



## THE IMPACT OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM ON TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACT

*Modernism, as a philosophy that is accepted to have started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has influenced various areas such as economy, politics, technology, literature and specifically education in line with the industrial revolution and enlightenment age. It is generally accepted that modernism has kept its overall effect on the mentioned areas until the end of the World War II and after that, it has started to lose its importance against postmodernism. In general perspective, postmodernism is regarded as a response against the shortcomings of modernism. While modernism is based on rapidness, standardization, change, improvement and objective knowledge as a result of positivism and progressivism in education, postmodernism is based on the theory of relativity, which implies the fact that reality will change according to time, place and culture. This study, in the phenomenological design of qualitative research, aims to find out which of the philosophies (modernism and postmodernism) and in what way, has more or higher impact on the teachers' views about knowledge, culture, values and human nature more. To this end, face to face interviews were conducted with the teachers of Turkish, Science and Social Studies lessons and the data obtained were analysed considering the main pillars of modernism and postmodernism.*

**Keywords:** Modernism, postmodernism, education, teachers' views

### INTRODUCTION

The definition of modernism includes modern thought, character or practice in general sense. In a more specific sense, modernism is defined as the modernist movement consisting of its set of cultural tendencies and cultural movements mainly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, modernism covers the tendencies, activities and products of those who transformed what was traditional and out of date into new social, economic conditions of an enlightened and industrialized world. Therefore, the period of modernism is characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, and advances in science and the social sciences. It is the age of what is new in psychology, philosophy, and politics. In this new approach, modernism can be regarded as a radical break with the past in search of what is new. In fact, this search is accepted to have started in the seventeenth century with its affect on the economy, politics, technology, literature and especially education with the rise of new ideas and theories. The novel ideas led to industrial revolution and enlightenment, upon which the modernism is based. Rationality, sovereignty of the mind, logic, scientific and global truths, systematic thinking and positivism are main characteristics of Modern Age. From this point of view, mind and science is accepted as a tool for progression and it is assumed that objective and universal knowledge can be reached through mind and experiment (Çolak, 2008).

It is generally accepted that modernism has kept its overall effect on the mentioned areas until the end of the World War II and after that, it has started to lose its importance against postmodernism. Since, postmodernism is regarded as largely a reaction against the intellectual assumptions and values of the modern period, many of the doctrines of postmodernism can be described as the direct denial of general philosophical perspectives of modernism. For example, according to postmodernism, reality can change depending on time, place and culture. However, the universality, equality and unity and validity of the same rules in everywhere are the components of modernism. Thus, postmodernism is based on subjectivism or relativism.

The scientific tradition, which was showed up after positivism, has brought up the following questions related to the value of the knowledge (Özden, 1999);

*Is science exact and constant or does it gain meaning according to the individual?*

*Should the knowledge be loaded or should it stimulate comprehension and critical thinking?*

*Should the required knowledge be loaded or should learning be taught?*

*Should the knowledge cover just mathematical and verbal intelligence or kinesthetic, rhythmic and self-esteem should be included?*

**Modernism versus postmodernism: knowledge, culture, values and human being**

- Modernist theory supports the idea that educators are the transformers of the objective knowledge. However, postmodernist theory asserts that teachers should compose the subjective knowledge with their pupils.
- According to the modernist theory, culture is the thing that all students must learn. Students from different cultures must learn the common language and the common culture, and the teachers must transfer the common properties of the society and culture. The unifying culture of modernist society is sovereignty and exploitation. Uniqueness is always based on the dominant culture. According to post modernism, all cultures and languages are equal. The realities of each culture are of equal value (McCallum and Lowery, 2006).
- Modernist theory supports the idea that educators are the authority about values, and students should learn the universal values via teachers. Thus, teachers are responsible for transferring the common values to all students. According to modernism, the most important values are progression and rationalism. However, according to postmodernist theory, education helps students to construct the values on their own culture. While they are constructing and learning their culture, students should put emphasis on tolerance, freedom, difference and emotions, which are the main pillars of postmodern approach to education.
- According to modernism, the nature of the human being is perennial and stable, and it is inherited and it remains objectively. Therefore, IQ tests and similar standardized tests are used to measure the students' intelligence according to the accepted common standards. This is necessary because individuals and society can make progress only by using objective knowledge. According to postmodernism, human being does not have a stable self. Each human being is unique, in a social form and has the potential to change. Thus, education should help individuals to create their own identity and personality. Individuals and society makes progression when they have reached their target (McCallum and Lowery, 2006).

