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### Assessment, Evaluation, and Guidance Policies in Primary Schools: An International Comparative Review

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#### Summary

This study compares assessment, evaluation, and guidance policies implemented at the primary school level from an international perspective and offers implications for Turkey. Examples from Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands, England, Poland, France, Japan, and Singapore have been examined. These countries were selected due to their high rankings in international student achievement (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and their prominent guidance policies.

The findings indicate that guidance approaches are closely related to the countries' cultural and social structures. Germany stands out with its early academic guidance model, South Korea with its centralized placement system, the Netherlands with flexible transition opportunities, England with its structure based on family involvement, and Japan and Singapore with an emphasis on character development and project-based learning.

In Turkey, there is no central guidance at the end of primary school. Placement is made only according to the address-based system to the nearest mainstream middle school, or, upon request, to an imam hatip middle school, private middle school, or "PROJECT" imam hatip middle schools that admit students through academic-based exams. The transition to high school is largely dependent on the High School Entrance Exam (LGS). This situation leads to a shortage of qualified workforce due to a lack of vocational guidance. The Turkish Century Education Model (TCEM) aims to address this shortcoming by focusing on a formative assessment approach and aims to monitor students' cognitive, affective, and social development in a process-based manner.

As a result, it is recommended that Turkey's guidance policies be reorganized based on cooperation among families, teachers, and schools, and on a structure grounded in skills and values. In this respect, TCEM presents an opportunity for transformation that is compatible with modern educational paradigms.

**Keywords:** assessment and evaluation, guidance policies, formative assessment, primary education, Turkish Century Education Model

#### Özet

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Bu arařtırmada, ilkokul d zeyinde uygulanan  l me-deęerlendirme ve y nlendirme politikaları uluslararası bir bakıř aısıyla karřılařtırmıř ve T rkiye iin ıkarımlar sunulmuřtur. Almanya, G ney Kore, Hollanda, İngiltere, Polonya, Fransa, Japonya ve Singapur  rnekleri incelenmiřtir. Bu  lkeler, uluslararası  đrenci bařarı sıralamalarında (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS)  st d zeyde yer almaları ve y nlendirme politikalarıyla  ne ıkmaları nedeniyle seilmiřtir.

Bulgular, y nlendirme yaklařımlarının  lkelerin k lt rel ve toplumsal yapılarıyla yakından iliřkili olduęunu g stermektedir. Almanya erken akademik y nlendirme modeliyle, G ney Kore merkezieti yerleřtirme sistemiyle, Hollanda esnek geiř imk nlarıyla, İngiltere aile katılımına dayalı yapısıyla, Japonya ve Singapur ise karakter geliřimi ve proje tabanlı  đrenme anlayıřıyla dikkat ekmektedir.

T rkiye’de ilkokul sonunda merkezi bir y nlendirme bulunmamaktadır. Sadece adrese dayalı sisteme g re en yakın normal eęitim veren ortaokul, isteęe g re imam hatip ortaokulu,  zel ortaokullar ya da akademik temelli sınavla  đrenci alan “PROJE” imam hatip ortaokullarına yerleřtirme yapılmaktadır. Liseye geiř s reci ise b y k  l de Liseye Giriř Sınavı (LGS)’na dayalıdır. Bu durum, mesleki y nlendirme eksiklięi nedeniyle nitelikli iř g c  aıęına yol amaktadır. T rkiye Y zyılı Maarif Modeli (TYMM), bu eksiklięi gidermeyi hedefleyerek biimlendirici deęerlendirme yaklařımını merkeze almakta ve  đrencinin biliřsel, duyuřsal, sosyal geliřimini s re temelli biimde izlemeyi amalamaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, T rkiye’nin y nlendirme politikalarının aile,  đretmen ve okul iř birlięine dayalı, beceri ve deęer temelli bir yapıda yeniden d zenlenmesi  nerilmektedir. TYMM, bu y n yle aędař eęitim paradigmasıyla uyumlu bir d n ř m fırsatı sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:**  l me ve deęerlendirme, y nlendirme politikaları, biimlendirici deęerlendirme, ilkokul eęitimi, T rkiye Y zyılı Maarif Modeli

