

Oral Exam System at Teacher Appointments in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Many systems have been developed on teacher selection and appointments procedures throughout history in Turkey. Latest teacher appointments and selection systems in Turkey is Oral Exam Evaluation. This new system is discussed in detail in this study. Basically, the study is to analysis what the positive and negative reflections of the system might be and all education Union' opinions about the oral examination. In addition, Contracted Teacher Oral Exam Evaluation Form is evaluated according to different view in this paper. When the relevant literature is reviewed, it was observed that the Oral Exam system is applied all over the world. However, some criticisms have been animadverted new system, which is applied recently in Turkey. The focal point of the criticisms is that the system is used as the fundamental determinants in teacher appointments. They criticized Oral Exam consist of the members of the commission that apply the exam, which is another contradiction of this system that is open to debates.

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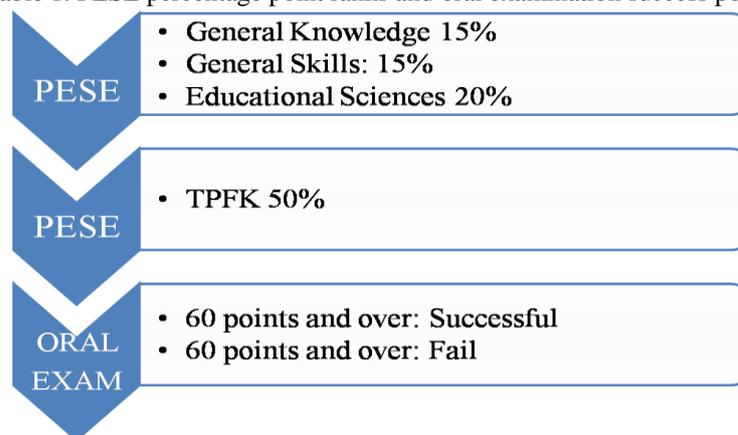
1. INTRODUCTION

Many systems have been developed and tested on teacher training and selection procedures throughout history. In this context, “the teacher training institutions such as high schools, institutes, academies and faculties, which were formerly connected to universities and Ministry of National Education[MEB (MoNE)] with the Higher Education Law, which was enacted in 1981 number 2547, were collected under the title of Higher Education Institution [HEI (YÖK)] on July 20, 1982” [1]. As of this date, a standard model was established [2] and “As of 1989-1990 academic year, the educational duration of all higher education institutions that trained teachers was increased to at least 4-year undergraduate degree” [3]. Then, “As of 1998-1999 academic year, a restructuring was started in teacher training institutions with the cooperation of MoNE and YÖK (HEI)” [4]. As of that year, the pedagogical formation classes were eliminated from the curricula of the faculties and high schools except for educational faculties [5], and it was made compulsory to be graduated from educational faculties in order to become teachers [6]. “In appointing teachers up to that moment, the higher education institutions that trained teachers were prioritized, and when needed, the graduates of other faculties were also given the chance to become teachers” [7]. This situation is the indicator of the fact that although the graduates from teacher training departments are easily appointed, this has not eliminated the need for more teachers. However, in time “there were pile-ups in applications as teachers” [8] and the supply-demand balance has never been established in teacher appointments [9].

In order to resolve this pile-up problem, teacher candidates were asked to succeed in the General Knowledge, General Abilities and Educational Sciences sections of the Public Personnel Selection Examination (PESE), which was prepared by Student Selection and Placement Center (SSPC), based on the decision of the Board of Ministers in 2002 with the date 18/3/2002 and number 2002/3975. In 2013,

according to the protocol on “General Management on Examinations to be Conducted for the Personnel who will be Appointed to Public Duties for the First Time” signed between MoNE, SSPC, and State Personnel Management (SPM); in addition to PESE, Teaching Profession Field Knowledge (TPFK) exam was made compulsory [10]; and in case teacher candidates were successful in both examinations, they were appointed within a limit set by the budget and number determined by Ministry of Finance by MoNE [11]. By 2016, with the Executive Order (EO) 668 released in the Official Gazette with the number 29783, it was made compulsory for the teacher candidates to be exposed to Oral Exams in case they were successful in General Knowledge, General Abilities and Educational Sciences in PESE and in TPFK (i.e. in case they received a point that corresponded to 3-fold of the quota assigned for their departments), and if they receive 60 and over from the Oral Exam, they would be considered as successful as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. PESE percentage point ranks and oral examination success points



