentally disabled students.

### **Family Backgrounds and Educational Expectations of Students**

Regarding the educational level of parents, majority of mothers (83%) had only 5-year elementary education while 17 percent of them continued their education after elementary school. About 71 percent of the fathers had only 5-year elementary education while 29 percent of them continued their education after elementary school. As consistent with level of education, 91 percent of the mothers are housewives. About 26 percent of the fathers are farmers; 22 percent of them are self-employed people; 13 percent of them are civil servants and 12 percent of them are workers.

Approximately all of the participant students (98%) expressed their desire to continue high school education. When they were asked to state the type of high school they preferred to

attend, 46 percent of them preferred Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools, while 35% preferred Science High Schools. A considerable number of the students (42%) preferred to attend Vocational Health High Schools that provide employment guarantee after high school education. There were two main reasons affecting students' preference of continuing higher education. First, students do not want to be a financial burden to their families (54%) and second, they expect to get a job easily after graduation (53%).

### **Characteristics of Teachers**

Forty-four percent of the respondents were classroom teachers and remaining were branch teachers. Approximately 58 percent of the participant teachers were female and the remaining participants were male (42%). Sixteen percent of the participants work at village schools and remaining work at district center (84%).

The teachers have at least four year undergraduate education, 38 percent of them have their master degrees, and more than half of them (68%) were graduated before 2002 and the remaining (32%) after 2002.

The first, second, or third year of teaching has commonly been identified as induction period (Gold 1996, Huling-Austin 1990; Keating, 2000, Lynn, 2002, Wiesman, Coover, & Knight, 1999). Teachers who are in their first, second, or third year of teaching and who did not have experience in teaching before called as novices (Taneri, 2004). In the present study, only 16 percent of the teachers are novice teachers—in their first, second, or third year of teaching— and the remaining are experienced teachers (84 %) with more than three years of experience. The average age of participant teachers was 31 and the average year of experience was seven.

### **School Administrators' Opinions about Characteristics of Teachers**

Administrators expressed that 57 percent of the teachers in their schools attended in-service training activities organized by the MONE. Sixty-two percent of the teachers participated in at least one in-service training in a year and the remaining (38%) did not participate in any in-service training activity in a year. Sixty four percent of teachers stated

that in-service training activities were not effective.

Although the school administrators maintained that there were not many teachers teaching outside of their areas of license, 71 percent of teachers stated that there were. All of the administrators, 65 percent of teachers, and 44 percent of students articulated that classrooms in their schools were not crowded. Seventy-eight percent of teachers had 29 or fewer students in their classroom, and only 22 percent of them had 30 or more students. In addition, the results revealed that 97 percent of the teachers believed that their students could continue their education after their graduation from primary school.

### **Perceptions of Teachers and Students about School Climate and Quality of Education**

Table 1 presents the results concerning the perceptions of teachers and students about school climate and the quality of education provided in their schools. As can be seen on Table 1 although 99 percent of the teachers stated that they did not discriminate among students, 43 percent of students expressed that the teachers discriminated among students. Nearly half of the teachers (46%) and twenty percent of students did not believe that the education provided by their school helped students to follow the scientific and technological developments in the world. Both teachers (59%) and students (45%) claimed that there was no corporal punishment and abuse in their school. Forty-one percent of the teachers and fifty-eight percent of the students insisted that education provided by their school was sufficient for the students to be successful in high school (Table 1).

Although 63 percent of the teachers stated that the English course provided by their school was not sufficient for the students to speak, read, and write English, 43 percent of students were satisfied with their English course. Similarly 65 percent of the teachers and 67 percent of students maintained that English education was not given enough importance in their school (Table 1).

More than half of the teachers (55%) and students (65%) stated that the school building and garden were always clean and organized. Most of the teachers believed that their school was safe (87%) and there was no violence in their school (81%). On the other hand,

43 percent of the students stated that there was violence in their school (Table 1).