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## Introduction

It is possible to divide the elements of an educational program into four categories: learning outcomes, content, teaching-learning process, and assessment. Assessment and evaluation practices in education systems not only determine students’ academic achievement but also play a critical role in shaping their future educational pathways. Guidance provided at the primary school level has wide-ranging impacts, from an individual’s career development to the notion of social equality. For this reason, countries have developed different guidance policies in line with their own cultural values, social needs, and economic goals (OECD, 2018). According to international comparisons, each country’s post-primary school guidance policies are closely linked to its educational philosophy, social values, and vision for development (EURYDICE, 2022). The main reason for selecting Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands, England, Poland, France, Japan, and Singapore as examples within the scope of this study is that these countries

are currently at the top of international student achievement rankings (such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and draw attention with their educational policies. These countries provide examples of successfully implementing assessment, evaluation, and guidance processes within different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. For instance, Germany is known for its strong vocational guidance system, while South Korea and Japan stand out for their emphasis on discipline and academic achievement. The Netherlands and England are notable for their flexible and student-centered guidance structures, whereas Singapore displays an innovative approach to assessment and evaluation processes with its project-based learning philosophy (Bakioğlu, 2014; Ekinçi, 2010; State University, 2022). Therefore, in this study, the assessment, evaluation, and guidance policies at the primary school level of these eight countries have been comparatively examined, and implications have been presented for Turkey. This comparison aims both to analyze successful practices at the international level and to discuss strategies compatible with the vision of the Turkish Century Education Model (TCEM) and provide suggestions.

### **Rationale for the Selection of Countries in the Study**

In this research, the inclusion of Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands, England, Poland, France, Japan, and Singapore in the study was based on multidimensional and theoretically grounded criteria. Primarily, these countries have consistently ranked at the top in international student achievement assessment studies (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) for many years and offer unique and institutionalized models in terms of assessment, evaluation, and guidance policies. This situation demonstrates that the selected countries are suitable for comparative analysis not only with their levels of academic achievement but also with the structural educational policies that support this success.

Secondly, countries were selected to represent the diversity of guidance approaches implemented at the primary school level. Germany and the Netherlands emphasize academic selectivity through guidance models based on early and multiple school types. South Korea and England adopt an exam-supported guidance approach through residence-based placement and centralized assessment practices. Poland and France prefer low exam-pressure models focused on teacher observation and developmental assessment. Japan and Singapore, on the other hand, represent holistic systems that integrate academic achievement with character development, values education, and project-based learning. This diversity is significant in demonstrating that guidance policies cannot be explained by a single pedagogical perspective.

Thirdly, the selected countries provide examples that use different policy instruments in their assessment and evaluation processes, such as the teacher's role, parental involvement, centralized exams, flexible transition opportunities, and skill-based evaluation, each with different weights. In this respect, the countries allow for a comparative analysis of the pedagogical, administrative, and socioeconomic dimensions of the guidance processes.

Finally, the selection of countries was made by considering comparability and the potential for policy transfer in the context of Turkey. Some of the selected countries implement early guidance models, some implement late guidance or models that restrict guidance; thus, they offer alternative or complementary policy options to the exam-based guidance approach currently debated in Turkey. In this framework, the countries included in the research were

determined through purposive and intentional sampling, both because they represent international best practices and because they present structures comparable to the skill-based assessment and evaluation approach of the Turkish Century Education Model.

### **Country-Based Analyses**

#### *Germany: Strict Guidance Based on Academic Achievement*

In Germany, post-primary school guidance is a practice that reflects the selectivity of the education system. At the end of 4th grade, students are directed to one of the Gymnasium, Realschule, or Hauptschule types based on teacher opinion, achievement grades, and social development reports (Çakır, 2019). While this system allows early recognition of individual talents, it is criticized because socioeconomic differences become decisive in placement. In recent years, Germany has begun to develop integrative school models to increase equal opportunity.

#### *South Korea: Centralized and Residence-Based System*

The South Korean education system is notable for its centralized structure and high academic standards. With the abolition of middle school entrance exams in 1971, an address-based placement model was adopted (Özbek, 2023). This model allocates students to public schools close to their homes by lottery. However, the existence of private schools perpetuates socioeconomic differences. Intense competition in education increases not only students' motivation for achievement but also their stress levels (Wise, 2023).

#### *Netherlands: Hybrid Model and Flexibility*

The guidance process in the Netherlands is flexible and multi-dimensional. At the end of 8th grade, results of the CITO exam and teacher assessments are considered together (State University, 2022). Students are guided into VMBO (vocational), HAVO (general), or VWO (university preparatory) tracks. The Dutch system allows students to progress to higher qualification levels after graduation through a flexible transition system ("stacking"). This structure balances both academic and vocational pathways.

