

Turkish New High School Physics Curriculum: Teachers' Views and Needs

Nuri BALTA*, Ali ERYILMAZ

Middle East Technical University, Department of Secondary Science & Mathematics Education Ankara, Turkey

Received 28 October 2010 - Revised 17 December 2010 - Accepted 21 December 2010

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the physics teacher's views about changes made to physics curriculum and in-service training needs about new topics added. To achieve this purpose, a survey is conducted via Internet. A questionnaire of 11 Likert-type items was used as a data collection tool. Data supplied by the participants were cleaned and finally views of 100 teachers were taken into account. The analysis of the results demonstrated that physics teacher's attitudes toward the changes are positive. And their in-service training needs are not too much. Further, the differences between the attitudes and needs of male-female teachers and state-private school teachers are also determined.

Key words: Physics Education; Curriculum Development; In-service Training Course

Introduction

Just as science, curriculum is constantly changing and being refined (Settlage & Southerland, 2007). In modern countries, the curriculums are being developed and replaced, in average, every five years according to current needs (PC, 2007). Each country re-organized their curriculum including recent teaching methods and techniques in education to bring up their individuals better and to raise them above the average of international arena in terms of knowledge, skills and aptitudes (Değirmenci, 2007).

In this context, in our country high school physics curriculum has been changed since 2007. Starting with the ninth grades, students have been continuing their education with a very different curriculum in terms of content and structure.

Students, who are receiving information, conform to the provided curriculum and receive the education presented to them. Yet, it is not the same for teachers, who are the practitioners of the curriculum (Baybars & Kocakulah, 2009). They are instructors and they need to understand the subjects that they are going to teach. So, it is teachers that are most affected by the changes made to the curriculum.

Since 2007, Turkish physics teachers have begun to present subjects that are different from which they had taught to their students for many years. Along with the new curriculum

*Corresponding Author: Phone: +90 312 356 6060, Fax: +90 312 3565555, Email: nuribalta@yahoo.com
ISSN: 1306-3049, ©2011

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the IX. National Sci & Math Edu Congress in Izmir-Turkey in Sep 2010.

teachers are no longer only supposed to solve problems on the board; but they must also associate physics topics with class activities.

The new physics education curriculum is based on spiral structure. (PC, 2007). Adaptation of teachers to this framework requires serious preparation and hard work. On the other hand, determining the boundaries of curriculum for each grade is very important. Because of the nature of the spiral structure, as Settlage and Southerland (2007) stated, a spiral curriculum can spread across several grade levels. In each grade some part of the subject should be taught. However, teachers resuming old habits, may teach for example, entire issue of “force and motion” to ninth grade students.

Real-life context based instruction is one of the most important features of the new curriculum. In this type of instruction students learn a subject by tying it to a real-world context in a way that allows them to make connections between the subject and its application to their lives as citizens, family members, and students (Yam, 2005). The physics teachers do not have adequate background in this regard. It is difficult for the teachers, who haven't trained for the real-life context based instruction during university education, to cope with this issue. It requires serious effort and study.

Together with the new curriculum, one of the biggest problems that teacher should struggle in physics lessons is to remediate students scientific errors and misconceptions. To overcome this problem, in new physics curriculum, the general misconceptions about each topic are especially pointed out. Hereof, preparation of teachers to remove misconception of students is another important issue.

Güneş et al. (2010) asked physics teachers about the problems related to implementation of the revised high school physics curriculum. They applied a survey to more than 600 teachers, and received teachers' general opinions about the new curriculum. The researchers argued that weekly class hours are inadequate and teachers are not so much ready for the new curriculum.

In order to investigate physics teacher candidates' knowledge levels about new concepts added to high school physics curriculum, Kapucu and Yıldırım (2010) administered a Likert-type questionnaire over 98 university students. Their findings showed that, more than 50% of prospective teachers did not have enough information about 19 of the 32 concepts - especially concepts related to astronomy and sound.

As Lumpe, Czerniak and Haney (1999); and Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) mentioned, the teachers plays a critical role in the success of any curriculum reform. Tobin, Tippins, and Gallard (1994) also have same opinion:

Future research should seek to enhance our understanding of the relationships between teacher beliefs and science education reform. Many of the reform attempts of the past have ignored the role of teacher beliefs in sustaining the status quo. The studies reviewed in this section suggest that teacher beliefs are a critical ingredient in the factors that determine what happens in classrooms. (p. 64)

In short, in our country, along with other high school teachers, physics teachers are also face to face with a new situation. In this study, we wanted to get opinions of physics teachers, who are teaching to ninth and tenth grades, about the new physics curriculum. Teachers are implementing the new curriculum. Therefore, their opinions may help curriculum developers to improve the curriculum. The expectations of the committee preparing the new high school physics curriculum from teachers are as follows:

In teaching and learning physics curriculum, teacher qualifications have an important place. The new approach requires physics teachers to have pedagogical knowledge along with pedagogical content knowledge. Studies, reveals that becoming an expert about a subject matter is different from teaching it to somebody. Pedagogical content knowledge is the knowledge of knowing how to teach a certain topic to other people. This is different from the knowledge about general teaching methods. A physics teachers who has pedagogical content knowledge should keep in mind that learners can have different motivation, learning and cognitive styles. Teachers should establish an environment to achieve meaningful learning and discover prior knowledge or the level of readiness of students about the subject. In addition, teachers should choose most efficient method of teaching by taking into account the nature of the subject, students' readiness levels, and their individual capabilities and they should give opportunity to students to practice new concepts in different situations (PC, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to reveal physics teachers' attitudes toward new high school physics curriculum, their opinions about their pedagogical content knowledge related to new topics, the amount of in-service training course they received about new curriculum, and their general opinions about the new curriculum. The results of public or private schools and the results of female and male teachers are also compared.

Method

A cross-sectional survey (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996) study was carried out to get teachers' views about changes made to physics curriculum. After the first version, the survey questions were checked by four physics teachers and an academician who took part in preparing new curriculum. The necessary changes were made based on their opinions. They confirmed the content validity of second version of the instrument. The survey (see the appendix for the survey) was administered in a two-month period on the Internet. Survey on the Internet was selected to reach to more participants and more easily. Teachers were directed from different ways to the home page of the survey to fill out the questionnaire. Popular Internet sites about physics education were used to announce the survey. Besides, information about survey was sent to many teachers via email. Additionally, help was asked to known teachers to reach to more participants.

