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A Comparative Study between the United States and Turkey on Teachers' Lesson Planning Effort

Hasan AYDIN¹

Abstract

Researchers' findings have already reached a general consensus that teacher planning has a significant effect on both teaching and learning. Many studies have been carried out to investigate effective ways to construct and improve planning. However, few studies have been done in a cultural context to help understand the similar and different challenges in teacher planning. A mixed methods study design was employed to determine what differences in teachers' lesson planning exist between two groups of teachers worked in different two regions. This study examines teachers (N=81) at the primary level from two regions in the United States and two regions in Turkey participated. Their demographics and data regarding the amount of time worked each week, the time on planning each week and opinions on the nature of planning were investigated. The findings of the study revealed differences in the cultural perspectives of the American and Turkish teachers in planning. The different challenges that teachers faced brought into light new possible efforts to help teachers improve their teaching.

Keywords: comparative study, lesson planning effort, mixed methods, planning, US, Turkey.

Introduction

Much has been made of professional development for teachers, especially in the current era of educational reform largely because it can facilitate teachers' learning (Ball, 1996). It is often argued that teachers in the United States need to learn more to teach effectively. They need what many refer to as pedagogical content knowledge: not only knowledge of the content, subject matter, or discipline, but also how students learn and make sense of various subject matter as well as pedagogical alternatives that enable students' learning in particular sub-

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jects (Grossman, 1990). Researchers have studied multiple tasks that teachers can undertake in their professional communities; one often-overlooked source of professional growth is the development of teaching planning, which is used in Turkey as a tool both for personal reflection and development as well as for collegial reflection. In the United States, planning and preparation are considered important; however, teacher planning seldom consists of more than a list of activities. According to Shen, Poppink, Cui, and Fan (2007), developing teacher planning is not often considered a professional-development experience for individuals, nor is it set in the context of a professional-learning community or a given school. In Turkey, however, organizational structure for both individual teachers and a school's professional community embed lesson preparation in two activities, preparing a lesson plan and refining the plan through open lessons (Ekiz, 2006).

Teachers are the ultimate decision makers in the classroom, focusing on curriculum content (what) and instructional techniques and strategies (how) to reach all students (Little, 2003). To achieve these ends, teacher planning has been identified as the major contributor to effective instruction. Planning is the decisions a teacher makes prior to the act of teaching (Peterson, Marx, & Clark, 1978). Teacher planning has become one essential part of teaching routine; few teachers can deny its important role in professional teaching development. Yildirim (2003) emphasizes that as an integral part of the teaching process and one of a teacher's most complex and important tasks, teacher planning gives access to a "focus of personal theory and professional thinking... at the interface of beliefs and practice" (Tann, 1993: 33). Over several decades educational researchers, including Putnam and Borko (2000) recognized that, to understand what transpires in the classroom and why, they must consider the important role that teachers play in shaping instruction. That is, researchers now know that "teachers construct their practice and make pedagogical decisions according to what makes sense to them" (Manouchehri & Goodman, 2000: 6-).

A principal limitation of research on teacher planning is that many studies have been done in different cultural contexts. These may face both similar and different challenges in teacher planning in different countries, and as assessment of these challenges may add to our understanding of teacher planning (Yildirim, 2003). In an attempt to bring a different perspective into teacher planning from a highly centralized system of education, the purpose of this study to investigate the planning process at the primary-school level both in the United States and Turkey through the perspective of a large group of teachers selected from four regions. In this study, elementary teachers' planning in the United States and Turkey were examined. This paper focused on comparing differences between teachers in both countries on their working time distribution, their specific planning approaches and preferred choices for help. The research questions for this study were:

- What are the differences between U.S. and Turkish teachers' major components of the working time? Are there any differences for the time that U.S. and Turkish teachers spend each week on planning?
- Do U.S. and Turkish teachers feel the amount of time they spend each week on planning for instruction is adequate? How are they different in the two countries?
- Do U.S. and Turkish teachers feel that if they spent more time planning, their instruction would be better? How are their perceptions of the time spent on planning for instruction and the quality of the planning different in the two countries?
- What are the differences between the U.S. and Turkish teachers' approaches to planning?
- What are the U.S. and Turkish teachers' perceived needs for help in improving instructional planning? Are there any differences for the things that U.S. and Turkish teachers feel are the most beneficial in helping them improve their planning skills?

