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# EVALUATION OF PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF AGENDA SETTING THEORY

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## Abstract

*In today's world, where the internet-based digitalization process has gained momentum, increasing the quality of learning in the educational process can be achieved by associating the transferred achievements with current topics and news in written and visual media by the teacher of the course, thus increasing the attention level of the learners in the learning environment. This situation, which shows the impact of the agenda on the educational process, increases the awareness level of the learners regarding the time period in which they live, the environment and the events that occur. In this direction, this study aimed to identify and evaluate the practices in the education process in the context of agenda setting, in line with teachers' opinions. This study, which was carried out with the phenomenology pattern, one of the qualitative research methods, was conducted with 30 teachers working in public schools. The data of the research were collected with a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained was analyzed with content analysis. As a result of the study, it was determined that the practical reflections of the activities prepared by the teachers based on the agenda setting theory were not sufficient in the context of learning.*

**Keywords:** *Agenda setting, educational practice, phenomenological design*

## Introduction

Important developments in science and technology from the past to the present have brought humanity to a new era. This period, shaped by science and technology, differs from the previous periods in many contexts. This period, especially with the developments in communication technologies, has made geographical distance, which is the biggest obstacle in front of information and communication, a relative concept. Today, people living in different continents have almost equal opportunities to reach the same news or information. This effect of technology, which wraps the whole world like a spider web, is increasing day by day. This situation can be associated with the dynamic structure of communication technologies. As a matter of fact, the functions of mass media, whose primary function was to inform and inform,

have diversified over time. Today, the media has a function that can direct and influence the feelings and thoughts of the individual regarding various facts and events. As a matter of fact, Bernard Cohen's (1963) saying "The media is successful in telling us what to think about, not what to think" is about this issue. The dominance of the media over individuals also paved the way for its emergence as a political power. The ability of political power to control and direct individuals is in the form of influencing the individual with the agenda they set. Every day, individuals are exposed to an artificial agenda determined by pressure groups and served by the media. This situation causes the individual to perceive that the agenda and content served are adopted and approved by the majority of the society. In the face of this situation, the individual avoids expressing their feelings and thoughts, and over time, he becomes a passive follower of the agenda. This issue has been under the lens of communication researchers for nearly half a century. Communication researchers address this process, which has not been tested empirically but includes causal relationships, under the title of agenda-setting theory. Under this title, the researchers included the general hypothesis of agenda setting, the importance of the hypothesis, the functional aspect and the effect aspect. Considering the impact of the media in the context of the individual and society, it can be said that it is important to understand this theory.

#### *Literature Review*

Agenda setting theory, which is accepted as a criterion in the evaluation of applications in the educational process, has an important place in today's world, where the use of digital products is common. With this awareness, the scope of this theory is detailed in the study carried out by the researchers.

Agenda setting theory is based on the understanding that people are informed thanks to the information given by the mass media and that people learn which events are more important with the agenda set by the media. Agenda setting; It is based on the understanding that the perception of the members of the society about the importance of certain issues is shaped by the importance they attach to that issue by the means of communication (McQuail & Windahl, 1997; Obiaje, 2022; Wanta, 1997). With the rapid changes and developments experienced with globalization in recent years, the digitalization process and social media not only change the traditional communication environment but also bring new changes in agenda setting (Tural, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). This situation reveals the influence of mass media and media in agenda setting. As a matter of fact, agenda setting theory has an important place in mass media research and practices (Obiaje, 2022). In the 21st century, the media and the mass media, which are influential on agenda setting, make their impact on individual and social life intensely felt and play the role of the main determinant of social change that also directs the life of the individual. Such a situation brings with it an increasing interest in determining the effect of mass media on individuals and society. In addition, it provides some concepts to come to the fore in explaining the effect of the media shaped by the mass media on the individual and the total. Agenda setting is among these concepts. This concept is often used synonymously with the concept of forming public opinion. But the two terms have different meanings. In this respect, revealing the difference between the two concepts may be useful in the context of understanding the concept of agenda setting.