#### *England: Parental Involvement and the Role of Local Authorities*

In England, the assessment process is based on parental involvement. Students are evaluated with SATs exams in years 2 and 6 of primary school. For the transition to secondary school, families state their preferences, and placements are made by local authorities (OECD, 2018). While this model encourages active parental involvement in education, limited school quotas can lead to regional inequalities in opportunity. In recent years, education policies have focused on the principles of 'school choice freedom' and 'performance-based accountability.'

#### *Poland: Teacher-Focused Assessment*

In Poland, students are assessed by teachers in the first three years of primary school through observation, behavioral analysis, and individual development reports. National exams are used only for statistical data purposes (Blamire, 2007). This system prevents early labeling of students. However, the limited presence of nationally standardized criteria can create consistency problems in teacher assessments. In recent years, education policies have focused on supporting the professional development of teachers.

#### *France: Observation-Based Assessment and Grade Repetition*

In France, assessment in the first three years of primary school is largely observation-based. Written exams begin in the 4th year. Individual development files are prepared for students and shared with teachers and parents (EURYDICE, 2022). Failing students may repeat a grade, though this is limited to only once. In France, the assessment process aims to monitor the development of both academic and social skills.

#### *Japan: Character Development and Academic Discipline*

Japan's education system is based as much on character development as on academic achievement. No exams are held until the 4th grade; students are educated in areas such as moral values, self-control, sense of responsibility, and social contribution (Ekinici, 2010). In 5th and 6th grades, national standardized tests are administered to complete the primary education process. This approach emphasizes that learning is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the formation of character.

#### *Singapore: Selective Exam System and Project-Based Learning*

The Singapore education system offers both academic excellence and an innovative approach to learning. At the end of 6th grade, students take the PSLE (Primary School Leaving Examination), and are placed in secondary education tracks according to their results (Bakioğlu, 2014). In recent years, under the policy "Teach less, learn more," exam pressure has been reduced and project-based learning has been promoted. This system supports analytical thinking, creativity, and self-regulation skills in students.

#### *Turkey's Context and Comparison*

At the end of primary education in Turkey, there is no central guidance exam or holistic guidance system that directs students to academic or vocational/skills-based tracks. However, considering current socio-economic conditions, guidance is no longer just a pedagogical preference, but also a structural necessity. In particular, the increasing demand for intermediate staff and qualified technical personnel in the labor market, coupled with the rise in numbers of higher education graduates who cannot be employed, makes the mismatch between the education system and the employment structure increasingly visible (Gür & Çelik, 2019).

The guidance approach currently implemented in Turkey largely relies on academic achievement. This leads to a guidance practice where exam performance, rather than individuals' interests, talents, and skills, becomes the defining criterion; as a result, the phenomenon of "unemployment among diploma holders" deepens, and a skills-based human

resource gap emerges in the production and service sectors (OECD, 2020). Reducing guidance processes in education solely to academic criteria hinders a multidimensional assessment of individual potential and causes talents that could be recognized at an early age to be overlooked.

In Turkey, the guidance process effectively begins at the transition to secondary education. In this context, central exams and local placement applications are carried out through the High School Entrance System (LGS) (Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey, 2022). However, LGS is essentially a mechanism that classifies students based on their level of academic achievement; vocational inclinations, individual talents, and psychomotor skills are only taken into account to a limited extent in this process. Therefore, the current system turns guidance into a competitive selection and elimination mechanism rather than a pedagogical development process.

In this respect, Turkey differs from Germany's early and institutionalized multi-school type model in terms of guidance policies. It occupies a hybrid but unresolved position between the structure in England, where family preference and exam results are both influential, and South Korea's residence-based guidance system (Eurydice, 2021). It cannot be said that Turkey has a unique, systematic, and sustainable guidance policy in this area. Practices are mostly limited to periodic regulations and exam-centered decisions.

In recent years, the introduction of "project schools" at the transition from primary to secondary education has brought a new dimension to the guidance debate. However, since student admission to these schools is also largely based on academic exams, this innovation falls short of achieving the goal of skills-based guidance. This situation makes the inconsistency between the discourse and practice of guidance even more evident.

On the other hand, the Century of Türkiye Education Model (TCEM) aims for a skills-based transformation in its approach to assessment and evaluation and is being implemented gradually at all levels of education (MoNE, 2023). Although it's only in its second year, there is not yet a clear and binding framework for how this skills-based assessment approach will be reflected in guidance policies, or by what criteria and mechanisms students will be guided starting from primary school. How the guidance system in Turkey will take shape in terms of the academic-skills balance remains uncertain, pending full implementation of TCEM at all levels.