Review of Literature

According to Kilpatrick, Swafford, and Findell (2001: 337) "effective teachers understand that teaching requires a considerable effort at design. Such design is often termed planning, which many teachers think of as a core routine of teaching". Teachers need to pay careful attention to planning their lessons and activities for students. From tasks and activities to instructional practices, teachers need to consider a variety of aspects of their instruction before teaching a lesson (Superfine, 2008). For theoretical models of lesson planning, Perserson, Marx, and Clark (1978) described that planning as a process of selecting educational objectives, diagnosing learner characteristics, and choosing from alternative instructional strategies in order to achieve certain learner outcomes.

Research into teacher planning is not a new endeavour in teaching and learning. For instance, the Mathematics Teaching in the 21st Century project, a large-scale international study on mathematics teacher preparation, assesses prospective teachers' competence to plan a lesson (Blomeke, *et al.*, 2009 Stolz, *et al.*, 2013). The project stated that lesson planning is a core task for all teachers. Baylor (2002) studied how teaching of instructional planning impacts pre-service teachers' performance, and observed that overall, the presence of the constructivist pedagogical agent affected pre-service teachers' meta-cognitive awareness of instructional planning in multiple ways, through a change in perspective and also through the underlying pedagogy of their instructional. She observed further that increased meta-cognitive awareness about instructional planning probably would

lead pre-service teachers to a richer and more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the planning process. The Instructional Planning Self-Reflective Tool (IPSRT), a self-regularity tool for pre-service teachers impacts teachers' performance, disposition, but non self-efficacy beliefs regarding systematic instructional planning (Kitsantas & Baylor, 2001). Through their research they found pre-service teachers who were instructed to use the IPSRT scored higher (i.e., developed more effective instructional plans) on the post-test measurement of achievement than did the control group participants. The study showed that IPSRT indicated a positive pre-service teachers' disposition regarding instructional planning.

While the limited research on planning seems to indicate that teachers focus largely on the content to be taught and rarely consider educational objectives, learners, characteristics, or instructional strategies. On the study of effective planning methods, McCutcheon & Milner (2002) revealed that teachers and teacher educators seemed to favour planning by objectives, and behavioral goals. An influence of the behavioral objectives movement may have been to frame some studies to examine whether teachers planned by objectives. In addition, researchers observed that the objectives movement may have influenced the teaching and planning of their times, and at these times teachers could not help but view knowledge as objective, therefore, they prepared lectures and sessions for drill and practice. As a result, the objectives movement may have influenced not only researchers' designs for studying planning, but also the very nature of the planning being studied. In assessing teachers' planning practices at the primary-school level in Turkey, Yildirim (2003) also recognized that the main problems faced by teachers in planning were the gap between the national curriculum and the classroom needs, difficulties in using the standard format for preparing plans, shortage of time and resources, insufficient support from principals and inspectors, and lack of cooperation among teachers.

The Planning Time

In general, studies related to teacher planning time have been conducted in Western countries. For instance, Lindqvist and Nordanger (2006) point out that many teachers never take breaks, "others use recess time for planning and organization, and they are accessible to pupils, colleagues and school managers all the recess time" (p. 433). Brante (2009) argued that it is easy to assume that, without breaks, teachers' work quality will suffer. At the same time it is possible to assume that thoughts and discussions concerning work, even during breaks and outside of work, can be a prerequisite for doing "good" work. Teachers have many responsibilities they must deal with that go beyond just planning for and teaching their classes, such as parent conferences, faculty meetings, hall duty, and paper work.

Teaching is identified as one of the four most stressful professions. Brante (2009) pointed out teacher workloads are increasing, while the time in which they have to complete these tasks has not changed. Teacher work is to some extent characterized by stress, burnout, and occupational decampment.