The concept of public opinion is a concept that has been tried to be defined by many researchers. As a matter of fact, the American scientist Harwood Childs reviewed all written sources in 1965 and compiled about fifty definitions of the concept of public opinion (Neumann, 1998). From this date to the present, the number of definitions has increased in parallel with the influence of public opinion on individual and social life. When the ethnic origin of the concept is examined, it is seen that it is derived from the words *publicus* and *opinion* in Latin and entered western languages, while it is expressed with the words "public opinion" in English

(Atabek, 1998). When the words public and vote that make up the concept are examined, it can be said that they essentially reflect the content of the concept. Namely, the concept of public is used to mean "open to everyone", and the concept of vote is used to mean "common opinion" (Neumann, 1998).

When the broad meaning of the concept is examined; It can be defined as the "general judgment" within a certain period about a subject that concerns the public. However, this definition does not mean that all members of the society have reached a consensus on the relevant issue. As a matter of fact, the structure of the society that includes different groups and the fact that each group has different attitudes and values makes it possible to disagree on the current issue. In a narrow sense, public opinion is the average of the ideas that social groups or individuals who have the opportunity to make their voices heard by means of mass media want to convey to the political authorities (Daver, 1993). When the formation of public opinion is examined, it can be mentioned that the emergence of an event or situation that may be perceived as a problem by some groups in the society, the formation of an opinion to evaluate this situation or event, the formation of attitudes in line with these views, and the transformation of attitudes into behavior (Vural, 1999). In line with this process, it can be said that attitudes and verbalized opinions are an important factor in forming public opinion. Attitudes, defined as affect for or against a psychological object (Thurstone, 1931), embody positive or negative reaction. The individual develops a cognitive, emotional and behavioral response to a situation, event or object on the axis of his attitude. Opinions, which can be defined as the verbal expression of attitudes, focus on the uncertainties and problems in a particular situation, unlike attitudes. In this context, they have a more rational structure than attitudes (Oskay, 1974).

The concept, expressed in English as "Agenda Setting", is considered as the first step in creating public opinion. The news media have a significant impact on drawing public attention to issues that its members consider important. However, the news media makes an effort to attract the attention of the public to certain aspects of the issue rather than to the whole. This effort is called the agenda-setting role of the news media (Salman, et al. 2016). In this context, agenda setting is the creation of public awareness and interest about issues highlighted by the news media on the public agenda (Obiora et al., 2024). Unlike in the process of forming public opinion, there is no change in the attitude or behavior of the individual in agenda setting. In this process, it is only possible to raise awareness about a certain situation, phenomenon or event in the individual. It can be said that the transformation of this awareness created in the individual into an attitude and the observation of behavior change in this direction constitute the content of the public opinion formation process.

In the context of agenda setting theory, the effort to create individual and social awareness is one of the most prominent practices in education, as in all areas of life. In particular, the use of internet-based digital tools in the learning environment has brought about the reflections of this theory. Social networks, which have initiated a new agenda-setting process by being incorporated into the traditional agenda-setting structure, are increasingly influencing the agenda of the media and politics with the advantage provided by their structural features (Güngör, 2021). It is also stated that social media significantly affects this theory (Gilardi et al., 2022). The individual and social orientation of the mass media, which constitutes the media and whose influence is increasing day by day in all areas of life, has more negative but also positive effects. These positive and negative effects can occur by making use of the current products offered by the media during the education process. Determining the direction of these effects according to the purpose of use depends on the teacher, who is the lecturer of the course. Therefore, in today's world, it can be said that the agenda-setting theory is important for the individual whose whole life, including education, is directed by the media, to become an individual with high awareness by making the best use of this situation as a conscious learner. In this study, which was carried out to determine the reflections of this theory in the education process, evaluations

regarding the positive and negative reflections of agenda setting were included in the study. As a matter of fact, since teachers aim to raise active citizens who follow the agenda and have social awareness, this study is expected to contribute to the literature with teachers' opinions in the context of agenda setting theory of practices in the education process.

