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Evaluation of class passing conditions of the failed students from the viewpoints of Education Ministry Officials, school administrators, teachers and parents

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Abstract

This survey aims to evaluate the social promotion of class-repeating students, applied with the changes in regulations made by the TRNC Ministry of National Education, for promotion to a higher grade from the viewpoints of Ministry of Education and school administrators, parents, teachers and students. For this survey, the semi-structured qualitative interviews were used. A total of 100 participants were interviewed, including school administrators, teachers and students in a high school. Based on the findings, we concluded that social promotion of the failed students to a higher grade is a defective practice. Also, it is hard in Cyprus to try to fulfill learning deficiencies in the higher grade. Lastly, the ongoing practice of social promotion enforced in recent years was favoured, because the authorities aimed at preventing possible overcrowding in lower grades rather than meeting the requirements of contemporary educational system. Thus, this educational policy in concern has numerous disadvantages.

Keywords: class passing, Ministry of Education, school administrators, teachers, parent.

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1. Introduction

There have been rapid and multi-dimensional developments and changes particularly in economic, social and cultural areas as in other fields in the world. The fact that the future society will be the information society has led the countries to work in that direction and seek to adapt these developments in education to the extent of their powers.

Education is the sum of processes in which the individual develops his/her skills, attitudes and positive behaviours in the society he/she lives (Aydin, 2000, p. 183). The education system has a complex structure and functioning. Within the system, educational philosophy, objectives, programmes, methods, administrators, students and parents move in spirals. All the elements in the system come together and constitute its characteristics. Any intervention on one or several parts of the system usually affects other elements, either directly or indirectly.

In general terms, education is defined as developing or changing behaviours consciously. The direction, content and method of this development depend on the social and economic conditions, culture and value judgement of the individual, and the development level of human rights and educational sciences in the individual's country (Altunya, 2000, p. 9).

Education signifies a contemporary value developing an individual's personal skills, helping to implement what he/she has learnt, improving his/her analysis and evaluation skills as well as the power of thinking. It goes without saying that a school is said to be contemporary only if it uncovers the skills of the student, creates a mutually supportive environment for the teacher and provides a psychological stance helping the individual to compete with the changing world (Reed, 1991, p. 4).

The Cyprus Turkish Education System via its life-long, qualified, educational vision for its countrymen aims at achieving a human being who has the following qualities:

- is invariably adaptive, open to change, peaceful and conciliative,
- prioritises humane values in addition to a generation that is loyal to freedom, democracy, peace, social justice and rule of law,
- internalises scientific thought and work,
- knows how to use computer technology,
- perpetually renovates,
- freely expresses thoughts and questions and searches,
- knows how to reach information,
- establishes good relations with Turkey and other neighbouring countries,
- embraces Ataturk's peaceful, contemporary, renovative, secular principles,
- is healthy in physical and psychological terms and virtuous with higher aesthetic senses.
- It also targets to raise creative generations compatible with the human beings of the 21st century,
- dignifies each and every person and sets the ground for them to develop in multi-dimensional ways [Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of National Education (TRNCMNE), 2005].

Within the scope of this vision and mission, various reforms have been made in recent years to improve Cyprus Turkish education. The primary one among those reforms was to increase the schooling years in college educational system to seven years. Before that reform, four years was the term in high school, but now, secondary school period is three years and is added to the college system. The aim was to achieve the determined targets in college education (TRNCMNE, 2009).

2. Purpose of the survey

This survey is intended to be guiding for TRNCMNE in understanding how the practice regarding the promotion of failed students to a higher grade with the changes made in class passing regulation in the years between 2013 and 2015 in Northern Cyprus affected TRNCMNE, the ministry's mission and

vision as well as the teachers and parents who are also stakeholders in education. To achieve it, the following questions were asked:

1. What is your opinion about the practice of passing failed students to a higher grade with the changes made in class passing regulation in the years between 2013 and 2015?
2. What are your opinions on any work aimed at fulfilling the learning deficiencies related to the previous grades, when a failed student is allowed to pass to a higher grade?
3. Do you think the opinions of the school administrators, teachers and parents should be taken in the cases of promotion of failed students to a higher grade?
4. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this change that is being made every year on class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of TRNCMNE?

3. Methods

In this survey, qualitative interview method is used. The questions are pre-determined and data are collected with these questions. Interview as a method is used as neither rigid nor flexible but preferred to be flexible between these two margins.

4. Study group

In the survey, sampling method is followed and the study group is formed in accordance with the snowball sampling. As most of the data is to be gathered from teachers, parents, administrators and Ministry officials, we think that the selected sample would be suitable for the purpose of the survey. In this study, a sum of 100 participants is interviewed including administrators, teachers and parents who are on duty in a vocational high school in Lefkosa, Cyprus along with the Ministry officials. Table 1 shows the participants.