Instead of teacher's opinions about the whole curriculum, we preferred to take their views on new topics added. The survey was based on two basic questions. First, we asked the teachers' in-service training needs related to new topics added to physics curriculum. Second, the attitudes of teachers toward new topics added were asked.

In two-month period, 104 participants filled the questionnaire. Since four of them were high school students or high school graduates they were excluded from the analysis. Finally, the views of 100 teachers were transferred to "excel" from Internet and the necessary analyses were made.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the survey are presented in the following numbered titles.

1. How long have you been teaching physics?

All the participants responded in this question and the answers ranged from 3 months to 32 years. Participating teachers have an average of 11 years of experience in teaching physics. As seen from Figure 1, most respondents have 12-15 years of teaching physics experience.

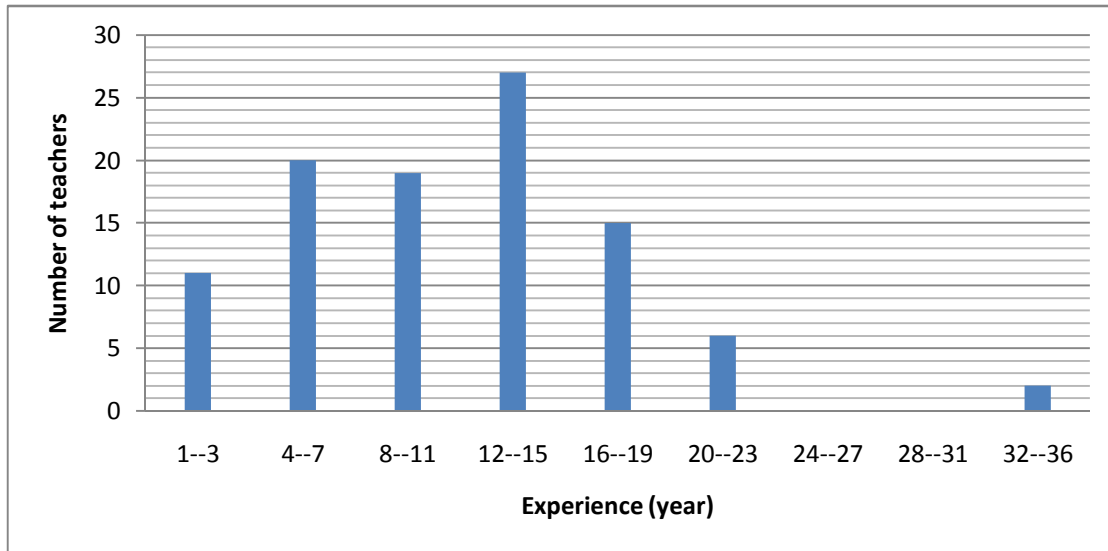


Figure 1. Years of the participant teachers' experiences

2. Is your school private or state?

Fifty six teachers from state and 44 teachers from private schools participated in the survey. The number of respondents working in public and private schools is important for subsequent analysis.

3. What is your gender?

Most of the participants are male teachers. The percentages of the male and female participants are 78 and 22, respectively. It is not known whether the ratio of the male and female teachers participated to the survey is same as the ratio of male and female physics teacher in Turkey.

4. What's your educational background?

The distribution of the participants' educational background is given in Figure 2. The data in Figure 2 points out that the majority of the teachers have bachelor degree.

According to Figure 2, considerable amounts (28%) of participants are continuing their education after bachelor degree.

5. Which cities are you living in?

96% of respondents gave answer to this question. The participants are from 44 cities and most of them are from Istanbul, Ankara and Konya. As indicated in Table 1, teachers from every region of Turkey have participated in the survey.

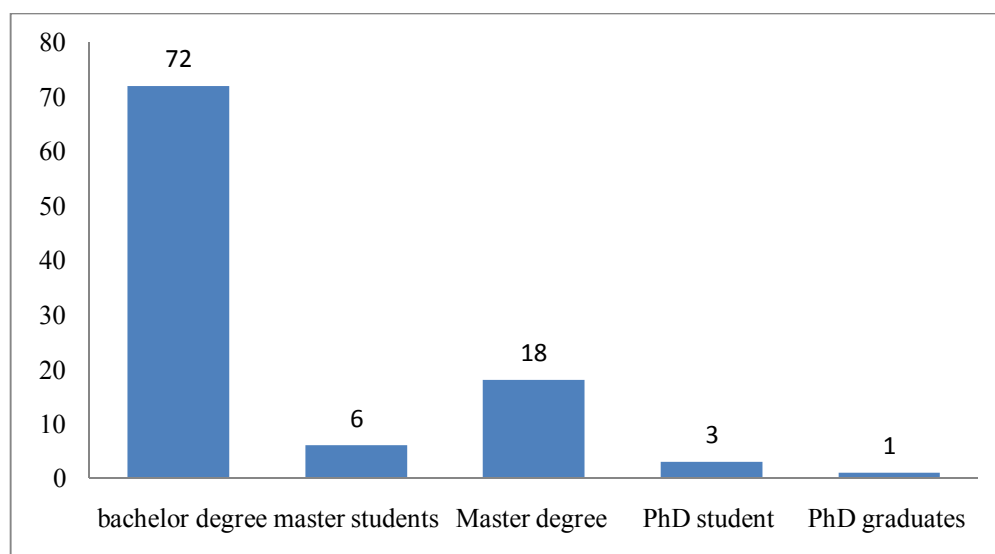


Figure 2. The educational status of the participants

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents by cities

City	f	City	f	City	f	City	f
İstanbul	14	Kütahya	1	Edirne	1	K.Maraş	1
Ankara	12	Ordu	2	Muğla	1	Denizli	4
Gaziantep	4	Çanakkale	2	Manisa	3	Hakkari	1
Kayseri	4	Batman	1	Osmaniye	2	Hatay	1
Konya	6	Tokat	1	Bursa	1	K.Kale	2
Van	1	Düzce	2	Ağrı	1	Aydın	2
Eskişehir	4	Bolu	1	Rize	1	Erzurum	1
Sivas	1	İzmir	1	Samsun	2	Antalya	2
Mersin	5	Elazığ	1	Nevşehir	1	Blank	4
A.Karahisar	1	Tunceli	1	Çorum	1	Total	100
Sakarya	2	Kastamonu	3	Giresun	2		
Total Number of cities							44