Hicks (2011) defines modernism and postmodernism as in the following chart.

Defining	Premodernism	Modernism	Postmodernism
<b>What is real?</b> (Metaphysics)	Realism: Supernaturalism	Realism: Naturalism	Antirealism
<b>How do I know?</b> (Epistemology)	Mysticism and/or faith	Objectivism: experience & reason	Social subjectivism
<b>What/Who am I?</b> (Human Nature)	Original Sin Subject to God's will Dualism	Tabula rasa; nature/nurture/choice combo Autonomy Integration	Social determinism Group conflict Reductionism
<b>How should I live?</b> (Ethics)	Collectivism: altruism	Individualism	Collectivism: egalitarianism
<b>How should we live?</b> (Politics and Economics)	Feudalism	Liberal capitalism	Socialism
<b>When &amp; Where</b>	Medieval	Enlightenment; current sciences, business, technical fields	Current humanities and related professions

**Aim and Importance of the study**

It is a fact that both modernism and postmodernism has affected the approaches to education. This is clear in the educational philosophies and learning theories clearly. The learning and teaching theories of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism takes its roots mainly from the modernist and postmodernist approaches. Classroom atmosphere, teachers and students' roles, teaching and learning methods have had to change depending on the approach adopted for the curriculum. However, in our age and education system, postmodern paradigm and constructivist education has started to gain importance. In this study, the objective is find out the level of modernist and postmodernist approaches of the teachers considering their views and perspectives on the knowledge, culture, values and human nature.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

In this study, with the aim of investigating teachers' perspectives about modernist and postmodernist paradigm and examining which paradigm is closer to their attitudes, phenomenology, within a qualitative research design, has been used. Within the scope of this study, face to face interviews has been implemented to obtain data so as to determine the views of the teachers from different branches. The aim of the phenomenological research is to understand the experiences in the education process by describing them and to improve the teaching-learning process. For this purpose, experiences formed with every perception, idea or belief in this education process can be the subject of the phenomenological researches (Ersoy, 2016).

### Participants

This study is conducted in 2018-2019 academic year in a secondary school in Karaman city in Turkey. Participants are 7 teachers: 3 Science and Technology, 2 Social Studies, 2 Turkish Lesson. The participants were picked according to the purpose of the study on the condition that are volunteer and enthusiastic to take part in the process.

**Table 1.** Qualities of the Participants

Codes	Experience (Years)	Branch	Sex
S1	18	Socail Sciences	Male
S2	11	Socail Sciences	Female
T1	16	Turkish	Female
T2	12	Türkish	Female
F1	9	Science	Male
F2	10	Science	Male
F3	6	Science	Female

### Data Collection and Analysis

Face to face interview technique was used to data collection. Negotiations were recorded and notes were taken to avoid data loss. Interview form was prepared by doing literature review regarding conceptual framework. The role of the researcher as a participant and moderator outshines in the researches which are conducted in qualitative method. Researchers knew the interviewees because they are colleagues working in the same school. In order to reveal the real thoughts of the teachers participating in the study group, the researchers explicitly explained the purpose of the study and assured that the obtained information would not be used for any other purposes. A mutual trust was ensured between the researchers and the participants and the positive atmosphere was provided to make participants feel relaxed.