Table 1. An example of a table evaluation of social promotion of failed Students from the viewpoints of Ministry Officials, school administrators, teachers and parents

Number of participants	
Ministry officials	1
School administrators	2
Deputy principals	5
Teachers	46
Parents	46
Total	100

5. The data-collecting process

The survey data were collected through interviews made with the participants in their rooms and in their convenient time between 2 and 26 May. The interviews were made face-to-face for about 30 minutes in an average between the surveyor and the participants, in order to specify the participants' views on class passing of the failed students. To collect rich and sound data from the Ministry officials, administrators, teachers and parents; face-to-face interviews are made in a comfortable and friendly environment guided by the surveyor.

6. The data-collecting instrument

The interview questions are chosen to be revealing the likely perceptions of ministry officials, school administrators, teachers and parents regarding the situations that might come out in the process of social promotion of the failed students to a higher grade, through a change made on the class passing regulation. In order to have an internal validity in the interview forms, the questions

were conveyed to two experts and some of the questions were omitted from the question list as the content of the questions were decided to be similar. Then, one ministry official, two administrators, two teachers and two parents were determined and pilot interviews were made with them. This way, it was checked, if the questions were lucid and clear. After that, the answers to the questions were delivered to two different experts and they were asked to control those answers and see, if the questions asked were in fact lucid and clear and contained the relevant topics and provided the required information. These two experts agreed 90% percent on the results. The validity of the questions in concern was confirmed at the end of this survey. As the interview questions were ready to provide the required data, data-collecting process was started. In this survey, data are evaluated according to the content analysis method. The data gathered according to the content analysis were analysed in four stages.

7. Organising data according to the codes and themes

In this stage, the opinions of the participants were explained to the reader in plain language and the views were presented first-hand. Footnotes were used in order to determine which interview notes belonged to which participant and the interview notes were given in quotation marks. Then the interviewee was identified in brackets. The coding system is demonstrated below by an example:

Example-1: '.....'(MEO) MEO: Ministry of Education Official; SA: School Administrator; T: Teacher; SP: Student Parents.

8. Forming data and dimensions

Data gathered from the answers given to the interview questions were examined and divided into meaningful sections. Then, these sections were also divided into meaningful sections in itself and the attained sections were coded with names. After that, the determined codes were categorised and themes were formed. These are:

1. Dimension, social promotion of failed students to a higher grade.
2. Dimension, fulfilling learning deficiencies related to the previous grades.
3. Dimension, taking the opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents in case of grade retention.
4. Dimension, the advantages and disadvantages of the change made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of Ministry of Education.

After the data gathered in this stage were categorised, the opinions of the participants were explained to the reader in plain language and at first hand.

9. Findings

The evaluation of social promotion of failed students to a higher grade through a change made on class passing regulation in terms of the opinions of Ministry officials, administrators, teachers and parents are given below:

9.1. Dimension: social promotion of failed students to a higher grade

The first dimension of the survey was constituted within the scope of the evaluations on passing failed students to a higher grade through a change made on class passing regulation. The aim was to establish thoughts by asking opinions to 100 participants about social promotion that enabled with the changes recently made in the class passing regulation at the end of each academic year. The opinions of the participants are presented in Table 3 with the designated figures and themes.

Table 2. Social promotion of failed students to a higher grade

Theme topics	Ministry official	School administrator	Deputy principal	Teacher	Parent	Percentage rate
I find the practice wrong	1	2	3	41	29	76
I find the practice right		-	1	3	17	21
I am neutral			1	2	-	3
Total	1	2	5	46	46	100

In the matter of social promotion of failed students with a change made on class passing regulation between the years 2013 and 2015; 76% of all the ministry officials, school administrators, teachers and student parents stated that they found the practice wrong.