Most teachers work considerably more than the hours stated in their contract to complete the work they have. Swain (1999) underlined that it is a rare day when there is even a half hour of uninterrupted time during the school day for planning and making assignment sheets. While most schools in the United States do not have a delegated number of hours to teacher planning time, all teachers in the United Kingdom are “legally entitled to 10% of their timetable, or contract, to what is known as planning, preparation, assessment time” (Rayment, 2006: 52). Massachusetts is working on one program aimed at giving teachers more time to prepare themselves for their classes focusing on four elements proven to impact teaching. Increased planning time for teachers is one of the four elements (Stack-Min, 2007). Planning is also described as an indispensable tool; no teacher can function without it. The students deserve the benefit of a lesson which is well organized, carefully planned, which treats them as individuals (Orlich, Harges, Callahan, Trevisian, & Brown, 2004).

The Format of Lesson Plans

Written lesson plans are useful in helping novice teachers deal with the many uncertainties they face in classrooms (Kagan & Tippins, 1992; Sargedine, & BouJaoude, 2014). Many teacher educators advocated simplified linear formats, such as objectives, contents, procedures, materials, evaluation (Kauchak & Eggen, 1989) anticipatory set, objectives, input, modeling, check for understanding, guided practices, and independent practice (Hunter, 1984). However, not every researcher agrees with this idea. Zahorik (1970) stated that too much planning can result in teachers being less sensitive and responsive to students. Other researchers, such as Yinger (1987) and McCutcheon (1980), argued that experienced teaching appears to be improvisational, with a teacher beginning with an outline of activities and then filling in details during teaching. In-service teachers consider written lesson plans are only useful for student teachers and on rare occasions when they must plan a completely new unit (Kagan & Tippins, 1992). In addition, Neale, Pace, and Case (1983) found that even student teachers appear to use written plans only when they are required to do so. In 2000, Stiff called attention to elements of good planning and implementation. He pointed out that teachers ignored the development of detailed and well-thought out written lesson plans (Panasuk et. al., 2002, Sargedine, & BouJaoude, 2014). On the other hand, the planning found in most lessons appears to occur mentally, without committing anything to paper.

Methods

The purpose of this mixed-methods inquiry was employed to determine what differences in teachers' lesson planning exist between two groups of teachers worked in different two regions. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that significant feature of mixed-methods research is its methodological multiplicity which often results in exceptional research compared to singular method research (as cited in Perkins, 2012). Mixed-methods research uses a "method and philosophy that attempts to fit together" the understandings provided by "qualitative and quantitative research" into a practicable solution (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19). Given the focus of this study, the researcher chose a quantitative comparison research design to investigate elementary teachers' planning in the United States and Turkey. This study focused on comparing differences between teachers in both countries on their working time distribution, their specific planning approaches and preferred choices for help. According to Creswell (2003), this type of methodology is appropriate when the purpose of a study is to collect and statistically analyze numerical data to determine any differences between two groups of students. The qualitative data was used to substantiate the quantitative data. Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, and then inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that determine how "social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Participants

A total sample of teachers from two schools in Turkey (n=42) and two public schools in the United States (n=39) participated in this study. Originally, it was intended to collect data on a sample of elementary teachers who all planned and taught a lesson on the same subject. Afterwards, researcher realizes that to secure this kind of sample is not only difficult, but may be unrepresentative for the study. So, researcher expanded the study to include elementary school teachers who taught a subject of their choice. In the end, about two-thirds of the sample was one elementary school from Istanbul, Turkey (n=27) and Las Vegas, Nevada, USA (n= 24). The remaining one-third was from another elementary school in Istanbul (n=15) and Las Vegas (n=15).

Istanbul and Las Vegas were chosen as research sites for several reasons. Las Vegas is located in Southern Nevada. Las Vegas is the most developed and populated city in Nevada and is one of the most special economical zones in Nevada. Istanbul is located the Northwest of the country and is the most populated city with approximately fifteen million citizens and is the most economically developed city in Turkey. Participating teachers vary in terms of gender, teaching

experience, teaching subjects, and grade level taught. Detailed background information is given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Information*