Sixty-seven percent of the teachers and 70 percent of the students claimed that the school building and the classrooms were large enough. Seventy-seven percent of students stated that their schools were heated and lighted well. More than half of the students seemed to be happy with their school. That is 59 percent of them stated that if they were given the chance they would not attend another school (Table 1). Although 96 percent of the teachers asserted that there was no gender discrimination among students, 46 percent of students believed that the female and male students were treated differently in their school (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Perceptions of teachers and students about school climate

Items	Teachers			Students		
	A & SA %	U %	D& SD %	A & SA %	U %	D& SD %
There is no discrimination among students in our school.	98.6	1.4	-	42.5	16.0	20.3
In our school, the female and male students are not treated differently.	95.7	-	4.3	38.2	15.6	46.2
There is no violence (e.g. fight, combat) in our school.	81.2	5.8	13.0	29.7	26.9	43.4
The school building and the classrooms are large enough.	66.7	1.4	31.9	69.8	14.2	16.0
English education is not attached importance in our school.	65.2	23.2	11.6	66.5	13.7	19.8
English course provided by our school is not sufficient for the students to speak, read, and write in English.	63.3	23.2	14.5	32.6	25	42.5
There is no corporal punishment and abuse in our school.	59.4	11.6	29.0	45.3	21.7	33.0
The school building and garden are always clean and organized.	55.0	15.9	29.0	64.6	22.2	13.2
Education provided by our school does not help students follow the scientific and technological developments in the World.	46.4	24.6	29.0	20.3	33.0	46.7
Education provided by our school is sufficient for the students to be successful in high school.	40.6	36.2	23.2	58.0	21.7	20.3

*SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; U: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree*

### Perceptions of Teachers and Students about Parental Involvement

Regarding the results concerning the perceptions of teachers and students about parental involvement in their school's activities, 62 percent of the teachers and 49 percent of

students stated that parents did not always attend social events in the school. Although about half of the teachers stated that parents did not always attend the school meetings (52%), about two third (70%) of the students expressed that their parents did not always attend the school meetings. Moreover, 73 percent of the students maintained that their parents did not always show interest in their school related activities including their lessons.

### **Perceptions of Teachers and Students about Curriculum Implementation**

Table 2 shows the teachers' and students' views on curriculum implementation in their schools. According to the findings, the majority of the teachers declared that they encourage students to think creatively and critically (94%); choose teaching methods appropriate to the topics and aims of the lesson (90%). The teachers also affirmed that they summarize the previous lesson and make connections with new topics (88%); they use alternative assessment techniques (e.g. portfolio, project, performance assessment.etc.) when assessing student achievement (84%) and they prepare the teaching environment according to students' developmental characteristics (84%). Besides, the teachers stated that they arrange teaching environment in a way to arouse the interests of the students (80 %); they include thought provoking activities in their classes (80%); they consider interests and abilities of students when arranging teaching environment (78%). Furthermore, the teachers declared that they revise the topics till all the students have learnt (77%); they include such activities as games, role playing, field trip, demonstration, presentation, experiment (71%); they encourage all students actively participate in the lessons (70%) and they believed that all students could be successful and encouraged them to be successful (70%).

Regarding students' responses on curriculum implementation, (see Table 2) the majority of the participant students stated that their teachers encouraged them to get new information (86%); all of their teachers were knowledgeable in their branches (82%); their teachers encouraged them to construct new opinions and problem solving methods (80 %). Besides, a considerable number of the students declared that their teachers repeated the

content until all students have learnt (73%); the lessons were appropriate for their interests and abilities (69%); game, role-playing, field trip, demonstration, presentation, and experiments were given place in their classes (67%). The students also affirmed that the classes included thought-provoking activities (67%); they prepared portfolios (61%); the teaching environment aroused their interests (66%); they often worked in groups (60%) and all students actively participated in the lessons (43%).

**Table 2.** The percentages of teachers' and students' perceptions of curriculum implementation

ITEMS	Teachers			Students			
	A & SA	U	D & SD	A & SA	U	D & SD	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Competition among students is encouraged during the lessons.	91.3	5.8	2.9	61.3	17	21.2	
Alternative assessment techniques (e.g. portfolio, project, performance assessment... etc.) are used when assessing student achievement.	88.4	5.8	5.8	61.3	23.1	14.2	
Teaching environment is arranged to arouse the interests of the students.	79.7	17.4	2.9	66	23.6	10.4	
The interests and abilities of the students are considered when arranging teaching environment.	78.2	17.4	4.3	68.9	25	6.1	
Teachers repeat the topics until all of the students learn.	76.8	15.9	7.2	73.1	17.5	9.4	
Thought-provoking activities are included in the lessons.	79.7	13	7.2	67	20.3	12.3	
In the lessons such activities game, role-playing, field trip, demonstration, presentation, experiments are given place.	71	15.9	13	66.5	17.9	15.6	
It is believed that all students can be successful and they are encouraged for being successful.	69.6	13	17.4	77.4	12.7	9.9	
All students actively participate to the lessons.	69.6	14.5	15.9	43.4	29.7	26.9	
Group-work activities are included in the lessons.	44.9	11.6	43.5	59.9	20.8	18.9	
Lecture method is used in courses.	15.9	17.4	66.7	63.7	9.4	26.9	

SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; U: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

However, 76 percent of the students asserted that their teachers did not use equipments such as overhead projector and computer in the lessons, and they compete with their classmates during the lessons (61%). The vast majority of teachers (91%) encouraged

students to compete each other during the lessons instead of collaborative working. Although, 67 percent of teachers maintained that lecturing was not the main teaching method, 64 percent of students believed the opposite (Table 2).

### Perceptions of Teachers and Students about Availability of Technology and Instructional Materials

The results revealed that 76 percent of students stated that the teachers did not use equipments such as overhead projector, computer in the lessons (Table 3). Majority of the teachers maintained that the number of books available in the school library (73%) and the computer access opportunities (71%) were not enough. Similarly, though all schools have computer library and internet connection, 66 percent of the students expressed that they could not use computers whenever they want. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers and 63 percent of students claimed that the course materials and equipments (e.g. map, overhead projector, and computer) were not available to use.

**Table 3.** The percentages of the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of availability of technology and instructional materials

ITEMS	Teachers			Students		
	A & SA %	U %	D & SD %	A & SA %	U %	D & SD %
There are not enough books in the school library.	72.5	10.1	17.4	55.2	20.8	24.1
The instructional materials and equipments (e.g. map, overhead projector, computer etc.) are proper.	66.7	14.5	18.8	24.1	13.2	62.7
The computer access opportunities are sufficient in our school.	20.3	8.7	71.0	23.6	10.4	66.0

SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; U: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Although administrators stated that the audiovisual materials were available to use in their school, 61 percent of the teachers asserted that the materials were not enough for instruction. Parallel with this finding 55 percent of the teachers do not use technology in their classes.

## **Discussion and Implications**

In this study, the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators about the quality of education provided in rural schools were investigated. School facilities, students' educational expectations, teacher characteristics, school climate, and quality of education, parental involvement, curriculum implementation, and availability of technology and instructional materials were used as indicators of school quality.

Since the number of students in the class may influence how teachers implement the curriculum, class size is considered as an important indicator of the quality of education provided in a school. The participant teachers and students stated that their classes were not crowded. Additionally, when the average number of students per school is considered, the schools studied are relatively small schools. Researchers found that students achieve more in smaller classes. With fewer students, teachers might be able to employ different pedagogical approaches and implement the curriculum in a more effective way. Studies also showed that teachers in smaller classrooms deal with fewer disciplinary problems, spend more time on instruction and enrichment activities, and offer more opportunities for more student participation (Bascia & Fredua-Kwarteng, 2008; Finn, Pannozzo & Achilles, 2003; Zahorik, 1999). In addition to that, Deutsch (2003) claimed that small classes support student engagement, enhance curricula, provide positive teacher student interaction, and increase time on instruction rather than on discipline and raise teacher morale.

The components of the school climate ranging from the quality of interactions among individuals to the physical comfort levels were also investigated. The results regarding to the physical comfort levels of the teachers and students showed that they were satisfied with the cleanliness and neatness of both the school building and garden. Moreover, the classroom lighting plays a vital role in student performance (Philips, 1997). According to the findings, most of the students were satisfied with the heating and lightening of the school.

The findings also revealed that there was not corporal punishment and abuse in the schools. It seems that both students and teachers perceive their school environment as positive. Negative comments, sarcasm, criticism, and put-downs cause students feel stressed out (Atkins, 1999) and have an impact on the students' achievement, self-concept, and social perspective taking (Bennett, 2001). In a positive and joyful school climate, students have been found to be more likely to experience better learning, memory, and feelings of self-esteem (Atkins, 1999).

Studies suggest that teacher characteristics are important indicators of school quality. That is, school quality is enhanced when teachers have high academic skills, teach the field in which they are trained, have more than a few years of experience, and participate in high-quality induction and professional development programs (Mayer et al., 2000).