In order to prevent data loss, the interview was recorded and the notes were taken to verify either of both. Then, the notes and records were transcribed for analysis by the researchers. The content analysis, one of the most frequently used techniques in qualitative researches, was used to analyze the obtained data. The data obtained by the audio recordings and notes taken at the time of the interview were analyzed. As a result of the conceptual framework and the obtained data, themes were formed and these themes were discussed in the findings and discussion sections. Direct quotations were frequently used to reflect the views of the participants effectively.

## FINDINGS

### Knowledge

While modernist theory supports the idea that educators are the transformers of the objective knowledge, postmodernist theory asserts that teachers should compose the subjective knowledge with their pupils. The teachers of social studies and Turkish indicated that students should construct subjective knowledge together with their teachers. While science teachers



think that students need to construct the knowledge for permanency and individual development, they have stated that there is too much objective and concrete knowledge in their own lessons, and they generally transfer this knowledge to their students in science teaching.

*Teachers of Social Sciences:* Both of the teachers participated in the research stated that students need to structure the subjective knowledge together with their teachers. They said:

*S1: Since the objective knowledge is given to the students as processed data, they do not need to show any effort and this pushes them to rote learning. It is more important for students to structure their knowledge and reach the result for learning to think and persistency. To learn thinking and for permanence, it is more important for students to reach the result by structuring their own knowledge...*

*S2: According to whom is it objective? In a changing world, students must structure the subjective knowledge and put something over it constantly to improve them...*

*Teachers of Turkish:* Both of the teachers think that students need to construct the subjective knowledge together with their teachers. They said:

*T2: In order for the students to be active, to participate in the process and to learn new things, they need to structure the subjective knowledge on their own...*

*T1: What is supposed to be is to students' structure the knowledge and the teachers' guide them, but because of the curriculum, teachers present the objective and literal knowledge. What we do is different from what we should do...*

*Teachers of science:* Teachers participated in the research stated that there is too much objective and concrete knowledge in science lesson. While they think that objective knowledge should be transferred to the students, they have emphasized that students must construct the knowledge for personal development. They said:

*F1: There is concrete information in Science teaching and it is more useful to transfer objective knowledge.*

*F2: For permanency students must structure the knowledge by themselves. It is better for students to learn by their own schemas but teachers should check and give feedback afterwards and if necessary mistakes should be corrected.*

*F3: Students do not forget the knowledge when they learn by discovery, they are learning to question and learning to learn and they improve themselves.*

## **Culture and Values**

In modernist paradigm, students from different cultures must learn the common language and the common cultural values. In this sense, the educators' mission is to transfer the common culture to students. According to the postmodernist paradigm, all cultures and languages are of equal value, and thus, every culture is important and has its own realities and values.

*Teachers of social sciences:* Teachers stated that if a common ground is to be met, the common culture and common language should be used. They also stated that individuals should be open to both change and different cultures. Otherwise, standardized mankind type may emerge. They stated that not all cultures and languages are of equal value. They emphasized that educators should not convey universal values and every child needs to be grown up with the values of his/her own culture, on the other hand they should also learn universal values. They said:

*S1: It makes sense, if they can meet on the common ground... We are the continuation of a multinational Empire like Ottomans. If we managed to live together for centuries, it could be done again... If we handle the matter from global perspective, we can say that what makes the English Language common was the colonist mindset... There is no specific study to make English global language... English may disappear soon and a new language with emoticons may emerge... If there will be a common language without being based on a specific nation, most of the problems will disappear.*

*S2: Students should be open to change. If they are educated according to a common culture, standardized mankind type may emerge and I don't prefer this situation...*

*Teachers of Turkish lesson:* Both of the teachers participated in the research stated that students must learn their cultures effectively. On the other hand, they should not be stranger to other cultures. They also think that not all cultures and languages are of equal value. They said:



*T2: Each student should primarily know his/her own culture very well and then learn other cultures. Students should not only be addicted to their culture...There must be a common language and there is...English seems like a common world language...*