Ministry Official (M.O.-1.) expressed his opinion as: *'I think passing failed students to a higher grade with a change made on class passing regulation causes serious troubles in two dimensions in the most general sense. The first of this dimension is passing the student to a higher grade without attaining the required gains, skills, behaviors, attitudes and values that are needed to be acquired in the relevant grade. In this case, the students in concern will face getting new gains and that would result in not obtaining the previous gains ever on the one hand and increasing the possibility of failure in the new classes on the other, since they could not attain the prerequisite skills. As to the second dimension, the sentiment of not being treated fairly prevails among the students who deliver outstanding performance or work intensely and hard to have those gains, skills and behaviors.'*

2 Administrators said: *'When a failed student is allowed to pass to a higher grade he/she faces serious difficulties to motivate himself/herself in the new courses. When a failed student passes to a higher grade, he/she poses serious disciplinary problems. I think they set a bad example to those students who study their courses methodically.'* 1 Administrator (O.I.-1), however, stated that he approves the practice: *'I find it right to allow students who cause problems in the school and commit disciplinary actions to graduate somehow and leave the school.'*

90% of the participants who work as teachers in the educational institutions told that they found it wrong to let the failed students pass to a higher grade. 25% of the participants stated in brief that *'when a failed student is allowed to pass to a higher grade, he/she says you decided to make me repeat the class but here I am standing in front of you.'* 35% of the participants said: *'Students say that we do not need to work, we will pass in any case.'* 10% of participants said: *'Students say their teachers that you do not have to fail me, I will pass anyhow, let me not attend make-up exams for nothing.'*

63% of the participant parents who expressed their thoughts about the passing of a failed student to a higher grade put forward that they found the practice wrong. In brief, 37% of the participants stated that *'I find it wrong and unjust', 'my child stopped working because of this practice, they pass in any case, those who are rightful pass the class as well as those who are not.'* 18% of the participants, however, stated that they found the practice right: *'I do not find it right for a student to extend the school one year by repeating classes', 'it is not right for a student to not pass the class because of the courses he/she failed.'*

9.2. Dimension: fulfilling learning deficiencies related to previous grades

The second dimension of the survey was formed within the scope of evaluation of fulfilling the learning deficiencies related to the previous grades. The aim was to establish thoughts by asking opinions to 100 participants on how (un)learnings in previous grades effects learnings in the failed students as they are promoted to a higher grade; thanks to the changes recently made in the class passing regulation at the end of each school year.

The opinions of the participants are presented in Table 3 with the designated figures and themes.

Table 3. Fulfilling learning deficiencies related to previous grades

Theme topics	Ministry official	School administrator	Deputy principal	Teacher	Parent	Percentage rate
Learning deficiencies should be fulfilled	1	-	-	5	26	32
There will be problems in the higher grade in terms of programming	-	2	5	30	5	42
The ministry officials should deal with it	-	-	-	6	10	16
No comment	-	-	-	5	5	10
Total	1	2	5	46	46	100

32% of the participants said that learning deficiencies related to previous grades should be fulfilled when failed students pass to a higher grade, 42% of the participants told that there would be problems in the higher grades in terms of programming, 16% of the participants commented that the Ministry of Education must take measures and 10% of the participant offered no comment in this respect.

According to the findings acquired from the survey, participant Ministry official said that learning deficiencies must be fulfilled in the current class. On the other hand, all the school administrators and 65.2% of teachers think that there would be serious problems in planning such a work aiming to fulfill learning deficiencies of a student related to previous grades.

Ministry Official (M.O.-1.) said that *'Fulfilling a learning deficiency related to a previous grade must be realised in the grade the deficiency occurs, not in the higher grade. In this respect, students in the relevant class should be monitored with trail tests and/or quizzes and the detected deficiencies should be overcome in the considering age group and time with support programmes. But such a practice is not available.'*

A school administrator (O.İ.-2) said *'The lessons taught in the previous grades are difficult to be included to a higher grade teaching program. I think there will be serious troubles in planning as far as Cyprus conditions are concerned.'* Another administrator concurred: *'In order to close the learning gap related to the previous grades out of the current classes, planning needs to be made, which is too difficult to make it happen in Cyprus conditions.'* A participant teacher said: (Ö.-8) *'The students who are promoted to a higher grade without deserving it are failing there either in anyway. Their learning deficiencies prevent them understanding the new courses or making comments and finding correlations. This practice does not help them to achieve these abilities in the higher grades. The idea that they will eventually pass to the next grade anyhow makes the students careless and effortless. A participant teacher, (Ö.-22) asked: 'As the curriculum control in courses and supervision of teachers skills and capabilities carried by the Ministry of Education pose a huge problem, even now that inspection even cannot be made, how will the learning deficiencies related to the previous classes be met in the higher grades?'* Another participant teacher stated (Ö.-13): *'To fulfill the deficiencies in concern, full-time schooling must be applied but in that case a huge chaos would occur as the students in Cyprus come to the schools from long distances and it is obvious it would cause problems in providing student needs such as food, etc. Besides, even a mention of full-time schooling goes around then the syndicates will immediately decide to go on a strike.'*

A participant (Ö.V.-28) said *'As a parent of a student, I think that the psychology of a student who has to repeat his/her class while his/her friends go to a higher grade would be badly influenced. So instead, it would be much more convenient to overcome poor learnings in the next grade.'* Another

participant (Ö.V.-7) also said that *'If my child repeats class, he would be seen and stamped as a lazy student.'*

9.3. Dimension: taking the opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents in cases of grade retention

The third dimension of the survey is constituted to evaluate the thoughts of school administrators, teachers and parents about being consulted on social promotion of retained students to the next grade. The aim was to establish thoughts by asking opinions to 100 participants and whether the opinions of the school administrators, teachers and parents on the social promotion of the failed students to the next grade should be taken.