Tablo1: TCEM Dimension and Its Relation to Formative Assessment

TCEM Dimension	Relation to Formative Assessment
Skills and Values-Based Approach	Enables the acquisition of skills and values by monitoring development throughout the process.
Student-Centered Learning	Ensures student participation in self-assessment and feedback processes.
Process-Oriented Education	Observes every stage of learning, focusing not only on results but on development.
Fair and Differentiated Instruction	Provides flexible assessment opportunities according to the individual needs of the student.

Source: (MoNE, 2023).

## **Discussion**

The guidance policies among the countries addressed in this study reveal not only the structural differences in their education systems, but also the educational philosophies and approaches to human development underlying these systems. In countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, the guidance process begins at an early age, which at first glance may be perceived as a selective approach centered on academic achievement. However, especially when examining the case of Germany, it becomes clear that guidance is not merely an exam-based elimination mechanism; rather, it is a multidimensional structure supported by long-term teacher observations, development reports, and opportunities for gradual transitions. The limitation of grade pressure during primary education, the use of development-focused assessments instead of report cards, and the structuring of grades 5 and 6 as a transition period for guidance demonstrate that pedagogical flexibility is maintained despite early guidance (+German Education System IG).

Conversely, in Turkey and South Korea, guidance practices are largely based on residence/local placement, which is then supported by centralized exams. In these countries, however, it can be said that exams function more as tools for ranking and elimination rather than for identifying students' interests and abilities. This leads to the perception of the guidance process more as a competitive transition period rather than a pedagogical guidance mechanism. The examples of Japan and Singapore, on the other hand, offer a different balance point between these two approaches; while maintaining high standards of academic achievement, they make character development, values education, and social-emotional skills an integral part of the guidance process (Bakioğlu, 2014; Ekinci, 2010).

These comparative findings clearly demonstrate that an effective and equitable guidance policy cannot be structured solely on exam-based mechanisms. As emphasized in the international literature, sustainable guidance systems are built upon holistic approaches that consider students' academic performance, interests and abilities, teacher assessments, behavioral and social development, as well as the economic and workforce needs of society (OECD, 2018). From this perspective, the German model, despite including early guidance, presents a more balanced pedagogical structure thanks to its multiple assessment tools and transition flexibility.

In the case of Turkey, the fundamental problem is that debates about guidance are still largely conducted around the axis of exam-centered placement, and that at the primary school level a systematic, teacher-based, and skill-oriented guidance infrastructure has yet to be sufficiently developed. The skill-based transformation targeted in measurement and assessment with the Century of Turkey Education Model holds significant potential; however, unless this transformation is integrated with guidance policies, the predominantly academic structure is likely to persist. Therefore, guidance should be redefined not as a placement operation squeezed into certain transition points, but as a structured, traceable, flexible, and multidimensional field of education policy that begins in primary school.

## Conclusion

In the context of the Turkish Century Education Model and Formative Assessment, the transition from primary to secondary education is not merely a technical stage that determines students' academic progression; it is also a multidimensional area of education policy that directly affects individual development, social justice, and societal integration. In this process, it is critical that the guidance mechanisms implemented take into account not only the academic achievement of students, but also their interests, talents, and developmental potentials, in order to prevent the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities. The main takeaway for Turkish policymakers is the necessity to establish a more balanced and inclusive guidance structure by supporting exam-based practices with family, teacher, and school cooperation in light of international experience (T.R. Ministry of National Education, 2022).

In this context, the Turkish Century Education Model (TCEM) represents a significant paradigm shift in the understanding of assessment and evaluation. Moving away from traditional approaches that focus on knowledge transmission, the model is based on skill, value, and action-oriented learning (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2024a). In TCEM, the learning process is conceptualized not as a result-oriented structure in which the student is evaluated passively, but as a dynamic process where the student actively participates and development can be monitored. In this respect, the model envisions learning to be evaluated not only through exam results, but also through progress and achievements demonstrated during the process.

This approach directly aligns with the understanding of formative assessment. Formative assessment is defined as an assessment process that constantly monitors the student's learning process, identifies their strengths and areas for development, and supports learning with effective feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Heritage, 2010). The skill and value-based structure of TCEM aims to holistically support not only students' cognitive acquisitions but also their affective, social, and self-regulation skills through formative assessment. This holistic approach offers significant opportunities for structuring guidance processes on a more equitable, flexible, and development-oriented basis.

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Internet Resources:

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**Use of Artificial Intelligence:** The English translation of this study utilized a trial access to Paperpal - an AI-powered academic writing assistant.