Item	Category	Country	Frequency	Percentage
Gender ¹	Male	U.S.	3	7.7%
		Turkey	17	40.5%
	Female	U.S.	34	87.2%
		Turkey	25	59.5%
Years of Teaching ²	<5	U.S.	12	30.8%
		Turkey	9	21.4%
	5-10	U.S.	15	38.5%
		Turkey	16	38.1%
	>10	U.S.	10	25.6%
		Turkey	17	40.5%
Number of Subjects Taught	1	U.S.	0	0%
		Turkey	37	88.1%
	2	U.S.	0	0%
		Turkey	4	9.5%
	3	U.S.	39	100%
		Turkey	1	2.4%
Grade Level ³	K-3	U.S.	24	61.5%
		Turkey	27	64.3%
	Elementary 4-6	U.S.	12	30.8%
		Turkey	15	35.7%

Note: ¹U.S-2 data missing; ²US-2 points missing; ³US-3 points missing.

Procedure

The same procedures were followed in selecting the U.S. and Turkish participants. In particular, the schools were chosen based on the recommendations of educators at each research site. Through the school’s administrators, the names of schools were identified in both countries. The researcher contacted three teachers in each school for the purpose of the distributing the surveys to their colleagues and collecting back the answer sheets after three weeks in the Fall, 2011 semester. Participants were informed that the information collected was confidential and for research purposes only. Overall, 75 copies were distributed and 42 of them were returned. Las Vegas area samples involved two public schools. After the schools were chosen, the surveys were distributed and 39 of them returned.

Instrument

The survey was originally designed in English. In order to ensure the equivalence of the two languages' versions of the tests, a process of English back translation was used. In this process, the researcher and another colleague, literate in both Turkish and English, contributed to the translation of the survey. The researcher translated from English into Turkish. Then the other colleague translated from English into Turkish. The final translation was then compared to the original survey to ensure the equivalence. The English back translation and the original English were consistent. After the survey was created, it was piloted in both countries to check if there were any ambiguities in wording. Teachers in the pilot study provided the researcher with their feedback and suggestions. To test for validity defined as the extent to which the researcher "uses methods and procedures" to guarantee a "high degree of research quality", member checks were employed (Jorgensen, 1989). As a basic check for reliability and validity, Cronbach's Alpha estimates were computed for each subscale score. All values were above .80, after survey questions have been reviewed for reliability and validity by five experts who had a doctoral degree in college of education.

Data Analysis

Convenience sampling was used to obtain a sample for the survey and four open-ended questions during research process. Eighty-nine respondents volunteered to participate in the online survey. Data analysis techniques included both qualitative and quantitative analysis to look for patterns and themes and exploratory regression analysis of surveys to examine variation in preferences across school and teachers characteristics. The quantitative data was downloaded and entered into SPSS. Eightynine surveys were collected and entered into SPSS. A preliminary analysis was conducted to determine usable data. For the yes or no questions, the frequency of yes or no in the answer sheet and each answer's percentage occurrence was recorded as well. The open-ended respondents document was read several times and hunches recorded in the right hand margin about meanings that were gleaned from the reading(s). Then, the researcher categorized and coded the answers by common themes, which are *cultural differences* influenced by the planning approaches between Turkish and American teachers and *the lack of help or resources* to carry out a satisfied planning. The findings were tallied and the percentage occurrence was recorded as well.

Results

1. What are the differences between U.S. and Turkish teachers' major components of the working time? Are there any differences for the time that U.S. and Turkish teachers spend each week on planning?

Both U.S. and Turkish teachers were asked to estimate the total number of hours they work for their job each week, including hours that they are contractually obligated to be on site, as well as additional on site hours they work (during school and after school hours). The U.S. teachers reported that the average total hours they work each week is 51 hours, while Turkish teachers reported that they spend an average of 49.8 hours each week working. When asked how many hours per week they spend planning for instruction, the U.S. teachers reported they spent an average of 7.9 hours per week on planning, which is about 15.5%, whereas Turkish teachers spend an average of 24.2 hours per week on planning for instruction, which takes about 48.6% of the total (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Differences of the time U.S. and Turkish Teachers Spend Each Week*

	U.S.	TR
Total Hours	51	49.8
Planning Hours	7.9	24.2
Percentage	15.5%	48.6%

T-test for Independent Means

The result of the t-test for the Total Hours revealed that there was no significant difference ($t(79) = 0.382, p > .05$) between the mean hours for U.S. ($M = 51$) and Turkish teachers ($M = 49.8$). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference of total hours between Turkish and U.S. teachers. However, the result of the t-test for the Planning Hours indicated that there was a significant difference ($t(79) = -6.837, p < .001$) between the mean hours for U.S. ($M = 7.9$) and Turkish teachers ($M = 24.2$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference of planning hours between Turkish and U.S. teachers, and conclude that the planning hours of Turkish teachers are significantly higher than U.S. teachers.