*T1: Universal cultures are important; it is a must for students to move towards universal culture in order to improve their vision...*

**Teachers of science:** The teachers participated in the research stated that students should learn a common language and culture, and that all languages and cultures are not of equal value. They emphasized that educators should convey universal values. They said:

*F2: It is difficult to say that all languages are of equal value for our lesson. I think Latin is superior to all languages when science is regarded as a lesson. Student should learn universal values. Science is life, everything is about Science, universal information should be taught...*

*F3: Students should learn the common language and if we think about the language of science, for example, the symbols are common in the periodic table so they are transferred to every culture...*

### **Human Nature**

While modernist paradigm puts forward that the human nature is steady, stable and objective, and it comes from hereditary, post-modernist paradigm supports that human being doesn't have a stable personality, and human being will and can change as a social creature.

**Teachers of social sciences:** Both of the teachers stated that human nature is not steady and human being is always in a change process. They said:

*S1: We have to believe in change and nothing is permanent but change in the world. Human being doesn't have stable personality, changing and growing always continues.*

*S2: Human nature changes. Most people say that people never change but I don't agree this, there is change.*

**Teachers of Turkish lesson:** Both of the teachers who attended to study stated that human nature is not steady and human being doesn't have a stable personality. They said:

*T1: If we had this interview in the early years of my profession, I would have been different and would have had fixed mindset. It has changed even me a lot in the last 16 years. Human nature is not stable. Of course there are hereditary traits but human being doesn't have a stable personality...*

*T2: If we start off from the expression nothing is permanent but change in the world, we can say that human nature is not steady. People say that the child is father to the man. I don't agree this expression...*

**Teachers of science:** All of the teachers participated in the study stated that human being doesn't have a stable personality. They said:

*F1: If we look at the background of science we see that human nature is not steady. For example, in Medieval Europe, science was in the power of certain groups, and people thought that science could not be renewed or improved. However, scientists emerged in the fields of biology, mathematics and astronomy disproved this idea and that's why Renaissance and Reform movements start...*

*F3: As human beings, we are doing everything that we say we will never do, so humans definitely don't have a steady personality. As an educator, we cannot accept the idea that human nature is stable...*

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

While the teachers of Social Studies and the Turkish Lesson think that the students should construct the subjective knowledge together with their teachers, the Science teachers think that the students should construct the knowledge for permanence and personal development. They also stated that there is too much objective and concrete knowledge in science lessons, and, in science education, they generally transfer the objective information to the students. Therefore, while Turkish and Social Studies teachers have postmodernist perspective about knowledge that students will have, Science teachers have postmodernist perspectives within the context of thinking, but they adopt modernist perspectives for their lessons.

Social Studies teachers stated that if a common ground is to be met, common culture and common language should be used also individuals should be open to change and different cultures. Science teachers think that students should learn a



common language and culture. Turkish teachers stated that students should primarily learn their own culture but they shouldn't be a stranger to other cultures.

All of the teachers stated that cultures and languages aren't of equal level and value. They stated that every individual should be educated with their own cultural values but they should also learn universal ones. Therefore, while teachers of Social Studies handle the culture with a modernist manner, they handle the values with postmodernist manner. Teachers of Turkish are closer to the postmodernist paradigm about culture and value. The Science teachers displayed a modernist manner about culture and value.

All of the teachers participated in the study in Turkish, Science and Social Studies branches stated that human nature isn't steady, it is always in a change process and human being doesn't have a stable personality. Therefore, all of the teachers participated in the study adopt the postmodernist perspective about human nature more.

In conclusion, to make a clear cut separation between modernist and postmodernist teachers seems to be impossible. Thus, a educators, it is better to expect teachers to know all about modernism and postmodernism so that they can be aware of what they are doing and what they are to do in the classroom while teaching and they should consider that the students they address to cannot be bi separated and discriminated as modern and postmodern. The challenges of this mixture of confusion can be a new or different scope for future studies.

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