6. Have you ever attend to any in-service training? Where and how long?

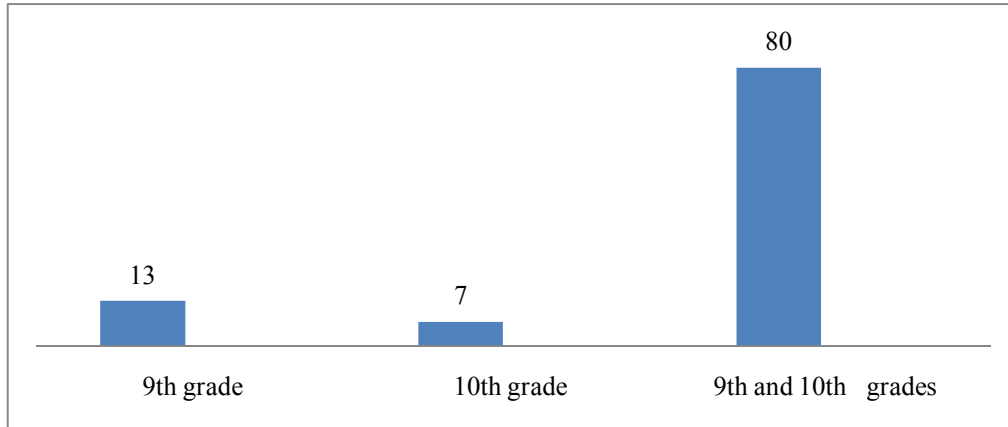
58% of participants responded in this question. At least 1 hour at most 3 months was the duration for this answer. 42% of the teachers that took part in survey had participated to an in-service training at various places and periods. As seen from Table 2, 42% of the participants didn't answer this question. This is the second most unanswered question by the participants.

Table 2. Results of the participants if they attended to in-service training course

In-service training course	f
Participated	44
Didn't participate	14
Blank	42
Total	100

7. Do you teach physics to 9th or 10th grades?

Since the survey is about new 9th and 10th grade curriculum, the classes that the participants are teaching are very important. Figure 3 shows that among the 100 participants, 80 of them are teaching both 9th and 10th grades.

**Figure 3.** Histogram of the participants according to grades they teach

8. Topics added to new physics curriculum are listed below. Check the topic whether you need in-service training or not.

This is one of the main questions of the survey. With the answers given to this question, it is tried to reveal if teachers are ready for the new physics curriculum. Table 3 indicates that the first three topics that respondents need in-service training are special relativity, plasma state of matter, and adhesion-cohesion-capillarity- surface tension. And their percentages are 55%, 55% and 54%, respectively. In average, 34.75% of the participants need in-service training course and 60.30% of them don't need.

Table 3. Topics that the participants need in-service training

Topics	I need	I don't need	No answer
What is physics?	13	83	4
Qualitative and quantitative observations	11	85	4
Fundamental and derived quantities	16	80	4
Hypothesis and theory	31	64	5
Modeling in physics and relation to mathematics	35	60	5
Renewable and non-renewable energy sources	22	74	4
Types of Thermometers (Liquid, gas, metal, etc.)	12	83	5
Internal energy	36	60	4
Plasma state of matter	55	39	6
Fission and fusion events	40	54	6
Radioactive elements	39	55	6
Fundamental forces of nature	26	71	3
Earthquake waves	52	45	3
The surface area and volume relationship- Strength	43	52	5
Characteristics of living things and the cross-sectional area or surface area divided by the volume relations	39	54	5
Adhesion-Cohesion-Capillary-surface tension	54	39	7
Formation of the atmosphere (factors affecting the structure)	44	53	5
Relationship between mass and inertia	22	73	4
Developments that affected to the birth of modern physics	50	44	5
Special relativity	55	38	6
Average	34.75	60.30	4.80

9. *What other topics do you need in-service training about?*

This question was the least answered by the participants. According to Table 4, only 8 people have responded to this question. And 5 of them had asked in-service training about lab experiments.

Table 4. Other topics that the participants need in-service training

Topic	f
Class activities related to physics subjects	2
Pressure in fluids	1
Lab experiments	5
Blank	92
Total	100

10. What is your attitude toward the addition of following topics to the 9th and 10th grade physics curriculum?

One of the most important changes made to the 9th and 10th grade curriculum is the addition of new topics. Teachers approach to these topics is very important for the curriculum developers. As seen from Table 5, the first three topics, added to new curriculum, that were mostly marked as negative are; radioactive elements, hypothesis and theory, and formation of the atmosphere. However, in average 66.90% of the respondents are appreciating the changes. And only 11% of them found the changes as negative.

Table 5. Teachers' attitudes towards new topics added

Topics	Positive	Negative	Did not notice	No answer
What is physics?	72	3	24	1
Qualitative and quantitative observations	65	9	25	1
Fundamental and derived quantities	68	8	22	2
Hypothesis and theory	54	20	24	2
Modeling in physics and relation to mathematics	67	13	19	1
Renewable and non-renewable energy sources	78	6	15	1
Types of Thermometers (Liquid, gas, metal, etc.)	58	9	32	2
Internal energy	65	11	19	5
Plasma state of matter	80	9	8	3
Fission and fusion events	67	16	14	3
Radioactive elements	58	24	15	3
Fundamental forces of nature	73	9	15	3
Earthquake waves	71	15	11	3
The surface area and volume relationship - strength	72	3	24	1
Characteristics of living things and the cross-sectional area or surface area divided by the volume relations	65	9	25	1
Adhesion-Cohesion-Capillary-surface tension	68	8	22	2
Formation of the atmosphere (factors affecting the structure)	54	20	24	2
The relationship between mass and inertia	67	13	19	1
Developments that affected to the birth of modern physics	78	6	15	1
Special relativity	58	9	32	2
Average	66.9	11	20.2	2

The comparison of the in-service training course needs of male and female participants about new topics:

There are 20 new topics added to the 9th and 10th grade physics curriculums. There may be differences between the views of male and female participants about these topics. To reveal the differences between the in-service training course needs of male and females, Figure 4 and Figure 5 are given.