The study sought answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are your thoughts about the impact of agenda setting theory on practices in the education process in Turkey?
- 2) What are your thoughts about the contribution of courses taught with practices and activities based on agenda setting theory to the learning process of students?
- 3) What do you think are the issues based on agenda setting that cause perception illusions in the education process?
- 4) What are your suggestions regarding the preparation and use of agenda-setting-based activities and practices in the lessons during the education process?

## Research Methodology

In this study, the practices in educational processes were evaluated based on teacher opinions within the context of agenda-setting theory. As a research method, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research approaches, was employed.

### *Research Design*

This study was designed as a phenomenological research. Phenomenological design focuses on situations that we are aware of but do not have in-depth and detailed knowledge. Facts can appear in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, concepts and situations in the world we live in. Phenomenology is a sufficient ground for research on subjects that are not completely known but not fully understood (Göçer, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Koçoğlu, et al., 2022). In this model, the researcher deals with the personal (subjective) experiences of the participants and explores the perceptions of individuals and the meanings they attribute to events. Phenomenology is a descriptive research method. Therefore, it only aims to describe the facts and does not generalize (Koopman & Koopman, 2017). In this study, the research was designed with a phenomenological pattern as it was aimed to reveal the detailed opinions of teachers regarding this situation by evaluating the practices in the educational process in the context of agenda setting theory and teachers' opinions.

### *Participants*

The study group of this research consists of 30 teachers. 30 teachers working in public schools in Malatya and Elâzığ provinces in Turkey. The data collection process continued until sufficient and satisfactory information was obtained, and the study group was completed after the interview with the 30th participant. Ten of these teachers work at primary school, 10 at secondary school and 10 at high school level. The purposive sampling method was used in the determination of the study group due to the condition of working in public schools. The teachers who contributed to the study with their opinions participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Before the study, the participants were informed about the subject by the researchers.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the teachers forming the study group are as follows:

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Teachers Forming the Working Group*

Characteristic	Description
Gender	18 female, 12 male
Age Range	25-50 years
Professional Experience	5-25 years
Education Level	All teachers have at least a bachelor's degree, 12 teachers have a master's degree

### *Data Collection Instrument*

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used to collect the study data in order to evaluate the practices in the education process in Turkey in line with the opinions of the teachers on the agenda setting axis. While developing the semi-structured interview form, questions related to the research topic were determined first. Focused questions that are easy to understand, open-ended, avoiding guidance and multidimensionality were selected and arranged logically (Koçoğlu & Egüz, 2019; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In order to ensure the content validity of the interview form used in the study, the opinions of the measurement and evaluation experts working at the İnönü University Faculty of Education were taken. It was stated that the form prepared by the experts was suitable for the purpose of the research and the questions were understandable. In addition, when the form was examined in the context of the content of the questions, it was concluded that it was in a balanced way. In this context, it can be said that the form as a whole and the questions in the form serve the purpose and represent the content of the subject. In line with the opinions and suggestions of these experts, the semi-structured interview form was given its final form. The form consisting of 4 questions was applied and the obtained data were analyzed.

### *Data Analysis*

In this research, the data obtained through semi-structured interviews were subjected to content analysis to systematically examine the frequency and patterns of themes within the responses. This method was selected to facilitate a structured yet flexible analysis of qualitative data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the participants' insights and experiences. This technique helps identify the main themes and sub-themes of the research, thereby aiding in understanding the participants' experiences and thoughts. The data collection process was conducted through face-to-face interviews with the selected participants. These interviews were carried out using a pre-prepared semi-structured interview form. This form contains open-ended questions that allow participants to freely express their thoughts on specific topics. Each interview was conducted in an environment where the participant felt comfortable and secure, and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

First, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into written form. Then, these transcripts were thoroughly examined, and the main themes and sub-themes were identified. During the theme identification process, participants' views were grouped into specific categories. Each theme was created based on the similarities in the participants' responses. The identified themes and sub-themes were visualized using tables created in a computer environment. These tables categorize the number of participants discussing the themes and similar views into four categories (O.1, O.2, O.3, and O.4 Opinion and ranking number). This approach clearly illustrates the intensity and diversity of participant views on a particular theme.