In the context of this decision, the Oral Exam results will be multiplied with 3-fold of the amount of teachers that will be appointed. The commissions that are approved by the Ministry of National Education will conduct the Oral Exams in city centers and the members of this commission are asked to use the “Contracted Teacher Oral Exam Evaluation Form” (Table 2). The form consists of 4 sections each of which has 5 criteria, and the percentage value of each section is equal. The criteria and percentage areas in the form are as follows; a) The ability of comprehending, summarizing, expressing and reasoning on a subject: 25%; b) Communicational Skills; self-confidence and ability to convince others: 25%; c) Being open for scientific and technological developments: 25%; d) Qualities on representation skills before the public, and educational qualities: 25%. There are 20 criteria under these 4 titles in the form, and commission members are given the right to assign 0-5 points for each criterion. The members consider the answers given by the candidate to any of the questions in the guide prepared by the ministry by lot when they are assigning points [12].

The Oral Exam system was applied for the first time in appointments teachers in August 2016; and thus, it was accepted in a de facto manner. However, it is possible that this system will bring many criticisms together with it, because in this system, when teacher candidates have the PESE points, they only have the right to take the Oral Exam, and only when the point given by the Oral Exam commission constitutes the appointment point can they have or lose the right to be appointed. In addition to this, the candidates that are called for the Oral Exam will constitute the 3-fold of the number of the teachers to be appointed, and the evaluations include subjectivity, which brings the possibility that the candidates that have low points from PESE may proceed those who receive high points. Another possible criticism is the fact that when candidates object to the results of the exams, the commission that will re-evaluate the objection will consist of the authorities that initially prepared/had it prepared and applied the Oral Exams [13].

Although the Oral Exam method is recently used by the MoNE in Turkey, Uygun [14], reported that some methods such as some tests, interviews and Teachers Board Decisions were used in selecting students to be accepted to teacher training schools in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir in early 1960s. When the practices in other countries in selecting teachers are considered, it is observed that central examinations are used as the sole method in Greece, Spain, Malta, Lichtenstein and Malaysia. In Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Netherlands, Iceland, Norway and Scotland, teacher candidates have to pass a test conducted by local authorities in order to become teachers. In Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, Estonia, Slovenia, Belgium, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Check Republic, Poland, Sweden, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the sole responsible authority in appointing teachers are the schools [15],[16]. In England, Germany, France, Finland,

South Korea, Singapore and Japan, on the other hand, both central and Oral Exams are applied, which will be mentioned in detail.

Table 2. Contracted Teacher Oral Exam Evaluation Form

I. The Skill of Comprehending, Summarizing, Expressing and Reasoning				
No	Proficiency	Point Value	Point Given	Total Section
1	The candidate can explain the topic in an understandable and satisfying manner, and s/he has consistency and integrity among the sections of the topic.	0-5		
2	The candidate can make comparison and evaluation on the given situation, and can produce convincing discourses.	0-5		
3	The candidate can present supportive evidence for his/her viewpoints on the given topic.	0-5		
4	The candidate can express his/her ideas in a self-confident manner when explaining the topic.	0-5		
5	The candidate makes up neat and clear sentences, and uses grammar rules even in explanations that have longer sentences, and cares for the stress and intonation.	0-5		
II. Communication Skills, Self-Confidence and Persuasive Skills				
No	Proficiency	Point Value	Point Given	Total Section
1	The candidate uses the Turkish Language in accordance with the rules, and in an accurate and efficient manner.	0-5		
2	The voice of the candidate is net, clear, and has full self-confidence. S/he adjusts her/his voice in a tone that can be heard by everyone in the medium.	0-5		
3	The candidate has full control of his/her gestures, mimes and the tone of her/his voice.	0-5		
4	The speech of the candidate is far from being monotonous, and s/he cares for the stress and pauses.	0-5		
5	Even if the candidate does not have adequate knowledge on a topic, s/he can speak in a manner that may influence and convince others.	0-5		
III. Being Open for Scientific and Technological Developments				
No	Proficiency	Point Value	Point Given	Total Section
1	The candidate makes it felt that s/he follows technological and scientific developments on the topic, and s/he can explain the technological developments in a proper and detailed manner	0-5		
2	The candidate expresses the positive and negative sides of science and technology on education by making associations with the topic.	0-5		
3	The candidate expresses the positive and negative sides of science and technology on education by making associations with the topic.	0-5		
4	The candidate makes evaluations on what the science and technology in the world may bring to educational field, and can give examples.	0-5		
5	The candidate has adequate knowledge on the project and works on educational technologies applied by Ministry of Education (FATİH, EBA, etc. projects).	0-5		
IV. Representative Skills Before Public and Educational Qualities				
No	Proficiency	Point Value	Point Given	Total Section
1	The candidate shows behaviors that are proper for the institution/profession s/he represents. S/he is consistent and concordant in her/his behaviors.	0-5		
2	The candidate can express her/his thoughts in a comfortable manner without the feeling of being judged of being rejected, and without overexcitement.	0-5		
3	The candidate can speak without being oppressive and insistent in an assertive manner and in a sincere manner.	0-5		
4	The candidate can explain the topic with ideas of her/his own, and make comments on it.	0-5		
5	The candidate uses time in a productive and efficient manner.	0-5		
		TOTAL POINTS		