The opinions of the participants are presented in Table 4 with the designated figures and themes.

Table 4. Taking the opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents in the case of grade retention

Theme topics	Ministry official	School administrator	Deputy principal	Teacher	Parent	Percentage rate
The opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents should be taken.	1	2	4	35	36	78
The opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents should not be taken.	-	-	-	6	-	6
No Comment	-	-	1	5	10	16
Total	1	2	5	46	46	100

On taking the opinions of school administrators, teachers and parents in the case of grade retention, 78% of participants expressed that their opinions should be taken, 6% said their opinions should not be taken and 16% preferred not to comment on the matter.

Ministry Official (B.Y.-1.) said: *'About this matter, the opinions of all educational stakeholders should be taken, by all means; especially teachers, school administrators and parents should be taken into account. However, there is one stakeholder that has always been forgotten: Students... Educational service aims at students but their opinions and their needs have always been ignored. Other people always decide on behalf of them. Even though they are not majors, each student is an individual and should own the right to speak about their future.'*

A participant administrator (O.İ.-3) said: *'Promoting a failed student to the next grade by taking the opinions of teachers and administrators might urge the student to think that those teachers and administrators can sustain negative thoughts about him/her in the next grade and thus he/she should be more careful and try to control his/her behaviours.'*

Another participant administrator (O.İ.-1) also said: *'The school administration's involvement in taking the opinions would diminish possible disciplinary problems.'* A participant teacher (Ö.-40) said: *'Letting teachers express their opinions about their students is in teachers' favour.'* A teacher said: *'Social promotion would positively change the student's opinion about his/her teacher and courses and that would let him/her act more carefully.'* A parent (Ö.V.-19) said: *'I think social promotion would help my child to be more careful and work well.'*

9.4. Dimension: the advantages and disadvantages of the changes made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of Ministry of Education

The fourth dimension of the survey is constituted to evaluate the opinions of survey participants about the advantages and disadvantages of the change made in class passing regulation in terms of

the educational targets of TRNCMNE. The aim was to establish thoughts by asking opinions to 100 participants about the advantages and disadvantages of the change made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of TRNCMNE.

The opinions of the participants are presented in Table 5 with the designated figures and themes.

Table 5. The advantages and disadvantages of the changes made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of Ministry of Education

Theme topics	Ministry official	School administrator	Deputy principal	Teacher	Parent	Percentage rate
Advantages	-	-	-	-	11	11
Disadvantages	1	2	5	41	25	74
No comment	-	-	-	5	10	15
Total	1	2	5	46	46	100

On evaluating the opinions of survey participants about the advantages and disadvantages of the change made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of TRNCMNE, 74% of participants expressed that this practice does not serve the targets of education and creates disadvantages. However, 11% stated that it is advantageous for the targets of education and 15% preferred not to comment on the considering matter.

According to the findings of the survey, 89.1% of all the Ministry officials and school administrators and teachers who shared their comments as well as 54.3% of the parents who shared their comments stated that the considering practice created disadvantage with respect to the targets of TRNC National Education.

Ministry Official (B.Y.-1.) stated that *'The underlying reason of the changes made by the Ministry on the class passing regulation is the overcrowding in the classrooms. From this perspective, it might be perceived as an advantage in terms of preventing it. The aspects I have stated above (especially in the 1st question) might however be interpreted as disadvantage. But the basic thing to be done here is to change the understanding and perspective. For example, class passing, course passing or similar practices are abolished in almost all modern education systems. Exam is nothing but a means that shows if the student gets the relevant required gains. As a matter of fact, in almost all European countries, there is not any 'exams' in schools till the age of 15. Depending on it, I can say that we should change our understanding and approach and prepare regulations allowing students to study with their same age group in addition to education and training practices built on skills, namely 'ability, being able to do' rather than class passing. However, today, there are serious concerns if the students we accept as successful, that is to say those students who pass classes (not with the help of regulation change but those who directly get the right to attend to the next grade through normal ways) are able to do, able to materialise what they have learned. Further to that, we see a lot of students who could not pass the class, who need to repeat the grade do not have so much deficiencies in terms of 'being able to do'. They are characterised to be an 'unsuccessful student' just because their grades in exams are low due to this exam-orientated approach.*