The analysis process was conducted independently by the researcher and two experts in the field of social studies at Fırat University and İnönü University. Consensus and discrepancies between the experts and the researcher were identified for each theme. This process played a critical role in ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the evaluated themes. Using the formula provided by Miles and Huberman (1994), the agreement rate in the analyses was calculated to be 89%. This high level of concordance significantly enhances the reliability and validity of the analyses.

## Research Results

### *The Situation Regarding the Effect of Agenda Setting in Educational Practices*

The answers given by teachers regarding the impact of agenda setting theory on educational practices were analyzed and the findings obtained are given in Table 2 in the form of sub-themes.

**Table 2**  
*Teachers' Perceptions of the Reflections of Agenda Setting in Education*

Theme 1: Reflections of Agenda Setting in Educational Practices		
	Sub-themes	<i>f</i>
The positive impact of agenda setting theory in educational practices	O.1. Program change	3
	O.2. Agenda-based attention	7
	O.3. Digitalization and virtualization in education	8
	O.4. Media-based sampling	6
The negative impact of agenda setting theory in educational practices	O.5. Content immutability	2
	O.5. Prejudice	4

Considering the Table 2 containing the findings obtained from the answers given by the teachers who constituted the study group to the first question in the semi-structured interview form, it is seen that remarkable findings have been reached. In particular, the fact that the teachers had different opinions on the subject revealed the diversity in the findings. It is observed that the most important finding that comes to the forefront is the evaluation of "digitalization and virtualization in education" as a reflection of the agenda setting theory in the education process. The opinions of the teachers, which exemplify Table 2, in which many similar important findings were obtained, are given below.

*"I didn't know what agenda-setting theory was until I talked to you. This has made me very confident in my assessment of its effects on the educational process. However, I would like to answer your question based on what I heard from you and read on the internet. I am a five-year primary school Life Studies teacher. While explaining the subjects to the children in my class, I sometimes make transfers by imitating the characters of the TV series. I think that this situation attracts their attention more and has an effect on their listening to the lesson. That's why I believe that this theory definitely has an impact on educational practices." (Primary School, Female Teacher, 9)*

*"I think that this theory should definitely be used in education. Contrary to our country, I see that it is used in the countries that make up the western world. I think it has no effect on our education system because we have been taught the same content for years with similar methods without changing it." (High School, Male Teacher, 4)*



### *Contribution of Agenda Setting Theory to Educational Practices*

The answers given by the teachers regarding the contribution of the practices and activities prepared on the basis of the agenda setting theory to the educational practices were analyzed and the findings obtained are given in Table 3 in the form of sub-themes.

**Table 3**  
*Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Contribution of Agenda Setting to Learning*

Theme 2: Contribution of Agenda Setting in the Learning Process		
	Sub-themes	<i>f</i>
Positive impact of the learning process	O.1. Media assisted learning	3
	O.2. Individual learning and repetition	7
	O.3. Creating a multi-learning environment	7
	O.4. Priority and importance in learning	3
	O.5. Organized and cooperative learning	4
Negative impact on the learning process	O.6. Cognitive transfer and Guidance	4
	O.7. Illusion of perception	2

When the findings obtained as a result of the content analysis and given in Table 3 are examined, it is observed that the teachers who make up the study group differ under the themes of "Yes" and "No" in terms of influencing the learning of learners by the practices and activities prepared on the basis of agenda setting theory and used in education. Particularly, it is seen that the sub-themes expressing that agenda-setting-based activities offer the opportunity of "individual learning and repeating what they have learned and a multi-learning environment that enables many senses to be active in learning" come to the fore. Including the sample opinions of the teachers who contributed to the study with their perspectives on the relevant findings may contribute to the process of making sense of the sub-themes. These views are exemplified below.