The result of the t-test for Additional on-site Hours indicates that there was significant differences ($t(79) = 4.646, p < .05$) between the mean hours for U.S. ($M = 12.8$) and Turkish teachers ($M = 5.8$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference of additional hours between Turkish and U.S. teachers, and conclude that the additional on-site hours of U.S. teachers are significantly higher than Turkish teachers.

The result of the t-test for After school Hours also indicates that there was significant differences ($t(79)=2.806$, $p<.001$) between the mean hours for U.S. ($M=8.6$) and Turkish teachers ($M=4.9$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference of after school working hours between Turkish and U.S. teachers, and conclude that the after school hours of U.S. teachers are significantly higher than Turkish teachers (See Table 3).

Table 3. Independent T-test for Total Hours, Contractual Hours, Additional on-site Hours, after School Hours and Planning Hours

		Mean	SD	t	p
Total	US	51	16.56	.382	.347
	TR	49.8	12.42		
Contractual Hours	US	33.7	7.52	-3.693	.116
	TR	39.5	6.48		
Additional on-site Hours	US	12.8	7.81	4.646	.015
	TR	5.8	5.64		
After school Hours	US	8.6	8.26	2.806	.015
	TR	4.9	2.49		
Planning Hours	US	7.9	6.36	-6.837	<.001
	TR	24.2	13.57		

From the t-test reports above, we can tell obviously that although the total Work Hours between U.S. and Turkish has little difference, Turkish teachers spent significantly more time planning their lessons than their U.S. counterparts. When it comes to after school working hours, U.S. teachers, however, spent significantly more time than their Turkish counterparts. As much as Figure 1 demonstrates, U.S. teachers' Additional on-site and After school Hours are about twice as much as Turkish teachers. In contrast, Turkish teachers' Planning Hours are about twice more than American teachers.

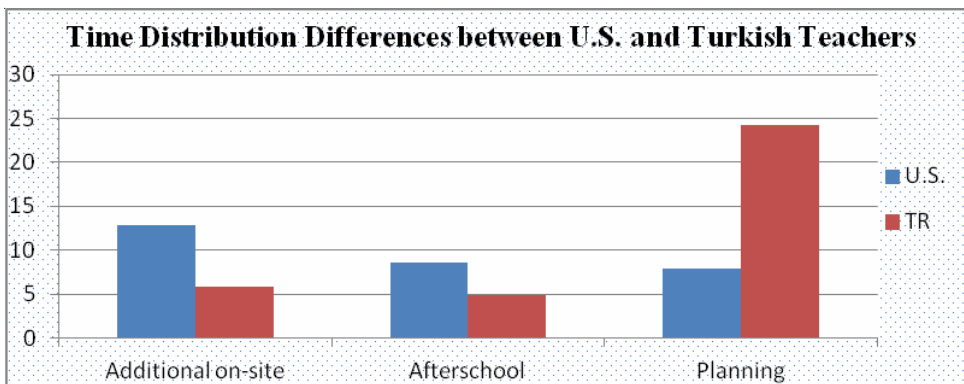


Figure 1. Time Distribution Differences between U.S. and Turkish Teachers

2. Do U.S. and Turkish teachers feel the amount of time they spend each week on planning for instruction is adequate? How are they different in the two countries?

Table 4 shows that about 95.3% of Turkish teachers think the amount of time they spend each week on planning is adequate. Only two teachers (4.7%) said that the amount of time for planning is inadequate. In contrast, only a little more than half (53.8%) of U.S. teachers feel the amount of time they spend each week on planning is adequate, and (35.9%) of them feel that they do not spend adequate time on planning.

