

PISA RESULTS OR X-RAY FILMS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

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To be able to develop well-equipped students in accordance with the expectations of the society is one of the objectives of every education system in every country. In this sense, monitoring student performance comparatively at international level, assessing students and schools characteristics is crucially important in order to structuring individuals' future lives. Determining student performances in different subject areas is a way for the countries examining the performance of their education systems (Anagün, 2011). Results of these assessments and evaluations enable steering the educational policy by diagnosing/revising the failures of the system.

Accordingly, on 6th December 2016, OECD released the results of its 2015 global rankings on student performance in mathematics, reading, and science, on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). It is reported that approximately 540,000 students completed the assessment in mathematics, science, reading literacies, representing about 29 million 15-year-olds in the schools of the 72 participating countries and economies (Pisa, 2016).

The target of PISA assessments is to find out which countries' education models are more effective rather than to rank the countries according to their PISA scores. Of course there are some objections about the validness and confidence or statistical calculations of the PISA exam too. One of them is "*some of the passages for science and math questions are so long and discursive that they obviously measure reading skills as well*" (Bracey, 2009). If such objections ignored, the results of PISA include prognostic signals that provide valuable information regarding the nature, structure, composition and functions of curriculum and thereby education policy of every participated country.

Even if the released data may not apply to our school, as suggested by Steadman (1995), as educators and citizens we should answer those questions: How well are our students having our curricular achievements? Can our students demonstrate high levels of general knowledge as well as sustained real-life problem-solving? Do they have a sense of ethics, civic activism, and social responsibility?

More importantly, can we argue that we graduated citizens who have enough democracy culture/education? If our answer is positive, how should we interpret the relationship between a failed coup (e.g. on the case of failed coup in Turkey on 15th of June 2016) and the quality of democracy achievements in our schools? Can a coup attempt be acceptable for a country who argues to have citizens having high level democracy literacy? We are, after all, preparing students to participate in a developed and democratic society, so reforms should become not only for a mere quest for higher test scores but also for a more democratic and liberal society.

After reading the news about ongoing massacres (e.g. in Syria), watching dramatic poverty stories in different countries, hundreds of people drown every day in a rush of immigrants in White Sea, as educators, can we say our graduated students to have enough level of humanitarian values? Or how can we guarantee our graduates to acquire desired level of behaviors such as honesty, mercy, justice, equity for all the people of the world? Which is a desired achievement for our curriculum; a student who can just describe what the honesty is, or another student who always behaves honestly to all the people? Moreover, how we should assess such behavioral achievements level of our students is another problem of today.

It is known that a good curriculum includes information, aims, values, skills and activities which develop the personality of the students and turn them into aware citizens. Aims and values which are the crucial components of curriculum, and if they are valued, if they are desired, they should induce the learner to increase his/her motivation necessary to accomplish them. A good curriculum is also a combination of such opportunities which enable the students to bring about positive behavioral changes in their personality. A good curriculum is a regular and formal program which is formulated for the realization of the objectives of education.

It should not be forgotten that “*A good product requires a good process*”. If there is something wrong about the quality of student achievements then the general education policy and curriculum should be scrutinized carefully. This may be the only way of getting the goals of education. Because education policy and curriculum are channels transferring students to their destinies.

PISA reports contain the nations' average score, rank, and proportion of students reaching various levels of achievement. But virtually all the media and political attention goes to the average scores and ranks (Bracey 2009). Instead of such a misguiding and unavailing effort, we must join our desire to compete with other nations with a willingness to learn from them (Munson, 2011). Based upon this fact, hermeneutical and interpretative emphasis is strongly needed (Klette, 2007) about the PISA results. At the local level, concerned educators, politicians and members of the society should determine (Steadman, 1995) and discuss how extensively schools need to be reformed and in which directions to take them.

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