*"I think that the practices and activities prepared on the basis of the agenda-setting theory have a negative impact on the learning process of students, rather than contributing to them. Due to this theory, it is common for us to encounter a learner mass in classrooms that perceives what I teach in class differently and as directed by the media. I think this situation causes an illusion of perception in students."* (Middle School, Female Teacher, 25)

*"As a social studies teacher, the use of media and mass media in learning environments can provide concrete, meaningful and permanent learning with the acquisition-based transfers in the programs. That's why I think agenda-setting theory based on media-based transmissions is important in the learning process."* (Primary School, Male Teacher, 30)

#### *The Situation Regarding the Issues Caused by Illusions of Perception in the Education Process*

The answers given by the teachers regarding the agenda-setting-based issues that are effective in the illusion of perception during the education process are analyzed and the findings are given in Table 4 in the form of sub-themes.

**Table 4**  
Teachers' Perceptions About the Issues that Cause the Illusion of Perception

Theme 3: Agenda Setting in Education and the Illusion of Perception	
Sub-themes	<i>f</i>
O.1. Subjects with advertisement content	6
O.2. Political issues	8
O.3. Psychological issues	3
O.4. Socio-cultural issues	3
O.5. Value-based issues	6
O.6. Historical issues	4

Considering the issues that cause the illusion of perception on the students in the learning-teaching process of the agenda-setting theory in education, it is understood that the members of the study group do not have similar perceptions about the theory. This situation can be seen in Table 4, which causes the diversity of the subject on the illusion of perception. Examples of teachers' views on this situation are given below.

*“I think it is very important to convey the contents prepared in line with the principle of timeliness in the education process in a meaningful way. As a secondary school teacher, I think this importance has increased even more for my level. In line with the agenda-setting theory, which is based on the transmission of the mass media on the basis of this principle, students who frequently use written, visual and social media in their studies related to the course, in my opinion, have more illusions about historical issues. The TV series that have been in the visual media for the last few years are the best examples of this.”* (Middle School, Male Teacher, 1)

*“Socio-cultural issues that cause cultural degeneration and alienation are at the forefront of the issues that cause the illusion of perception in the transfers based on agenda-setting in the education process. The transfer of these subjects in a way that is disconnected from the geography and social structure may cause the learners to become lonely.”* (High School, Male Teacher, 20)

#### *Suggestion Regarding Agenda-Setting-Based Activities and Practices Status*

The answers given by teachers regarding the use of agenda-setting-based activities and practices in lessons during the education process were analyzed, and the findings obtained are given in Table 5 in the form of sub-themes.

**Table 5**  
*Perceptions Including Teacher Suggestions for Agenda-Setting Activities*

4th Theme: Agenda Setting in Education and Teacher Suggestions	
Sub-themes	<i>f</i>
O.1. It should not contain any redirects	10
O.2. It should be suitable for the level of the student	8
O.3. Must be suitable for gains	4
O.4. Based on attractive visuals	3
O.5. Using for concretization	5



Considering the findings in Table 5 obtained based on the opinions of the members of the working group, it proves that agenda-setting theory-based practices and activities can be used functionally in the education process. It is seen that the opinions presented by the members of the study group as suggestions are grouped under five different sub-themes. Considering the findings given as sub-themes, it is observed that "applications and activities do not include orientation" come to the fore. In Table 5, sample opinions regarding the findings consisting of suggestions are given below.

*"The most important thing to consider when using agenda-based activities and practices in the education process is that these activities and practices do not cause learners to mislead. I think that activities and practices based on misdirection cause students to learn outside the course and outside the learning outcome."* (Primary School, Male Teacher, 3)

*"The most important step that should be taken as a priority in the use of activities and practices related to all the theories used in the education process, especially determining the target, is to be suitable for the learning outcomes of the course."* (High School, Female Teacher, 7)

## Discussion

In the study, important conclusions have been reached that the reflections on the use of applications and activities prepared based on agenda-setting theory in education vary. It has turned out that the theory-based activities prepared do not cause any practical reflection in Turkey in terms of learning. This situation can be explained as the theory being based on transfer in a cognitive sense, as opposed to activities based on behavior change. This result obtained in the study is similar to the statement "agenda setting theory is based on verbal information transfer and awareness" emphasized in the study conducted by Maxwell and Donald (1993). In addition, the fact that the activities prepared in accordance with this theory do not reveal learning-based reflections due to the "immutability of the transmitted content" constitutes another of the important results achieved in the study. This result was obtained by Rogers and Dearing (2012) in their study, the content does not change in the transfers related to the general topics of agenda setting theory, but the transfer methods of the content vary according to the vehicle used, showing similarities with the statement.