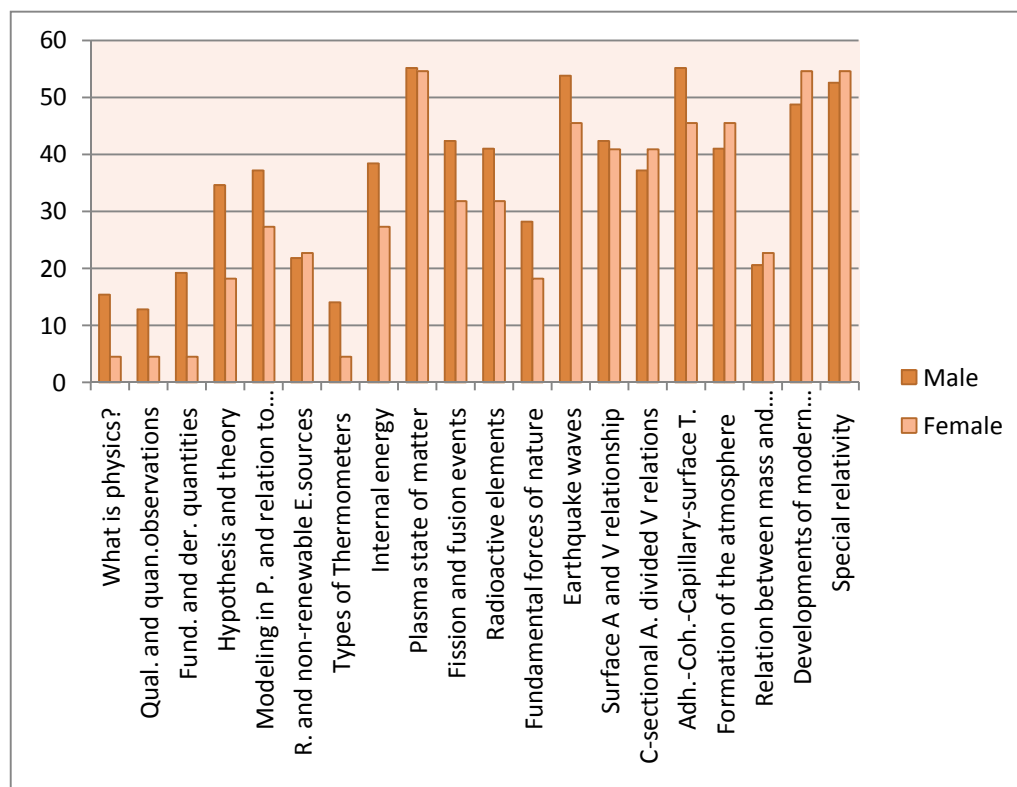


Figure 4. Histogram of the male and female teachers who marked I need in-service training on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

Figure 4 shows the views of male and female participants about each new topic added. As seen from Figure 4, for 14 topics male participants show more needs than females and for 6 topics females' shows more needs than males.

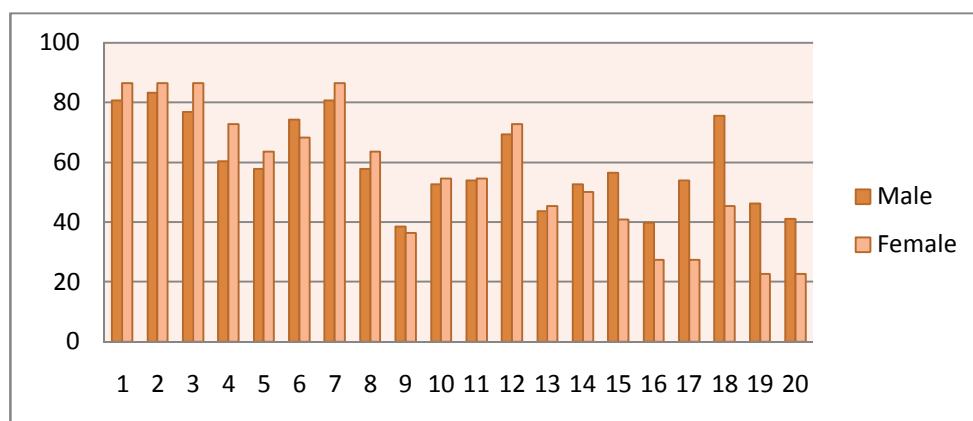


Figure 5. Histogram of the male and female teachers who marked I don't need in-service training on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

Figure 5 shows that for 11 topics female participants show less need than male participants and for 9 topics males show less need than females. The 18th column is about the relation between mass and inertia. And male teachers' need for this topic is noteworthy.

The comparison of the in-service training course needs of state and private school participants about new topics added:

To look at the differences between the views of state and private school teachers Figure 6 and Figure 7 are given. Although their in-service training needs will not be an indicator of their quality, it may guide the in-service training organizing institutions.

According to Figure 6, in equal amount of topics, respondents from state and private schools have in-service training course needs about new topics added to the curriculum. However, about “hypothesis and theory” private school teachers wants more help than the state school teachers and about the “plasma state of matter” it is vice versa.