Teachers who participate in quality professional development activities are thought to be more successful (Ballou 1996; Ehrenberg & Brewer 1994, 1995; Ferguson 1991). The findings of this study revealed that more than half of the participant teachers in three rural schools attend at least one in-service training activity in a reference year for their professional development. Besides, according to the findings, many of the teachers in rural schools have at least nine-year teaching experience. It might be concluded that the teacher qualification was not an important issue in the rural schools studied. However, it is difficult to generalize this finding to whole country because of the location of the district that is quite close to Ankara, which is a metropolitan city. Especially teachers who continue their postgraduate education in one of the universities in Ankara prefer to work in those schools under consideration. On the other hand, results also revealed that a considerable number of teachers taught classes outside their degree areas. It could be argued that teacher shortage is still an important issue in this district as in many other rural areas in the country (UNICEF, 2004).

The results of this study showed that there are some problems with parents' involvement in rural schools. Even though the quality of child learning and motivation in school is affected by the parents' involvement in educational experiences (Baker & Stevenson, 1986;

Becker & Epstein, 1982; Coleman, 1987; Corner, 1986), the findings of this study revealed that the involvement of parents in their children's education was limited only to attending parent teacher conferences. Additionally, the participant teachers expressed that they faced with some problems in collaborating with parents. The elementary curriculum requires parents to be exact partners in their children's education. The rural schools need to convince parents that they value both their contributions at school and their participation at home. Increasing the role of parent as supporter might be accomplished by simply giving parents more information about school activities. For example, letting parents know that their attendance at school events can increase school achievement (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Sport events, school trips, exhibitions, or kermises may be valuable opportunities for parents to support their children at school.

Regarding the curriculum implementation, the results revealed that the classroom activities seemed to be appropriate with the constructivist approach suggested by the MONE. The intended curricula of Turkish elementary schools hold a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. It is claimed that the classroom is no longer a place where the teacher transfers knowledge to passive students, who wait as empty vessels filled. Both teachers and students perceived that the classes are appropriate with students' interests and abilities and a variety of teaching-learning strategies were employed in lessons. On the contrary, there were some problems with curriculum implementation. The key activity in a constructivist classroom is problem solving. Students use inquiry methods to ask questions, investigate a topic, and use a range of resources to discover solutions and answers. Whilst students learn better when they actively engaged in doing authentic tasks (Oxford, 1990), the results of this study revealed that lecture is a still more frequently used teaching method. Although cooperative learning is more effective and supportive than competitive or individualistic learning experiences (McManus & Gettinger, 1996), it was recognized that many of the teachers encourage students to compete rather than to collaborate.

English language has become essential in the lives of young people who aspire to advance their careers in anywhere in the world. To keep up with the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

people all over the world are required to communicate with each other in English (Kim, 2001); thus, the implementation of English course was scrutinized as a school quality indicator. The findings revealed that the teachers perceived the English education provided in rural schools as insufficient in preparing students to use the language effectively. The findings showed that although students learn English as a compulsory subject, the teachers insisted that the students have difficulties in communicating English. Findings also revealed that none of the rural schools studied have language laboratory that plays an important role in language teaching and learning.

Apart from those indicators, research has reported that success of students is affected negatively due to limited access to appropriate curriculum materials. Curriculum materials provide critical support in promoting teachers' effective implementation of instruction (Powell & Anderson, 2002). However, the rural schools suffer from lack of sufficient materials (Tezcan, 1992). Besides; technology has the potential to support curriculum and policy reform. There is a mutual relation between reform and technology (Vrasidas & McIsaac, 2001). Technology-enhanced environments have a positive impact on students' achievement in all main subject areas (Baker et al., 1994; Sivin-Kachala, 1998), and technology has the potential to support constructivist learning (Jonassen, 2004). Hence, technology should be used for active, authentic, and co-operative activities (Jonassen, 2004). It was seen that teachers and students expressed that there were some problems related to the availability of technology in rural schools. It is also seen that computers are not widely available in rural schools. The immense majority of computers in many schools are out-of-date donated models. Moreover, the majority of teachers do not use equipments such as overhead projector and computer in their lessons.

There is a strong relationship between education and social development. In order to improve rural areas' economic, social, and cultural facilities, a quality of education should be provided. Schools are crucial parts of rural development. Therefore, public policy should recognize the importance of schools in social and economic development of rural communities.

Understanding of the perceptions of educational stakeholders will help rural schools become more responsive to the development needs of their communities. The results provide valuable information for policy makers on the needs of rural schools to increase school quality. The findings also highlighted the awareness of teachers, students and administrators of the importance of school facilities, teacher characteristics, school climate and quality of education provided, parent involvement, curriculum implementation and availability of technology and instructional materials.

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