Another conclusion obtained from the research is that teachers have the idea that activities based on agenda setting support media-assisted learning, individual learning, creating a multi-learning environment and cooperative learning. individuals born in the 2000s and later are called Generation Z. Generation Z is a generation with a high awareness of the developments in the country and in the world (Kavalcı & Ünal, 2016). In this case, it is effective for the relevant generation to closely follow both traditional and new media tools. Indeed, digital platforms have reduced the threshold-keeping power of traditional media and potentially increase the capacity of various actors to shape the agenda (Gilardi et al., 2022). In this context, it is important that the agenda, which is shaped by both traditional and new media tools, is included in the educational process. In this context, it is said that activities based on agenda setting will have an impact on creating a multi-learning environment that allows many senses to be active in learning with individual and cooperative learning indicated by teachers.

Another result of the research is that a significant part of the teachers see advertising content and political issues among the agenda-setting-based topics that cause perception Deceptions in the educational process. The media's agenda is effective in determining the public's agenda. The agenda is shaped by the media. However, the agenda set by the media can serve the purpose of certain institutions, individuals and commercial enterprises, and artificial agendas are formed. This situation causes perception illusions in the individual. Ads and political issues are influenced by them. Advertisements can be defined as sales through the

media. The main purpose of advertising is to increase sales (Pektaş, 1987). For this purpose, various products are advertised through the media. However, the product presented by the media in the advertisements may not have the specified qualities. It can lead to perception illusions in political issues and actors determined by the media. As a matter of fact, the media sets the agenda, the media influences politics, economy, culture, etc. are guided by their prejudices on the issues (McCombs, 2005). This situation can be related to the approach of threshold keepers, who have an important influence on setting the agenda, to political issues by taking into account their personal values, the interests of the media organization to which they are affiliated and their focus on political power (Atabek, 1998). In this context, it is said that it is usual for teachers to see advertising content and political topics among the agenda-setting-based topics that cause perception deceptions in the educational process.

It constitutes another result of the research that applications and activities based on agenda setting theory can be used functionally in the educational process. In this context, an important part of teachers attach importance to the fact that activities and practices based on agenda setting do not contain guidance and are appropriate for the student level. The basic assumption of the agenda-setting theory is that the media guides the individual and determines the limits of how much he will think about what (Murdock, 1975). In this context, it is said that the teachers' opinion that agenda-setting-based activities should not guide students is correct. At the same time, activities based on agenda setting should be appropriate for the cognitive and affective characteristics of the students, in other words, it should be appropriate for the student. It can be said that this situation is limited in that it affects the student's participation in relevant activities and practices.

## Conclusions and Implications

In this study, which is based on the evaluation of the practices in the education process in the context of agenda setting theory, remarkable results have been reached. These results, which consist of the findings in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, contain important clues regarding the use of agenda setting theory in education. In the study, activities and practices based on agenda setting; Remarkable results have been reached that students contribute to the learning process, that they cause illusions of perception in the learning process, that these illusions emerge under various topics, and that the reflections of the agenda setting theory in the practices in the education process in Turkey.

As a result, it is said that the practical reflections of the activities prepared based on the theory of agenda setting in Turkey in the context of learning are not sufficient. Despite this, teachers have the opinion that it is important for the agenda-setting theory, which was put forward half a century ago, to find its own place in education. In this context, it is clear that there will be positive sides to the functional use of agenda-setting-based practices and activities in education. However, it is important to take into account some aspects, such as the student's level, age and course achievements, when applying these practices and activities in classes.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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