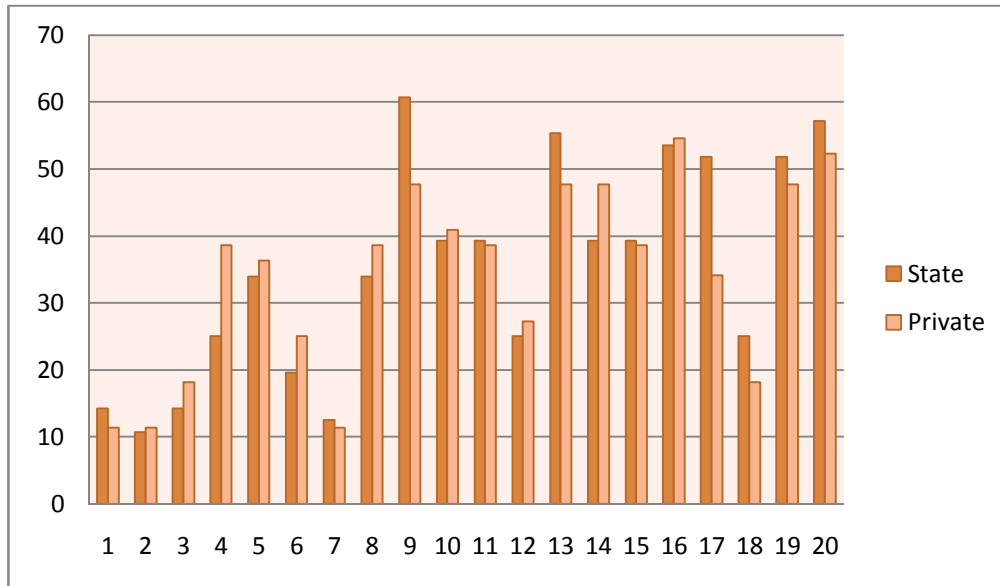


Figure 6. Histogram of the state and private school teachers who marked I need in-service training on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

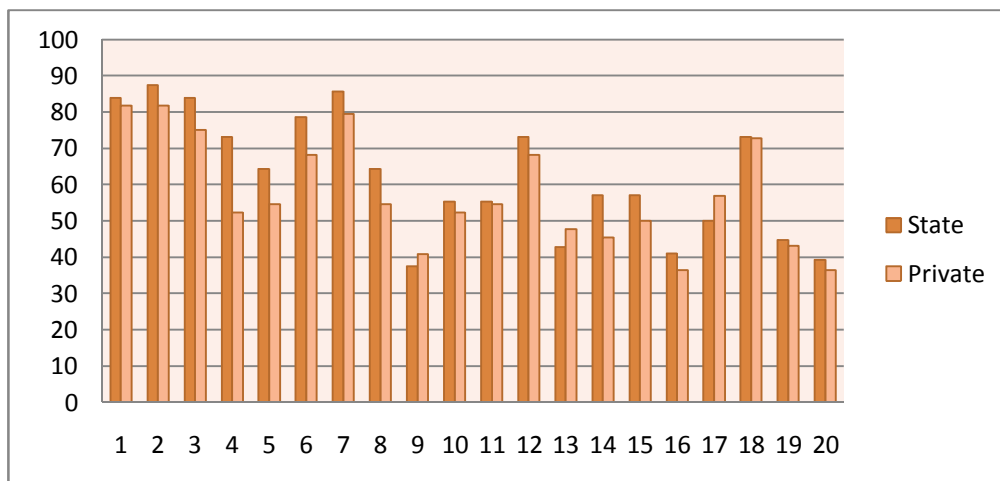


Figure 7. Histogram of the state and private school teachers who marked I don't need in-service training on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

It is clearly seen from Figure 7 that the participants from state schools asked less need for in-service training course then private school participants.

The comparison of the attitudes of male and female participants toward the changes made to new physics curriculum:

Positive and negative attitudes of males and females are compared in Figures 8 and 9. Revealing the differences between their attitudes will be interesting. Any differences will attract the attention of researchers.

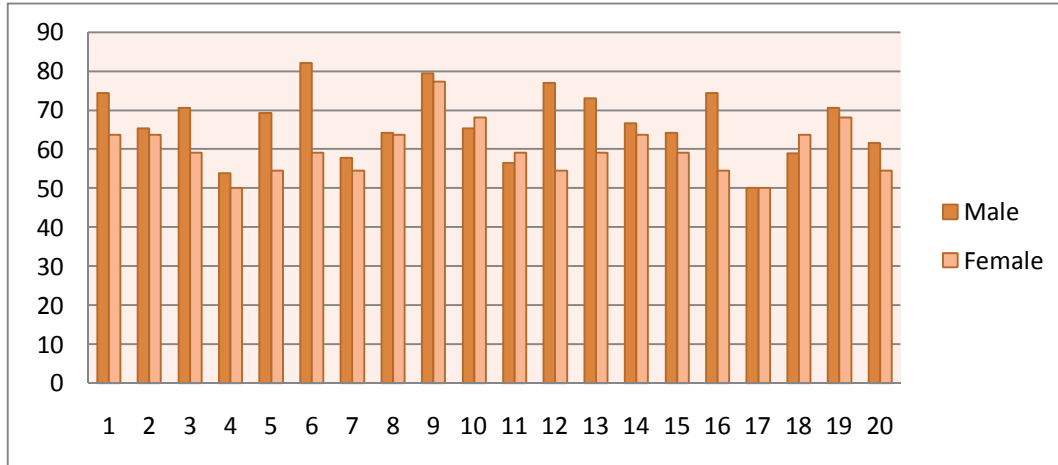


Figure 8. Histogram of the attitudes of the male and female teachers who marked positive on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

According to Figure 8, male participants have found the new topics added more positive than females. Males precede females for 16 topics and females precede only for 3 topics.