Table 4. U.S. and Turkish Teachers' Attitudes on Planning Time is Adequate

	Yes		No		Missing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
US	21	53.8	14	35.9	3	4.3
TR	40	95.3	2	4.7	0	0

For the U.S. teachers, Teacher 1 said they did “not [have] enough time to plan, too many emails and paperwork.” Teacher 2 reported: “if I were to spend less time doing other tasks, I would perform better.” Teacher 3 reported a similar reason; that it “depends on the amount of other work to be done that week”. For Turkish teachers, only two of them indicated they do not have adequate time for planning and they do not provide reasons why they think so. The rest all indicated they have adequate time and they can usually finish planning at work, and do not need to do planning work at home.

3. Do U.S. and Turkish teachers feel that if they spent more time planning their instruction would be better? How are their perceptions of the time spent on planning for instruction and the quality of the planning different in the two countries?

In terms of investing more time on planning, almost all teachers claimed that their planning would be improved. Regarding this question, research found that all of the Turkish teachers consider their planning will be improved if they spend more time at it while 82.1% of U.S. teachers indicated the same attitude (see table 5). And when explaining why they think so, the U.S. teachers think that it would enable them to have better preparation to make “a more detailed plan,” “cover more materials, investigate themes and subject to make it more fun” “differentiate instructions,” and “get familiar with the newly adopted materials.” For most of the Turkish teachers, they claimed that it would “create a more creative and interesting classroom atmosphere to engage students” and “focus more on the students’ reaction and reflection.”

Table 5. U.S. and Turkish Teachers' Attitude on "More Planning Time will be Better"

	Yes		No		Missing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
US	32	82.1	3	7.7	4	10.2
TR	42	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

4. What are the differences between U.S. and Turkish teachers' approaches to planning?

When the teachers from two countries were asked to choose one way that best describes their planning approach, the results indicated there are major differences between teachers from the two countries. Thirty-five U.S. teachers (89.7%) claimed that they only write key points in planning, and three teachers (7.7%) write in great detail, while only one teacher (2.6%) plans mentally. On the other hand, thirty-nine Turkish teachers (92.9%) write their plan in great detail, two teachers (4.8%) write only key points and one teacher (2.4%) plans mentally (see table 6).

Table 6. Planning Approach Differences between U.S. and Turkish Teachers

	In Great Detail		Key Points		Plan Mentally	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
US	3	7.7	35	89.7	1	2.6
TR	39	92.9	2	4.8	1	2.4

T-test for Independent Means

The result of the t-test for planning approaches revealed that there was significant difference ($t(79)=11.118, p<.001$) between the mean for U.S. ($M=1.95$) and Turkish teachers ($M=1.10$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference of planning approaches between U.S. and Turkish teachers, and conclude that significantly more U.S. teachers were using "Key Points" planning approaches than Turkish while significantly more Turkish teachers were using "In Great Details" than U.S. (see table 7).

Table 7. Independent T-test Planning Approaches

	Mean	SD	t	p
US	1.95	.32	11.118	<.001
TR	1.10	.37		

Considering the significantly different result of planning approaches between teachers in the two countries, the phenomenon that most of the U.S. teachers adopt mental planning while most Turkish teachers tend to write in great details (see Figures 2) also explains the time distribution mentioned above.



Figure 2. *Different Planning Approaches Sampled in the Study*

5. *What are American and Turkish teachers’ perceived needs for help improving instructional planning? Are there any differences for the things that U.S. and Turkish feel are the most beneficial in helping to improve their planning skill?*

As stated in Table 8, about 46.2% of U.S. teachers reported they need help for improving planning, while 93.0% of Turkish teachers reported they need help for improving instructional planning.

Table 8. *U.S. and Turkish Teachers’ Attitudes on “Need help for Improving Planning”*

	Yes		No		Missing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
US	18	46.2	16	41.0	4	12.8
TR	420	93.0	0	0.0	2	7.0

Among those U.S. teachers who claimed they need help for improving planning, their most frequently listed things that they feel are the most beneficial in helping them are more time, collaboration, guidance, and fewer demands. Among those Turkish teachers who reported they need help for improving planning, their most frequently listed beneficial things are understanding students better (including their emotions and psychological factors), more communications to parents, more diversified planning, and more instructional content related to real-life.