Explanation

A Proficiency File is prepared for each teacher candidate by the institution in which the candidate is a student in France. In the end of the year, this file is examined and the teacher candidates that fail are taken to interviews by the Evaluation Commission. The candidates that are accepted to be successful as a result of the evaluations start their jobs as teachers [17]. In Japan, teacher candidates have to be successful in the examination conducted by provincial education board in order to be appointed. This exam includes individual

and group interview techniques in it. Successful teacher candidates are accepted as teachers provided that they have the first two years as the trial period [18].

In Singapore, teacher candidates are determined not after they graduate from teaching departments but before they enter the faculty. “When the students are selected the selection exams and the interviews are applied or sometimes their skills are measured” [19]. Teacher candidates in England are determined not after they graduate from teaching departments but before they enter the faculty, which is also the case in Singapore. “The Higher Education Institutions in England determine the applications according to their own conditions; and application is compulsory for all teacher training programs” [20] “In Finland, the candidates who are successful in University Entrance Exams have to pass written entry exam, skills test, individual interview and group discussion stages” [21]. In Finland, some teachers are determined not when they graduate from the teaching departments but before they enter the faculty. For example, in the Classroom Teachers program, there is a written and a skill test in the entrance exam. There may be interview and group applications in the skills test [15].

“In Germany, there is a 2-stage examination. Teacher candidates who are successful in the “First State Exam”, which consists of Written and Oral Exam, perform a 2-year teaching practice; and after this process, they take the “Second State Exam”. If teacher candidates are successful in this exam, they are appointed” [22]. In South Korea, there is a 2-stage examination in teacher selection processes. In the first stage, the curriculum knowledge and dominance in educational sciences of teacher candidates are tested; and in the second stage, the skills such as writing an article, interview and application are measured [18]. When the literature is reviewed, it is observed that Oral Examinations are applied all over the world -although it differs from country to country in the determination and application step. As mentioned above, Oral Exams are used preferable in some countries; and in some other countries, it is used in a compulsory manner together with written exams. Since Oral Exam system is applied in recent years in Turkey, it has led to some arguments. The syndicates that are active in the educational field expressed their viewpoints and objections on this subject and proposed their recommendations.

1.1. The Viewpoints of the Educational Syndicates on Oral Exam System

When the viewpoints of the educational syndicates in Turkey were examined the following findings were obtained: Eğitim-İş (Educational Science Employees Syndicate) expressed that Oral Exams were not objective due to their nature. The syndicate claimed that the teacher candidates were evaluated solely according to their own individual values and judgments by the members of the Oral Exam commission, and these exams could not be used as an evaluation tool in public administration [23].

Eğitim-Bir Sen (Educationalists Union Syndicate) expressed its viewpoint as the winning or losing reasons of the teacher candidates in Oral Exams being not explained in an objective manner, and claimed that teacher candidates were eliminated with a few minutes’ interview by different commissions, and added that this situation would damage the sense of justice. The syndicate also claimed that the 3-fold rule applied in appointing personnel to the public institutions was not possible to be applied in such an institution like the Ministry of Education, which appoints 30 thousand personnel in one employment process, and recommended that a fair system should be replaced instead of the Oral Exam application [24].