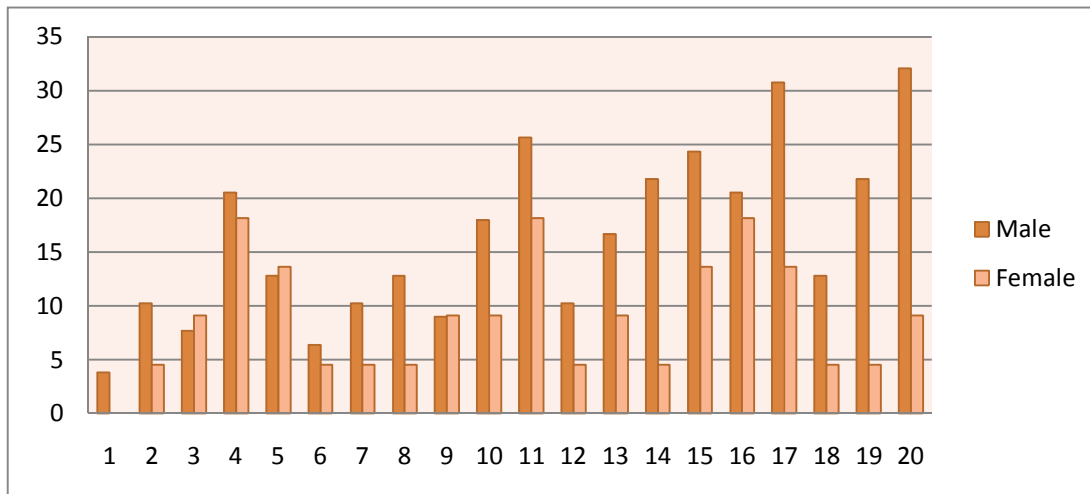


Figure 9. Histogram of the attitudes of the male and female teachers who marked negative on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

According Figure 9, the number of topics that male participants found as negative is more than the number of topics that females found as negative. This difference is distinctive especially for special relativity, formation of the atmosphere, and radioactive elements.

The reader should notice that the number of topics that were found as positive and also negative for male participant is more than that of females. This can be perceived as confusion. Yet, the reason is the attitudes of females. As seen from Figure 10 they mostly preferred to say “did not notice”.

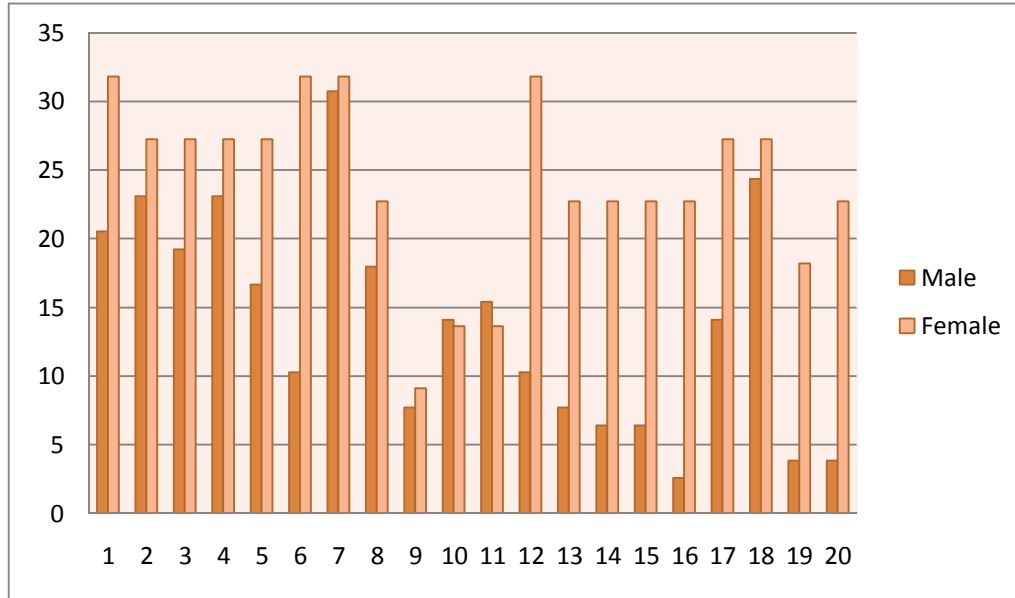


Figure 10. Histogram of the attitudes of the male and female teachers who marked did not notice on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

According to Figure 10, the number of topics that female participants found as “did not notice” is more than the number of topics that males found as “did not notice”. The distinctive difference is seen in fundamental forces of nature.

The comparison of the attitudes of the state and private school participants toward the changes made to the new physics curriculum:

In order to be able to see the differences between the attitudes of the state and private school teachers, Figures 11, 12, and 13 are given. Comparison of their attitudes toward new topics added is remarkable.

Figure 11 points out that participants from state schools found the new topics as more positive. Participants from state schools precede the participants from private schools for 13 topics and the participants from private schools precede the others for 7 topics.

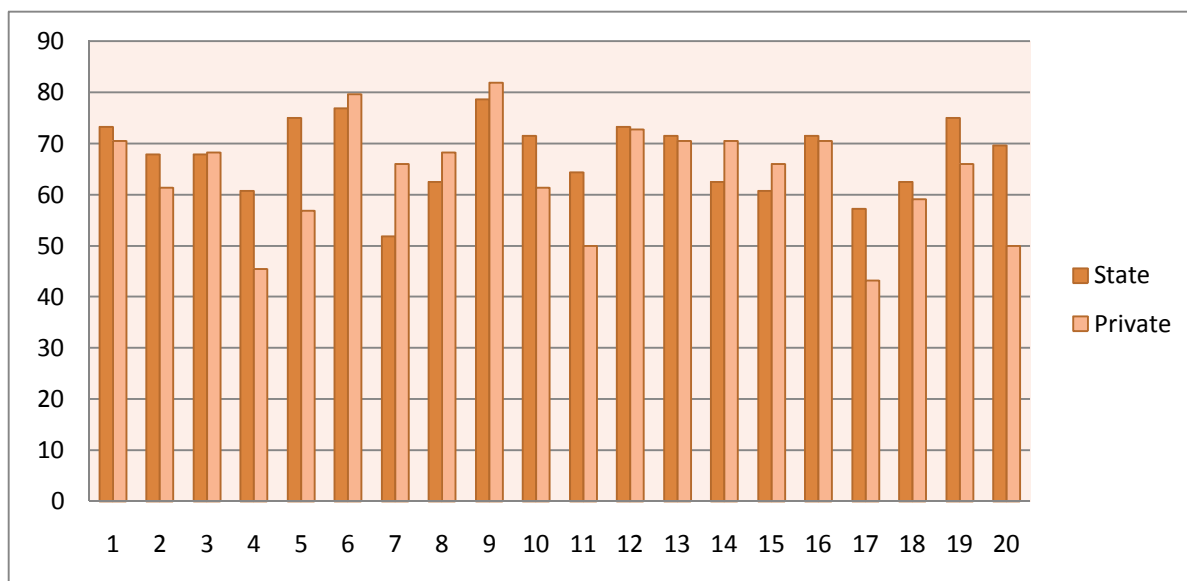


Figure 11. Histogram of the attitudes of the state and private school teachers who marked positive on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