Discussion

When comparing the background information of the teachers in the U.S. and Turkey, one of the most noticeable differences is the number of subjects taught. Elementary school teachers teach multiple subjects in the United States, while Turkish elementary school teachers usually are assigned to teach one subject. In this sense, Turkish elementary school teachers are content specialists while U.S. elementary teachers are generalists. Each Turkish teacher teaches five to ten 40-50 minute lessons per day. When not teaching, American and Turkish teachers are

expected to grade students' homework and prepare lesson instruction at their offices. Most schools provide offices separate from their classroom. In the office, teachers have their own desks or tables and they are arranged to work together by the subject and by the grade levels they teach. Each school has a teaching research group that allows teachers to prepare their lessons collaboratively.

Planning vs. Teaching: Culture Differences or Education Policy

As shown in the results section, the time components and distribution indicate that the time spent on teaching and planning varied dramatically between U.S. and Turkish teachers. U.S. teachers' Additional on-site Hours and after school-work Hours are twice as much Turkish teachers. Still, Turkish teachers reported they spent significantly more time on planning lessons. These phenomena are explicable by looking closely at the cultural background, teaching conditions and educational policy. In Turkey, the nationalism cultural heritage has a long-term dominant influence on standardized orders in education. All Turkish schools adopt the nation-wide standardized curricula and standard guidance stipulated by the National Ministry of Education. Most importantly, the reality of "teaching and testing" poses pressure on every school and it is prevalent in the current Turkish educational system. In schools, each subject has its own teaching research group; careful lesson planning takes place at both macro- and micro-levels (Shen, Popink, Cui & Gan, 2007). Teachers are scheduled to get together each week to talk about the arrangement and plans in a week; they begin by "mapping out the content for the whole semester, then move on to planning for the unit, and finally to each lesson" (Shen *et al.*, p. 182). This shows a continuum from semester, to unit, and finally to each lesson.

In addition, lesson plans are a critical criterion in evaluating teachers and the teaching quality in a school. These teaching conditions and environments build up a hierarchical education system that ensures standardized system to be carried out. It helps develop a more systematic instruction and keeps the teaching at a consistent level by means of collective discussion and planning. According to Yildirim (2003), "observing the national curriculum more closely may result in more detailed and right plans" (p. 539), however, there are concerns that over-dependence on the standard guidance may result in the overemphasis on writing plans in a unified format and conformity to curriculum instead of designing lessons according to students' developmental needs and the learning issues that arise spontaneously in class.

In the U.S., there is no set standard American curriculum. Instead, each state has its own curriculum standard. Moreover, each school district within a state may have separate curriculum standards set in place. While the US Department of Education published educational guidelines, this governmental department has no control over the actual curriculum that each state adheres to. In teaching practice,

the teachers are required to pay attention to both the social and educational development of children. Through individual or group instruction, elementary school teachers educate young students in the areas of English, math, science, and more. To some extent, this system has some merits. For example, it allows teachers to have greater autonomy in teaching, more contact hours with students, and the ability to pay more attention to individual development. However, in various ways, the lack of one standardized curriculum causes varied problems. For example, some states have excellent educational standards while other states are greatly lacking in the educational department. For example, in Nevada state the graduation rate is 51.3% and its ranked 49th out of 50 in the nation (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). In addition, many states are constantly changing and altering curricula, which results in state-wide confusions. Each teacher has to take charge of several subjects while their planning time is far less than Turkish teachers'. As the American teachers in the survey complained, they have too much workload and too many demands to have enough preparation in planning so that "lesson planning becomes just simple paper exercise it often is the United States" (Shen *et al.*, p. 190).

Those comparisons between Turkish and American all demonstrate the cultural factors and education system that interrelated in education format and characteristics of both countries. Cultural activities are highly stable over time, and they are not easily changed (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Therefore, both cultural influences and the educational system should be considered when investigating the lesson planning in both countries.

What are Planning Approaches or Strategies to Improve Effective Teaching: Time or Others?