A school administrator (O.İ.-1) explained that *'With this practice, raising a generation with no skills and with unclear aims is opened. But what we expect for a student model is to evaluate the interests and talents of students and equip them with the required information and skills by unearthing them as stated in the National Education Law; help them gain performance habits by working together and in solidarity with them; prepare them for life and ensure them to have a job that would make them, their family and their society happy and prosper; by this way enhance welfare and happiness in their country on the one hand and support and facilitate economic, social and cultural developments in social unity and solidarity; raise them as citizens who wish to make their society and nation a constructive, creative*

and distinguished partner of the contemporary civilization and make perpetual efforts in accordance with that very wish.'

A teacher (Ö.-11) said: *'This change done every year damages our young generations. It is done with daily political motives to earn sympathy of the voters. But what we do not know is that the future of the new generations is put at risk. This has to be stopped.'* A participant teacher (Ö.-35) told: *'Students graduate easily as they are promoted to the next grade without any retention. After the graduation, they can enter into any university they want. In our country, university education is so easy; a very unsuccessful student can go to a medical faculty if he/she wants and becomes a doctor or finishes a law school and becomes a lawyer. Yes, he/she owns a diploma at hand but unfortunately an unqualified one. I, for myself, can trust neither a doctor nor a lawyer. Are these the generations that will take us to the next stage?'*

According to these findings, it might be said that these changes made in the class passing regulation is not a fruitful endeavour aiming at the targets stated in the TRNC National Education Law.

10. Conclusion

The findings gathered from the views of survey participants who are ministry officials, school administrators, teachers and parents of students and from the suggestions regarding the changes made in the class passing regulation and social promotion are presented below, under four dimensions.

10.1. Dimension: social promotion of failed students to a higher grade

Social promotion of failed students to the next grade without gaining the expected behaviours and attitudes in previous grade with the changes made in the class passing regulation might be said to be academically not true and also an unjust practice for those students who have worked hard.

The findings also show that this recent practice has created negative outcomes for school administrators. It can be said that failed students who are promoted to the next grade cause disciplinary problems and set a bad example for successful students.

Most of the teachers working in educational institutions feel uncomfortable with the practice that allows social promotion of failed students to the next grade. Also, teachers are the ones among the stakeholders who suffer the most because of the problems occurring as a result of this practice. It can be said that the practice negatively affected in-class motivation and the desire to work of the students who are successful. Besides, the teachers face problems in terms of class management.

It can also be claimed that most parents find the practice of promoting failed students to the next grade by means of the changes made in the class passing regulation wrong. However, it should be added that 40% of parents approve the practice, saying that class repeating is not right for students because they fail some courses.

10.2. Dimension: fulfilling learning deficiencies related to previous grades

Fulfilling learning deficiencies related to previous grades in a higher grade is not seen possible under Cyprus conditions, but still, accepted to be appropriate trying to fulfill those deficiencies in the higher grade.

According to the findings obtained from the survey, when a failed student is promoted to the next grade who is trying to fulfill their learning deficiencies in that grade would cause serious problems in terms of planning, as part-time schooling prevails in Cyprus conditions. It can also be said that TRNCMNE needs to undertake more responsibilities in terms of educational management and

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supervision. Even if it is decided to implement full time schooling as a solution, it can be claimed that providing transportation and food for students would still be a source of problem.

50% of the participant parents of students think that trying to fulfill learning deficiencies of a failed student in the higher grade is more favourable than having the students repeat their classes. The underlying reason of this approach is that parents are more concerned about psychological exhaustion of students and them being called lazy by others rather than fulfilling their deficiencies. Besides, they think that the students can complete what they lack in the next grade in any case. Also, students who are promoted, according to the parents, would be motivated to be more careful against teachers and school administration.

10.3. Dimension: the advantages and disadvantages of the changes made in class passing regulation in terms of the educational targets of Ministry of Education

The findings of the survey show that the changes made by TRNCMNE in class passing regulation in recent years are perceived to be done in order to prevent a chaos that might occur because of the overcrowding in classrooms as the number of academically failed students increases, rather than following the class repeating and social promotion practices in the contemporary education systems.

100% of school administrators and 89.15% of the teachers who expressed their opinions in addition to 54.3% of parents of students who shared their comments stated that the considering practice damages the targets of TRNC National Education. It can be claimed that these changes made in class passing are not the practices aiming at the targets of TRNC National Education Law and it harms the society and next generations.

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