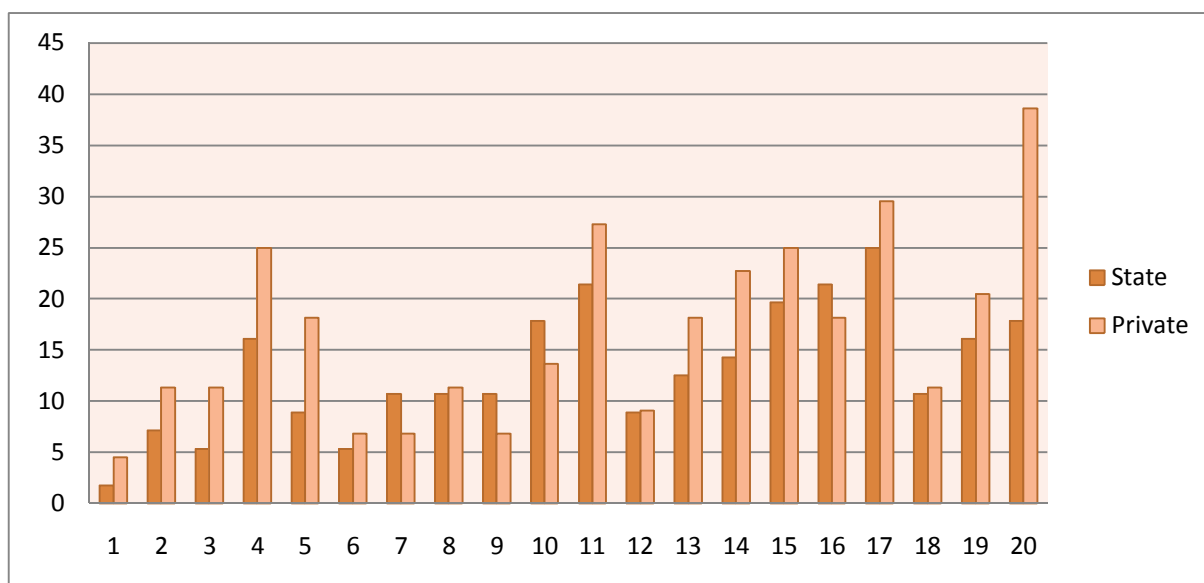


Figure 12. Histogram of the attitudes of the state and private school teachers who marked negative on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

As seen from Figure 12, when compared to each other, for 4 topics private school participants said more negative and for 16 topics state school participants said more negative. There is again a clear difference in special relativity which is in favor of the private school participants.

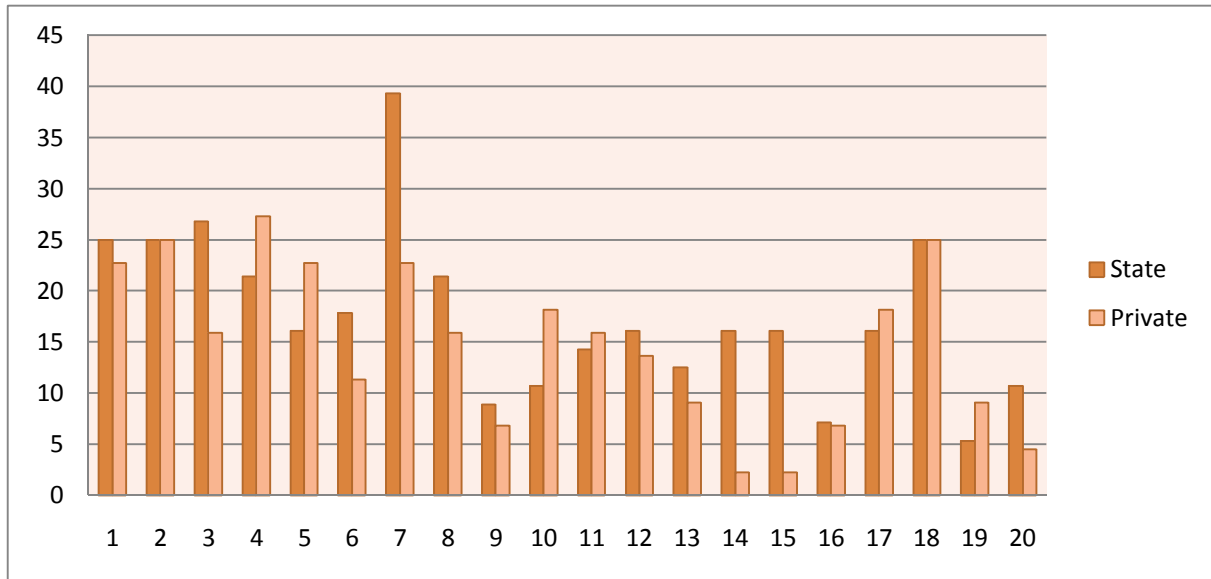


Figure 13. Histogram of the attitudes of the state and private school teachers who marked did not notice on 20 new topics added to the curriculum

Figure 13 indicates that for 12 topics state school participants precede private school participants and for 6 topics private school participants precede state school participants. There is equality for two topics, they are; qualitative and quantitative observations - the relationship between mass and inertia. The biggest difference is visible for the “types of thermometers”.

11. What is your opinion about the whole curriculum?

Beside the views of the participants to each of the 20 new topics added, it is also preferred to see their views on the whole new curriculum. The new physics curriculum is different than the old one in many aspects. In Table 6 the most striking views are listed.

Table 6. Teachers’ general opinions about the curriculum

Opinions	f
Books and resources are insufficient	6
Too much activities	2
insufficient class hours	20
Teachers are not ready	7
The curriculum is complex	5
Too many subjects are in the curriculum	6
No need of special relativity in the curriculum	2
Others	12
Blank	40
Total	100

Results

Most of the studies carried out in this area are related to overall evaluation of the new physics curriculum. However, this study seems unique in investigating the teachers' views about each new added topic. That is why comparing this research results to others are a little bit hard.