The differences between U.S. and Turkish cultures also influence the planning approaches between the two. The findings show that Turkish teachers' prefer detailed planning while U.S. teachers prefer writing key points. This point, to some extent, is consistent with the discussion above. Since Turkish teachers have a greater portion of the professional day that they spend on planning one particular subject matter, they would like to design a well-thought out and effective plan to cope with students' potential questions and interests. While the U.S. teachers' attention and energy is scattered to deal with classroom routine and several subjects in a day, they write key points. So does the time matter in effective planning? One interesting thing is that when asking to invest more time in planning, all Turkish and the majority of U.S. teachers claim that their planning would be improved, which is inconsistent with the 95.3% Turkish and 53.8% U.S. results that regard they have adequate time in planning. These findings, to some extent, suggest that teachers from both countries feel that they are not satisfied with their planning. This may be due to the lack of help or resources to carry out a satisfied

planning, which can be reflected from their perceptions of help for planning. The findings that U.S. teachers' preference for help on improving instructional planning are collaboration, guidance and less classroom routine demands while the Turkish teachers need more help with understanding the psychological factors behind students' behaviors and reactions.

The findings on the teachers' preferences for help on improving instructional planning also indicate possible new directions for efforts to help teachers improve their teaching. Many of these efforts have focused on helping adopt new beliefs and ideas about teaching and learning. However, there is growing evidence that having teachers experience new forms of teaching or carry out tasks might be a better way to lead them to revise their practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2011). Lesson planning is integral to teachers' professional development in Turkey; teachers can resort to their professional colleagues' work by studying their lesson plans or seeking input from colleagues and adjusting the content to suit students' knowledge level as well as individual reflection. According to Shen, Popink, Cuo, and Gan (2007) argued that "textbooks, students, and teaching methods are the three focuses on lesson planning" (p. 188). In addition, they stated that Turkish practice demonstrates that the teachers "focus on the content knowledge in the textbook and understanding what students will make of the content, and link the two" (p. 188). This individual and collegial planning and working time may be a necessary condition to improve quality of teaching in American schools; detailed lesson plans provide a way for American teachers to better understand content, student learning, and pedagogical content knowledge.

Nevertheless, for Turkish teachers, lesson planning also presents its own setbacks. First of all, usually the planning preparation formats do not change over time and teachers' creativity and productivity would be underestimated. Therefore, it might be necessary to introduce an interesting and productive direction to engage them in novel lesson construction practice. Second, planning too extensively tends to result in concentrating only on the content of the textbooks instead of understanding students' psychologically factors. Results from this study indicate that Turkish teachers had a need to incorporate students' psychological factors into their lesson planning. Therefore, Turkish schools could consider establishing or developing psychologist service; this professional consultation works as a useful resource for solving classroom problems and helps teachers understand the psychological reasons behind students' behaviors. Doing so could contribute to an effective classroom management, which is suggested or preferred by teachers in some Western studies (e.g., Little, 2005; Stephenson *et al.*, 1999). In Turkey, the psychological issues are still weak points that have been neglected up until now. It is often an ingrained stereotype that students come to learn and master related knowledge only. Therefore, both the schools and teachers would pose more emphasis on the content knowledge from textbooks instead of dealing with students' true feelings and needs. However, the ongoing educational reform calls

for more consideration on the children's motivation, development and diversity management.

Overall, in this study, both U.S. and Turkish teacher planning are studied. By examining the cross-national approaches and perceptions on the lesson planning, some interesting indications are suggested. The results demonstrate not only the different features between two countries but also the rationales and implications, which provide outsiders' perspectives for both sides. In this study, U.S. teachers focus more on teaching rather than planning, and Turkish teachers are in the opposite situation. Consequently, most of the U.S. teachers ask for collaborative cooperation and guidance on the instructional planning while Turkish teachers have more interests in improving understanding of the students and creating an active classroom environment. However, this study only used survey methodology by comparing teachers' broad beliefs, which can only partially illuminate what transpires in the classroom (Thompson, 1992). Future research is needed to carry out by means of on-spot observation on the teaching organization and classroom reactions to reach a comprehensive understanding of the influences of various factors that affect planning and the relationships between planning and instruction. Besides, the students' perceptions can also be investigated to reflect the planning.

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