Eğitim-Sen (Education and Science Employees Syndicate) pointed out to the objection method and the evaluation of the objections to the results of Oral Exams. The syndicate emphasized that the Oral Exam Commission being both the authority that would apply the Oral Exams and that would evaluate the objections was a contradiction. In addition, the syndicate also stated that the commission that would prepare/prepare and apply the Oral Exam questions would also evaluate the objections and make final decisions would cause more “preferential treatments” in the educational field, which increased the concerns on this issue [25].

Türk Eğitim-Sen defined the Oral Exam system as “the exam type that is the farthest from objectivity and that is almost impossible to audit bringing many unfair practices”. The syndicate claimed that the concerns on “preferential treatments” increased in the society, and recommended a method which may be summarized as “MoNE may provide a password to the candidates that are known only by them and keep the names of the members of the commission secret, and the candidate can enter the exam not with his/her name but with the password” in order to eliminate these concerns. Türk Eğitim-Sen stated “this application is not a concrete evaluation, and it is almost impossible to base it on concrete criteria” [26].

Anadolu Eğitim-Sen stated that the answers of the teacher candidates during the Oral Exam should be recorded in minutes by each of the members of the commission, the grade given by the members to the teacher candidates should be justified, and the answers given by the teacher candidates should be recorded by making use of technological opportunities (voice recording, video recording, etc.). The syndicate emphasized that each grade that was not given to the teacher candidates should be justified legally; and arbitrary grades should be avoided [27].

2. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

All the discussion considered in teacher appointments system in Turkey must be re-examined and modified, otherwise the system will cause injustices. A new teacher appointments and assignment system must be designed by taking the opinions of all critics. Oral Exam system is not sole determinant in teacher appointments.

The relevant literature was reviewed and it was observed that the Oral Exam system is applied all over the world. Some criticisms have been mentioned about this system, which is applied recently in Turkey, by the syndicates. The focal point of the criticisms is that the system is used as the sole determinant in teacher appointments. As mentioned above, after teacher candidates pass the PESE (General Knowledge, General Skills, Educational Sciences, and TPFK), they receive Oral Exam, and they are appointed with the points they receive from this stage or they are considered as unsuccessful. In other words, while Oral Exams are used as the complementary elements of written and similar other exams in the world, they are used as the sole determinants of appointing teachers in Turkey, which is beyond being complementary. As a matter of fact, in countries where Oral Exams are applied, it is observed that this system is used sometimes for preferential purposes, and the influence of Oral Exams on appointment point is kept low.

Another reason for the criticisms of the educational syndicates that are active in Turkey on Oral Exam application is the suspicion of its activating the “preferential treatment” mechanism, because evaluations have subjectivity in them; and the evaluations of the members of the commission about the answers of the candidates are not based on adequate and concrete data. The main reason that constitutes the basis of the suspicions of the syndicates is not recording the Oral Exams by making use of technological opportunities (video recording, voice recording, etc.). In addition, the authorities that will evaluate the objection of the candidates that object to the results of the Oral Exam consist of the members of the commission that apply the exam, which is another contradiction of this system that is open to debates.

Some criticisms have been directed by education unions to this system that has been put into practice in Turkey [23]-[27]. The focus of the criticisms is that the system is used as almost the sole determinant factor in teacher appointments. In other words, while oral exams are used as supplementary to written exams in the world, in Turkey beyond being supplementary, they come to the fore as determinant factor of appointment. In fact, when the countries where the oral examinations are implemented are investigated, it is understood that the system is mostly used preferably and its effect on appointment point is low.

Another reason of the criticisms of the education unions acting in Turkey is their suspicion that the system can impel the mechanism of “clout” [26]. The assessments include relativity and evaluations that will be made by the commission members do not depend on sufficient concrete data. The main reason which originated the suspicion of education unions is oral examinations are not recorded via the use of technology (e.g. video and audio recording) [27]. Moreover, the authority to assess the objections to the results of the oral examinations are the commission members of the examination themselves is another dilemma of the system which is directed criticisms.

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