1. The participants' in-service training needs about new topics added are not so much. However, teacher's needs for 10th grade topics are more than that of 9th grade.
2. Teachers have point out that they need in-service training for lab experiments.
3. In-service training needs about new topics added is more for the teachers from private schools than the state school teachers.
4. The male participants reveal more need for in-service training course when compared to the female participants
5. Plasma state of matter and earthquake waves are two topics of 9th grade that participants mostly wanted in-service training about.
6. Special relativity and Adhesion-Cohesion-Capillary-Surface tension are two topics of 10th grade that the participants mostly wanted in-service training about. Kapucu and Yıldırım (2010) also argued that physics teacher candidates are not too much familiar with the topic Adhesion-Cohesion.
7. The participants' general attitudes toward the changes made to new physics curriculum are positive. However, their positive attitudes are more for the 10th grade when compared to the 9th grade.
8. The male teachers' general attitudes toward the changes made to new physics curriculum are more positive and more negative when compared to the female teachers.
9. The number of topics that the female participants marked as "did not notice" were more than that of the male participant.
10. The private school teachers' general attitudes toward the changes made to the new physics curriculum are more negative when compared to the state school teachers.
11. The teachers' attitudes toward "radioactive elements, fission -fusion events and hypotheses –theory" are more negative when compared to other 9th grade topics.
12. The participants' attitudes toward "formation of atmosphere, characteristics of living things and the cross-sectional area or surface area divided by the volume relations" are more negative when compared to other 10th grade topics.
13. Weekly class hours are inadequate for 9th and 10th grades. Güneş et al. (2010) also found similar results.

Implications

1. Many participants denoted the inadequacy of weekly class hours. That's why the 9th and 10th grade hours should be increased.
2. Instead of introducing new physics curriculum in the in-service training, the new topics added should be taught to teachers. Since this study revealed that teachers' in-service training needs could be different. Therefore, content of the in-service training should be determined by surveys.

3. Since the teachers have positive feeling against the curriculum change, the committee developing the new physics curriculum can continue to improve the curriculum.

References

- Baybars, M.G. & Kocakulah, M.S. (2009). Evaluation of grade 9 physics curriculum based on teacher's views *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(1), 1121-1126.
- Değirmenci, U. (2007). *İlköğretim 4., 5., 6. Sınıflar Fen ve Teknoloji Dersi Yeni Öğretim programının Uygulanması İle İlgili Öğretmen Görüşleri* (Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Gazi Ün. Eğ. Bilimleri Enstitüsü. Ankara.
- Fraenkel, J.R. & Wallen, N.E. (1996). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, 3rd ed., New York, USA, Mc Grawhill, Inc.
- Güneş, B., Ateş, S., Eryılmaz, A., Kanlı, U., Serin, G. & Arslan A. (2010). *Yenilenen lise fizik dersi öğretim programının uygulama süreci ve yaşanan sıkıntılarının tespiti üzerine bir araştırma, IX Ulusal Fen Bilimleri ve Matematik Eğitimi Kongresi*, 23-25 September, İzmir.
- Kapucu, S. & Yıldırım, U. (2010). *Fizik öğretmen adaylarının fizik öğretim programındaki yeni kavramlar hakkındaki bilgi seviyeleri, IX ulusal fen bilimleri ve matematik eğitimi kongresi*, 23-25 September, İzmir.
- Lumpe, A.T, Czerniak, C.M. & Haney, J.J. (1999). Assessing teachers' beliefs about their science teaching context, *Electronic Journal of Science education*, Retrieved 28.11.2010 from <http://ret.fsu.edu/Files/Tools/CBAST.pdf>
- Ornstein, A.C. & Hunkins, F.P. (2004). *Curriculum: Foundations, principals and issues* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Physics Curriculum (PC) - Fizik Öğretim Programı (2007). *Ortaöğretim fizik dersi 9. sınıf öğretim programı*, Retrieved March 12, 2009, from www.fizikprogrami.com,
- Settlage, J. & Southerland, S.A. (2007). *Teaching science to every child*. New York: Routledge.
- Tobin, K., Tippins, D.J. & Gallard, A.J. (1994). Research on instructional strategies for teaching science. In D.L. Gabel (Ed.), *Handbook of research on science teaching and learning* (pp. 45–93). New York: Macmillan.
- Yam, H. (2005). *What is contextual learning and teaching in physics?* Retrieved November 4, 2010 from Contextual Physics in Ocean Park. http://www.phy.cuhk.edu.hk/contextual/approach/tem/brief_e.html

Appendix: Questionnaire

1. How long have you been teaching physics?			2. Is your school private or state?				
3. What is your gender?			5. Which city are you living in?				
4. What's your educational background?			7. Do you teach physics to 9 th or 10 th grades?				
6. Have you ever attend to any in-service training course? Where and how long?			8. Do you need in-service training course about the following topics		9. What is your attitude toward the addition of following topics to the 9 th and 10 th grade physics curriculum?		
Grade	Subject	Topic added	I need	I don't need	Positive	Negative	Did not notice
9 th grade	Nature of physics	What is physics?					
		Qualitative and quantitative observations					
		Fundamental and derived quantities					
		Hypothesis and theory					
		Modeling in physics and relation to mathematics					
	Energy	Renewable and non-renewable energy sources					
		Types of Thermometers (Liquid, gas, metal, etc.).					
		Internal energy					
	Matter and its properties	Plasma state of matter					
		Fission and fusion events					
Radioactive elements							
Force and motion	Fundamental forces of nature						
Waves	Earthquake waves						
10 th grade	Matter and its properties	The surface area and volume relationship -Strength					
		Characteristics of living things and the cross-sectional area or surface area divided by the volume relations					
		Adhesion-Cohesion-Capillary-surface tension					
		Formation of the atmosphere (factors affecting the structure)					
	Force and motion	The relationship between mass and inertia					
Modern physics	Developments that affected to the birth of modern physics						
	Special relativity						
What other topics do you need in-service training course about?							
What is your opinion about the whole curriculum?							